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Research Article

Principal Leadership on Special Education Implementation: Basis for a Development Program

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ABSTRACT

During S.Y. 2024–2025, this study looked at how school principals in the Division of Cavite, implemented special education (SPED) programs. A questionnaire created by the researcher was used to collect data from 120 school principals using a descriptive-quantitative design. The results showed that principals were very involved in advocacy (4.59), including students with disabilities in decision-making (4.78), and keeping an eye on inclusive practices (4.53). However, stakeholder engagement (2.85) and staff professional development (2.64) received lower ratings. Stakeholder engagement (2.46) and innovation (2.81) trailed behind integrity (4.88), motivation (4.82), and feedback (4.72), which were all highly correlated with leadership behaviors. Keeping up with technology (4.85), scarce resources (4.79), and resolving conflicts (4.76) were the main obstacles. Principals' engagement and leadership behaviors were found to be significantly positively correlated ($r = 0.819, p < .001$). In order to improve inclusive education outcomes, a development program that emphasizes leadership training, resource management, teamwork, staff professional development, and parent-community partnerships was suggested in light of these findings.

Keywords: *Principal Leadership, Special Education, Inclusive Education, Development Program*

Background

In order to provide students with a range of learning needs with equal opportunities to succeed academically and socially, special

education is an essential component of inclusive education systems. School principals, who serve as instructional leaders and decision-

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makers in creating inclusive learning environments, are at the center of this endeavor. In addition to implementing policies, they play a crucial role in allocating resources, supporting teachers, and interacting with families and communities. Effective school leadership has a significant impact on the success of special education initiatives, according to research conducted worldwide (Liu & Meyer, 2020; Athanases & Larrivee, 2014).

Despite this significance, many principals still have a difficult time fulfilling their responsibilities as inclusion leaders. Their capacity to fully support students with disabilities is frequently hampered by a lack of resources, resistance to change, and the quick development of educational technologies. Principals' involvement varies in some situations; they are more active in advocacy and monitoring but less active in providing professional development and maintaining stakeholder collaboration (Lee & Kim, 2017; Garcia & Rodriguez, 2018). The quality of inclusive education provided in different schools and communities varies as a result of these disparities.

The Department of Education in the Philippines has strengthened the movement for inclusive education through its policies and initiatives. However, different districts have different local realities when it comes to implementing special education. In areas like Cavite, principals frequently struggle to balance their leadership duties, adjust to sociocultural norms, and satisfy the growing demand for fair educational opportunities for students with disabilities (Santos & Cruz, 2019; Reyes & Garcia, 2021).

In light of these difficulties, it is essential to comprehend how principals implement inclusive practices, what leadership philosophies they embrace, and what barriers they face. Without this understanding, attempts to create leadership development programs that work run the risk of not being in line with the real needs of communities and schools.

This study aimed to close that gap. It specifically looks at how involved they are in inclusive education, the tactics they use, the obstacles they encounter, and the connection between engagement and effective leadership by

examining the leadership styles and difficulties faced by school principals in the Schools Division of Cavite, during SY 2024–2025. In light of these conclusions, the study suggests a training program designed to improve principal leadership, which is essential to the effective implementation of special education.

Methods

The study's methodology, including the research design, population and sampling strategies, tools utilized, data collection processes, and statistical analyses, is presented in this chapter. In order to investigate the leadership roles that school principals play in implementing special education programs in the Schools Division of Cavite, the study's validity, reliability, and contextual relevance were to be guaranteed.

Quantitative Method

The degree of principals' involvement, their leadership styles, and the difficulties they faced in advancing inclusive education were all assessed using a descriptive-quantitative research design. In order to provide an objective representation of the target population, 120 school principals were chosen for the study using simple random sampling.

A questionnaire created by the researcher using relevant literature, earlier research, and unpublished theses served as the main tool. It was broken down into four parts: (1) inclusive practices by principals; (2) leadership behaviors and strategies; (3) organizational, resource-related, and sociocultural challenges; and (4) stakeholder perceptions of the effectiveness of leadership.

The study used weighted means for data analysis in order to characterize the challenges, leadership behaviors, and engagement of principals. Principals' engagement and leadership strategies were tested for a significant relationship at the 0.05 level of significance using Pearson's *r*.

