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Innovative Leadership of School Principals and the Teachers' Work Behavior and Level of Commitment

Jerson F. Tuang^{1*}, Sherrilyn B. Quintos²

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the innovative leadership practices of school principals and their impact on teachers' innovative work behavior and the level of commitment in public secondary schools in Region III, Philippines, using a mixed-methods sequential design. A questionnaire survey was administered to 129 teacher respondents. Findings demonstrated that school principals generally exhibited a high level of innovative leadership, while teachers displayed highly innovative behavior and a high level of commitment across all aspects. Interpersonal skills, innovative thinking, and principles as team builders are strong predictors that influence teachers' innovative work behavior and commitment. Through an in-depth interview and thematic analysis, this research revealed seven themes that describe principals' innovative leadership: collaborative strategic leadership in an innovation culture, transformative future-focused integrated development, responsive and dynamic initiatives, consistent empowerment and cultivation of teacher excellence, a positive and supportive school environment, courageous collaborative growth, and professional cohesion. Consequently, the study highlights that innovative leadership is a crucial approach to addressing the complex challenges confronting education, recommending the implementation of a professional development program to further enhance the innovative leadership capabilities of school principals, thereby fostering greater teacher innovativeness and commitment.

INTRODUCTION

In a challenging educational environment, school principals are viewed as primary drivers of institutional change and success. Leaders are responsible for addressing the complex challenges confronting education, including teacher shortages, curriculum implementation, and the quality and outcome of learning. Given the limited resources and the demands of the 21st-century skills, both leaders and teachers must cultivate environments that prepare students to be functionally literate and work-ready in a competitive world. The context highlights the need for school leaders to possess innovative leadership competencies essential for alignment with strategic plans and achieving educational goals.

Leadership within the organization is crucial in determining whether it succeeds or fails in achieving objectives (Batmolin, 2025). It is essential for ensuring long-term sustainability for both organization and individual (Alarabiat & Eyupoglu, 2022) and has been recognized as an important factor in determining organizational effectiveness. When leaders apply a unique style of managing people, aligning with the goals can be considered innovative leadership (Mgaiwa, 2023). Innovative leadership has been linked to sound management style (Hernandez *et al.*, 2023), innovative knowledge, and the skills of employees (Abun *et al.*, 2023), teacher commitment (Sutiyatno *et al.*, 2022), and educators' performance (Mutoharoh *et al.*, 2023). Although literature confirms that leadership involves influencing teachers' innovative work behavior and professional commitment, there is still meager empirical

data on the specific dimensions of innovative leadership. Existing research investigated dimensions of innovative leadership, but with scant emphasis on innovative work behavior of teachers and commitment in a regional context.

In the Philippines, there is a proactive approach for enhancing educational quality; the Department of Education Region III spurred school principals and teachers to initiate and implement learning continuity plans and innovative strategies driven by a collective desire for transformative change and a commitment to quality education. An implementation guideline on innovation management provides directions in managing innovation projects at the regional, division, and school levels, ensuring innovations are not isolated but are an integrated strategy. However, there is a need for an empirical study on innovation in the local context.

This study seeks to address the significant gaps by examining the innovative leadership of school principals and assessing their impact on teachers' innovative work behavior and level of commitment. By adopting a collaborative lens, the study aimed to promote shared responsibility for educational improvement, directly addressing the need for enhanced leadership to address persistent educational challenges in the region.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of the literature examines the interwoven connections between the innovative leadership practices of the school principals and the innovative work behavior and commitment of the teachers necessary to integrate

¹ Bataan School of Fisheries, Orion, Philippines

² Department of Arts and Sciences, Bataan Peninsula State University, Balanga, Philippines

* Corresponding author's e-mail: tuangjerson@gmail.com

concepts and expand understanding on dimensions that were investigated in this research.

The Philippine education system, through the governance of the Basic Education Act of 2001, typically empowers schools and principals with the authority and accountability to effectively manage and implement programs that directly address the needs of learners and communities. Despite this mandate, there are compounding issues with education outcomes (Filoteo, 2021) and low proficiency levels of students in the 2022 Program for International Student Assessment results. The Department of Education continues to address the problems of human resource distribution and mitigate teacher workloads, geared towards a conducive and effective learning environment (DepEd, 2024). This proactive approach requires leaders who consistently practice innovative leadership, inspire teachers for transformative change, and pursue the unwavering pursuit of quality education. Leadership inspires people to think creatively (AlAhmari, 2022), plays a crucial role in driving innovation and fostering environments that encourage collaboration, and the adoption of modern technologies (Jassim, 2024). Innovative leadership fosters creativity and ensures the alignment of key stakeholders' interests with the organizational vision and goals. When a leader interacts with organizational members, they can leverage the innovation process, as leaders influence, empower, and motivate individuals to achieve goals (Costa *et al.*, 2023). To foster innovation, strong leadership characterized by shared responsibility and collaboration among various stakeholders plays a pivotal role in the educational setting (Philips *et al.*, 2023). According to Hernandez *et al.* (2023), there are four key dimensions of innovative leadership: strategic thinking, creative thinking, action patterns, and interpersonal skills. Additionally, Pagaura (2020) included visionary, team builder, relationship builder, and risk taker as innovative attributes necessary for leaders in their educational strategic planning.

