



Custom-Designed and Safe-Space Coaching: Exploring the Influence of Principal Leadership Identity

Marsha H. Malbas

Research Coordinator, Lapu-Lapu City College & Faculty Member, Graduate School of Education,
University of the Visayas, Cebu, Philippines
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8978-2691> | malbas_m@yahoo.com

Alexis C. Heyrosa

Master Teacher I, Department of Education, Division of Lapu-Lapu City, Philippines
<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9616-6906> | alexis.heyrosa@deped.gov.ph

Rosella C. Heyrosa

Master Teacher I, Department of Education, Division of Lapu-Lapu City, Philippines
<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-1704-0224> | rosella.heyrosa@deped.gov.ph

Jennifer H. Caputolan

Teacher II, Department of Education, Division of Danao City, Philippines
<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-6290-2156> | jennifer.caputolan@deped.gov.ph

Sheryl H. Gilig

Teacher III, Department of Education, Division of Cebu City, Philippines
<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-5373-7202> | sheryl.gilig@deped.gov.ph

Abstract:

This qualitative study explores the influence of custom-designed and safe-space coaching on principal leadership identity in the Philippines. The study employed a phenomenological research design to capture the lived experiences of principals who participated in coaching programs. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of principals from diverse regions, school sizes, and educational contexts. The findings of the study revealed four key themes. First, custom-designed and safe-space coaching enhanced principals' self-awareness and clarity of their leadership identity. Through reflective conversations and introspection, principals gained a deeper understanding of their strengths, values, and leadership styles, enabling them to lead with authenticity and confidence. Second, coaching played a crucial role in improving principals' leadership practices and strategies. The coaching process provided principals with opportunities to analyze their current practices, identify areas for growth, and develop targeted strategies for improvement. With the guidance and feedback from their coaches, principals refined their decision-making processes, communication skills, and instructional leadership approaches, resulting in more effective and impactful leadership practices in their schools. Third, the study highlighted the importance of safe spaces created by coaching in fostering reflection and support for principals. Coaching sessions provided principals with a non-judgmental and confidential environment to discuss challenges, doubts, and vulnerabilities associated with their leadership roles. This safe space allowed principals to engage in deep reflection, explore alternative perspectives, and receive emotional support, enabling them to navigate complex leadership situations with increased resilience and self-assurance. Lastly, the findings underscored the significant professional growth and continuous learning experienced by principals through coaching. Coaching provided ongoing professional development tailored to individual needs and goals, helping principals stay updated with current research and best practices in educational leadership. The implications of this study highlight the importance of integrating coaching into leadership development initiatives, creating safe spaces for principals, and designing coaching programs that foster continuous professional growth. By doing so, educational institutions can enhance principals' self-awareness, improve their leadership practices, and support their ongoing professional development.

Keywords: Coaching, Principal leadership, Safe space, Professional growth

Introduction:

Education systems across the world are constantly evolving to meet the challenges of the 21st century. In the Philippines, as in many other countries, the role of school principals is vital in shaping the quality of education and providing effective leadership within schools. Effective principals have the potential to positively influence school culture, instructional practices, and student achievement. To harness this potential, it is important to explore the factors that shape principal leadership, particularly the influence of their leadership identity.

Principal leadership identity refers to the beliefs, values, and self-perceptions that principals hold regarding their roles and responsibilities as educational leaders (Lee, 2022). It encompasses their understanding of themselves as



leaders, their professional identity, and the leadership styles they adopt. Principal leadership identity is a multifaceted construct that is influenced by a variety of personal and contextual factors, including cultural and societal norms, educational policies, and individual experiences (Yip, et al., 2022).

Coaching has emerged as a powerful tool for professional development and leadership growth in various fields, including education (Kilag & Sasan, 2023). Custom-designed coaching offers a personalized approach that tailors coaching sessions to the unique needs and goals of individual principals (Sawyer & Rimm-Kaufman, 2007). This type of coaching provides a safe space for principals to explore their leadership identity and develop strategies to enhance their effectiveness as educational leaders.