Result and Discussion

In order to address the research questions, this chapter presents, evaluates, and interprets all of the collected data

Table 1. Areas of School Principals' Engagement (N = 120)

Statement	Mean	Description
Principals involve students with disabilities in decision-making	4.78	Very Much Engaged
Principals champion inclusive education and advocacy	4.59	Very Much Engaged

According to the results, principals are very interested in including students with disabilities in educational decision-making (M = 4.78). This illustrates a trend toward inclusive and participatory leadership, where students are given the freedom to influence their own learning. Principals also firmly support inclusive education (M = 4.59), portraying themselves as

champions for students with special needs. These findings suggest that the most effective pillars of principal engagement are student empowerment and advocacy. Stakeholder collaboration and professional development, on the other hand, received lower ratings, indicating varying degrees of involvement across the various leadership domains.

Table 2. Leadership Behaviours and Strategies (N = 120)

Statement	Mean	Description
Upholds integrity and ethical standards	4.88	Very Much Observed
Inspires a sense of purpose and motivation	4.82	Very Much Observed

The findings show that integrity and ethical standards are the strongest ways for principals to exhibit leadership (M = 4.88). This suggests that school administrators have a strong commitment to honesty, fairness, and openness—elements that foster trust among the student body. Inspiring motivation and purpose was the second-strongest behavior (M = 4.82), demonstrating that principals not only support their staff's values but also encourage them to work toward inclusive education objectives.

When combined, these two qualities demonstrate a leadership approach that is grounded in both moral authority and visionary drive, which is crucial for overcoming the obstacles associated with inclusive education. However, weaker areas like innovation and stakeholder engagement imply that while principals may be strong in values-based leadership, they still need to improve their adaptive and outward-looking leadership techniques.

Table 3. Challenges Encountered (N = 120)

Statement	Mean	Description
Difficulties in keeping up with technological advancements	4.85	Very Much Serious
Obstacles in accessing necessary resources or funding	4.79	Very Much Serious

Adapting to the rapid advancements in technology is the biggest challenge principals face (M = 4.85). This illustrates how difficult it is for schools to manage new systems, incorporate digital tools, and keep up with advancements in special education technology. The second significant problem is a lack of funding and resources (M = 4.79), which limits access to

specialized services, support personnel, and educational materials. These two difficulties show that without adequate financial and technological resources, even highly motivated principals are unable to maximize their effectiveness as leaders. Maintaining inclusive education initiatives requires addressing these obstacles.

Table 4. Relationship Between Engagement and Leadership Behaviors

Variables	r	p-value	Interpretation
Principals' Engagement × Leadership Behaviors	0.819	0.000	Significant

The results of the statistical analysis showed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.819$, $p < .001$) between the leadership behaviors of principals and their involvement in inclusive education. Accordingly, principals who take an active role in student involvement, advocacy, and monitoring also exhibit stronger leadership qualities like honesty, drive, and clear communication. The significance level attests to the fact that this relationship represents a genuine and enduring pattern rather than being the result of chance. According to this research, leadership effectiveness is fueled by engagement; the more principals engage in inclusive practices, the more their leadership traits are strengthened, which results in better special education implementation outcomes.

Principals scored highest on advocacy, integrity, and motivation across all results, indicating that Tarlac's Filipino school administrators are models of values-driven leadership. Technology and resource issues, however, highlight structural obstacles that call for organizational and policy-level solutions rather than just leadership behaviors. Since engagement and leadership are strongly correlated, leadership development should emphasize both skill development and promoting active, hands-on participation in inclusive education practices.

Conclusion

According to the study, principals in the Schools Division of Cavite are most active in advocacy and including students with disabilities in decision-making, but they are less active in offering professional development and interacting with stakeholders. Their motivation and integrity are the strongest aspects of their leadership, but their creativity and ability to work with others are lacking. Their ability to maintain inclusive practices is hampered by two major obstacles: obtaining sufficient resources and adjusting to technological advancements. Crucially, the strong positive correlation found between principals' engagement and leadership behaviors suggests that active participation directly improves the efficacy of leadership. Although principals already exhibit strong values-driven leadership, these findings demonstrate that systemic support in the form

of technology, resources, professional development, and stakeholder partnerships is necessary for them to successfully implement inclusive education.

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