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## Educational Leadership through the Lens of Human Relations

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### ABSTRACT

Integrating human relations into leadership practices, educational leaders can better meet the needs of the school's stakeholders and gear them towards sustainable educational outcomes. This study aimed to explore the human relations practices of school heads. Qualitative descriptive method was employed and data were gathered through interviews with the school heads. Through thematic analysis, themes were generated to describe the human relations practices in schools. Themes include: relationship harmonization; relationship building and community engagement; effective communication and transparency; empowerment and involvement of teachers; support to well-being; recognition and motivation.

### Introduction

In educational leadership, human relations play a vital role in every facet of school operations, from classroom dynamics to more general school policy. Competent leaders encourage students to achieve, involve parents and communities in supporting the schools' objective, and enable teachers to educate effectively. Leaders who practice effective human relations are also better able to handle the changing demands of education.

Organizations, including schools, are inherently complex and dynamic space where individuals collaborate toward common goals despite challenges (Smith, 2013). School heads are tasked to maintain organizational structures, while simultaneously nurturing the human potential who can influence the attainment of the goals of the school (Ware, 2019; Yan-Li & Hassan, 2018). By integrating human relations into leadership practices, educational leaders can better meet the needs of the teachers, students, and communities, leading to more effective and sustainable educational outcomes.

Studies pointed out various factors indicating human relations in schools. Amey and Eddy (2023) pointed out creating effective teams to fulfill the school's strategic goals. Human relations are also indicated by provision of professional development for improved instructional practices among teachers (Fischer et al. 2018; Kinyua, 2023); fruitful and satisfying working conditions (Bratton et al., 2021). In a broader sense, the study Armagan et al (2020) revealed two distinct but interconnected bases for human relations in school leadership: the sympathetic basis, centered around emotional and relational aspects of leadership such as trust, motivation, and accessibility, and the political basis, which focuses on strategic and formal dimensions like authority, role balance, and financial management.

While numerous studies have explored various factors that indicate human relations in the realm of educational leadership, a research gap is seen in the aspect of how principals in rural communities adapt their human relations practices to reflect the unique needs of their school communities. Leadership is culturally bound (Plaister-Ten, 2022); hence, practices of human relations practices may vary in different contexts due to differences in community dynamics. By focusing on human relations, this research sought to offer a human relations model for educational leaders to strengthen their capacity for leading the school community.

### Research Question

What are human relations practices of school leaders?

### Research Design

The study employed descriptive-qualitative research design as it sought to determine the themes that describe human relations in the school setting. Qualitative research is ideal for capturing the nuances of human relations, as it emphasizes understanding people's experiences, perspectives, and meanings. As to Creswell (2017), qualitative research is designed to explore complex phenomena within their context, which makes it particularly valuable when studying the dynamics of relationships in educational leadership. The study was conducted in different schools in within the Cotabato Province, Philippines. These schools in this division were characterized by diverse educational environments and varying community members. The said schools have unique educational contexts, providing a valuable opportunity to find out the factors in human relations of school heads who participated in the study through interviews. These data from the interviews were transcribed and thematically analyzed through the steps proposed by Braun and Clark (2006).

## Results and Discussion

The themes that describe the human relations in schools include relationship harmonization; relationship building and community engagement; effective communication and transparency; empowerment and involvement of teachers; support to well-being; recognition and motivation.

**Relationship Harmonization.** Relationship harmonization in the context of human relations within a school environment is about fostering an atmosphere where individuals can coexist peacefully, resolve disputes constructively, and maintain strong professional relationships. It requires proactive measures to prevent conflicts from escalating, effective conflict resolution mechanisms, and an emphasis on open communication.

School heads emphasized the importance of taking preventive steps to avoid conflicts before they escalate. For example, one participant shared

We always try to prevent conflicts before they happen. I encourage regular meetings with the team to address potential issues early on. SH11

We have a policy in place that encourages transparency. If there's a conflict between two staff members, they know they can come to me or another trusted colleague for mediation before things escalate further. SH3

Moreover, the school heads consistently pointed out the value of open dialogue as a method of resolving conflicts.

