PANTAO
(International Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences)
Volume 5, Issue 2
ISSN 3028-0877 | DOI 10.69651/2022PIJHSS

Beyond ideal: A phenomenological study of transformative leadership in public secondary schools in Soccsksargen Region

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ABSTRACT

Leadership in schools transcends administrative function it shapes the professional identities, pedagogical practices, and emotional well-being of teachers who stand at the heart of educational transformation. This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of ten secondary school teachers with transformational school leaders in Sarangani Province and General Santos City, Philippines. Grounded in Transformational Leadership Theory and Narrative Inquiry, the study examined how teachers describe, feel about, and derive insights from transformational leadership in everyday school contexts. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews then analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. Three overarching themes emerged: relational-transformational leadership for holistic human development, teacher empowerment for student-centered pedagogical innovation, and collaborative emotionally intelligent leadership anchored in contextualized vision and identity formation. Findings revealed that transformational leadership operates through relational, emotional, and contextual pathways rather than through direct administrative mandates. The study challenged universalist leadership assumptions and called for context-sensitive, culturally grounded frameworks that position Filipino values as legitimate foundations for educational leadership theory and practice.

Keywords: Transformational leadership, lived experiences, teacher empowerment, thematic analysis, professional identity, emotional intelligence, Philippine secondary education.

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DOI: http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS05021184

Recommended citation:
Dondriano, L. J. H., Dondan, J. T., Jr., Natavio, A. M., Rollo, C. R., & Sison, J. S. (2026). Beyond ideal: A phenomenological study of transformative leadership in public secondary schools in Soccsksargen Region. Pantao (International Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences) 5 (2), 4744-4764. http://doi.org/10.69651/PIJHSS05021184

Date Submitted: May 5, 2026
Date Accepted: May 12, 2026
Date Published: May 19, 2026

INTRODUCTION

Transformational Leadership Theory remains one of the most influential frameworks for understanding how school leaders mobilize change, motivate teachers, and improve school outcomes. Principals who demonstrate idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration are consistently linked with higher teacher performance and stronger organizational outcomes (Thahir et al., 2025; Komara et al., 2025). Transformational leadership is further associated with enhanced teacher motivation, professional commitment, and classroom innovation, making it a preferred model in educational reform agendas (Ramos, 2025; Menon, 2023).

Despite the extensive literature on transformational leadership, much evidence relies on surveys and outcome indicators rather than rich, narrative accounts of teachers' everyday experiences. Contextual constraints including resource limitations, workload pressures, and policy demand shape how transformational leadership is enacted in practice, revealing gaps between its theoretical ideal and its uneven realization in schools (Komara et al., 2025; Sliwka et al., 2023). Teachers lived experiences remain underused as a lens for interrogating Transformational Leadership Theory, particularly at the secondary level where accountability pressures and curriculum demands are especially intense.

By centering secondary teachers' voices, this study addresses a critical gap in the literature. For school leaders, it clarifies how their practices are experienced at the classroom level. For teachers, it validates their lived realities. For policymakers and leadership preparation programs, it offers practical guidance for translating transformational leadership ideals into contextually responsive action.

This study is anchored in Republic Act No. 9155 (Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001), which designates school principals as instructional leaders responsible for creating quality learning environments. The Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (DepEd Order No. 024, s. 2020) further outlines leadership competencies aligned with transformational dimensions, while Republic Act No. 10533 (K to 12 Program) reinforces the need for adaptive, research-informed leadership. Together, these frameworks provide the policy basis for examining transformational leadership within the Philippine secondary school context.

Statement of the problem

This phenomenological study aimed to explored and understand the lived experiences of secondary school teachers in relation to school leaders who practice transformational leadership, particularly how such leadership influences teachers' professional growth, motivation, classroom practices, and perceptions of leadership in everyday school contexts. Specifically, the study sought to examine:

1. How do teachers describe their lived experiences with school leaders who practice transformational leadership in secondary school settings?
2. How do teachers feel about the transformative influence of school leaders' transformational leadership on their professional growth and classroom practices?
3. What insights do teachers provide about transformational leadership based on their experiences in everyday school life?

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METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design, guided by the transcendental phenomenological framework of Moustakas (1994), to explore the lived experiences of teachers with school leaders who practice transformational leadership. Phenomenology was appropriate for this study as it focused on understanding the essence and meaning of a shared experience from the perspectives of individuals who have directly encountered the phenomenon. In this approach, the researcher practiced epoche or bracketing to set aside personal assumptions and biases, allowing participants' experiences to be described as authentically as possible. Data were typically collected through in-depth interviews or reflective accounts, and analyzed through processes such as horizonalization, textural and structural descriptions, which were then synthesized to reveal the essential nature of teachers' experiences with transformational leadership in secondary school contexts.

