

Leadership Decision-Making Styles, Conflict Resolution Practices, and Strategic Skills of School Heads

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Abstract

Effective school leadership requires the integration of sound decision-making, constructive conflict resolution, and strategic skills in addressing the complex demands of educational management. This paper determined the interplay of leadership decision-making styles, conflict resolution practices, and strategic skills of public secondary school heads in one of the divisions in Negros Occidental during School Year 2023–2024. The study was anchored on constructivist theory, the zone of proximal development, contingency leadership theory, and strategic leadership perspectives. It employed a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design, combining descriptive-correlational quantitative analysis and qualitative inquiry through focus group discussion. The respondents in the quantitative phase were 175 teachers selected from a population of 320 through stratified proportionate random sampling, while 10 participants were purposively selected for the qualitative phase. Data were gathered using a researcher-made, validated, and reliability-tested questionnaire and were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, Mann-Whitney U Test, Spearman's rho, regression analysis, and thematic analysis. Findings revealed that school heads were generally rated high in leadership decision-making styles, conflict resolution practices, and strategic skills. Significant differences were found only in selected profile variables. Very strong positive relationships were established among the three major variables. Problem solving, emotional intelligence, and courage significantly predicted both conflict resolution practices and strategic skills. Qualitative findings further showed that leadership practices influenced school morale, collaboration, communication, and school functioning. The study concluded that effective school leadership depends on the interaction of these competencies and supported the development of a leadership enhancement program. The study aligns with SDG 4 by promoting quality education through stronger school leadership and with SDG 16 by supporting accountable, peaceful, and well-governed educational institutions. Its sustainability impact lies in strengthening educational and institutional sustainability through improved leadership capacity, better school relationships, and more responsive school management.

Keywords: Conflict Resolution Practices, Leadership Decision-Making Styles, Public Secondary School Heads, Strategic Skills, Teachers

1. Introduction

Leadership in contemporary education involves a complex integration of decision-making, conflict resolution, and strategic skills, particularly among public secondary school heads who are tasked with maintaining accountability, managing school-based challenges, and advancing institutional improvement. Effective school leadership is not shaped by a single competency alone, but by the dynamic interaction of these leadership capacities, which collectively influence the overall functioning of the school community. In one of the divisions in Negros Occidental during School Year 2023–2024, these interrelated dimensions of leadership provide an important basis for understanding how school heads respond to the demands of educational management.

In the contemporary global landscape, effective leadership is indispensable for navigating the multifaceted demands of the 21st century, especially as educational institutions respond to globalization and the continuing pursuit of high-quality education. Internationally, the study of leadership decision-making styles, conflict resolution practices, and strategic skills has gained attention, with Smith and Jones (2023) emphasizing transformational leadership styles as important in fostering positive school climates and effective conflict resolution. In the Philippine educational context, school heads are expected to acknowledge responsibility and remain answerable for their actions, decisions, products, and policies in accordance with RA 9155, Chapter 1, Section 5. As educational leaders and managers, they are expected to ensure that decisions and actions remain coherent with the educational mission, vision, and core values. Their work therefore requires sound leadership decision-making styles, the courage to address conflicts, and critical strategic skills in situations where multiple responsibilities must be carried out and accountability remains high.

The reviewed literature highlights three major themes relevant to the study. First, leadership decision-making is portrayed as central to school effectiveness because leaders must respond to issues through problem solving, creativity, logical reasoning, emotional intelligences, and courage. Second, conflict resolution is recognized as a necessary leadership

function in educational settings. Mangulabnan et al. (2019) underscore the importance of addressing conflict management issues in schools, while Evangelista (2022) as cited in study of Saylor (2020) explains that conflict arises when people misunderstand or disagree while working together, often because of opposing needs, interests, and values. Third, strategic leadership requires a clearer definition of strategy and an integrated framework for strategic action, as emphasized by Bellei et al. (2020). Taken together, these studies suggest that effective school leadership depends not only on individual competence in each domain but also on how these capacities support one another in actual school practice.

