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Research Article

Agile Management Practices of School Heads in the City School's Division in Zambales

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ABSTRACT

Educational institutions operate in environments that require school leaders to respond to changing learner, teacher, policy, and community needs. This study examined agile management practices of school heads in public junior high schools in the Division of Zambales. A quantitative correlational design was used with respondents composed of teachers, school heads, and stakeholders. Data were collected through a validated questionnaire covering collaboration, communication, customer focus, continuous improvement, and change readiness. Weighted means were used to describe perceptions across respondent groups. School heads rated their own agile management practices as very high while teachers and stakeholders both reported as high. Across groups, collaboration, customer focus, and continuous improvement were consistently among the more strongly rated dimensions, while change readiness or communication tended to receive comparatively lower ratings depending on respondent group. In conclusion, Agile management was highly evident in the participating schools, particularly in collaborative and improvement-oriented practices. The findings suggest that school leaders can further strengthen agility by institutionalizing responsive communication, change-readiness support, and systematic feedback mechanisms.

Keywords*: Agile Management, Educational Leadership, Public Junior High Schools, School Heads, Zambales*

Introduction

Managing a public school is not simply a matter of keeping schedules, forms, and programs on track. In the participating public junior high schools in Zambales, school leadership operates at the intersection of classroom needs, personnel concerns, learner welfare, community participation, and directives that can change the way schools organize their work. A school head may need to respond to an

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immediate learner concern in the morning, clarify an implementation issue with teachers later in the day, and still attend to monitoring, reporting, and school improvement requirements. This everyday reality makes responsiveness and adaptability practical leadership concerns rather than abstract management ideas.

Agile management is relevant to this setting because it emphasizes collaboration, responsiveness, feedback, iterative improvement, and the capacity to adjust action when conditions change. Recent work on distributed leadership likewise shows that school improvement is strengthened when leadership is not treated as the work of one person but is shared through professional learning and participation (Galdames-Calderón, 2023). Evidence synthesized by Grissom et al. (2021) also points to the importance of school leaders in building productive school climates, supporting collaboration and professional learning, and managing people and resources strategically.

Educational change, however, is rarely implemented through a single announcement. Fullan (2025) emphasizes that sustainable change requires attention to the interaction among people, organizational conditions, and system-level reform. This is particularly relevant to Philippine public schools, where new policies are translated into schedules, lesson planning, assessment practices, learning resources, and school-level routines. DepEd's implementation of the MATATAG Curriculum illustrates this point. DepEd Order No. 010, s. 2024 established policy guidelines for implementation, while DepEd Order No. 012, s. 2024 introduced additional flexibility for Grades 3 to 10 to accommodate differences in school contexts, including staffing and facilities (Department of Education [DepEd], 2024a, 2024b).

The policy environment remained active during the period of data collection. In May 2026, DepEd completed nationwide orientations on Learning Systems Reform Policies covering reforms in areas such as the school calendar, lesson planning, classroom assessment, flexible learning programs, education in emergencies, work immersion, and the strengthened Senior High School curriculum. The national orientation emphasized clear explanations, technical support, and feedback as schools prepared for implementation (DepEd, 2026). These developments provide an important context for examining communication and change readiness: the effectiveness of a reform depends not only on the decision to introduce it but also on how clearly the change is understood, discussed, supported, and monitored at school level.

The present study responds to the need for localized evidence by examining agile management practices from three perspectives of school heads, teachers, and stakeholders in public junior high schools in the Schools Division of Zambales. Looking at these groups together provides a more grounded picture than relying on school heads' self-assessments alone. The study specifically described the level of agile management practices in terms of collaboration, communication, customer focus, continuous improvement, and change readiness, and compared the resulting descriptive patterns across respondent groups.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of the Study

The study used agile management principles as its organizing framework. In school leadership, agility refers to the ability to respond to changing needs while maintaining a clear focus on learning, people, and school improvement. Five dimensions were used to operationalize the construct. Collaboration refers to working with teachers and members of the school community in addressing school concerns. Communication concerns the timely, understandable, and accessible exchange of information. Customer focus refers to attention to learners and other beneficiaries of school services. Continuous improvement involves reviewing practices, using evidence and feedback, and making adjustments. Change readiness refers to preparedness to understand, implement, and sustain new directions.

