

# Cultural Orientation and Indigenous Leadership Practices in Relation to the Leadership Competencies of School Heads in Selected IP Schools in Oriental Mindoro

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## Abstract

This study examined the relationship among cultural orientation, indigenous leadership practices, and leadership competencies of school heads in selected Indigenous Peoples (IP) schools in Oriental Mindoro, Philippines. Anchored on Culturally Responsive Leadership Theory (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016), the research employed a descriptive–correlational design to assess variable levels and determine their interrelationships. Data were collected from 80 school heads selected through proportional stratified random sampling across eight districts. A structured and validated questionnaire measured cultural orientation, indigenous leadership practices, and leadership competencies using a five-point Likert scale, with reliability confirmed through Cronbach’s alpha values ranging from 0.801 to 0.890. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson’s correlation, and multiple regression analysis. Findings revealed high levels of cultural orientation, indigenous leadership practices, and leadership competencies among school heads. Significant positive relationships were found among all variables, indicating that culturally oriented leaders are more likely to exhibit indigenous leadership practices and stronger leadership competencies. Regression analysis showed that community values were the only significant predictor of leadership competencies within cultural orientation, while cultural stewardship and decision-making significantly predicted leadership competencies within indigenous leadership practices. These results highlight the importance of integrating community values and cultural stewardship in strengthening leadership effectiveness. The study concludes that culturally grounded leadership is essential in sustaining both educational quality and cultural identity in indigenous school contexts, and recommends strengthening cultural orientation programs, leadership training, and meaningful community engagement strategies. The study aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education) by promoting inclusive and culturally responsive education and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by addressing disparities affecting Indigenous Peoples learners. It contributes to educational and cultural sustainability by reinforcing leadership practices that preserve indigenous identity while enhancing institutional effectiveness and community engagement.

**Keywords:** Cultural Orientation, Indigenous Peoples Education, Indigenous Leadership Practices, Leadership Competencies, School Heads

## 1. Introduction

Leadership in indigenous educational settings extends beyond conventional management roles, requiring deep engagement with community traditions, values, and socio-cultural realities. School heads in IP-integrated schools face challenges such as geographic isolation, promoting learner well-being, and maintaining culturally grounded education (Lugatiman, R., & Bauyt, L. 2024). Cultural orientation influences leadership by shaping how leaders embrace traditions, language, customs, and community values. Barriers in language and culture have been shown to affect learners transitioning between indigenous and mainstream education, emphasizing the need for culturally aligned leadership (Suyot, 2024). Likewise, indigenous communities express a desire for education that reflects their heritage, reinforcing the importance of culturally responsive leadership (Bauyt, 2024).

Literature highlights three interrelated dimensions: cultural orientation, leadership competencies, and indigenous leadership practices. Leadership competencies include managerial, instructional, interpersonal, and visionary capabilities essential for school effectiveness. These competencies are strengthened by resilience, resourcefulness, and sociocultural awareness in diverse contexts (Pangandoyon et al., 2024; Mandin, 2024). When combined with cultural orientation, these competencies produce leadership practices that are participatory, community-centered, and culturally grounded. The integration of indigenous knowledge systems, such as mother-tongue-based multilingual education, demonstrates how leadership supports culturally relevant learning environments (Suyot, 2024; Yoder, 2024).

In the Philippine context, Indigenous Peoples education is guided by frameworks that promote cultural inclusivity and preservation (Department of Education, 2011). Schools serving IP communities operate in geographically and culturally diverse settings, requiring leadership that aligns with both national education policies and local traditions. Globally, culturally responsive leadership has been recognized as essential for equity and inclusion in diverse educational systems, highlighting the need for leaders who can navigate cultural, social, and institutional complexities (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016).

This study is anchored on Culturally Responsive Leadership Theory, which emphasizes the integration of learners' cultural identities into leadership practices, policies, and school environments (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). The framework posits that effective leadership in diverse contexts requires awareness of cultural dynamics, promotion of inclusivity, and alignment of school practices with community values. This theoretical lens supports the examination of how cultural orientation and leadership competencies shape indigenous leadership practices.

Despite existing studies on culturally responsive leadership and indigenous education, there is limited empirical research examining the direct relationships among cultural orientation, leadership competencies, and indigenous leadership practices within the Philippine IP school context. Specifically, the extent to which these variables interact and influence leadership effectiveness remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by investigating these relationships in selected IP schools in Oriental Mindoro.

This study aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals:

SDG 4 – Quality Education: by promoting inclusive and culturally responsive education for Indigenous Peoples.

SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities: by addressing cultural and educational disparities affecting indigenous learners.

SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions: by strengthening culturally responsive leadership within educational institutions.

The research supports equitable access to education and culturally inclusive governance within school systems.

The study contributes to educational sustainability by supporting culturally relevant teaching and leadership practices. It advances cultural sustainability through the preservation and integration of indigenous knowledge, traditions, and language in education. Additionally, it promotes institutional sustainability by informing leadership development programs that align with community values and inclusive policies. By bridging culture and leadership, the study strengthens community engagement, social cohesion, and long-term educational effectiveness in indigenous contexts.

