

Original Article

School Leaders' Leadership Styles and Teachers' Motivation in Remote Public Elementary Schools

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Abstract. School leadership is critical in sustaining teacher motivation, particularly in geographically challenging environments where educators face professional isolation and resource constraints. This conceptual gap remains largely underrepresented in mainstream educational literature. Anchored in Bass's Full Range Leadership Theory and Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, this study aimed to determine the leadership styles of school leaders, assess the level of teachers' motivation, and investigate the correlation between these variables in mountainous public elementary schools in Esperanza District III, Division of Sultan Kudarat, for the School Year 2025-2026. A descriptive-correlational research design was utilized. Through stratified random sampling with equal allocation, 85 teachers from 17 mountainous schools (5 teachers per school) were selected as respondents. Data were collected using a theoretically grounded, expert-validated, and highly reliable (reliability coefficient = .921) researcher-made Likert-scale questionnaire. Following rigorous assumption testing (normality and linearity) to ensure methodological validity, statistical tools, including the weighted mean, Pearson correlation (r), and t-tests, were employed to analyze the data. Findings revealed that school leaders prominently exhibit transactional (Mean = 4.25, Strongly Agree) and transformational (Mean = 4.20, Strongly Agree) leadership styles, alongside laissez-faire practices (Mean = 4.17, Agree). Correspondingly, teachers demonstrated high levels of both intrinsic (Mean = 4.28, Strongly Agree) and extrinsic (Mean = 4.29, Strongly Agree) motivation. Correlational analysis established a strong, highly significant positive relationship between school leaders' leadership styles and teachers' motivation ($r = 0.740$, t -computed = 11.57, $p = 0.000$). The leadership styles employed by school heads, particularly active approaches such as transactional and transformational leadership, significantly drive both teachers' internal fulfillment and external motivation in remote settings. The study concludes that providing clear direction, recognizing performance, and offering individualized support are essential for maintaining high teacher morale in geographically challenged areas.

Keywords: *Leadership styles; Mountainous schools; School leaders; Teacher motivation; Transformational leadership.*

School leadership has become increasingly significant in the development of teachers' motivation, particularly in schools situated in geographically challenging regions. In mountainous public elementary schools, school leaders serve as instructional administrators, as well as sources of encouragement, stability, and support for

teachers who encounter daily challenges such as professional isolation, extended travel distances, and inadequate resources. Leadership practices are particularly essential for maintaining teacher motivation and commitment in districts such as Esperanza District III in the Division of Sultan Kudarat, where these challenges are an integral part of the daily school experience.

Teachers who work in mountainous schools frequently exhibit a strong commitment to their students; however, their motivation may be influenced by the manner in which school administrators guide, support, and interact with them. In rural and marginalized contexts, teachers' motivation has a substantial impact on their performance, job satisfaction, and willingness to remain in the profession, as evidenced by Rossiandy & Indradewa (2023). Despite the demanding conditions of their work, teachers are more likely to remain motivated when they feel valued, supported, and inspired by their school leaders (Luo, 2025).

Leadership style is the term used to describe the unique methods by which school leaders influence instructors through decision-making, communication, supervision, and interpersonal relationships (Guillergan, 2024). A study conducted by Rahmawati (2022) demonstrates that transformational, instructional, participative, and servant leadership styles are positively correlated with increased teacher motivation. Transformational leadership, in particular, has been found to motivate teachers by fostering a shared vision, recognition, and professional development, whereas instructional leadership enhances motivation by providing clear objectives, guidance, and feedback (Sholeh et al., 2026).

Leadership becomes even more essential in rural and remote school environments. Nawab and Quraishi (2024) suggest that teachers in mountainous and rural schools depend significantly on supportive leadership to manage their workloads, limited facilities, and limited professional development opportunities. In public elementary schools, Philippine-based research has also confirmed that school heads' effective leadership styles are substantially correlated with teachers' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Albino, 2023). These results emphasize the necessity of analyzing leadership practices in localized contexts rather than relying solely on general assumptions.