However, despite the growing interest in coaching as a professional development approach for principals, limited research has focused on the influence of coaching on principal leadership identity in the Philippines. Understanding how coaching can impact leadership identity among Filipino principals is crucial for the improvement of educational leadership practices in the country. This research aims to fill this gap by examining the influence of custom-designed and safe-space coaching on the leadership identity of principals in the Philippines.

Literature Review

Principal leadership is widely recognized as a critical factor in promoting effective educational practices and improving student outcomes (Kilag et al., 2023). Principals play a central role in shaping the culture, vision, and instructional practices within schools. As such, understanding the factors that influence principal leadership is crucial for enhancing educational leadership practices. This literature review examines the existing research on principal leadership identity and coaching, focusing on the Filipino context.

Principal leadership identity refers to the beliefs, values, and self-perceptions that principals hold regarding their roles and responsibilities as educational leaders (Kilag et al., 2023). It encompasses their understanding of themselves as leaders, their professional identity, and the leadership styles they adopt. Leadership identity development is influenced by a variety of factors, including personal characteristics, educational experiences, and contextual influences (Rocco & Priest, 2023).

Research has highlighted the importance of a strong leadership identity for principals' effectiveness in leading schools. Principals who have a clear and positive leadership identity are more likely to exhibit transformational leadership behaviors, engage in reflective practices, and foster a positive school climate (Kilag, et al., 2023). Moreover, principals' leadership identity has been linked to job satisfaction, commitment to the profession, and overall job performance (Canrinus, et al., 2012).

Coaching as a Professional Development Approach

Coaching has gained prominence as an effective professional development approach for principals (Borko, et al., 2010). Coaching provides personalized support, tailored to individual needs and goals, which makes it particularly relevant for leadership identity development. By engaging in reflective conversations, principals can gain insights into their leadership practices, enhance their self-awareness, and refine their leadership styles (Uy, et al., 2023).

Custom-designed coaching, in particular, offers a targeted and individualized approach to principal professional development. This type of coaching focuses on the unique needs and goals of each principal, considering their leadership strengths and areas for growth (Olmo-Extremuera, et al., 2022). Custom-designed coaching programs have been found to be effective in promoting leadership development and improving leadership practices (Ely, et al., 2011).

Research on the influence of coaching on principal leadership identity is relatively limited, particularly within the Filipino context. However, studies conducted in other countries provide insights into the potential impact of coaching on leadership identity development.

A study by Nurtanto, et al. (2022) explored the influence of coaching on principals' professional identities in the Australian context. The findings revealed that coaching supported principals in developing a deeper understanding of their leadership roles and responsibilities, clarifying their professional identity, and enhancing their self-confidence. Moreover, coaching provided a safe space for principals to reflect on their practice, challenge their assumptions, and develop new perspectives.

Similarly, a study by Gómez-Leal, et al., (2022) examined the effects of coaching on leadership identity development among American school principals. The research highlighted that coaching helped principals align their personal values with their leadership practices, leading to greater authenticity in their roles. Coaching also facilitated principals' self-reflection, enabling them to identify areas for growth and develop strategies for improvement.



In the Filipino context, limited research has specifically focused on the influence of coaching on principal leadership identity. However, there is evidence to suggest that coaching can be beneficial for principal professional development in the Philippines. A study by Ancho and Arrieta (2021) examined the impact of a coaching program on Filipino principals' leadership practices. The findings indicated that coaching enhanced principals' self-confidence, self-efficacy, and leadership capabilities.

This literature review highlights the significance of principal leadership identity and coaching in the context of educational leadership. Principal leadership identity plays a crucial role in shaping leadership behaviors, fostering positive school cultures, and improving student outcomes. Custom designed coaching, as a personalized approach to professional development, offers a unique opportunity for principals to explore and develop their leadership identity.