Individuals are more willing to take actions to accomplish a goal when they believe they can produce the desired outcome (Noreña-Chavez & Guevara, 2020). This premise is also evident to a creative teacher who can innovate in their work. Innovative Work Behavior (IWB) encompasses the entire process within the school context involving modifying and enhancing the learning environment to support students' achievement (Sary *et al.*, 2023). The rapid development of society demands that educators possess innovative behavior to ensure that teachers remain relevant to the ever-evolving education system (Zainal *et al.*, 2021), a vital indicator of school success (Widiastuti & Kusmaryan, 2020), where teachers and students can develop creative ideas, learning areas, and group activities, creating great learning for students (Shabeer *et al.*, 2020). Ahmed *et al.* (2023) emphasized the importance of continuing professional development, specifically highlighting the adoption of innovation, exploring opportunities, generating ideas, promoting ideas, realizing ideas, and adopting innovative techniques

to enhance student outcomes. Teachers who exhibit innovative work behavior are categorized as creative educators who offer ideas to enhance school performance (Johari *et al.*, 2021).

Nowadays, teachers' commitment has a significant effect on the quality of education, which in turn influences students' motivation, engagement, and academic success (Cabanilla *et al.*, 2024). The commitment of teachers is an internal factor that motivates teachers to actively participate in sustaining school involvement and improving teaching strategies to attain their objectives (Blanco *et al.*, 2022). It is a state of mind in which someone accepts a choice or makes a concerted effort to carry out effectively (Choudhury & Chechi, 2021). Educators' commitment can also be described as an inner force that invests time and energy, fosters connections, leads to improved teaching practices, and ultimately helps learners achieve their goals (Shu, 2022). Meanwhile, Thien (2014) breaks down teachers' commitment into four multifaceted areas: students, teaching, school, and profession. Sunitha and Kailavani (2023) emphasize that teachers' commitment to the teaching profession requires motivation to fuel their practice in enhancing student engagement and achieving the overall educational outcomes. According to Crespo Jr. & Malabarbas (2023), the teaching profession remains challenging due to growing demands and the world's changing needs, and teachers' performance is related to their understanding of current trends, practices, and their commitment. Principals' leadership enhances both teacher motivation and performance, underscoring the critical role of effective leadership in inspiring and improving teachers' performance (Sariakin *et al.*, 2024). Education leaders, such as school principals, have the power to influence and transform the educational environment (Culduz, 2023). This study explores how the dimensions of innovative leadership of school principals impact the teachers' innovative work behavior and commitment.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methods and Techniques of the Study

The study employed a mixed-method research design, specifically a sequential explanatory strategy. Creswell (2013) noted that this two-phase design involves initially collecting and analyzing quantitative data, followed by qualitative data to further explain or elaborate on the quantitative findings. The first phase employed a quantitative approach to describe the extent of school principals' innovative leadership practices, teachers' innovative work behavior, and commitment. A correlational method was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationships among the variables. The second phase involved collecting qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with a purposively selected group of teacher respondents. This component aimed to explore the in-depth experiences and perceptions of the teachers regarding their school principals' innovative leadership. The findings from both phases

were integrated for a richer and nuanced understanding of how innovative leadership influences teachers' innovative work behavior and level of commitment. The result of the analysis served as the basis for developing a professional development program tailored for secondary school principals in DepEd Region III.