Stakeholder Theory provides a complementary perspective. Schools make decisions that affect teachers, learners, parents, and community partners; therefore, management cannot be considered agile if affected groups are simply informed after decisions have already been made. Stakeholder-oriented management places value on listening, considering interests, and maintaining relationships with people who are affected by organizational action (Freeman, 1984). In a public-school setting, this perspective helps explain why collaboration and communication are central to the practical meaning of agility.

The conceptual structure was therefore straightforward: the five dimensions were measured through the questionnaire, responses were summarized for each respondent group, and the resulting patterns were compared descriptively. Because the available analysis consisted of weighted means and rankings, the study does not claim that the groups differed significantly in a statistical sense.

The conceptual model used an Input–Process–Output structure: agile management formed the principal inputs; survey administration, sampling, validation, and statistical analysis constituted the process; and empirical findings and an integrated leadership framework represented the output.

Objective of the Study

The study aimed to: (1) determine the perceived level of agile management practices of school heads in public junior high schools in the Schools Division of Zambales in terms of collaboration, communication, customer focus, continuous improvement, and change readiness; and (2) compare the descriptive patterns of perceptions among school heads, teachers, and stakeholders.

Methodology

The study employed a quantitative descriptive-comparative design. The descriptive component summarized the perceived level of agile management practices using weighted means. The comparative component examined the pattern of scores across three respondent groups. No experimental manipulation was involved, and no inferential test of statistical significance was conducted. Accordingly, the study does not use correlational or causal language in interpreting the results.

The study involved 619 respondents: 12 school heads, 427 teachers, and 180 stakeholders. All 12 school heads in the participating schools were included through total sampling. The teacher sample was drawn from a population of 693 using Slovin's formula at a 0.03 margin of error and proportionate simple random sampling. Fifteen stakeholders from each participating school were included through criterion-based selection. Stakeholders were selected because of their direct involvement in school activities, familiarity with school leadership practices, or participation in decision-making and school support activities.

A structured questionnaire measured five dimensions of agile management: collaboration, communication, customer focus, continuous improvement, and change readiness. The instrument underwent content validation and a test run at Tapinac Senior High School. Internal consistency was examined through Cronbach's alpha. The final responses were recorded using a four-point response scale.

Data were gathered after authorization from the Schools Division Superintendent and coordination with participating school heads. The survey was administered in May 2026. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and the safeguards for voluntary participation, confidentiality, and appropriate handling of research data. Completed questionnaires were encoded and summarized for academic and school-improvement purposes.

Weighted means and rank ordering were used to describe the five dimensions for each respondent group. The four-point scale used in the manuscript was interpreted as follows: 3.25–4.00 = Strongly Agree; 2.50–3.24 = Agree; 1.75–2.49 = Disagree; and 1.00–1.74 = Strongly Disagree. Because no inferential comparison was performed, differences among means are treated as descriptive patterns only.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents

Respondent Group	Sample(n)
School heads	12
Teachers	427
Stakeholders	180
Total	619

Note. The study included 15 stakeholders per participating school.

Table 1 shows that the study included three groups who encounter school leadership from different positions. The 12 school heads provided the leadership perspective, while teachers represented those who work with school-level decisions and implementation on a daily basis. Stakeholders added an external or community-facing perspective. The multi-perspective arrangement is useful because a school head may judge a practice by the intention behind it, while a teacher or stakeholder may judge the same practice by how clearly it is experienced in actual school transactions.

Table 2. Agile Management Practices by Respondent Group

Respondent Group	Grand mean	Description
School heads	3.85	Strongly Agree
Teachers	3.56	Strongly Agree
Stakeholders	3.56	Strongly Agree

Note. Scale: 3.25–4.00 = Strongly Agree.

The results show a consistently favorable assessment of agile management across the three respondent groups. As presented in Table 2, school heads recorded the highest overall mean (3.85), followed by teachers and stakeholders, both at 3.56. All three means fall within the Strongly Agree category. The close teacher and stakeholder ratings are notable because they indicate that the favorable assessment was not confined to the school heads' own perspective. At the same time, the higher self-rating of school heads should be read carefully. The result may reflect the difference between knowing the administrative work behind a decision and experiencing the decision as a teacher or community partner. Since no inferential test was conducted, the study cannot conclude that the groups differ significantly; it can only report that their descriptive ratings were not identical.