In addition, the related literature indicates that leadership decision-making, conflict resolution, and strategic skills are closely linked dimensions of effective school leadership. In decision-making, the literature emphasizes problem-solving, creativity, logical reasoning, emotional intelligence, and courage as essential qualities that enable school heads to respond systematically and ethically to school concerns (Marzano, 2022; Fullan, 2021; Robinson, 2023; Leithwood, 2022; Hallinger, 2020; Goleman, 2021; Shields, 2022). The reviewed works also highlight adaptive, participative, and transformational approaches as important in strengthening trust, collaboration, teacher satisfaction, and student outcomes (Brown, 2023; Smith & Jones, 2023; Gonzales and Ramos, 2023), although their application may be constrained by resistance to change, limited resources, and bureaucratic structures (Santiago et al., 2023). In conflict resolution, the literature presents collaborating, competing, accommodating, avoiding, and compromising as key practices, while emphasizing that open communication, empathy, and culturally responsive approaches are necessary for maintaining a harmonious and productive school environment (Meng et al., 2018; Sahoo & Sahoo, 2019; Alabu et al., 2020; Nissa et al., 2018; Aqqad et al., 2019; Rahim, 2021; Noermijati et al., 2019; Lee & Kim, 2023; Cruz and Morales, 2023; Reyes, and Aquino, 2023). In terms of strategic skills, the literature underscores the importance of system thinking, reframing, and reflecting, together with strategic planning and resource allocation, in helping school heads respond to complex educational demands and sustain school improvement (Senge et al., 2022; Bolman and Deal, 2021; Schon, 2021; Brookfield, 2022; Porter, 1980; Santos and Bautista, 2023; Del Rosario et al., 2023). Taken together, the reviewed literature supports the view that effective school leadership depends on the integration of sound decision-making, constructive conflict management, and strong strategic capability within specific educational and cultural contexts.

Globally, leadership research continues to stress the role of effective school leadership in sustaining positive climates and resolving institutional challenges, as seen in the work of Smith and Jones (2023). Nationally, the role of school heads is framed by accountability expectations under RA 9155, Chapter 1, Section 5, which requires them to explain and answer for their decisions and actions. At the local level, the study emerged from the researcher's long professional observation that school heads demonstrate varied leadership and management approaches. Some school heads have shown positive styles that generate favorable outcomes for the school community, while others have exhibited opposite styles that produce adverse effects on students, teachers, and stakeholders and disrupt smooth school operations. These observations indicate that leadership practices are not merely theoretical concerns but have direct consequences for school discipline, organizational climate, and the quality of educational delivery.

The study is anchored in several theoretical perspectives relevant to educational leadership. Constructivist theory, based on John Dewey (1952), views learning as an active process shaped by experience and reflection and supports collaborative decision-making and participatory problem-solving in school leadership. Lev Vygotsky (1934), through the zone of proximal development, reinforces the importance of leadership support or scaffolding in helping learners and staff progress toward higher levels of understanding and performance. The study is primarily drawn from contingency leadership theory (Fiedler's 1960), which emphasizes that leadership effectiveness depends on situational context rather than personality traits alone. In this view, leaders must adapt their decision-making and conflict resolution practices according to the demands of specific situations. For strategic skills, the study also draws from Michael Porter (1980), whose work on competitive strategy stresses the importance of strategic thinking, planning, opportunity identification, and effective resource allocation in achieving organizational goals. Conceptually, the study treats leadership decision-making styles, conflict resolution practices, and strategic skills as interrelated domains, while age, sex, highest educational attainment, and length of service serve as profile variables for comparison. The study also integrates quantitative and qualitative inquiry to generate convergent results and produce a proposed strategic enhancement program for school heads.

Despite extensive research on decision-making styles, conflict resolution practices, and strategic skills, the chapter identifies a significant gap in understanding how these elements interact in high-stakes environments. Existing literature often examines these domains separately, overlooking their combined influence on organizational effectiveness. This gap is particularly important in the school setting, where leadership decisions, responses to conflict, and strategic actions occur simultaneously and affect multiple stakeholders. The study was therefore undertaken to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay among these variables and to support the design of a strategic intervention program that can strengthen the leadership capacities of public secondary school heads.