I encourage staff to address their concerns openly through dialogue. Sometimes, just having an honest conversation can clear up misunderstandings that could otherwise lead to conflict. SH5

If a disagreement arises, we encourage the staff to bring it to the table. I believe that by openly discussing issues, we can find solutions that satisfy everyone. SH9

A recurring theme in the interviews was the role of the school head as a mediator in conflict resolution. This is very needed in school as explained by the participants:

I act as a mediator whenever necessary. It's important for both sides to feel heard, and I make sure to give them the space to discuss their views without judgment. SH11

School leaders highlighted that conflict resolution should never be biased or influenced by personal relationships. They emphasized the value of maintaining fairness in every step of the process to ensure that all parties involved felt heard and respected.

*Importante man jud* (the most important is...) to maintain fairness in resolving conflicts. I always remind them *nga wala jud koy favoritism*. Everyone's voice should be heard, and we need to ensure an equitable solution to any disagreement. SH12 resolving conflicts isn't about winning or losing, but finding a balanced solution *mao nga if naay disagreements nga muarise* (if disagreement arises...) they are dealt with fairly. I often remind the staff that resolving conflicts isn't about winning or losing, it's about finding a fair and balanced solution for everyone SH8

The participants also pointed out about the importance of having clear policies in place for managing conflicts. The school heads recognized that these policies provide a structured framework that guides conflict resolution processes and ensures consistency across the board.

I think the key to harmonizing relationships is consistency. If we implement policies that are followed by everyone and encourage open dialogue, we avoid a lot of potential conflicts SH 11

**Relationship Building and Community Engagement.** For the school heads, the school becomes a place where cooperation thrives, as everyone works together towards common goals in a harmonious and inclusive environment. Their key practices in promoting respect and cooperation include encouraging respect for diversity, ensuring all voices are heard, and promoting mutual understanding. A culture where cooperation is emphasized allows for smoother interactions between different groups, leading to an atmosphere of trust and collaboration which supports effective communication and ensures that every member of the school community feels comfortable and valued.

Sa mga bago nga magtutudlo, kailangan gyud nila ug giya. Ang mga senior nga magtutudlo magtabang sa ila, not just academically, but pati na sa emotional support. Nindot kaayo kay magka-amigo sila." (For new teachers, they really need guidance. Senior teachers help them, not just academically, but also with emotional support. It's great because they become friends.) SH 3

We always make sure that parents and other stakeholders are included in school events. When they feel involved, they connect more with the school and feel like they're part of the journey of the students. SH 7

Similar response also highlights the importance of the parents' involvement in school.

Importante jud ang parents and community para sa school. Kanang participation nila sa PTA mas mag ok among relasyon ana. (It's important to us that parents and the community see that they have a role in the school's activities. Their involvement in PTA and events creates a deeper connection.) SH 10

Furthermore, a strong sense of belonging is crucial for building an inclusive and supportive school culture according to the school heads. Ensuring that all personnel, whether teachers, staff, or stakeholders, feel they are a valued part of the school community helps create an atmosphere of collaboration.

When people feel included and appreciated, they are more likely to contribute positively and work toward common goals. We make sure that everyone in the school feels like part of the team. Whether it's through regular meetings or casual gatherings, we want them to feel appreciated for their efforts. SH 2

I believe that if the staff feels valued, they will be more motivated to work harder. I always make it a point to acknowledge their contributions. SH 8

Finally, actively engaging stakeholders in school activities is key to fostering strong community ties. This engagement not only helps strengthen interpersonal relationships but also builds trust and collaboration between the school and the broader community.