The overall pattern fits the practical meaning of distributed leadership. Galdames-Calderón (2023) found that collaboration and professional learning can distribute leadership work across members of a school. Grissom et al. (2021) similarly identified collaboration, professional learning, school climate, and strategic management among important areas of effective principal practice. In the Zambales setting, the strong overall ratings therefore suggest that respondents generally see school heads as able to mobilize people and sustain improvement-oriented work.

Table 3. Agile Management Dimensions Reported by School Heads

Dimension	Weighted mean	Rank
Collaboration	3.80	4
Communication	3.82	3
Customer focus	3.94	1.5

Dimension	Weighted mean	Rank
Continuous improvement	3.94	1.5
Change readiness	3.76	5

Note. Grand mean = 3.85; all dimensions were interpreted as Strongly Agree.

Table 3 shows that school heads strongly affirmed all five dimensions of agile management. For school heads, customer focus and continuous improvement shared the highest rating (3.94). Communication followed at 3.82, collaboration at 3.80, and change readiness at 3.76. All five dimensions were still rated Strongly Agree. The pattern suggests that school heads see their leadership most strongly in terms of responding to learners and improving school practices. Change readiness, although still strongly affirmed, occupied the lowest position within this group.

That ordering matters when viewed against the current policy environment. DepEd schools are expected to implement reforms while maintaining continuity of teaching and learning. The MATATAG Curriculum guidelines and their later amendments illustrate how schools must sometimes adjust implementation arrangements to local conditions (DepEd, 2024a, 2024b). A school head may therefore be confident about the value of a reform while still encountering practical limits in preparing every teacher, clarifying every procedural detail, and sustaining the change after the initial rollout. The lower relative score for change readiness may reflect this implementation burden rather than a rejection of change.

Table 4. Agile Management Dimensions Reported by Teachers

Dimension	Weighted mean	Rank
Collaboration	3.60	1
Communication	3.54	4
Customer focus	3.57	3
Continuous improvement	3.58	2
Change readiness	3.53	5

Note. Grand mean = 3.56; all dimensions were interpreted as Strongly Agree.

Table 4 shows that Teachers rated collaboration highest (3.60), followed by continuous improvement (3.58), customer focus (3.57), communication (3.54), and change readiness (3.53). The differences are small, but the ordering is informative: teachers most strongly associated agile management with working together and improving practice. Communication and change readiness were still positively rated, yet neither was among the strongest dimensions.

This pattern is understandable in a school where implementation is often experienced through instructions, meetings, training, forms, classroom requirements, and follow-up support. Communication is not simply the existence of announcements; teachers need to know what a change means for their particular tasks, when it takes effect, what resources are available, and where questions can be raised. DepEd's Learning Action Cell policy positions school-based professional learning as a mechanism for improving teaching and learning (DepEd, 2016). More recent MATATAG implementation guidance likewise highlights orientation, capacity building, and support for school leaders and teachers (DepEd, 2023, 2024c). Thus, the lower relative ratings for communication and change readiness point to the need to make policy communication more dialogic and implementation support more continuous.

Table 5. Agile Management Dimensions Reported by Stakeholders

Dimension	Weighted mean	Rank
Collaboration	3.60	1
Communication	3.54	5
Customer focus	3.56	2.5
Continuous improvement	3.56	2.5
Change readiness	3.55	4

Note. Grand mean = 3.56; all dimensions were interpreted as Strongly Agree.

Table 5 shows that Stakeholders rated collaboration highest (3.60), while customer focus and continuous improvement shared the next position at 3.56. Change readiness followed at 3.55, and communication received the lowest rating at 3.54. The spread is narrow, so the result should not be interpreted as evidence of a major weakness. Instead, it identifies communication as the dimension that stakeholders experienced least strongly relative to the other four dimensions.

The stakeholder result is particularly important because communication is the channel through which school-community collaboration is maintained. A parent or community partner may support a school program but still have limited visibility into why a change was made, what role is expected from stakeholders, or how feedback is used after implementation. This is consistent with the stakeholder-oriented view that affected groups should have opportunities to participate rather than merely receive information (Freeman, 1984). The finding also fits DepEd's continuing emphasis on stakeholder participation and feedback in school improvement and in the dissemination of education reforms

Across the three respondent groups, communication and change readiness did not emerge as the leading dimension. The pattern is more precise than saying that both were uniformly the lowest: communication ranked third among school heads, fourth among teachers, and fifth among stakeholders; change readiness ranked fifth among school heads and teachers and fourth among stakeholders. What is consistent is that neither dimension occupied the top position for any group, and at least one of the two appeared among the bottom two in every group.

