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TEACHERS' INSTRUCTIONAL ADAPTABILITY IN SHAPING COLLABORATIVE SCHOOL CULTURE IN GEOGRAPHICALLY ISOLATED SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore teachers' instructional adaptability and the level of collaborative school culture in geographically isolated schools. It specifically examined teachers' instructional adaptability in terms of differentiated instruction, flexible classroom management, learner-centered strategies, and technology integration, while assessing collaborative school culture through shared leadership, collegial support, professional learning communities, and collective decision-making. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was utilized, including surveys, Spearman's rho, multiple regression analysis, and thematic analysis of interview data. Findings revealed that teachers demonstrated high levels of instructional adaptability and a highly developed collaborative school culture, particularly in shared leadership and professional learning communities. However, technology integration was the only dimension with a significant relationship to shared leadership, and flexible classroom management individually influenced collegial support. The study concludes that fostering instructional adaptability and collaboration in isolated schools requires focused professional development, peer support systems, and enhanced leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Areas (GIDA) in the Philippines face significant challenges in accessing basic services, including education, due to remote locations and limited infrastructure. Teachers in these areas often work under difficult conditions characterized by inadequate facilities, insufficient materials, and restricted opportunities for professional development. These realities require educators to be highly adaptable and

resourceful to engage students effectively and maintain strong professional relationships with colleagues. Despite these challenges, there is limited research exploring how instructional adaptations contribute to a collaborative school culture in GIDA contexts. This study addresses this gap by examining the role of teachers' instructional adaptability in shaping a collaborative culture and exploring the lived experiences of educators in remote municipalities such as Antipas, Arakan, and President Roxas.

METHODS

This research employed a two-phase design to systematically examine the variables. Phase 1 utilized a descriptive correlational design to assess the relationship between instructional adaptability and collaborative school culture using standardized surveys distributed to 210 public school teachers selected via proportionate random sampling. Statistical tools used included mean scores, Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation, and Multiple Regression Analysis. Phase 2 adopted a phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of teachers through in-depth interviews with 20 purposively selected participants. Data from these interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns regarding instructional strategies and challenges. The study was conducted during the 2025–2026 school year, adhering to ethical standards such as informed consent and confidentiality through coded identifiers.

RESULTS

Quantitative results indicated that teachers possess a "Highly Adaptive" level of instructional adaptability (Overall M = 4.47), with high ratings in technology integration, flexible classroom management, and differentiated instruction. Similarly, the collaborative school culture was found to have "Very High Engagement" (Overall M = 4.49), particularly in shared leadership and professional learning communities. Correlation analysis revealed that technology integration was the only dimension significantly associated with shared leadership ($r = .211$, $p = .050$). Regression analysis further showed that technology integration significantly influenced shared leadership ($p = .049$), while flexible classroom management had a significant positive effect on collegial support ($p = .022$). Qualitative themes highlighted that teachers use localized strategies, differentiate tasks based on learner readiness, and build trust through small-group work to promote collaboration.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that teachers in geographically isolated schools are exceptionally skilled at modifying their methods to meet diverse learner needs despite resource constraints. Technology integration emerges as a critical bridge for shared leadership, as digital tools allow teachers to exchange ideas and coordinate activities regardless of physical distance. Additionally, flexible classroom management—such as adjusting routines and seating—plays a vital role in strengthening professional cooperation and support among colleagues. However, the low R^2 values across most models indicate that instructional practices alone do not fully explain collaborative culture; factors like leadership style, school climate, and organizational trust are likely more influential. Teachers also face persistent challenges in managing multigrade dynamics and balancing heavy workloads, necessitating more robust institutional support.

CONCLUSIONS

Teachers in geographically isolated schools demonstrate high levels of instructional adaptability, which is essential for creating inclusive and effective learning environments in multigrade settings. While a collaborative school culture is highly developed in these areas, instructional adaptability only partially predicts its success, with specific strengths found in the links between technology and leadership, and classroom management and collegial support. This study establishes that strengthening a teacher's capacity to adapt is vital for a supportive environment, yet systemic factors like leadership style and community involvement remain critical. Ultimately, fostering a sustainable collaborative culture in remote regions requires a holistic approach that combines individual teacher innovation with focused professional development and enhanced administrative support.