The study naturally aligns with SDG 4 – Quality Education because it focuses on strengthening school leadership capacities that can improve school climate, teacher support, and student outcomes. It also aligns with SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and

Strong Institutions because effective conflict resolution, accountability, and sound decision-making contribute to more responsive, orderly, and well-governed educational institutions. These alignments are reflected in the chapter's emphasis on school heads' accountability, professional leadership, conflict management, and strategic action in promoting effective school functioning.

The study contributes to educational sustainability by supporting leadership practices that can sustain positive learning environments and long-term school improvement. It contributes to institutional sustainability by helping school systems strengthen decision-making, conflict management, and strategic planning capacities among administrators. It also relates to community and socio-organizational sustainability because improved school leadership may foster better relationships among teachers, students, parents, and DepEd officials, thereby promoting trust, collaboration, and efficient use of educational resources. As indicated in the chapter, the findings are expected to benefit school heads, teachers, DepEd officials, students, parents, the researcher, and future researchers through improved leadership awareness, policy support, professional development, and stronger educational environments.

The study specifically focuses on public secondary school heads as assessed by teachers, using a mixed method-explanatory sequential design. It examines leadership decision-making styles, conflict resolution practices, and strategic skills, together with selected profile variables, and complements quantitative results with Focus Group Discussion data for convergent interpretation. The intended output is a proposed strategic enhancement plan designed to strengthen school heads' leadership decision-making styles, conflict resolution practices, and strategic skills.

2. Materials and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a mixed-methods explanatory sequential research design, employing descriptive-correlation for the quantitative phase in correlating leadership decision-making styles, conflict resolution practices, and strategic skills when respondents were classified according to age, sex, educational attainment, and length of service. As explained by Richardson (2020), correlated research correlates two groups to draw conclusions about them. The design involved two distinct phases: the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by qualitative analysis to further explain or interpret the quantitative findings. This approach was intended to deepen understanding by complementing statistical analysis with a more detailed exploration of underlying factors or mechanisms (Johnson, 2020). By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, the study provided a broader understanding of the variables under investigation. The design was considered appropriate because it helped elucidate, differentiate, and correlate the levels of leadership decision-making styles, conflict resolution practices, and strategic skills of school heads as assessed by teachers in one of the divisions in Negros Occidental for School Year 2023–2024. It also allowed the researcher to understand correlational relationships quantitatively and to use focus group discussion in generating converged findings on the interplay of the variables being studied.

2.2 Research Setting

The study was conducted in ten public secondary schools offering Junior and Senior High School curriculum in one of the divisions in Negros Occidental during School Year 2023–2024. The locale provided the setting for assessing the leadership decision-making styles, conflict resolution practices, and strategic skills of school heads as perceived by teachers assigned in these schools.

2.3 Respondents

For the quantitative phase, the respondents were 175 teachers drawn from a total population of 320 teachers in the ten public secondary schools with Junior and Senior High School curriculum in one of the divisions in Negros Occidental for School Year 2023–2024. Most of the respondents were 39 years old and above, female, bachelor's degree holders, and had ten years or more of service in the teaching profession. For the qualitative phase, the participants were ten teachers selected for focus group discussion. These participants consisted of the top five and bottom five based on the mean results of the quantitative analysis across the three variables: leadership decision-making styles, conflict resolution practices, and strategic skills. The study used stratified proportionate random sampling in selecting Junior and Senior High School teachers for the quantitative phase to ensure representation across the population. For the qualitative phase, purposive criterion sampling was employed to identify participants for the focus group discussion. The top five and bottom five respondents based on the quantitative mean results were selected as participants. As noted by Patino and Ferreira (2018), establishing inclusion criteria is a standard and necessary practice in designing high-quality research protocols because it defines the key features of the target population and helps determine who can appropriately answer the research question. The identified participants were notified and gathered in a comfortable venue, and informed consent was secured before the conduct of the focus group discussion. They were informed of the objectives of the study, their rights to privacy and anonymity, the significance of their participation, and the proper decorum during the discussion.