The study was conducted in selected secondary schools in Sarangani Province and General Santos City, areas located in the SOCCSKSARGEN Region in Mindanao. Sarangani Province was predominantly rural and characterized by diverse cultural communities, including several Indigenous Peoples groups, while General Santos City served as a major urban and economic center in the region with a larger concentration of secondary schools and educational institutions. These locations provided varied educational contexts, from rural and resource-constrained schools to more urbanized learning environments, allowing the study to capture diverse teacher experiences with transformational leadership practices in secondary classrooms. The inclusion of schools from both settings enabled a deeper exploration of how leadership behaviors are perceived and experienced by teachers across different institutional, cultural, and socio-educational conditions.

The participants of this study were public secondary school teachers with direct experience working under school leaders practicing transformational leadership. Inclusion criteria required that participants were currently teaching in a secondary school in Sarangani Province or General Santos City, had at least five years of teaching experience to ensure sufficient professional exposure and sustained interaction with leadership practices, were actively involved in classroom instruction and school activities, and were willing to participate in in-depth interviews to share personal experiences. A total of 10 participants were purposively selected, following phenomenological research guidelines, to provide a rich, in-depth exploration of lived experiences while maintaining a manageable dataset. The five-year minimum teaching experience ensured that participants had the context and longitudinal perspective necessary to meaningfully reflect on how transformational leadership had influenced their professional growth, motivation, and classroom practices over time.

This study utilized three primary data collection lenses to explore the phenomenon of transformational leadership in secondary classrooms. Semi-structured interviews served as the main instrument, using open-ended questions that allowed participants to narrate their personal transformative moments and experiences with school leaders. Reflective journals complemented the interviews, enabling participants to document and reflect on how they navigate classroom power dynamics and interpret leadership influences in their daily practice. Additionally, the researchers maintained an epoché diary to bracket their own assumptions and biases, ensuring that interpretations remained grounded in the participants lived experiences rather than the researchers' prior beliefs or professional perspectives.

The study was conducted following a step-by-step phenomenological procedure. First, ethical clearance and school permissions were secured. Next, participants meeting the inclusion criteria were purposively selected. Data collection began with semi-structured interviews,

followed by reflective journals completed by participants, while the researchers maintained an epoché diary to bracket personal assumptions. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and all data were organized, coded, and analyzed using phenomenological methods, including horizonalization, textural descriptions, and structural descriptions, to identify significant statements and synthesize the essence of teachers lived experiences with transformational leadership in secondary classrooms.

This study employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis to examine teachers' experiences with transformational leadership. In the first phase, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by repeatedly reading the interview transcripts for initial impressions and patterns that emerged across participants' accounts. In the second phase, initial codes were systematically generated by identifying meaningful units of data that captured something significant about teachers' experiences in relation to transformational leadership. In the third phase, these codes were sorted and grouped into potential themes by examining how different codes related to one another and what broader patterns they collectively suggested. The fourth phase involved reviewing and refining these candidate themes against the full dataset to ensure that each theme was internally coherent, clearly distinguishable from others, and faithfully representative of the data as a whole. Themes that lacked sufficient evidential grounding were collapsed or reconsidered, while those with strong and varied support across participants were retained and sharpened. In the fifth phase, each theme was given a clear name and definition that captured its essence and its specific contribution to understanding how transformational leadership is experienced in everyday secondary school life. Finally, in the sixth phase, the analysis was written up as a rich, interpretive narrative that moved fluidly between the thematic patterns and the participants' own words, producing findings that are both analytically rigorous and grounded in the lived texture of teachers' professional experiences.

This study adhered to strict ethical considerations to ensure the rights, safety, and dignity of all participants. Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was obtained from relevant authorities, and informed consent was secured from each participant, clearly explaining the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Participants' confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by using pseudonyms and securely storing all data. The researchers also practiced sensitivity and respect during interviews and reflections, avoiding any harm or discomfort. Additionally, the researchers-maintained reflexivity through an epoché diary to bracket personal biases, ensuring that interpretations remained faithful to participants lived experiences rather than the researchers' assumptions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined the lived experiences of 10 purposively selected public secondary school teachers working under school leaders who practice transformational leadership in selected secondary schools in Sarangani Province and General Santos City, SOCCSKSARGEN Region, Mindanao. Employing a qualitative phenomenological research design guided by the transcendental phenomenological framework of Moustakas (1994), the study collected data through semi-structured interviews, participant-maintained reflective journals, and a researcher-maintained epoché diary. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, which involved familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, construction of potential themes, review and refinement of themes, definition and naming of themes, and production of an interpretive narrative. The discussion that follows is grounded entirely in the data gathered from participants and is interpreted in

direct relation to the study's objectives of understanding how transformational leadership is experienced, felt, and reflected upon by teachers in everyday secondary school life.