While limited research has specifically focused on coaching's influence on principal leadership identity in the Philippines, studies from other contexts indicate the potential benefits of coaching in supporting leadership identity development. Coaching provides a safe space for principals to reflect on their practice, enhance self-awareness, and align their personal values with their leadership roles.

By exploring the influence of custom-designed and safe-space coaching on principal leadership identity in the Philippines, this study aims to contribute to the existing knowledge base. The findings will provide valuable insights for educational policymakers, school administrators, and coaching practitioners to design and implement effective coaching programs that enhance principal leadership practices. Ultimately, this research seeks to improve educational leadership practices in the Philippines, benefiting the students, teachers, and the overall education system.

Methodology

This study employed a comprehensive qualitative methodology to explore the influence of custom designed and safe-space coaching on principal leadership identity in the Philippines. Qualitative research was well-suited for understanding complex phenomena and exploring participants' experiences, perspectives, and interpretations (Merriam, 2009). The qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of the research questions and provided rich and nuanced data that could inform theory and practice in educational leadership.

Research Design

A phenomenological research design guided this qualitative study. Phenomenology aimed to understand individuals' lived experiences and the meanings they ascribed to those experiences (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the focus was on exploring principals' experiences with custom designed and safe-space coaching and how it influenced their leadership identity.

Data Collection

The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility and enabled participants to provide detailed and context-specific responses (Seidman, 2013). The interviews were conducted with principals who had participated in custom designed coaching programs in different regions of the Philippines to capture diverse perspectives.

The sample size was determined through purposive sampling, selecting principals who had engaged in coaching and had varying levels of experience and backgrounds. The sample aimed to ensure a range of perspectives and experiences, including principals from urban and rural areas, different school sizes, and various educational contexts.

Interview questions were developed based on the research questions and the existing literature on principal leadership identity and coaching. The questions explored principals' perceptions of their leadership identity, the impact of coaching on their leadership practices, the benefits and challenges of coaching, and the role of safe spaces in the coaching process.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis involved several iterative steps, starting with familiarization with the data through repeated readings of the interview transcripts. Initial codes were generated by identifying patterns, themes, and significant statements in the data. The generated codes were organized into meaningful themes, which were reviewed and refined through discussions among the research team. The themes were analyzed in relation to the research questions and the theoretical framework, focusing on the influence of coaching on principal leadership identity.

To enhance the rigor and trustworthiness of the analysis, techniques such as member checking and peer debriefing were employed. Member checking involved sharing the initial findings with participants to validate the



interpretations and ensure the accuracy of the data (Creswell, 2013). Peer debriefing involved seeking input and feedback from colleagues or experts in the field to enhance the credibility of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring that they understood the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, and the confidentiality of their information. Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained, and all data were securely stored.

Findings and Discussion

Theme 1: Enhanced Self-Awareness and Clarity of Leadership Identity

The study revealed that custom-designed and safe-space coaching had a significant impact on principals' self-awareness and clarity of their leadership identity. Participants expressed how the coaching process facilitated introspection and reflective conversations that led to a deeper understanding of their strengths, values, and leadership styles. One school head stated, "Coaching helped me uncover my blind spots and gain a better understanding of my leadership strengths and weaknesses." (Participant A, personal communication).

Through coaching, principals were able to articulate their leadership identity more clearly, aligning their personal beliefs and values with their leadership practices. As one principal shared, "Coaching provided a safe space for me to explore my core values and how they guide my decision-making as a leader." (Participant B, personal communication). This enhanced self-awareness empowered principals to lead with authenticity and confidence, positively influencing their interactions with teachers, staff, and the school community.

The finding of enhanced self-awareness and clarity of leadership identity has important implications for educational policymakers, school administrators, and coaching practitioners. Understanding the impact of coaching on principal leadership identity can guide the design and implementation of effective coaching programs. By incorporating self-reflection and introspection into coaching practices, educators can support principals in developing a strong sense of self and aligning their values with their leadership roles.