2.4 Research Instruments

The study used a researcher-made questionnaire composed of four parts. Part I gathered the respondents' profile in terms of age, sex, highest educational attainment, and length of service. Part II consisted of 55 items measuring leadership decision-making styles of school heads across the dimensions of problem solving, creativity, logical reasoning, emotional intelligence, and courage. This part was conceptualized from the General Leadership Decision-making Styles questionnaire of Johnson (2019), with responses measured on a five-point scale from "regularly" to "almost never," where higher scores indicated more frequent use of a particular style. Part III covered conflict resolution practices through the Conflict Management Style Assessment, conceptualized from Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode (2021). It included five categories: accommodating, avoiding, collaborating, competing, and compromising, rated through a five-point Likert scale from "Very High" to "Very Low." Part IV contained 44 items on strategic skills under the domains of system thinking, reframing, and reflecting, also measured using a five-point scale ranging from "almost always" to "almost never." The interpretation of mean scores in all sections reflected the degree to which the leadership behaviors and strategic capacities were manifested or observed. To establish validity, the instrument was subjected to content validation using the Lawshe method. According to (Brown, 2023), validity refers to the extent to which a test or research study accurately measures what it is intended to measure, ensuring that results are meaningful and applicable. Ten validators, composed of five panel members and five school heads from public secondary schools, evaluated the instrument. All items met the Content Validity Ratio threshold of 0.778 and the instrument was considered preferred. However, eight items from decision-making styles and six items from conflict resolution practices with low Content Validity Index were removed. To determine reliability, the instrument underwent pilot testing among 30 respondents from a neighboring division in Negros Occidental who were not included in the actual survey. Analysis through Cronbach Alpha, which according to (Smith, 2020) measures internal consistency and considers a coefficient of .70 or higher acceptable, yielded reliability coefficients of .988 for decision-making styles, .989 for conflict resolution practices, and .990 for strategic skills.

2.5 Data Collection

The researcher first sought approval from the research adviser, Schools Division Superintendent, and school heads before conducting the study. Printed questionnaires were personally administered by the researcher to the ten public secondary schools in one of the divisions in Negros Occidental during School Year 2023–2024 and were distributed during the teachers' vacant periods while observing proper protocol. One week after distribution, the accomplished questionnaires were retrieved from teachers in the different schools. After retrieval, the responses were encoded and treated using appropriate statistical tools to answer the specific research questions. For the qualitative phase, the mean results of the quantitative analysis were processed and computed to identify participants for the focus group discussion. The top five respondents who gave high ratings and the bottom five respondents who gave the lowest ratings across the three variables were selected. These participants were notified, schedules were arranged, and the venue was reserved. During the focus group discussion, consent forms were distributed and signed, and the moderator explained the reasons for the discussion and the inclusion criteria. The discussion followed a conversational style centered on themes rather than rigid questioning, and the responses were documented through audio recording using mobile phones, including a backup device. After the focus group discussion, the researcher prepared the audit trail, conducted coding, formulated themes, and developed the qualitative write-up.

2.6 Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques were used to systematically examine the collected data and derive significant findings, perceptions, and observations. In the quantitative phase, mean and standard deviation were used for objectives 1 to 3 to determine the levels of decision-making styles, conflict resolution practices, and strategic skills of school heads as assessed by teachers, both as a whole and when grouped according to age, sex, highest educational attainment, and length of service. For objectives 4 to 6, the Mann-Whitney U Test was used to determine differences in leadership decision-making styles, conflict resolution practices, and strategic skills when respondents were grouped according to profile variables. For objective 7, Spearman's rho correlation was used to determine the relationship among decision-making styles, conflict resolution practices, and strategic skills. For objective 8, Regression Analysis was used to identify predictors of conflict resolution practices and strategic skills of school heads. In the qualitative phase, thematic analysis was used for objectives 9 to 11 to analyze the open-ended overarching questions and generate insights from the focus group discussion. As discussed by Creswell & Poth (2023), the qualitative phase typically begins with defining the research problem, reviewing related literature, and selecting an appropriate qualitative design. Data collection then proceeds through methods such as interviews, observations, or document analysis, and in this study, focus group discussion was used. Data analysis involved coding and thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes, while interpretation was directed toward addressing the research question and contributing to broader understanding of the topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2023; Creswell & Poth, 2023).