Relational-transformational leadership for holistic human development

Teachers' accounts consistently revealed that effective school leaders exercise what organizational literature terms interpersonal emotion regulation, a sophisticated and intentional set of practices that encompasses sensing early signs of burnout, organizing non-judgmental forums for collective expression, providing concrete material support, and carefully calibrating whether communicative approaches should be directed collectively toward the group or individually toward specific members depending on the emotional and professional context. Far from being incidental acts of kindness, these behaviors constitute a recognizable and deliberate form of leadership practice in which the emotional climate of the school is actively managed, monitored, and sustained. Concrete illustrations from the data make this tangible: Participant 6's account of a school leader who organized the simple but symbolically powerful act of serving food during particularly demanding periods communicates care in a register that transcends formal authority, while Participant 1's description of a structured check-in circle reflects an institutionalized ritual through which leaders create protected space for teachers to voice fatigue, frustration, and vulnerability without professional consequence. Perhaps most analytically revealing is Participant 10's nuanced account of a leader who deliberately generalizes negative feedback, framing it as a shared concern rather than an individual failure, in order to protect the dignity of those most affected, while simultaneously individualizing positive reinforcement so that personal achievements are recognized with specificity and warmth. This represents not merely good interpersonal instinct but a strategically sophisticated relational architecture that holds accountability and belonging in productive tension, preventing the emotional environment from collapsing into either punitive rigidity or undifferentiated permissiveness.

Underlying these varied practices is a foundational insight that participants articulated with remarkable consistency: teachers do not and perhaps cannot compartmentalize their professional performance from their emotional well-being. When these two dimensions are treated as separable by institutional structures or leadership philosophies, teachers experience a form of relational disconnection that gradually erodes motivation, commitment, and creative investment in their work. Conversely, school leaders who create genuine conditions for emotional safety generate what Participant 1 described as a reservoir of trust, an accumulated relational capital that the professional community can draw upon during periods of institutional pressure, policy disruption, or collective uncertainty. This framing positions emotional leadership not as a supplementary or peripheral gesture that leaders perform in addition to their administrative responsibilities, but as a structural condition upon which institutional resilience fundamentally depends. When this reservoir is deep and consistently replenished through sustained relational attention, teachers demonstrate greater capacity to absorb difficulty, maintain instructional quality, and remain professionally engaged even under challenging circumstances; when it is shallow or neglected, even modest institutional stressors can precipitate disengagement, interpersonal conflict, and erosion of collective purpose.

This interpretation finds robust empirical grounding in recent literature. Gu et al. (2024) established that principal transformational leadership does not merely model emotional competence from a distance but actively amplifies teachers' own emotional intelligence, producing measurable downstream effects on psychological well-being and organizational commitment, suggesting that the leader's emotional practices are contagious in a professionally

constructive sense, gradually reshaping the emotional culture of the institution over time. Complementing this, Berkovich and Eyal (2017) confirmed through empirical analysis that principals' emotional reframing, the capacity to help teachers reconstruct the meaning of difficult experiences in ways that are less threatening and more generative, functions as a significant mediating mechanism between transformational leadership behaviors and teacher motivation, meaning that emotional competence is not simply a byproduct of effective leadership but one of its primary operative pathways. Together, these studies substantiate what participants described experientially: that being led by someone who demonstrates genuine emotional attunement produces not only immediate feelings of support but durable changes in how teachers relate to their work, their colleagues, and their institution.

However, the relationship between emotional leadership and teacher outcomes is not uniformly positive, and the data demands that this complexity be taken seriously rather than glossed over in the interest of a tidy conclusion. Mäkikangas et al. (2025) identified a significant and counterintuitive paradox embedded within transformational leadership: while such leadership reliably reduces emotional exhaustion in the short term by providing validation, encouragement, and relational warmth, it can simultaneously and progressively intensify performance demands and role expectations in ways that generate new and distinct forms of pressure over time. The very inspiration that transformational leaders cultivate creates heightened internal standards among teachers, who may then experience the gap between aspiration and daily classroom reality as a source of renewed stress rather than sustained motivation. This finding resonates deeply with Participant 9's explicit caution that leaders must be careful to avoid too much leniency, recognizing that emotional support extended without clear accountability structures, professional expectations, or honest evaluative feedback risks producing an environment of comfortable complacency rather than genuine growth, one where teachers feel cared for but not challenged, affirmed but not developed. The implication is that emotional leadership, to be genuinely transformative rather than merely palliative, must be paired with a culture of honest professional dialogue in which compassion and standards coexist rather than compete.