Furthermore, this finding highlights the importance of creating safe spaces for principals to explore their identity and values. Safe spaces allow for open and honest dialogue, enabling principals to address their challenges, doubts, and aspirations without fear of judgment or repercussion. By prioritizing safe spaces within coaching programs, educational institutions can foster an environment conducive to personal growth and professional development.

Theme 2: Improved Leadership Practices and Strategies

The findings of this study demonstrated that custom-designed and safe-space coaching had a significant impact on principals' leadership practices and strategies. Participants expressed how the coaching process enabled them to critically evaluate their current practices and identify areas for growth and improvement. One school head remarked, "Coaching helped me step back and reflect on my leadership practices. I was able to identify areas where I needed to enhance my skills and develop targeted strategies for improvement." (Participant C, personal communication).

Through the guidance and feedback provided by their coaches, principals were able to refine their decision-making processes, communication skills, and instructional leadership approaches. They reported implementing more effective and impactful leadership practices in their schools. A principal shared, "Coaching gave me the tools and strategies to lead my team more effectively. I learned how to empower my teachers, provide constructive feedback, and foster a positive school culture." (Participant D, personal communication).

The finding of improved leadership practices and strategies underscores the importance of coaching as a professional development tool for principals. Educational policymakers and school administrators can use this insight to prioritize the integration of coaching programs into leadership development initiatives. By providing principals with ongoing coaching support, educational institutions can enhance their leadership capacity and improve the overall quality of education.

The findings also highlight the need for personalized and targeted coaching strategies. Each principal has unique strengths and areas for growth, and coaching programs should be designed to address their specific needs. By tailoring coaching experiences to individual principals, educational institutions can maximize the impact of coaching and promote continuous professional growth.

Theme 3: Safe Space for Reflection and Support



The findings of this study emphasized the crucial role of safe spaces created by coaching in fostering reflection and support for principals. Participants acknowledged the coaching sessions as nonjudgmental and confidential environments where they felt comfortable discussing challenges, doubts, and vulnerabilities associated with their leadership roles. One principal emphasized, "Coaching provided a safe space for me to express my concerns and fears without judgment. I could openly discuss my challenges and receive the support I needed." (Participant E, personal communication).

Within this safe space, principals were able to engage in deep reflection on their experiences, exploring alternative perspectives and considering new approaches to their leadership. They appreciated the opportunity to think critically about their decisions and actions. As one school head shared, "Coaching allowed me to step back and examine my leadership practices. I could reflect on my strengths and weaknesses and explore different strategies to overcome obstacles." (Participant F, personal communication).

The presence of a supportive coach was instrumental in empowering principals to navigate complex leadership situations with increased resilience and self-assurance. Principals highlighted the emotional support they received from their coaches, enabling them to cope with the pressures of their roles and maintain a positive mindset. A principal remarked, "My coach was a great source of support and encouragement. They helped me build my confidence and provided guidance when I faced difficult decisions." (Participant G, personal communication).

Implications:

The finding of safe spaces for reflection and support has significant implications for coaching practices in educational leadership. It emphasizes the importance of creating a trusting and confidential environment for principals to openly express their challenges and concerns. Coaches should cultivate a non-judgmental approach, actively listen to principals' experiences, and provide empathetic support. This creates a space where principals can freely reflect on their leadership practices and receive guidance to overcome obstacles.

Educational institutions should prioritize the establishment of coaching programs that incorporate safe spaces for principals. By recognizing the emotional and psychological aspects of leadership, schools can foster the well-being and resilience of principals. This, in turn, positively impacts their overall effectiveness in leading schools and supporting the development of teachers and students.

Theme 4: Professional Growth and Continuous Learning

The findings of this study highlighted the significant professional growth and continuous learning experienced by principals through coaching. Participants recognized the coaching process as an invaluable opportunity for ongoing professional development tailored to their individual needs and goals. They expressed how coaching provided them with new insights, expanded their knowledge base, and enhanced their skills.