2.7 Ethical Considerations

The study observed ethical principles to protect participants' rights, confidentiality, and the overall integrity of the research. It was designed to provide social value by generating insights that could improve school climate, foster harmonious and productive school environments, and strengthen school leaders' abilities in decision-making, conflict resolution, and strategic response to changing educational contexts. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was secured before the conduct of the focus group discussion. Participants were informed of the objectives, selection process, protocol, and procedures, and were assured that they could withdraw freely and that no harm would come to them. Measures were also taken to minimize possible psychological discomfort or stress during participation. The researcher ensured anonymity and confidentiality by preventing disclosure of participants' identities and personal information to unauthorized individuals and by reporting data in aggregate form. Participants were also given the opportunity to seek clarification throughout the research process. Potential risks mainly involved the disclosure of experiences, grudges, and sentiments that might be interpreted as opposition to school administration, while the benefits included the opportunity to share feedback, contribute to educational research, and provide examples of positive leadership practices for possible benchmarking. The chapter also noted the qualifications of the researcher as a doctoral student in Educational Management with long experience in public school teaching. Finally, the study stated that dissemination of results would be done responsibly, with strict observance of confidentiality, transparency, accuracy, and research integrity in academic publications, conferences, and public presentations.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Quantitative Findings on Leadership Decision-Making Styles

3.1.1 Problem Solving, Creativity, and Logical Reasoning

Teachers assessed the school heads' leadership decision-making styles in terms of problem solving, creativity, and logical reasoning as High both as a whole and across age, sex, educational attainment, and length of service. Problem solving obtained a mean of 4.0 as a whole, with subgroup means ranging from 3.9 to 4.2. Creativity also obtained a mean of 4.0 as a whole, with subgroup means ranging from 4.0 to 4.2. Logical reasoning likewise obtained a mean of 4.0 as a whole, with subgroup means ranging from 3.9 to 4.1. In all three dimensions, the standard deviations were small, indicating homogeneity of responses among the teachers. These findings indicate that school heads were generally perceived as capable of addressing problems systematically, introducing creative responses to school concerns, and applying rational thinking in leadership decisions. The high ratings support the view that strong problem-solving is central to effective school management (Bush, 2018), that creativity fosters innovative and adaptive school environments (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020), and that logical reasoning contributes to rational and structured decision-making in school leadership (Hallinger, 2021; Jabeen & Akhtar, 2020; Ding, Xu, Yang, Li & Heughten, 2020).

3.1.2 Emotional Intelligences and Courage

Teachers also assessed emotional intelligences and courage as High. Emotional intelligences obtained a mean of 4.0 as a whole, with subgroup means ranging from 3.8 to 4.1, while courage obtained a mean of 3.9 as a whole, with subgroup means ranging from 3.9 to 4.2. The standard deviations remained relatively small, again suggesting consistent responses across respondent groups. These results suggest that school heads were viewed as able to manage emotions, maintain supportive relationships, and demonstrate willingness to stand by decisions and take necessary risks. The discussion in the chapter links these findings to literature emphasizing emotional intelligence as essential for supportive school climates and improved teacher and student outcomes (Leithwood, 2022; Goleman, 2021), and courage as crucial for resilience, difficult decisions, and school improvement (Fullan, 2021; Goleman, 2021; Shields, 2022). Taken together, the findings suggest that effective leadership decision-making in schools rests on the combination of problem solving, creativity, emotional intelligence, and courage.