While extensive research has established the general link between leadership and teacher motivation, the majority of these studies are situated in urban or highly accessible environments. A significant conceptual and empirical gap exists regarding how these leadership dynamics operate in highly remote, geographically challenged environments like Esperanza District III in the Division of Sultan Kudarat. This study addresses this gap by investigating how standard leadership paradigms function under extreme physical constraints, offering a localized context that moves beyond general assumptions to provide actionable insights for remote school administration.

This study is anchored in two primary theoretical frameworks: Bass's Full Range Leadership Theory (1985) and Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (1985). Bass's theory provides the foundation for evaluating school leaders by categorizing leadership into transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire styles, which dictate how leaders interact with and inspire their subordinates. Concurrently, SDT provides the lens for understanding teacher motivation, distinguishing between intrinsic motivation (driven by internal satisfaction) and extrinsic motivation (driven by external rewards or recognition). This study conceptualizes how specific leadership behaviors (Bass) fulfill or hinder the psychological needs of teachers, thereby driving their internal and external motivational states (SDT) within the challenging context of mountainous educational settings.

In light of these factors, the objective of this study is to ascertain the leadership styles of school leaders and the level of motivation of teachers in remote public elementary schools in Esperanza District III, Division of Sultan Kudarat, and to investigate the substantial correlation between these variables. The findings of this study may serve as a foundation for leadership development programs, policy formulation, and support mechanisms that address the realities of teachers and school chiefs in geographically challenged areas, by employing a descriptive-correlational research design.

Methodology

Research Design

The researcher used a descriptive-correlational research design. This specific design was selected because it directly aligns with the study's dual objectives. The descriptive survey is a fact-finding study with adequate and

accurate interpretation. It is used to collect demographic data about people's behavior, practices, intentions, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, judgements, interests, perceptions, and the like, which are then analyzed, organized, and interpreted (Brondolo, 2021). In this study, the descriptive approach was essential for systematically assessing and quantifying the prevailing leadership styles of school leaders and the current levels of motivation among teachers in remote public elementary schools in Esperanza District III, Division of Sultan Kudarat, for the School Year 2025-2026. Furthermore, the correlational method was chosen as the most appropriate statistical approach to answer the study's primary research question. It allows the researcher to investigate and measure the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the independent variable (leadership styles) and the dependent variable (teacher motivation) without manipulating them within their natural, geographically challenged environment.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in 17 identified remote public elementary schools in Esperanza District III, Division of Sultan Kudarat.

Research Respondents

The respondents of the study were the teachers in remote public elementary schools in Esperanza District III, Division of Sultan Kudarat, for the School Year 2025-2026. To ensure the validity of the data, the researcher applied specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusion was limited to teachers holding permanent positions who have been teaching at their current school for at least one full academic year. Newly hired teachers, substitute teachers, and those on temporary contracts were excluded from the study, as they may not have had sufficient time to fully experience and evaluate the school leader's practices. The study employed a Stratified Random Sampling method with equal allocation, where the 17 identified remote schools served as the strata. From each stratum, exactly 5 teachers who met the criteria were randomly selected, resulting in a total of 85 respondents. This stratified approach ensured equal and comprehensive data representation across all target schools within the district.

Research Instrument

The researcher-made survey questionnaire was newly developed specifically for this study through a rigorous review of existing literature. The specific test items were originally constructed by operationalizing the core constructs of Bass's Full Range Leadership Theory and Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory to ensure strong theoretical grounding. For instance, sample items measuring leadership included "The school leader acts in ways that build teachers' respect and trust," while items measuring motivation included "I find teaching personally fulfilling". To establish content validity, the initial draft of the instrument was submitted to a panel of experts, including the research adviser, master teachers, and a school principal, who evaluated the items for relevance, clarity, and theoretical alignment. Following revisions based on expert feedback, a pilot test was conducted among 10 teachers who were part of the target population but excluded from the final respondent pool. To establish the internal consistency and reliability of the instrument, the pilot data were analyzed using the Guttman Split-Half Coefficient Method via SPSS. The reliability testing, overseen by a statistician, yielded a coefficient of .921, indicating that the instrument is highly reliable and methodologically sound for data collection.