Population and Sample of the Study

The study involved teachers from public secondary schools in the four divisions of Region III: Schools Division of Bataan, City of Balanga, Olongapo City, and Zambales. A combination of stratified and convenience sampling techniques was employed to select the study participants. A stratified random sample was used to ensure proportional representation of the four divisions. According to Simkus (2023), this method involves dividing the population into distinct subgroups and then randomly selecting participants from each subgroup. The sample size was determined through a G*Power analysis as recommended by Kang (2021), a total of 129 teacher-respondents were determined, and proportionally distributed: 9 or 6.98% from SDO City of Balanga, 48 or 37.21% from SDO Bataan, 20 or 15.50% from SDO Olongapo City, and 52 or 40.31% from SDO Zambales. Convenience sampling was employed in the distribution and retrieval of questionnaires. A non-probability method used to select readily available participants, especially when time and resources are limited (Golzar *et al.*, 2022; Bhardwaj, 2019). In the qualitative phase of the study, a purposive sampling was used to select teacher-participants in the interview, following inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Research Instruments

Given the mixed-method research design, two primary research instruments were utilized to gather and analyze data comprehensively. The first instrument was a survey questionnaire developed by adopting and modifying the four established tools relevant to the variables of the study. The concept of innovative leadership practices was primarily adapted from Hernandez *et al.* (2023), who identified four key dimensions: strategic thinking, innovative thinking, action patterns, and interpersonal skills. Additionally, the study incorporated two sub-dimensions from Pagaura (2020): risk taker and team builder, to accurately reflect innovative leadership of the school principals in the Philippine public school context. Some items were carefully rephrased to fit the local setting. Similarly, the measurement of teachers' innovative work behavior drew upon the framework developed by Zainal *et al.* (2021), which includes exploring opportunities, generating ideas, promoting ideas, and realizing ideas. While the original dimensions were retained, several items were modified for clarity and contextual suitability. In addition, teachers' commitment was measured following the conceptualization by Thien (2014), which covers commitment to students, teaching, school, and profession. Items from this framework were also adjusted

to align better with the sociocultural and institutional environment of Region III's public secondary schools. Complementing the quantitative survey instrument, a semi-structured interview guide was designed to collect qualitative data from selected teacher respondents.

To ensure the quality of the instrument, a validation process was conducted. Five experts in the field reviewed the instruments. Comments and recommendations were carefully considered and incorporated to improve item phrasing, ensure technical accuracy, and enhance the comprehensiveness of the questionnaire and interview guide. The results of the content validation of the instrument are reflected in the Scale Content Validity Index (S-CVI). The Thirty (30) items of innovative leadership gained an excellent remark with a 1.00 computed Kappa Statistic Value. Similarly, the teachers' innovative work behavior-20 items and commitment-20 items instrument obtained an excellent 1.00 computed Kappa Statistic Value. The result of the reliability analysis of the innovative leadership instrument received positive remarks, with a computed Cronbach Alpha Value of 0.92, indicating excellent reliability. The instrument for innovative work behavior received a good remark with a Cronbach Alpha of 0.82, while the teacher commitment instrument received an excellent remark with 0.90.

Statistical Processing and Treatment of Data

The quantitative data were tabulated using frequency, percentages, mean, standard deviation, and correlation among the datasets. These data were systematically organized and analyzed using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Statistics version 21 to address the research questions. The weighted mean was utilized to evaluate the innovative leadership practices, teachers' innovative behavior, and commitment using a four-point Likert scale with interpretation of values. In the hypothesis testing of the research, SPSS provides the significance probability values with the acceptable level at 0.05. In the qualitative part, the textual data were coded and analyzed through themes to identify connections that support the quantitative results on innovative leadership. A peer-reviewed study was conducted to address the method's weaknesses, thereby enhancing the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the qualitative findings. Then it was supported by existing literature and studies.

Ethical Considerations

In this study, the researchers obtained informed consent from the respondents to participate in answering the survey questionnaire and interview. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, subject participation, potential risks and discomfort, potential benefits, confidentiality, authorization, compensation, voluntary participation, withdrawal of authorization, and cost reimbursement. There were no identifiable elements or factors that would have singled out the respondents' identities. Excerpts or narratives used that supported

the presentation of themes were represented using anonymous coding. The integrity and credibility of this research were maintained through a rigorous procedure of keeping and safeguarding. The researcher also adhered to the copyright and related rights principles stipulated in RA 8293, the Intellectual Property Code of the Philippines, and RA 10173, or the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Sources of information are reflected through direct and indirect in-text citations, which were appropriately referenced using APA 7th Edition. The paper underwent

an online anti-plagiarism test using the Turnitin platform to determine a 15 percent similarity index and assess the uniqueness of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Phase I: Quantitative Findings

Innovative Leadership Practices of School Principals

Table 1 summarizes the respondents' perception of the Innovative Leadership Practices of School Principals in the four (4) divisions in DepEd Region III, Philippines.