Taken together, these converging and occasionally contradictory findings carry clear and consequential implications for educational leadership practice and policy. School leaders must move beyond treating emotional support as an informal, discretionary, or personality-dependent feature of their leadership and instead institutionalize structured emotional support mechanisms as standard and non-negotiable components of school governance. This includes the systematic implementation of check-in circles and peer debriefing sessions that provide regular, protected space for collective emotional processing; the development of individualized support pathways that recognize the distinct emotional needs, career stages, and personal circumstances of each teacher; and the cultivation of leadership communication practices that are sensitive to when collective versus individual responses is most appropriate and most ethical. Critically, these capacities cannot be assumed to develop naturally through experience alone. Leadership training programs at both pre-service and in-service levels must explicitly incorporate interpersonal emotion regulation as a core professional competency alongside instructional supervision, curriculum management, and strategic planning. Only when emotional intelligence is treated as a learnable, assessable, and institutionally valued leadership skill, rather than an innate personal quality that some leaders happen to possess, will school systems be positioned to cultivate the kind of emotionally intelligent, relationally attentive leadership that teachers consistently identify as the most enduring source of their professional motivation, resilience, and commitment.

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Teacher empowerment for student-centered pedagogical innovation

Teachers' narratives across the dataset revealed that transformational leadership exerts its most consequential influence on classroom practice not through direct instructional prescription or administrative mandate, but through the activation of teacher professional identity and self-efficacy, two deeply internalized psychological resources that, once mobilized, generate the kind of autonomous pedagogical innovation that externally imposed compliance structures consistently fail to produce. Participants articulated two primary transformational vectors through which this influence operates: a fundamental pedagogical shift from compliance-driven practice toward genuinely student-centered instruction, and a form of contextual humility induced by sustained immersion in the specific cultural and social realities of the communities' teachers serve. Participant 1's vivid distinction between the defensive posture of teaching by textbook to avoid mistakes and the creative risk of using digital tools and collaborative stations illustrates with particular clarity how transformational leadership creates what might be understood as structural permission to innovate, an institutional signal that experimentation is not only tolerated but valued, and that failure in the service of growth will not be met with punitive consequence. Participant 10's account of being guided to bring themselves to the level of learners in a geographically isolated far-flung school adds a relational and culturally situated dimension to this transformation, revealing that leadership-induced pedagogical growth is not a uniform, universally applicable process but one that is shaped, textured, and sometimes fundamentally redirected by the specific human and communal contexts within which teachers work. Across both of these vectors, the most durable pedagogical transformations reported were those driven by deeply internalized purpose rather than externally monitored compliance, suggesting that when teachers genuinely absorb and personally own the values their leader's model, the resulting instructional change is both more profound and more sustained than any change produced by top-down directives or performance management mechanisms alone.

This interpretive pattern finds strong empirical support in recent literature. Chen et al. (2025) demonstrated through structural analysis that transformational leadership primarily affects teacher professional development through indirect pathways, most notably through teacher self-efficacy and organizational culture, rather than producing direct and immediate changes in instructional behavior. This finding aligned precisely with participants' consistent descriptions of internalizing their leaders' influence over time, gradually reshaping their professional identities and expanding their sense of what is pedagogically possible, rather than simply executing specific directives handed down from above. The mechanism, in other words, is psychological and cultural before it is behavioral, meaning that leadership impact on classroom practice must be understood as operating through a layered and temporally extended process of identity transformation rather than through the straightforward transmission of instructional expectations. However, this affirmative account must be held alongside a significant empirical complication introduced by Kaya (2024), who found that transformational leadership did not produce a statistically significant direct effect on teacher creativity, with professional resilience emerging as the proximate predictor of creative instructional outcomes rather than leadership behavior itself. This finding introduces an important note of analytical caution: the positive feelings of inspiration, purpose, and transformation that teachers describe with genuine conviction and emotional depth may not always reliably translate into measurable creative or innovative classroom outcomes. The subjective experience of being transformed does not automatically or inevitably produce objectively observable pedagogical change, and the factors that bridge the gap between motivational feeling and innovative practice are

considerably more complex than a straightforward leadership-effects model would suggest. In light of these converging and complicating findings, school leaders must design deliberate and structurally robust professional development pathways that systematically bridge the space between inspiration and skill acquisition, pairing the motivational encouragement that transformational leadership reliably produces with concrete and sustained pedagogical training, structured mentorship relationships, and institutionalized reflective practice mechanisms that give teachers the tools, the feedback, and the supported space necessary to convert internalized purpose into demonstrable instructional transformation. Furthermore, the impact of leadership on classroom practice must be tracked through observable instructional data and evidence-based teaching indicators, not measured exclusively through teacher satisfaction surveys that capture motivational affect but cannot adequately assess the quality or durability of pedagogical change.