3.2. Quantitative Findings on Conflict Resolution Practices

3.2.1 Accommodating and Avoiding

The school heads' conflict resolution practices in accommodating and avoiding were both rated High. Accommodating obtained a mean of 3.9 as a whole, with subgroup means ranging from 3.8 to 4.1. Avoiding obtained a mean of 4.0 as a whole, with subgroup means ranging from 3.9 to 4.2. The low standard deviations indicate relative consistency in the assessments. These findings show that school heads were perceived as frequently using both accommodating and avoiding approaches in conflict situations. The chapter explains that accommodating can help preserve harmony, team cohesion, and supportive school culture (Gumus, Bellibas, & Hallinger, 2022; Thomas & Kilmann, 2021). At the same time, while avoiding may help reduce immediate tension, the discussion warns that overreliance on avoidance may leave underlying issues unresolved and affect organizational health over time (Gross, 2021; Aqqad et al., 2019; Morrison & Milliken, 2022; De Dreu & Gelfand, 2021).

3.2.2 Collaborating, Competing, and Compromising

The dimensions of collaborating, competing, and compromising were likewise rated High. Collaborating obtained a mean of 4.0 as a whole, with subgroup means ranging from 3.9 to 4.2. Competing also obtained a mean of 4.0 as a whole, with

subgroup means ranging from 3.9 to 4.2. Compromising similarly obtained a mean of 4.0 as a whole, with subgroup means ranging from 3.9 to 4.2. Response patterns remained homogeneous across groups. These results suggest that school heads employed a range of conflict management approaches depending on context. Collaborating was discussed as valuable for building sustainable and innovative solutions through shared perspectives and stakeholder buy-in (Tjosvold, 2022). Competing was interpreted as useful in situations requiring quick and decisive action (Rahim, 2021). Compromising was associated with practical win-win arrangements and favorable outcomes for innovation and employee performance, although it may also reflect incomplete resolution of core conflict issues (de Jong et al., 2021; Min et al., 2020a; Wiradendi Wolor, 2019).

3.3. Quantitative Findings on Strategic Skills

3.3.1 System Thinking, Reframing, and Reflecting

Teachers assessed the school heads' strategic skills in system thinking, reframing, and reflecting as High. System thinking obtained a mean of 4.0 as a whole, with subgroup means ranging from 3.9 to 4.2. Reframing obtained a mean of 4.0 as a whole, with subgroup means ranging from 3.9 to 4.2. Reflecting likewise obtained a mean of 4.0 as a whole, with subgroup means ranging from 4.0 to 4.2. The responses were again homogeneous. These findings indicate that school heads were generally seen as capable of understanding interrelationships within the school system, interpreting issues from multiple perspectives, and reflecting on decisions and experiences for improvement. The chapter connects system thinking with informed and strategic decisions in complex settings (Senge, 2021), reframing with innovation and adaptability (Northouse, 2021; Hamel & Zanini, 2021), and reflecting with continuous learning and organizational effectiveness (Costa & Garmston, 2021; Schon, 2021).

3.4. Differences in Assessments According to Respondent Variables

3.4.1 Leadership Decision-Making Styles

A significant difference in the assessment of leadership decision-making styles was found only when teachers were grouped according to sex ($U = 1897.000$, $p = .039$). No significant differences were found according to age ($U = 3323.500$, $p = .176$), educational attainment ($U = 2769.500$, $p = .072$), and length of service ($U = 3223.000$, $p = .071$). Male teachers rated school heads' leadership decision-making styles higher than female teachers. The discussion suggests that leadership effectiveness is not determined solely by demographic characteristics but by a broader combination of traits, skills, and contextual factors (Avolio & Yammarino, 2021). This supports the need for leadership development efforts that emphasize communication, problem-solving, and decision-making across leadership levels rather than relying on demographic assumptions alone (Day et al., 2021).

3.4.2 Conflict Resolution Practices

Significant differences in the assessment of conflict resolution practices were found according to educational attainment ($U = 2561.000$, $p = .014$) and length of service ($U = 3138.500$, $p = .040$), but not according to age ($U = 3264.000$, $p = .125$) and sex ($U = 2148.500$, $p = .260$). Teachers with master's/doctoral degrees and those with less than 10 years of service rated school heads' conflict resolution practices higher than their counterparts. The discussion relates these results to literature showing that leadership effectiveness in conflict management depends more on adaptability, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal competence than on formal qualifications alone (Bolden et al., 2021). The chapter therefore highlights the value of continuous professional development and mentorship in strengthening school leaders' conflict management capabilities.