Data Analysis

While descriptive statistics (weighted mean) were utilized to determine the prevailing leadership styles and motivation levels, inferential statistics were strictly applied to test the study's hypotheses. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was utilized to measure the strength and direction of the linear relationship between leadership styles and teacher motivation.

Prior to conducting inferential analyses, foundational statistical assumptions were tested to ensure data integrity. The Shapiro-Wilk test was utilized to assess the normality of the data distribution for both leadership styles and teacher motivation variables, with results indicating normal distribution ($p > 0.05$). Furthermore, scatterplots were generated to confirm the assumption of linearity between the independent and dependent variables. Boxplots were examined to ensure the absence of significant outliers that could skew the correlational and inferential outcomes. Because all assumptions for parametric testing were met, the use of Pearson (r) and independent t-tests was deemed methodologically appropriate.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers asked permission from the Schools Division Superintendent of Sultan Kudarat to conduct this

study. After his approval, the researchers likewise sought permission from the District Supervisors, the school heads, and the respective respondents to gather the necessary data. After doing so, the researchers distributed the questionnaires to the respondents personally through a face-to-face medium using printed copies. The data collection process was conducted over a duration of three weeks during the month of November 2025. After its distribution, the researchers retrieved and checked all the items to ensure they were properly answered. Then, tabulation and analysis were processed through the use of Microsoft Excel for quick and accurate results. It was run by a computer using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The data were presented in tables after all were analyzed and interpreted using the said processing techniques.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to implementation, the researchers ensured compliance with the following procedures and protocols for all of the above plans and suggestions.

Informed Consent

The researcher obtained informed consent from all participating teacher-respondents, ensuring they fully understood the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Consent was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw at any time without consequences.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The researcher ensured the confidentiality of participants' identities and responses. This study used pseudonyms or codes instead of real names to protect their privacy. Data was stored securely, and access was limited only to the research team.

Data Protection

The researcher adhered to data protection laws and regulations to safeguard participants' information and ensured that data was stored and transmitted securely.

Voluntary Participation

The researcher ensured that participation in the study was entirely voluntary and not influenced by coercion or external pressures.

Results and Discussion

School Leaders' Leadership Style in Terms of Transformational Leadership

Table 1. *Level of School Leaders' Leadership Style in Terms of Transformational Leadership*

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
1. The school leader acts in ways that build teachers' respect and trust.	4.28	Strongly Agree
2. The school leader demonstrates high ethical standards.	4.21	Strongly Agree
3. The school leader clearly communicates the school vision and mission.	4.10	Agree
4. The school leader promotes creativity and innovation in teaching.	4.17	Agree
5. The school leader gives personal attention to teachers who need support.	4.25	Strongly Agree
Overall Mean	4.20	Strongly Agree

Note. 4.20 - 5.00-Strongly Agree; 3.40 - 4.19-Agree; 2.60 - 3.39-Moderately Agree; 1.80 - 2.59 -Disagree; 1.00 - 1.79 -Strongly Disagree

The data presented in Table 1 show the level of school leaders' leadership style in terms of transformational leadership. The overall mean of 4.20, interpreted as Strongly Agree, indicates that school leaders in Esperanza District III generally demonstrate transformational leadership behaviors that positively influence teachers and the school environment.

Among the indicators, the highest mean is "The school leader acts in ways that build teachers' respect and trust" (M = 4.28), suggesting that school leaders are effective in establishing strong, trust-based relationships with teachers. This is followed by "The school leader gives personal attention to teachers who need support" (M = 4.25) and "The school leader demonstrates high ethical standards" (M = 4.21), indicating that leaders show concern for individual teacher needs while maintaining integrity and professionalism.

The lowest mean is "The school leader clearly communicates the school vision and mission" (M = 4.10), although still interpreted as Agree, suggesting that communication practices are present but may still be strengthened to

ensure a clearer and more consistent understanding of the school's direction among teachers.