Complementing the domain of classroom transformation, teachers across the dataset described their experience of motivational influence in distinctly affective and identity-centered terms rather than in the instrumental language of extrinsic reward. Participants invoked concepts such as professional dignity (Participant 1), feeling seen and valued (Participants 1 and 7), and gratitude (Participant 4) to describe what leadership recognition meant to them, a vocabulary that signals something considerably deeper and more personally significant than the satisfaction of receiving a salary increment or a formal promotion. These accounts reveal that when leaders confer institutional trust through deliberate acts of role elevation, such as formally inviting teachers to facilitate professional development workshops for their peers, chair working committees, or mentor junior colleagues, they activate what may be understood as a state of professional dignity: a powerful and generative condition in which teachers experience themselves not as compliant implementers of externally determined procedures, but as genuinely capable, intellectually respected, and professionally valued contributors to the institutional mission. Transformational motivation in this context operates primarily through a self-concept mechanism: when leaders communicate authentic belief in teachers' capabilities, whether through explicit verbal affirmation as in Participant 10's account of a master teacher who was publicly recognized and trusted with expanded responsibilities, or through the structural trust implicit in being given meaningful leadership roles, teachers undergo an upward restructuring of their professional self-concept that generates intrinsic motivation capable of sustaining performance, commitment, and creative investment well beyond the specific moment of encouragement that originally catalyzed it.

Teachers also identified two complementary motivational architectures that together constitute the full structure of effective transformational motivation in school settings. The first is a system of formal recognition encompassing institutionalized awards such as Gawad Parangal, structured feedback processes, and public acknowledgment of professional achievement reported by Participants 2, 9, and 3 as powerfully affirming of their professional identity and worthy of their continued investment. The second is a form of autonomy-granting mentorship characterized by individualized consideration, deliberate resource provision, and the explicit freedom to independently design and execute instructional approaches without micromanagement, described by Participants 1, 8, and 6 as the most intrinsically motivating form of leadership engagement they experienced. These two architectures correspond respectively to Bass and Avolio's (1994) foundational dimensions of inspirational motivation and individualized consideration, and their simultaneous presence in teachers' accounts suggests that neither dimension alone is sufficient to produce the full motivational effect that transformational leadership is theoretically capable of generating. Participant 1's explicit framing of a supportive hands-off approach as the most effective motivational process in their professional experience underscores with particular force that teachers value autonomy not

merely as a management convenience that reduces the burden on the leader, but as a meaningful and intentional signal of institutional trust in their professional judgment, competence, and creative capacity. Effective motivational architecture in transformational school leadership must therefore combine the public dimension of visible recognition, which affirms teacher identity in the relational and communal space of the school community, with the private and structural dimension of genuine autonomy, which communicates trust in a register that no formal award ceremony, however sincere, can fully replicate. Schools that offer only one of these dimensions, recognition without autonomy, or autonomy without acknowledgment, likely produce motivational effects that are real but incomplete, failing to engage the full spectrum of what teachers need to experience in order to sustain deep professional commitment over time.

This interpretive framework is corroborated by Roesminingsih and Windasari (2024), who confirmed through empirical analysis that transformational leadership directly and positively affects teacher performance and work motivation, identifying recognition and constructive feedback as core operative mechanisms, a finding that maps directly onto participants' accounts of how Gawad Parangal ceremonies and structured feedback conversations produced meaningful and lasting changes in their sense of professional purpose and institutional belonging. Ninković and Knežević Florić (2018) further demonstrated that transformational school leadership predicted collective teacher efficacy, consistent with how participants described their individual sense of professional capability being elevated and expanded through sustained leader encouragement and deliberate role elevation opportunities. Kaya (2024) additionally confirmed that transformational leadership significantly predicted teachers' professional resilience, an important finding that connects motivational experience to a broader dispositional capacity to persevere through challenge, adapt to disruption, and maintain instructional quality under adverse conditions. However, this body of affirmative evidence must again be held in productive tension with a significant empirical complication: Karakose et al. (2025) found that the effects of leadership on teacher professional development are predominantly indirect and substantially mediated by a range of contextual variables, issuing an important methodological warning against the assumption that motivational feelings, however genuinely and intensely experienced, will directly and inevitably produce measurable professional growth outcomes. Teachers' subjective sense of being motivated must be actively and structurally scaffolded by concrete learning opportunities, mentorship relationships, and institutionalized professional development pathways if it is to translate into the kind of sustained, observable, and ultimately student-centered professional growth that transformational leadership aspires to cultivate. A further and equally important complication is introduced by Bao (2024), who found that the motivational effects of transformational leadership on innovative behavior are significantly moderated by teachers' individual levels of uncertainty avoidance, indicating that motivational processes and recognition strategies that prove highly effective and energizing for innovation-ready, risk-tolerant teachers such as Participants 1 and 10 may be considerably less effective, and in some cases actively counterproductive, for teachers who operate with higher levels of risk aversion and professional caution. This finding carries a critical practical implication: a uniform, one-size-fits-all motivational approach that applies identical recognition and autonomy strategies across an entire faculty is likely to be insufficient, inequitable, and ultimately ineffective in reaching the full diversity of teacher profiles present in any real school community.