Table 1: Summary of School Principals' Innovative Leadership Practices

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Description
Strategic Thinking	3.69	0.44	Highly Practiced
Innovative Thinking	3.64	0.46	Highly Practiced
Action Patterns	3.67	0.45	Highly Practiced
Interpersonal Skills	3.73	0.40	Highly Practiced
Risk Taker	6.67	0.45	Highly Practiced
Team Builder	3.74	0.43	Highly Practiced
Composite Mean	3.69	0.39	Highly Practiced

Table 1 results showed that the general respondents' perception of the innovative leadership of school principals was highly practiced ($\bar{x} = 3.69$, $SD = 0.39$). This means that public secondary schools in DepEd Region III consist of school principals who are innovators. Innovative leadership is crucial in the 21st century, and the success of the school depends on the kind of leaders leading the institution (Pagaura, 2020). Among the indicators, the most highly rated dimension was team builder ($\bar{x} = 3.74$, $SD = 0.43$). School principals play a vital role as team builders in the school organization. Teamwork enables employees to achieve exceptional outcomes through knowledge sharing, skill sharing, and synergy between teams, fostering a collaborative work environment where every employee is willing to contribute and participate in decision-making and problem-solving (Oyefusi, 2022). The lowest rated

dimension, despite being highly practiced, was innovative thinking ($\bar{x} = 3.64$, $SD = 0.46$). This suggests that school principals need further integration into innovative leadership practice to truly equip schools to succeed and achieve development in the educational system. Ahmed (2021) underscores the crucial role schools play in equipping the education system for innovation and overcoming challenges. Further, the existing strengths of school principals on innovative leadership should always be capitalized on to foster a collaborative and positive approach to drive improvement initiatives and innovations in schools.

Teachers, Innovative Work Behavior

Table 2 provides a summary of the Teachers' Innovative Work Behavior in the four (4) divisions in DepEd Region III, Philippines.

Table 2: Summary of Teachers. Innovative Work Behavior

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description
Exploring Opportunities	3.66	0.34	Highly Innovative
Generating Ideas	3.51	0.42	Highly Innovative
Promoting Ideas	3.54	0.48	Highly Innovative
Realizing Ideas	3.58	0.42	Highly Innovative
Composite Mean	3.57	0.37	Highly Innovative

Table 2 summarizes all indicators of teachers' innovative work behavior, showing that teachers are highly innovative ($\bar{x} = 3.57$, $SD = 0.37$). This means that teachers viewed themselves as engaging in a positive level of innovative work, thereby demonstrating an exploration of opportunities, generating, promoting, and realizing ideas. Teachers' work behavior involves seeking out techniques and processes, as well as generating new ideas or thoughts they apply in their work (Sari *et al.*, 2021).

Among the indicators, exploring opportunities has the highest rating of highly innovative ($\bar{x} = 3.66$, $SD = 0.34$). Teachers identify the needs of their clients, students, parents, and community. Teachers stand as the primary drivers for fostering innovations in schools, cultivating a culture where they feel valued and respected (Mokhlis *et al.*, 2025). This powerfully attests that teachers with proactive behavior are driven to explore innovation. The low rating of the indicator for generating ideas, despite it

being highly innovative ($\bar{x} = 3.51$, $SD = 0.42$), suggests that cultivating a positive schoolwork environment, characterized by trust and collaboration, could empower teachers to think innovatively. Izzati *et al.* (2023) identify idea generation as a dimension related to an individual's ability to combine information to solve problems and improve performance. Additionally, sustaining support and recognition for teachers in promoting and realizing ideas can fortify a culture of innovation within the teaching force.

Teachers' Level of Commitment

Table 3 displayed the level of commitment of teachers in the four (4) divisions in DepEd Region III, Philippines. Table 3 summarizes all indicators of teachers' commitment, highlighting that teachers have a high level of commitment ($\bar{x} = 3.75$, $SD = 0.27$). This means that teachers consistently demonstrated a strong commitment to their roles to students, teaching, school, and profession. Cagape *et al.* (2021) attest that teachers have a high level

Table 3: Summary of Teachers' Level of Commitment

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description
Students	3.83	0.29	High Commitment
Teaching	3.73	0.33	High Commitment
School	3.73	0.34	High Commitment
Profession	3.71	0.38	High Commitment
Composite Mean	3.75	0.27	High Commitment

of commitment across dimensions even during difficult times. Educators' commitment is an inner force that invests time and energy, fosters connections, leads to improved teaching practices, and ultimately helps learners achieve their goals (Shu, 2022). Teachers have a high level of commitment to students ($\bar{x} = 3.83$, $SD = 0.29$). This indicates that teachers fundamentally shape not only the academic engagement of the students but also foster holistic growth and enrich the educational experience of the students. Ghimire (2022) supports the findings that teachers' commitment enables them to carry out day-to-day responsibilities with a highly positive attitude towards students' learning. This is also supported by Riezel and Quines (2022), that teachers who put students' needs first are meticulous in their planning, allowing them to deliver exceptional lessons and extracurricular opportunities constantly. Among the indicators of teachers' commitment, the lowest mean agreed value was commitment to the profession ($\bar{x} = 3.71$, $SD = 0.38$). Professional commitment is essential for teachers

to fulfill their role effectively, as it involves a dedication to continuous learning, professional development, and ethical standards (Garg, 2024). Moreover, while teachers have an exceptionally high level of commitment to their students, commitment to the profession is a crucial and effective characteristic for every teacher, contributing to success and effectiveness within the educational landscape.