These findings support the research conducted by Proffitt (2021), which emphasizes that transformational leadership is essential in promoting teacher motivation, professional growth, and school improvement. Leaders who build trust, uphold ethical standards, encourage innovation, and provide individualized support contribute to a more collaborative and effective educational environment. Further, these findings imply that while school leaders generally practice transformational leadership behaviors, there is still room for enhancement, particularly in effectively communicating the school's vision and mission and further encouraging innovation. Strengthening these areas can contribute to improved teacher engagement and overall school performance (Tiongson, 2025).

School Leaders' Leadership Style in Terms of Transactional Leadership

Table 2. *Level of School Leaders' Leadership Style in Terms of Transactional Leadership*

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
1. The school leader clearly explains expected performance standards.	4.23	Strongly Agree
2. The school leader provides recognition when teachers meet goals.	4.35	Strongly Agree
3. The school leader monitors teachers' performance regularly.	4.20	Strongly Agree
4. The school leader gives feedback to correct mistakes.	4.15	Agree
5. The school leader uses rewards to motivate teachers.	4.31	Strongly Agree
Overall Mean	4.25	Strongly Agree

Note. 4.20 - 5.00-Strongly Agree; 3.40 - 4.19 -Agree; 2.60 - 3.39 -Moderately Agree; 1.80 - 2.59 -Disagree; 1.00 - 1.79-Strongly Disagree

The data presented in Table 2 show the level of school leaders' leadership style in terms of transactional leadership. The overall mean of 4.25, interpreted as Strongly Agree, indicates that school leaders in Esperanza District III generally practice transactional leadership behaviors, particularly in setting expectations, monitoring performance, and providing rewards and feedback.

Among the indicators, the highest mean is "The school leader provides recognition when teachers meet goals" (M = 4.35), suggesting that school leaders effectively acknowledge and reward teachers' accomplishments. This is followed by "The school leader uses rewards to motivate teachers" (M = 4.31) and "The school leader clearly explains expected performance standards" (M = 4.23), indicating that leaders emphasize clear expectations and utilize incentives to encourage teacher performance.

The lowest mean is "The school leader gives feedback to correct mistakes" (M = 4.15), although still interpreted as Agree, suggesting that while corrective feedback is practiced, it may still be enhanced to further support teacher improvement and professional growth.

These findings imply that transactional leadership practices are evident among school leaders, particularly in reinforcing performance through rewards and recognition. Wanjiru et al. (2025) suggest that transactional leadership, when effectively implemented, can improve teacher performance by providing clear structures, expectations, and incentives that guide behavior and enhance productivity.

School Leaders' Leadership Style in Terms of Laissez-Faire Leadership

Table 3. *Level of School Leaders' Leadership Style in Terms of Laissez-Faire Leadership*

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
1. The school leader avoids making important decisions.	4.19	Agree
2. The school leader provides little guidance to teachers.	4.27	Strongly Agree
3. The school leader delays action when problems arise.	4.06	Agree
4. The school leader rarely follows up on teachers' concerns.	4.11	Agree
5. The school leader allows teachers to work without supervision.	4.22	Strongly Agree
Overall Mean	4.17	Agree

Note. 4.20 - 5.00-Strongly Agree; 3.40 - 4.19-Agree; 2.60 - 3.39-Moderately Agree; 1.80 - 2.59-Disagree; 1.00 - 1.79-Strongly Disagree

The data presented in Table 3 show the level of school leaders' leadership style in terms of laissez-faire leadership. The overall mean of 4.17, interpreted as Agree, indicates that school leaders in Esperanza District III tend to exhibit laissez-faire leadership behaviors to a considerable extent, particularly in allowing autonomy and minimal

supervision among teachers.

Among the indicators, the highest mean is “The school leader provides little guidance to teachers” (M = 4.27), suggesting that teachers are often given independence in carrying out their tasks with limited direct supervision. This is followed by “The school leader allows teachers to work without supervision” (M = 4.22) and “The school leader avoids making important decisions” (M = 4.19), indicating a tendency toward a hands-off approach in leadership practices.