In light of these converging insights, school leaders must commit to deploying genuinely differentiated motivational strategies that thoughtfully and responsively combine public recognition systems with individualized mentorship conversations, ensuring that the full

spectrum of teacher motivational needs, spanning the need for public affirmation and the need for trusted autonomy, is consistently and meaningfully addressed. Teacher leadership pipelines must be formally constructed within school governance structures, creating institutionalized mechanisms through which teachers are deliberately and systematically invited to lead peer professional development sessions, chair working committees, and serve as mentors to junior colleagues, thereby converting the motivational experiences that transformational leadership produces into sustained and structurally supported professional growth trajectories that endure beyond individual moments of inspiration. The Department of Education should formally recognize teacher-led learning facilitation as a legitimate and assessable performance indicator within official evaluation frameworks, affirming at the systemic level the professional dignity that participants identified as among the most powerfully motivating experiences of their careers. Finally, motivational processes and recognition structures within schools should be periodically and rigorously assessed through qualitative teacher feedback mechanisms that are capable of surfacing the nuanced dimensions of relevance, dignity affirmation, and individual fit that quantitative satisfaction surveys are structurally ill-equipped to capture, ensuring that the motivational architecture of the school remains responsive, equitable, and genuinely aligned with the diverse professional identities, aspirational trajectories, and contextual realities of every teacher it is designed to serve.

Collaborative, emotionally intelligent leadership anchored in contextualized vision and identity formation

Teachers in this study do not merely describe their experiences with school leadership; they actively analyze and theorize them. Participants 1 and 10, in particular, function as critical observers of their own institutional environments, naming the visible gap between transformational leadership's idealized premises and the resource-constrained, historically complex realities of their schools. Participant 1 articulates that a top-down vision produces compliance while a collaboratively constructed one produces genuine ownership, a meta-level insight that moves beyond personal account into theoretical contribution. Participant 5's formulation that vision is caught, not taught and the accompanying Walk the Talk Factor captures the embodied, relational nature of how organizational direction is transmitted, suggesting that goal internalization occurs as much through observed leader behavior as through formal communication channels. In the domain of emotional leadership, Participant 1 further frames emotional intelligence as equally important as instructional expertise, grounding a theoretical claim in lived professional experience. Participant 10 reveals a personal trajectory from rebellion to perseverance through emotionally attuned corrective feedback, illustrating how leaders who reframe correction as purposive rather than personal can reshape teacher identity and resilience over time. Participant 10's additional principle, that effective leadership must align with what the school actually needs rather than what theory prescribes, constitutes an emic retheorization of transformational leadership from within Philippine secondary school experience. Participant 9's suggestion that leaders be more humane while maintaining proper supervision hints at an ongoing alignment gap between leader intent and teacher perception, further complicating the idealized picture.

What emerges across all three thematic domains is a coherent picture of reflexive professional identity among teachers who have experienced authentic collaborative and emotionally supportive leadership. Those who have participated in genuine vision-setting develop an internalized alignment between personal professional purpose and institutional direction that persists without external reinforcement, a state qualitatively distinct from mere goal compliance. Similarly, teachers who have experienced genuine emotional attunement

from their leaders develop professional hardiness: the sustained capacity to remain committed through adversity, which differs meaningfully from compliance-driven endurance. Taken together, these observations suggest that transformational leadership in Philippine secondary schools is best understood not as a fixed, transferable style but as a context-negotiated relational practice, dynamically shaped by institutional history, community relations, resource availability, and the reciprocal readiness of both leaders and those they lead. The theory-practice gap observed in this study was not a failure of implementation but a structural feature of leadership in complex, under-resourced, and historically burdened educational environments.

Karakose et al. (2025) confirmed that collective teacher efficacy mediates the relationship between leadership and teacher professional development, and that shared goal ownership is a key mechanism through which this efficacy is built. The same study validated participants' observations that transformational leadership effects are conditional rather than universal, operating predominantly through indirect pathways shaped by contextual variables. Ghamrawi et al. (2024) further established that teacher leadership cultivation requires participatory goal-setting as a structural condition, not an optional gesture. Gu et al. (2024) confirmed that principal transformational leadership moderates the relationship between emotional intelligence and organizational commitment, specifically by activating teachers' dispositional emotional intelligence to help them manage stress and sustain commitment. Kaya (2024) found that professional resilience, fostered by transformational leadership, was a significant predictor of teacher creativity. Chen et al. (2025) further established that transformational and instructional leadership function as complements, with neither alone sufficient to address the full complexity of contextual school leadership demands.