One plausible explanation is that collaboration is easier to observe than the quality of communication behind it. People can see that a committee met, that teachers worked together, or that a school activity was completed. It is harder to see whether information moved early enough, reached everyone who needed it, allowed questions, and returned as feedback to the decision maker. In a busy public-school setting, communication can become task-centered: an instruction is transmitted, a form is completed, and the next requirement begins. That process may accomplish compliance without always producing the shared understanding needed for agile implementation.

Change readiness presents a related challenge. Readiness is more demanding than willingness. It involves understanding the reason for a reform, knowing what will change in practice, having access to resources or technical assistance, and receiving feedback while the new practice is being tested. DepEd's 2026 nationwide orientations on Learning Systems Reform Policies explicitly recognized the need to prepare teachers and school heads for reforms through clearer information, support, and feedback. The reforms discussed included lesson planning, classroom assessment and grading, flexible learning programs, education in emergencies, work immersion, and the strengthened Senior High School curriculum (DepEd, 2026). The timing is significant because the present study gathered its data in May 2026, the same period in which the Department was intensifying field orientation on these reforms.

The Zambales findings therefore point to a leadership task beyond announcing change. School heads may strengthen agility by creating short feedback cycles after orientations, identifying which parts of a policy remain unclear to teachers, and providing implementation support before compliance deadlines. Learning Action Cells can serve this purpose because DepEd formally recognizes them as school-based professional learning communities (DepEd, 2016). In practical terms, an agile communication routine could include a brief policy orientation, a space for questions, a record of unresolved concerns, a responsible person for follow-up, and a later check on whether the change is working in classrooms. Such routines connect communication with change readiness instead of treating them as separate administrative tasks.

The results also support a cautious interpretation of leadership self-assessment. School heads rated communication relatively higher than teachers and stakeholders did. This does not mean that school heads' assessment is inaccurate. Rather, the difference in vantage point suggests that leaders may perceive the communication process through the actions they initiate, while teachers and stakeholders experience it through the clarity, timeliness, and usefulness of the information they receive. This is precisely why multiple respondent perspectives are valuable in studying agility.

The results suggest that schools already have a useful foundation: collaboration is consistently strong, and customer focus and continuous improvement are also well rated. The next step is to connect these strengths to more deliberate communication and change support. For example, a collaborative meeting can end with three simple products: what was decided, who needs to know, and when the decision will be reviewed. A new policy can be accompanied by a short implementation checklist and a feedback point rather than being treated as a one-time orientation. Stakeholder consultations can also include a mechanism for reporting what happened after their suggestions were considered.

These actions are consistent with the direction of DepEd policy. The Department's MATATAG implementation guidance recognizes the different contexts of schools and provides room for adjustments, while the Learning Action Cell policy provides a structure for school-based professional learning. The 2026 Learning Systems Reform orientation further underscores the importance of clear guidance, technical assistance, monitoring, and feedback. Agile school leadership in Zambales can therefore be strengthened not by adding another layer of meetings, but by making existing meetings and feedback mechanisms more purposeful.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Agile management practices were strongly evident across the participating public junior high schools in the Schools Division of Zambales. School heads reported the highest overall mean, while teachers and stakeholders produced closely aligned ratings. Collaboration, customer focus, and continuous improvement were recurring strengths. Communication and change readiness remained positively rated but did not occupy the top position in any respondent group. Because the study used descriptive statistics only, these patterns should not be interpreted as statistically significant differences among groups.

The findings support four practical recommendations. First, school heads may institutionalize short, two-way feedback routines after policy orientations and major school decisions. Second, schools may use Learning Action Cells and similar existing structures to discuss not only what a new policy requires but also what teachers need to implement it. Third, change-readiness activities may include implementation timelines, role clarification, resource mapping, and follow-up checks rather than one-time orientation sessions. Fourth, future studies may use inferential tests such as one-way ANOVA or an appropriate nonparametric alternative to determine whether the observed differences among respondent groups are statistically significant, provided

that the raw data and assumptions required for those analyses are available.

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