The lowest mean is “The school leader delays action when problems arise” (M = 4.06), although still interpreted as Agree, suggesting that while delays in addressing issues occur, they are slightly less evident compared to other laissez-faire behaviors.

These findings imply that while school leaders provide autonomy to teachers, there may be a lack of active leadership involvement in decision-making, guidance, and problem-solving. Norris et al. (2021) emphasize that excessive reliance on laissez-faire leadership may result in unclear direction, reduced accountability, and lower organizational effectiveness, particularly in educational settings where guidance and support are essential.

Teachers’ Motivation in Terms of Intrinsic Motivation

Table 4. *Level of Teachers’ Motivation in Terms of Intrinsic Motivation*

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
1. I find teaching personally fulfilling.	4.41	Strongly Agree
2. I enjoy teaching because it is meaningful to me.	4.32	Strongly Agree
3. I am motivated by my desire to help learners succeed.	4.35	Strongly Agree
4. I feel satisfied when I perform my teaching tasks well.	4.20	Strongly Agree
5. Teaching gives me a sense of accomplishment.	4.11	Agree
Overall Mean	4.28	Strongly Agree

Note: 4.20 - 5.00-Strongly Agree; 3.40 - 4.19-Agree; 2.60 - 3.39- Moderately Agree; 1.80 - 2.59-Disagree; 1.00 - 1.79-Strongly Disagree

The data presented in Table 4 show the level of teachers’ motivation in terms of intrinsic motivation. The overall mean of 4.28, interpreted as Strongly Agree, indicates that teachers in Esperanza District III are generally intrinsically motivated, finding personal satisfaction and meaning in their teaching profession.

Among the indicators, the highest mean is “I find teaching personally fulfilling” (M = 4.41), suggesting that teachers derive a strong sense of personal gratification from their work. This is followed by “I am motivated by my desire to help learners succeed” (M = 4.35) and “I enjoy teaching because it is meaningful to me” (M = 4.32), indicating that internal values, passion for teaching, and commitment to student success drive teachers.

The lowest mean is for “Teaching gives me a sense of accomplishment” (M = 4.11), although still interpreted as Agree, suggesting that while teachers do feel a sense of achievement, this aspect of intrinsic motivation may still be strengthened.

These findings imply that intrinsic motivation is evident among teachers, as they are driven by personal fulfillment, enjoyment, and a strong sense of purpose in their profession. Intrinsically motivated teachers tend to demonstrate higher engagement, commitment, and effectiveness in teaching, which positively impact student learning outcomes (Clanton Harpine, 2024).

Teachers’ Motivation in Terms of Extrinsic Motivation

Table 5. *Level of Teachers’ Motivation in Terms of Extrinsic Motivation*

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
1. Recognition from school leaders motivates me to work harder.	4.27	Strongly Agree
2. Opportunities for promotion motivate me to perform well.	4.28	Strongly Agree
3. Incentives encourage me to improve my performance.	4.43	Strongly Agree
4. Support and feedback from my school leader motivate me.	4.45	Strongly Agree
5. Job security motivates me to do my best in teaching.	4.19	Agree
Overall Mean	4.29	Strongly Agree

Note: 4.20 - 5.00- Strongly Agree; 3.40 - 4.19 -Agree; 2.60 - 3.39-Moderately Agree; 1.80 - 2.59-Disagree; 1.00 - 1.79-Strongly Disagree

The data presented in Table 5 show the level of teachers’ motivation in terms of extrinsic motivation. The overall mean of 4.29, interpreted as Strongly Agree, indicates that teachers in Esperanza District III are generally motivated by external factors such as recognition, leadership support, and organizational practices.

Among the indicators, the highest mean is “Support and feedback from my school leader motivate me” (M = 4.45), suggesting that direct guidance and encouragement from school leadership play a critical role in driving teachers' performance. This is followed by “Incentives encourage me to improve my performance” (M = 4.43) and “Opportunities for promotion motivate me to perform well” (M = 4.28), indicating that tangible rewards and career advancement prospects are also strong external motivators.