Berkovich and Eyal (2017) caution that leaders may not be aware of how their interpersonal emotion regulation actually lands with followers, and that misalignment between leader intent and teacher perception can produce unintended outcomes. This caution is directly reflected in Participant 9's account and in Participant 10's experience of internal inequity within a single school, where vision-sharing was found to be far from uniformly participatory even among colleagues. This resonates with Gronn's (2003) critique that transformational leadership risks replicating hierarchical structures beneath an inspirational surface, with true co-construction requiring structural conditions that many schools have not yet established. More broadly, Bass and Riggio's (2006) foundational framework presented transformational leadership as universally effective across contexts in fulfilling follower needs and elevating extraordinary performance. This universalist claim is directly challenged by the participants' contextually specific accounts, particularly Participant 10's far-flung school experience and Participant 9's recognition of pre-existing institutional dysfunction as a structural barrier. The model's assumptions of motivated followers, adequate resources, and cooperative institutional cultures are empirically absent in many Philippine public secondary school settings.

These findings carry significant implications for educational policy and practice. The Department of Education should explicitly designate teacher participation in vision-drafting and goal-setting as a governance standard rather than an optional exercise, and school administrators should be assessed on the quality of their participatory planning practices, not merely on whether vision statements formally exist. Leadership development programs in the Philippines should incorporate emotional intelligence modules focused on interpersonal emotion regulation, culturally sensitive expressions of care, and the calibration of collective versus individual feedback within Filipino school contexts, drawing on values such as malasakit, pakikisama, and bayanihan as legitimate conceptual frameworks rather than peripheral considerations. Principals should receive regular, structured feedback on how their

emotional leadership is perceived by teachers. More broadly, the Department of Education should develop context-differentiated leadership frameworks that distinguish between practices suited to established, resource-adequate schools and those required in far-flung, under-resourced, or previously dysfunctional settings. Philippine leadership scholarship, in turn, should pursue indigenous theorization, integrating Filipino cultural values not as supplements to Western models but as foundational theoretical constructs in their own right.

The findings of this study collectively demonstrate that transformational leadership in Philippine public secondary schools is not experienced as a singular or uniform phenomenon but as a multidimensional relational practice whose effects are shaped by emotional attunement, shared vision-construction, pedagogical empowerment, and the contextual realities of each school community. Across the three major thematic domains, specifically relational-transformational leadership for holistic human development, teacher empowerment for student-centered pedagogical innovation, and collaborative emotionally intelligent leadership anchored in contextualized vision and identity formation, the ten participants consistently revealed that the most enduring leadership influence operates through psychological and relational mechanisms rather than through administrative directives or formal accountability structures. These results directly address the study's objectives by documenting the lived experiences, felt transformations, and reflective insights of teachers who have been led by principals practicing transformational leadership, and they confirm that such leadership generates measurable changes in professional identity, pedagogical practice, motivational orientation, and institutional belonging when it is authentically enacted within culturally responsive and contextually sensitive frameworks. The contribution of these findings to the field lies in their indigenous theoretical grounding, foregrounding Filipino educational values and the specific structural challenges of public secondary schooling in Mindanao as constitutive elements of transformational leadership theory rather than as deviations from a Western-derived ideal. These results and their implications provide the empirical and analytical foundation upon which the succeeding chapter will build its conclusions, recommendations, and proposals for future research.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the lived experiences of teachers under transformational school leadership, yielding a set of findings that collectively illuminate the relational, psychological, and contextual dimensions of leadership as it unfolds in Philippine public secondary schools. Across the narratives shared by teacher participants, effective transformational leadership emerged not through sweeping institutional declarations but through deliberate, emotionally attentive acts: sitting with teachers during difficult moments, organizing check-in circles, calibrating feedback to protect professional dignity, and offering material and spiritual support during personal crises. Leaders who practiced interpersonal emotion regulation, sensing burnout early, creating protected space for collective expression, and distinguishing between collective and individual responses, were described as generating what one participant called a "reservoir of trust." This accumulated relational capital functioned as a structural resource that the school community could draw upon during high-pressure periods. Micro-leadership, the quiet but consistent affirmation of every teacher's name, challenge, and contribution, was found to be equally formative as formal instructional leadership. The overarching experience teachers narrated was one of being seen as whole persons rather than functional role-occupants.