We invite parents to attend school events and even encourage them to participate in decision-making kanang naa gud problema sa amon school..ginainvolve gid na sila. This involvement makes them feel that they have a stake in the school's success. SH 4

Based on the results, fostering a culture of respect and cooperation, strengthening interpersonal relationships, and actively engaging stakeholders are essential strategies for building a connected and supportive school community. For the school heads, promoting inclusivity through respectful dialogue, shared responsibility, and mutual support enables smoother collaboration among staff, teachers, and the wider community. This aligns with Leithwood and Jantzi (2015), who argued that when teachers and stakeholders are meaningfully involved in school decisions and initiatives, they are more likely to be committed and engaged. These findings suggest that relationship building in schools is not limited to internal dynamics but extends to partnerships with the community, creating a strong foundation for trust, collaboration, and shared goals.

**Effective Communication and Transparency.** Based on the responses of the school heads, effective communication and transparency focuses on creating an environment where information is openly shared and understood by all members of the school community, fostering trust and clarity. It emphasizes the importance of providing clear, transparent, and timely information on policies and decisions, ensuring that teachers, staff, and other stakeholders are always informed.

For school leaders, maintaining open communication channels is vital. By using multiple methods of communication—such as emails, calls, texts, and face-to-face meetings—they can ensure that all members of the school community receive and engage with information in the most accessible and effective way. This narration of the participant clearly show how open communication is given emphasis.

When we share the right information openly, everyone in the school—whether it's the teachers, staff, or even the parents—can be on the same page. This not only prevents misunderstandings but also creates an inclusive environment where everyone feels involved. I always make sure that we provide regular updates to our teachers and staff. This helps them stay informed and aligned with our school's goals, so they can effectively do their jobs and contribute to the overall success of the school. SH1

Additionally, holding meetings in a respectful and inclusive manner creates a space for open dialogue and ensures that all voices are heard, contributing to a positive and collaborative school culture.

Nagapatawag jud ko ug regular meeting and even dialogue sa mga cases which needs special attention like atong nangluod lagi daw namo nga parent...i need to reach out and have a meeting with her to understand the issue. SH4

Based on the results, effective communication and transparency are essential for school heads to successfully lead their institutions. Through regular updates, open channels, and inclusive meetings, school leaders foster an environment of trust, clarity, and collaboration within the school community. This supports Goleman (2015), who emphasized that emotional intelligence—including the ability to communicate effectively—is critical in educational leadership, as it enables leaders to connect with their staff, address concerns, and build supportive relationships.

Furthermore, Sullivan and McNall (2016) highlighted that clear, open, and inclusive communication contributes to a sense of belonging and trust among educators, which ultimately leads to increased teacher motivation and engagement. These insights affirm that transparent and effective communication practices are foundational to maintaining positive human relations in school leadership.

**Empowerment and involvement of Teachers.** As manifested in the interviews, empowering teachers is not just about giving them freedom in their classrooms, but also actively involving them in decision-making processes that affect the school as a whole. As shared by the teachers, when teachers are given the autonomy to make decisions, contribute to planning, and engage in the development of school policies, they feel valued and motivated.

As verbalized by the participants, teachers, who are on the front lines of education, understand the unique needs of their students. Giving them the power to make decisions allows them to tailor their teaching practices to better serve their students, leading to a more effective and personalized learning experience.

empowerment of teachers...comes by giving teachers the freedom to explore various teaching strategies...do not dictate them how to deliver the lessons in their respective classes. SH4

Similarly, school heads also allow teachers to collaborate on school projects and initiatives further enhances their sense of ownership and teamwork, as they are empowered to contribute ideas and work together toward common goals. And also they invlve teachers in decision making.

Mga project holders or program holders man sad ang mga teachers. Example kanang sa Math park, ilaha nang project so tabangan sad natyo sila nga mocollaborate with stakeholders or sa mga parents.. SH9

Ang pag-apil sa mga teachers sa planning ug pag-set sa mga goals ug objectives sa eskwelahan maghatag kanila og oportunidad nga magpahayag sa ilang mga panglantaw. Kini magpadako sa ilang kadasig ug paghigugma sa ilang trabaho, ug makatabang sa pagbuo sa mga desisyon nga makabeneplisyo sa tanan. SH14

It is implied from the results that the school heads believed that empowerment and involvement of teachers are essential for creating a motivated, engaged, and effective teaching staff. By allowing teachers the autonomy to make decisions, supporting their innovative approaches to instruction, and involving them in planning and decision-making, school leaders foster a strong sense of ownership and professional commitment. This finding aligns with Deci and Ryan (2017), who emphasized that autonomy is a key driver of intrinsic motivation, leading to higher engagement and creativity among teachers.