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## **2. Material and Methods**

### **2.1 Research Design**

The study adopted a descriptive–correlational research design, which combines the description of current conditions with the analysis of relationships among variables without manipulation. The descriptive component assessed the levels of cultural orientation, indigenous leadership practices, and leadership competencies, while the correlational component examined their relationships using Pearson's correlation coefficient. Multiple regression analysis was further applied to determine the predictive influence of cultural orientation and indigenous leadership practices on leadership competencies (Creswell, 2014; Kerlinger & Lee, 2000).

### **2.2 Locale of the Study**

The study was conducted in selected Indigenous Peoples elementary schools across eight districts in Oriental Mindoro, Philippines, namely Bulalacao, Gloria, Bongabong North, Roxas, Puerto Galera, Pinamalayan, Mansalay, and Socorro. These schools serve indigenous communities located in both mountainous and coastal areas under the Department of Education

's Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program.

### **2.3 Respondents of the Study**

The respondents of the study were school heads assigned to Indigenous Peoples elementary schools within the selected districts of Oriental Mindoro. These individuals were chosen due to their direct involvement in managing schools that cater to indigenous learners and communities.

### **2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure**

A total of 80 school heads participated in the study, selected from a population of 100 through proportional stratified random sampling to ensure representation across districts. The sample size was determined using the Raosoft Sample Size Calculator, applying a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level. This method ensured that each district was proportionally represented in the sample.

## 2.5 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire composed of three parts: a cultural orientation instrument assessing traditions, language, customs, and community values; an indigenous leadership practices instrument measuring decision-making, community engagement, and cultural stewardship; and a leadership competencies instrument evaluating culturally responsive and inclusive leadership, emotional intelligence and trust-building, instructional and academic leadership, crisis and resilience leadership, and visionary and transformational leadership. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement. The instrument underwent validation by five graduate faculty experts in educational leadership, research methodology, and Indigenous Peoples Education. A pilot test involving 20 school heads yielded Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.801 to 0.890, with an overall reliability coefficient of 0.894, indicating high internal consistency.

## 2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data were collected through the administration of the validated questionnaire to the selected school heads in the identified districts. The process ensured that responses were systematically gathered from participants representing Indigenous Peoples schools across the province.

## 2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, to summarize the levels of the variables. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationships among cultural orientation, indigenous leadership practices, and leadership competencies. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify significant predictors of leadership competencies. The interpretation of scale values ranged from very low to very high, and the level of significance for statistical tests was set at  $\alpha = .05$ .

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## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Levels of Key Variables

#### 3.1.1 Cultural Orientation of School Heads

The findings revealed that school heads demonstrated a high level of cultural orientation, with strong engagement in traditions, customs, language, and community values. Among these dimensions, traditions obtained the highest level, while community values, although still high, registered the lowest relative score. Overall, the results indicate that school heads consistently integrate cultural elements into their leadership practices. This finding aligns with the concept of culturally responsive leadership, which emphasizes the integration of learners' cultural identities into school practices to promote inclusivity and equity (Aguayo et al., 2025). The strong emphasis on traditions reflects leadership that values indigenous heritage, consistent with Cooper (2025), who highlighted the importance of embedding indigenous knowledge in education. Similarly, the role of language in enhancing cultural relevance supports findings by Nyaaba et al. (2025). The relatively lower emphasis on community values suggests the need for deeper integration of these values in decision-making processes, as noted by Mansfield and Lambrinou (2024).

#### 3.1.2 Indigenous Leadership Practices

The results indicated a high extent of indigenous leadership practices among school heads, particularly in cultural stewardship, followed by community engagement and decision-making. This suggests that leaders actively incorporate indigenous knowledge, values, and traditions into their leadership roles. This outcome reflects leadership that is culturally grounded and community-centered. The prominence of cultural stewardship underscores the critical role of preserving and promoting indigenous identity within schools, consistent with Cooper (2025). Participatory decision-making aligns with Mansfield and Lambrinou (2024), who emphasized integrating indigenous knowledge into leadership processes. Furthermore, the emphasis on community engagement reflects relational leadership practices, as highlighted by Washington & Johnson (2023), while the integration of Filipino indigenous values supports the findings of Dayson et al. (2024) and Major (2023).

#### 3.1.3 Leadership Competencies of School Heads

The findings showed that school heads possessed a high level of leadership competencies across all dimensions, with visionary and transformational leadership ranked highest and crisis and resilience leadership ranked lowest, though still high overall. This indicates strong leadership capacity in managing schools and fostering inclusive environments. These results suggest that school heads are capable of balancing administrative effectiveness with culturally responsive practices. The strong performance in culturally responsive leadership supports the findings of Mansfield and Lambrinou (2024) and Cooper (2025), who emphasized inclusive leadership structures. Emotional intelligence and trust-building align with Major (2023), while instructional leadership reflects the role of leaders in supporting teaching and learning processes as discussed by Nganga and Kambutu (2024). The importance of resilience and visionary leadership is further supported by Highfield et al. (2024) and Washington & Johnson (2023), highlighting the need for adaptability and long-term strategic direction.