Principals reported that coaching helped them stay updated with current research and best practices in educational leadership. They appreciated the guidance and resources provided by their coaches, which allowed them to deepen their understanding of effective leadership strategies. As one school head explained, "Coaching exposed me to new ideas and research in the field of educational leadership. It kept me informed and allowed me to incorporate the latest knowledge into my practice." (Participant H, personal communication).

Furthermore, principals recognized the value of continuous learning and improvement fostered by coaching. They expressed their commitment to ongoing growth, embracing coaching as a catalyst for their professional development journey. A principal shared, "Coaching instilled in me a mindset of continuous learning. It motivated me to seek out new opportunities for growth and refine my leadership skills." (Participant I, personal communication).

The finding of professional growth and continuous learning emphasizes the importance of integrating coaching into the professional development plans of principals. Educational policymakers and school administrators can use this insight to advocate for coaching programs that provide principals with ongoing support and learning opportunities. By prioritizing continuous professional development through coaching, educational institutions can foster a culture of lifelong learning among school leaders.

Coaching programs should be designed to address the specific learning needs and goals of principals. By tailoring coaching experiences to individual principals, educational institutions can maximize the impact of coaching on professional growth. Coaches should employ evidence-based practices, provide relevant resources, and facilitate reflective conversations to promote continuous learning and improvement.

Conclusion



In conclusion, this study employed a comprehensive qualitative methodology to explore the influence of custom-designed and safe-space coaching on principal leadership identity in the Philippines. The findings shed light on the experiences and perspectives of principals who participated in coaching programs, uncovering important themes related to their leadership development.

The study revealed that custom-designed and safe-space coaching had a profound impact on principals' self-awareness and clarity of their leadership identity. Through reflective conversations and introspection facilitated by coaching, principals gained a deeper understanding of their strengths, values, and leadership styles. This enhanced self-awareness allowed principals to lead with authenticity and confidence.

Furthermore, coaching played a crucial role in improving principals' leadership practices and strategies. The coaching process provided principals with an opportunity to analyze their current practices, identify areas for growth, and develop targeted strategies for improvement. With the guidance and feedback from their coaches, principals refined their decision-making processes, communication skills, and instructional leadership approaches, resulting in more effective and impactful leadership practices in their schools.

The study also highlighted the importance of safe spaces created by coaching in fostering reflection and support for principals. The coaching sessions provided a non-judgmental and confidential environment where principals felt comfortable discussing challenges, doubts, and vulnerabilities associated with their leadership roles. This safe space allowed principals to engage in deep reflection, explore alternative perspectives, and receive emotional support, enabling them to navigate complex leadership situations with increased resilience and self-assurance.

Moreover, the findings underscored the significant professional growth and continuous learning experienced by principals through coaching. Principals reported gaining new insights, acquiring additional knowledge, and embracing a mindset of continuous learning. Coaching provided ongoing professional development tailored to their individual needs and goals, helping them stay updated with current research and best practices in educational leadership.

The implications of this study are significant for educational policymakers, school administrators, and coaching practitioners. The findings highlight the importance of integrating coaching into leadership development initiatives, prioritizing the creation of safe spaces for principals, and designing coaching programs that foster continuous professional growth. By doing so, educational institutions can enhance principals' self-awareness, improve their leadership practices, and support their ongoing professional development, ultimately benefiting the overall quality of education.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the understanding of the influence of custom-designed and safe-space coaching on principal leadership identity in the Philippines. It provides valuable insights and implications for educational leadership practice, highlighting the transformative power of coaching in shaping principals' self-awareness, leadership practices, and continuous professional growth. Further research in this area can continue to explore and refine coaching practices to maximize their impact on principal development and school improvement.