**Support to Well-being.** Supporting the well-being of teachers and staff is essential to creating a positive and productive school environment. As shared by the school heads, mental health support goes beyond just acknowledging the importance of emotional well-being; it actively ensures that educators and school personnel are supported in a way that allows them to thrive both personally and professionally.

*Encouraging an open dialogue about mental health allows individuals to express their emotions and seek help without feeling stigmatized. Kaya sabi ko if may problema, they need to open up or I will facilitate na sana makaopen up sila. Dapat kasi mentally healthy rin si teacher. SH15*

One practical approach to supporting mental health is by organizing wellness programs for teachers and staff, such as group exercises like Zumba or mindfulness activities. These programs can provide a healthy outlet for stress, enhance camaraderie, and promote overall well-being.

As pointed by the participants, creating an atmosphere where teachers feel secure to express their emotions and concerns without fear of retaliation or judgment is crucial.

*We value relationships talaga. We have a good working environment...ang gaan sa pakiramdam kahit pagod ka. We do like mga team-building activities. SH8*

*Camaraderie is really important in school kasi stress na baya ang mga teacher. Need natin ang isat-isa. SH2*

It can be gleaned from this result that mental health support and a safe work environment are essential to the overall well-being of teachers and staff, which directly influences their performance and job satisfaction. School leaders who prioritize emotional well-being, provide opportunities for open communication, and foster a sense of camaraderie help create a supportive and productive school environment.

**Recognition and Motivation.** The school heads also acknowledged that noticing the hard work and achievements of teachers not only boosts their confidence but also creates a positive school culture that encourages productivity and a commitment to excellence.

Recognizing the accomplishments of teachers and their contributions is a great way to keep their enthusiasm and happiness in their work. Through awards and incentives, we show our appreciation for their hard work in teaching. So we have recognition like every school anniversary. SH7

Recognizing all teachers and staff fairly and consistently strengthens trust in the system. It's important that we follow DepEd and Civil Service guidelines to ensure that recognition programs offer equal opportunities for everyone. SH1

The feedback from school heads highlights how recognition practices—whether through public acknowledgment, awards, or simple celebrations—play a significant role in teacher motivation and performance. Teachers who feel genuinely valued are more likely to stay motivated, perform at their best, and contribute positively to the school's success. This supports the findings of Armstrong (2016), who asserted that recognition, whether formal or informal, enhances job satisfaction and productivity. Likewise, Kerns (2017) emphasized that consistent and meaningful recognition fosters trust and collaboration within the school, encouraging teachers to engage more fully and take initiative in their roles. These findings affirm that recognizing teachers' contributions is a powerful tool in sustaining a motivated and committed teaching workforce.

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## Implication and Concluding Remarks

The findings from the study reveal a set of critical leadership practices that hold powerful implications for rural schools in the Philippines, where limitations in resources, personnel, and access to professional development often hinder school effectiveness. Specifically, the themes of *relationship harmonization, community engagement, communication, empowerment, well-being, and recognition* point toward transformative practices that can be strategically implemented in low-resource, geographically isolated settings to uplift school culture, boost teacher motivation, and enhance collaboration with communities.

These findings support the development of contextualized school leadership frameworks tailored to rural Philippine schools, emphasizing relational leadership, participatory governance, and community mobilization. By nurturing human relations through inclusive, empathetic, and culturally rooted practices, school leaders can overcome systemic constraints and foster sustainable school improvement in rural settings.

These implications resonate with the Department of Education's thrusts on participatory governance, school-based management, and inclusive education, and thus should be integrated into training modules for school heads, particularly those assigned to remote or underserved regions.

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