The lowest mean is “Job security motivates me to do my best in teaching” (M = 4.19), which is interpreted as Agree. This suggests that while job stability is an important factor, it is slightly less influential than direct leadership support and tangible incentives.

These findings imply that extrinsic motivation among teachers is evident, particularly through support, feedback, and incentives. According to Williamson and Blackburn (2023), external factors such as rewards, recognition, and supportive leadership significantly influence teacher motivation and performance, complementing intrinsic motivation in improving overall work outcomes.

School Leaders’ Leadership Styles and Teachers’ Motivation

Table 6. *Correlation Results Between School Leaders’ Leadership Styles and Teachers’ Motivation*

Variables	Correlation	t - computed	p - value	Interpretation
School Leaders’ Leadership Styles Teachers’ Motivation	.740	11.57	0.000	Highly Significant

Table 6 indicates a statistically significant positive correlation between school leaders’ leadership styles and teachers’ motivation ($r^* = .740$, $t^*(83) = 11.57$, $p^* = 0.001$). The correlation coefficient (r^*) of .740 suggests a strong positive relationship. This indicates that as school leaders actively demonstrate and apply their leadership behaviors, teachers' motivation also tends to increase. The computed $t^*(83)$ -value of 11.57 is statistically significant, with a p^* -value of 0.000. Since the p^* -value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis (that there is no relationship between the two variables) is firmly rejected. This provides strong evidence that the observed correlation is highly significant and not due to chance.

The findings suggest that the effective application of distinct leadership styles by school administrators is associated with enhanced teacher motivation. Specifically, the data highlights that active leadership approaches, such as transactional leadership, which relies on clear expectations and performance-based rewards, and transformational leadership, which focuses on inspiring vision and building trust, play critical roles in driving motivation. Furthermore, the provision of professional autonomy and independence through laissez-faire leadership also acts as a positive motivator in the workplace. These results align with Sumampong and Arnado (2024), who emphasize that leadership practices significantly influence teacher motivation, engagement, and performance in educational settings. Eventually, leaders who exhibit these varied behaviors create a supportive environment that acts as a strong motivator for teachers, translating into a more engaged and effective instructional practice (Sulaiman et al., 2025).

Conclusion

This study advances the current understanding of educational leadership by contextualizing Bass’s Full Range Leadership Theory and Deci and Ryan’s Self-Determination Theory within the unique, resource-constrained environment of mountainous public schools. Rather than merely confirming a known correlation between leadership and motivation, the findings reveal a distinct localized dynamic: in geographically isolated settings, school leaders must effectively blend transformational and transactional styles to sustain both teacher morale and operational structure. Furthermore, the unexpected coexistence of laissez-faire leadership tendencies with high teacher motivation offers a novel contribution to the literature. It suggests that in remote schools where direct supervision is challenging, a degree of leadership detachment might inadvertently foster teacher autonomy, forcing educators to rely heavily on their intrinsic resilience and self-determination.

These insights carry specific and critical implications for educational practice and policy. In practice, school leaders assigned to mountainous areas must consciously adopt an adaptive leadership approach—providing clear transactional expectations to manage logistical hurdles, while simultaneously utilizing transformational strategies to combat the professional isolation felt by remote teachers. At the policy level, educational institutions and division offices should move away from one-size-fits-all, urban-centric leadership models. Policymakers must design and fund context-specific leadership development programs tailored specifically for school heads deployed to geographically challenged areas.

To further enrich this emerging field, future research should build upon these findings by transitioning from descriptive assessments to qualitative explorations. Future researchers are encouraged to investigate the lived experiences of remote teachers to deeply understand the psychological mechanisms behind their high motivation despite instances of laissez-faire leadership. Building on recent studies concerning far-flung educational settings (Tiongson, 2025) and new theoretical frameworks for teacher engagement (Sumampong & Arnado, 2024), future inquiries should also test targeted leadership interventions to determine which specific practices best promote long-term retention and well-being among educators in mountainous districts.

Contributions of Authors

The principal author contributes to the study's writing and implementation. The co-author edits and supervises the data.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors assert no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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