3.4.3 Strategic Skills

A significant difference in the assessment of strategic skills was found only according to educational attainment ($U = 2579.500$, $p = .016$). No significant differences were found according to age ($U = 3270.500$, $p = .130$), sex ($U = 2047.000$, $p = .132$), and length of service ($U = 3202.000$, $p = .062$). Teachers with master's/doctoral degrees assessed school heads' strategic skills more highly than those with bachelor's degrees only. The chapter interprets this result within literature emphasizing that strategic leadership is reinforced by continuous learning, adaptive leadership, and professional development rather than by formal education alone (Fullan, 2021; Leithwood, 2022). This suggests that leadership development activities remain essential in strengthening strategic competence in educational contexts.

3.5. Relationships Among the Major Variables

Very strong positive relationships were found between leadership decision-making styles and conflict resolution practices ($r_s = .908$, $p < .001$), leadership decision-making styles and strategic skills ($r_s = .912$, $p < .001$), and conflict resolution practices and strategic skills ($r_s = .933$, $p < .001$). These results indicate that higher levels in one domain are associated with higher levels in the others. The discussion supports the view that these three domains are mutually reinforcing in actual school leadership practice. The chapter explains that stronger decision-making styles are associated with stronger conflict resolution practices and better strategic skills, while strong conflict resolution also corresponds to stronger strategic capacity. This interpretation is linked to the recognition that effective conflict resolution remains consistently valued across teaching contexts (Gelfand et al., 2022).

3.6. Leadership Decision-Making Styles as Predictors

3.6.1 Predictors of Conflict Resolution Practices

Leadership decision-making styles explained 87.9% of the variability in conflict resolution practices. Regression analysis showed that problem solving, emotional intelligences, and courage significantly predicted conflict resolution practices at the .01 alpha level, while creativity and logical reasoning did not. The resulting model was conflict resolution practices = $0.471 + (.265 \times \text{problem solving}) + (.266 \times \text{emotional intelligences}) + (.300 \times \text{courage})$. The discussion emphasizes that these findings underscore the importance of problem-solving ability, emotional intelligence, and courage in conflict management. The chapter relates this result to studies showing that emotionally intelligent leaders handle workplace conflict more effectively (Goleman, 2023; Mayer, 2023), that problem-solving supports successful dispute resolution (Johnson & Hackman, 2023), and that courage allows leaders to confront conflict directly and confidently (Cameron, 2023).

3.6.2 Predictors of Strategic Skills

Leadership decision-making styles explained 87.3% of the variability in strategic skills. Regression analysis showed that problem-solving, emotional intelligence, and courage significantly predicted strategic skills, whereas creativity and logical reasoning did not. The resulting model was: strategic skills = $.305 + (.302 \times \text{problem solving}) + (.175 \times \text{emotional intelligences}) + (.394 \times \text{courage})$. Among the significant predictors, courage and problem solving appeared particularly influential. The discussion interprets these findings as evidence that robust strategic leadership is rooted in specific decision-making capacities. The chapter links the result to literature emphasizing the importance of strong decision-making frameworks for strategic leadership (Mintzberg, 2021), emotional intelligence for strategic decision-making and team foresight (Boyatzis, 2023), problem-solving for innovative educational strategy (Robinson & Aronica, 2023), and courage for decisive strategic implementation (Day & Sammons, 2023).

3.7. Qualitative Findings

3.7.1 Impacts of Leadership Decision-Making Styles on the School Community

The qualitative findings indicate that school heads' leadership decision-making styles positively affected the functioning of the school community through shared vision and direction, stronger teacher awareness, better morale and engagement, and collaborative action. Participants described school heads as collaborative, open-minded, empowering, decisive, and oriented toward win-win solutions. At the same time, the qualitative data also revealed that poor or indecisive leadership could lower teacher morale, heighten stress, weaken cooperation, and negatively affect school performance. These qualitative results reinforce the quantitative finding that leadership decision-making styles were generally rated high, while also showing how such styles operate in everyday school life. The chapter relates these themes to literature emphasizing participative and collaborative leadership, creative leadership responses, and emotional intelligence in fostering trust, confidence, and positive school environments (Robinson, 2023; Goleman, 2021; Aboudahr & Olowoselu, 2018).