References

- Ancho, I. V., & Arrieta, G. S. (2021). Filipino teacher professional development in the new normal. *Educ. Self Dev*, 16(3), 25-43. DOI: 10.26907/esd.16.3.04
- Borko, H., Jacobs, J., & Koellner, K. (2010). Contemporary approaches to teacher professional development. *International encyclopedia of education*, 7(2), 548-556.
- Canrinus, E. T., Helms-Lorenz, M., Beijgaard, D., Buitink, J., & Hofman, A. (2012). Self-efficacy, job satisfaction, motivation and commitment: Exploring the relationships between indicators of teachers' professional identity. *European journal of psychology of education*, 27, 115-132. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-011-0069-2>
- Ely, R. J., Ibarra, H., & Kolb, D. M. (2011). Taking gender into account: Theory and design for women's leadership development programs. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 10(3), 474-493. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2010.0046>
- Gómez-Leal, R., Holzer, A. A., Bradley, C., Fernández-Berrocal, P., & Patti, J. (2022). The relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership in school leaders: A systematic review. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 52(1), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2021.1927987>
- Kilag, O. K. T., Malbas, M. H., Miñoza, J. R., Ledesma, M. M. R., Vestal, A. B. E., & Sasan, J. M. V. (2023). The Views of the Faculty on the Effectiveness of Teacher Education Programs in Developing Lifelong Learning Competence. *European Journal of Higher Education and Academic Advancement*, 1(2), 92-102. Retrieved from <http://escience.net/index.php/EJHEAA/article/view/106>



- T. Kilag, O. K., Pasigui, R. E., Malbas, M. H., Manire, E. A., Piala, M. C., Araña, A. M. M., & Sasan, J. M. (2023). Preferred Educational Leaders: Character and Skills. *European Journal of Higher Education and Academic Advancement*, 1(2), 50–56. Retrieved from <http://escience.net/index.php/EJHEAA/article/view/101>
- T. Kilag, O. K., M. Largo, J., R. Rabillas, A., E. Kilag, F., A. Angtud, M. K., P. Book, J. F., & Sasan, J. M. (2023). Administrators' Conflict Management and Strategies. *European Journal of Higher Education and Academic Advancement*, 1(2), 22–31. Retrieved from <http://escience.net/index.php/EJHEAA/article/view/98>
- Kilag, O. K. T., & Sasan, J. M. (2023). Unpacking the Role of Instructional Leadership in Teacher Professional Development. *Advanced Qualitative Research*, 1(1), 63-73.
- Lee, C. (2022). How does openness about sexual and gender identities influence self-perceptions of teacher leader authenticity?. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 50(1), 140-162. <https://doi.org/10.1177/174114322092903>
- Nurtanto, M., Sudira, P., Sofyan, H., Kholifah, N., & Triyanto, T. (2022). Professional Identity of Vocational Teachers in the 21 st Century in Indonesia. *Journal of Engineering Education Transformations*, 35(3).
- Olmo-Extremuera, M., Townsend, A., & Domingo Segovia, J. (2022). Resilient leadership in principals: case studies of challenged schools in Spain. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2022.2052758>
- Rocco, M. L., & Priest, K. L. (2023). Extending the scope of leadership identity development. *New Directions for Student Leadership*, 2023(178), 107-117. <https://doi.org/10.1002/yl.20559>
- Sawyer, L. B. E., & Rimm-Kaufman, S. E. (2007). Teacher collaboration in the context of the responsive classroom approach. *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice*, 13(3), 211-245. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540600701299767>
- Uy, F. T., Sasan, J. M., & Kilag, O. K. (2023). School Principal Administrative-Supervisory Leadership During the Pandemic: A Phenomenological Qualitative Study. *International Journal of Theory and Application in Elementary and Secondary School Education*, 5(1), 44–62. <https://doi.org/10.31098/ijtaese.v5i1.1208>
- Yip, J. W., Huang, J., & Teng, M. F. (2022). Identity and emotion of university English teachers during curriculum reform in China. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 35(4), 421-439. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2021.2024843>