The study further found that transformational leadership influenced classroom practices and professional identities primarily through psychological and internal pathways rather than through direct instructional directives. The most enduring pedagogical transformations were

those driven by a deeply internalized sense of purpose, marked by a shift from compliance-oriented teaching toward genuinely student-centered instruction. Two distinct but complementary transformational vectors emerged from the data. The first was a structural permission to innovate, in which leaders communicated through their behavior that experimentation is valued and that failure in service of growth is not punishable. The second was contextual humility, most visible in the experience of teachers in geographically isolated schools who learned to align their pedagogy with the actual cultural and social realities of the communities they serve. Motivationally, teachers used the language of professional dignity, of being seen and valued, and of gratitude to describe what recognition meant to them. Two motivational architectures surfaced: formal recognition systems such as Gawad Parangal and structured feedback, and autonomy-granting mentorship that communicated institutional trust in teachers' professional judgment. Neither architecture alone was found sufficient to sustain full motivational engagement, suggesting that a balanced integration of both approaches is necessary for durable professional motivation.

Teachers also offered critically reflective insights regarding the nature and limits of transformational leadership in practice. The most analytically significant of these was that transformational leadership, as a lived experience, is best understood not as a fixed style to be applied uniformly but as a context-negotiated relational practice shaped by institutional history, resource availability, community dynamics, and the reciprocal readiness of both leaders and those they lead. A collaboratively constructed vision was found to produce genuine ownership, while a top-down vision produced only compliance, and vision was understood to be transmitted as much through a leader's visible behavior as through formal communication. Teachers identified the theory-practice gap not as a failure of implementation but as a structural feature of leadership in complex, under-resourced, or historically burdened schools. Pre-existing institutional dysfunction, limited resources, and varying follower readiness were recognized as conditions that must be addressed before the full aspirations of transformational leadership can be realized.

These findings carry significant implications for school governance, leadership development, and educational policy. The emotional climate of a school is not incidental to its academic functioning; it is foundational to it. When teachers experience genuine relational attunement from their leaders, their professional commitment deepens in ways that formal performance systems alone cannot produce. However, emotional leadership must be paired with honest professional standards, as care extended without accountability risks producing comfort without growth. The subjective experience of being supported must therefore be anchored in structures that simultaneously affirm and challenge teachers. Furthermore, because transformational leadership operates primarily through indirect psychological pathways, its effects on classroom practice are real but not automatic. The motivational energy that leadership inspires must be actively scaffolded by concrete professional development opportunities, mentorship relationships, and structured reflective spaces if it is to translate into sustained and observable instructional growth. A uniform, one-size-fits-all motivational strategy will be insufficient across a faculty of diverse professional profiles, career stages, and risk orientations.

The study also reveals that the universalist assumptions embedded in foundational transformational leadership frameworks, namely that followers are motivated, resources are adequate, and institutional cultures are cooperative, do not reflect the ground realities of many Philippine public secondary schools, particularly those in far-flung or previously dysfunctional settings. Leadership theory and policy must account for this contextual complexity rather than treating the gap between theory and practice as a problem to be corrected by more determined

implementation. Filipino cultural values of bayanihan, malasakit, and pakikisama offer legitimate and contextually grounded theoretical resources for rethinking what effective school leadership looks like in Philippine educational environments, and their integration into leadership frameworks is not supplementary but foundational.

In light of these findings and implications, this study advances several recommendations directed at school leaders, educational institutions, and the Department of Education. Schools are encouraged to institutionalize structured emotional support practices, such as regular check-in sessions and peer debriefing spaces, as part of ordinary school governance rather than as occasional responses to crisis. Leadership development programs should include training in interpersonal emotion regulation, with particular sensitivity to Filipino cultural expressions of care such as malasakit, pakikisama, and bayanihan. Principals would also benefit from receiving periodic, structured feedback from their teachers on how their emotional leadership is experienced, enabling ongoing and constructive calibration rather than correction after disengagement has already set in. School leaders are further encouraged to design professional development pathways that pair motivational encouragement with practical pedagogical training, mentorship, and structured reflection, so that inspiration becomes skill rather than remaining aspiration. Differentiated motivational approaches that combine visible recognition with individualized mentorship would more equitably engage the full range of teacher professional identities present in any school. The Department of Education is likewise encouraged to formally recognize teacher-led peer learning facilitation as an assessable performance indicator, affirming at the systemic level the professional dignity that teachers consistently identified as among their most transformative experiences.

At the policy level, the Department of Education is recommended to develop context-differentiated leadership frameworks that distinguish between leadership practices suited to well-resourced, established schools and those appropriate for far-flung, under-resourced, or recovering institutional environments. Teacher participation in vision-setting and school planning should be established as a governance norm rather than left to individual principal discretion, giving teachers a structured and meaningful role in shaping the direction of institutions they are expected to sustain. Philippine leadership scholarship and preparation programs would benefit from gradually integrating indigenous cultural values as foundational conceptual frameworks, positioning them not as supplements to Western leadership models but as legitimate and contextually grounded theoretical contributions in their own right. Taken together, these recommendations affirm that transformational leadership in Philippine schools is most fully realized when it is relationally attentive, contextually responsive, and grounded in the cultural and institutional realities that teachers and leaders navigate each day.

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