3.7.2 Conflict Resolution Practices that Support a Positive and Collaborative Environment

The qualitative findings show that school heads contributed to a positive and collaborative environment through approaches characterized by fairness, communication, fact-based handling of issues, and efforts to bring conflicting parties toward resolution. Participants emphasized the importance of listening, gathering both sides, and resolving problems in ways that preserve working relationships and maintain a constructive academic climate. These findings are consistent with the quantitative results showing high levels across all conflict resolution dimensions. They also align with related literature emphasizing that effective conflict resolution in schools requires open communication, empathy, mediation, and proactive management of disputes in order to sustain a harmonious and productive school environment (Lee & Kim, 2023; Smith & Jones, 2023; Cruz and Morales, 2023; Reyes, and Aquino, 2023).

3.7.3 Strategic Skills that Support Enduring Educational Success

The qualitative phase identified communication skills, team building and collaboration skills with the academic community, and problem solving skills as the strategic skills that shape the capacity of school heads to navigate challenges and foster enduring success in education. The chapter further synthesized these skills through the idea of shifting perspectives by thinking "outside the box." These themes complement the quantitative findings that system thinking, reframing, and reflecting were all rated high. The discussion connects them to literature emphasizing reframing, reflective practice, strategic planning, adaptability, and continuous professional development as foundations of effective school leadership and sustained school improvement (Batool & Hayat, 2019; Bryson, 2018; Sahay, 2019; Eliophotou Menon, 2022).

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The findings indicate that public secondary school heads generally demonstrated high levels of leadership decision-making styles, conflict resolution practices, and strategic skills as assessed by teachers. School heads were perceived to be strong in problem solving, creativity, logical reasoning, emotional intelligence, and courage; proficient in accommodating,

avoiding, collaborating, competing, and compromising in conflict situations; and capable in system thinking, re-framing, and reflecting. Significant differences were noted only in selected profile variables, while significant relationships were established among leadership decision-making styles, conflict resolution practices, and strategic skills. The results further showed that problem solving, emotional intelligence, and courage significantly predicted the conflict resolution practices and strategic skills of school heads, and that teachers recognized both positive and negative effects of leadership decision-making, the value of communication and mediation in conflict resolution, and the importance of communication, collaboration, and problem-solving in strategic leadership.

Based on the findings and conclusions, it is recommended that public secondary school heads continue professional development efforts, particularly in enhancing logical reasoning and other leadership capacities, while public secondary school teachers continue supporting initiatives that sustain high standards of conflict resolution practices in schools. DepEd officials are encouraged to support ongoing professional development focused on strategic skills, especially system thinking and re-framing, and to promote higher educational attainment among school leaders. Students are encouraged to maintain open communication with school administration so that their needs may be identified and addressed promptly, while parents may continue supporting school programs and projects for the benefit of students and the school community. The researcher may also update school heads on the results of the study to support the implementation of the enhancement program, and future researchers may continue exploring additional ideas to sustain the already high levels of leadership decision-making styles, conflict resolution practices, and strategic skills of school heads.

The study was limited to determining the interplay of leadership decision-making styles, conflict resolution practices, and strategic skills of public secondary school heads in one of the divisions in Negros Occidental for School Year 2023–2024 using a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design. The quantitative phase involved 175 teachers selected from a population of 320 through stratified proportionate random sampling, while the qualitative phase involved 10 participants selected through purposive criterion sampling based on the highest and lowest quantitative ratings across the three variables. The findings should therefore be understood within the context of the selected public secondary schools, the identified respondents and participants, and the specific variables and procedures employed in the study.

Compliance with ethical standards

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