### 3.2 Relationships Among Variables

#### 3.2.1 Cultural Orientation and Indigenous Leadership Practices

The results showed strong, positive, and statistically significant relationships between all dimensions of cultural orientation and indigenous leadership practices. This indicates that higher levels of cultural orientation are associated with stronger implementation of indigenous leadership practices. This relationship confirms that cultural orientation serves as a foundation for leadership in indigenous contexts. Leaders who are more attuned to traditions, language, customs, and community values are more likely to adopt participatory and culturally grounded leadership approaches. This supports Mansfield and Lambrinou (2024), who emphasized that cultural awareness enhances relational trust and alignment with community expectations.

#### 3.2.2 Cultural Orientation and Leadership Competencies

The findings revealed strong and significant positive relationships between all dimensions of cultural orientation and leadership competencies, with community values showing the strongest association. This suggests that leaders who align closely with community values tend to demonstrate higher leadership competencies. This result highlights the importance of community-centered leadership in strengthening overall leadership effectiveness. Aligning leadership practices with community values fosters trust, inclusivity, and responsiveness, which are essential components of effective leadership. This supports the argument of Mansfield and Lambrinou (2024) that culturally responsive leadership strengthens institutional alignment with community expectations.

#### 3.2.3 Indigenous Leadership Practices and Leadership Competencies

The results indicated strong, positive, and statistically significant relationships between indigenous leadership practices and leadership competencies across all dimensions. Cultural stewardship exhibited the strongest relationship, followed by community engagement and decision-making. These findings suggest that leadership practices grounded in indigenous culture enhance leadership effectiveness. Leaders who actively preserve culture, engage communities, and make culturally informed decisions demonstrate stronger competencies. This is consistent with Cooper (2025) and Nganga and Kambutu (2024), who emphasized that culturally informed leadership practices contribute to improved leadership performance and outcomes.

### 3.3 Predictors of Leadership Competencies

#### 3.3.1 Cultural Orientation as Predictor

The regression analysis showed that cultural orientation significantly predicts leadership competencies, explaining a substantial portion of their variance. However, among its dimensions, only community values emerged as a significant predictor, while traditions, language, and customs did not independently predict leadership competencies. This finding suggests that leadership effectiveness depends more on integrating community perspectives than merely acknowledging cultural elements. Community values play a crucial role in guiding leadership decisions and fostering inclusive practices. This supports Cooper (2025), who emphasized that alignment with community values enhances credibility and inclusivity in leadership.

#### 3.3.2 Indigenous Leadership Practices as Predictor

The results indicated that indigenous leadership practices significantly predict leadership competencies, with cultural stewardship as the strongest predictor, followed by decision-making, while community engagement was not independently significant. This implies that preserving and promoting indigenous culture, along with making contextually appropriate decisions, are critical drivers of leadership effectiveness. Cultural stewardship strengthens identity and institutional relevance, while decision-making ensures alignment with local contexts. Mansfield and Lambrinou (2024) noted that culturally informed decision-making enhances trust and participation, while Nganga and Kambutu (2024) suggested that community engagement contributes more effectively when integrated with other leadership practices.

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## 4. Conclusion & Recommendations

School heads in Indigenous Peoples schools in Oriental Mindoro demonstrated high levels of cultural orientation, indigenous leadership practices, and leadership competencies, indicating strong implementation of culturally responsive and community-centered leadership. Significant positive relationships were observed among these variables, confirming that culturally oriented leaders are more likely to practice indigenous leadership and exhibit higher leadership competencies. Among the dimensions of cultural orientation, community values emerged as the most significant predictor of leadership competencies, while within indigenous leadership practices, cultural stewardship and decision-making were identified as key predictors, with community engagement not independently influencing leadership competencies.

Programs aimed at strengthening cultural orientation, particularly in community values, should be enhanced through immersion and cultural integration initiatives. Leadership development efforts should prioritize cultural stewardship and culturally informed decision-making to improve leadership competencies. Additionally, community engagement strategies should be refined to ensure meaningful and outcome-based participation aligned with decision-making and cultural initiatives, while institutionalizing culturally responsive leadership frameworks within the DepEd Indigenous Peoples

Education program to support the development of effective and culturally grounded school leaders

### Compliance with ethical standards

The authors declare no conflict of interest. This study complied with recognized ethical standards for human-participant research by ensuring voluntary participation with informed consent, the right to withdraw without penalty, and strict confidentiality through anonymous, secure, and aggregated data handling. Given the study's non-invasive nature, procedures were non-invasive, and safeguards were observed to minimize discomfort, with guidance to appropriate support services when needed, and required institutional permissions were secured for instrument use and access to academic records.

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