Influence of Innovative Leadership Practices of School Principals on Teachers' Innovative Work Behavior and Commitment

This part of the study dealt with the research question of how innovative leadership practices influence teachers' innovative work behavior and commitment.

The present findings confirm that the role of innovative leadership practices of the school principals significantly influences teachers' innovative work behavior, specifically on the dimensions of interpersonal skills, team builder, and innovative thinking. As shown in Table 4, Model 3, the standardized beta weights signify that "Interpersonal

Table 4: Regression Analysis of School Principals. Innovative Leadership Practices on Teachers' Innovative Work Behavior.

Model	Predictors	R	Adjusted R ²	F-value	B	SE	B	t-values	p-value
1	Constant + Interpersonal Skills	.21	.05	5.92 *	2.91 0.18	0.27 0.07	.21	10.61 ** 2.43 *	.000 .016
2	Constant + Interpersonal Skills + Team Builder	.27	.08	5.10 **	3.09 0.33 0.20	0.29 0.10 0.10	.39 .25	10.85 ** 3.17 ** -2.04 *	.000 .002 .044
3	Constant + Interpersonal Skills + Team Builder + Innovative Thinking	.34	.11	5.26 **	3.04 0.27 0.35 0.23	0.28 0.11 0.12 0.10	.32 .30 .29	10.81 ** 2.55 * -3.00 ** 2.29 *	.000 .012 .003 .024

** significant at 0.01 level; * significant at 0.05 level; B-Unstandardized; β -Standardized Beta; SE- Standard Error of Estimate; Strength of Relationship: $\pm .80$ – ± 1.0 High Relationship; $\pm .60$ – $\pm .79$; Moderately High Relationship; $\pm .40$ – $\pm .59$ Moderate Relationship; $\pm .20$ – $\pm .39$ Low Relationship; $\pm .01$ – $\pm .19$ Negligible Relationship

Skills” ($\beta=0.32$) is relatively more important than “Team builder” ($\beta=0.30$) and “Innovative Thinking” ($\beta=0.29$) in predicting teachers’ innovative work behavior. Moreover, the unstandardized B-coefficients of “Interpersonal Skills” ($B=0.27$), “Team Builder” ($B=0.35$), and “Innovative Thinking” ($B=0.23$) are the amount of increase attributed to the corresponding value. Supporting these findings, Almessabi and Alhosani (2024) identified interpersonal skills, team builder, and innovative thinking as significant predictors of teachers’ work behavior within innovative leadership. Broadening this perspective, the assertions that innovative leadership

is a style that positively impacts teachers’ innovative work behavior align with the previous findings of Izzati (2023) and Cimen *et al.* (2023), both of which indicate that innovative leadership can significantly enhance teachers’ innovative work behavior, ultimately contributing to improving educational effectiveness.

The findings shown in Table 5 also confirm that the role of innovative leadership practices influences teachers’ level of commitment particularly innovative thinking, team builder, and interpersonal skills. Model 3 shows that the standardized beta weights indicate that “Innovative thinking” ($\beta=0.47$) has a greater influence compared

Table 5: Regression Analysis of School Principals’ Innovative Leadership Practices on Teachers’ Level of Commitment.

Model	Predictors	R	Adjusted R ²	F-value	B	SE	B	t-values	p-value
1	Constant + Innovative Thinking	.30	.09	12.70 **	3.09 0.18	0.19 0.05	.30	16.67 ** 3.56 **	.000 .000
2	Constant + Innovative Thinking + Team Builder	.37	.14	10.22 **	3.34 0.34 0.22	0.20 0.08 0.08	.57 .35	16.40 ** 4.38 ** -2.67	.000 .000 .009
3	Constant + Innovative Thinking + Team Builder + Interpersonal Skills	.44	.20	10.32 **	3.08 0.28 0.34 0.25	0.22 0.08 0.09 0.08	.47 .43 .36	14.30 ** 3.61 ** -3.80 ** 3.03 **	.000 .000 .000 .003

** significant at 0.01 level; * significant at 0.05 level; B-Unstandardized; β -Standardized Beta; SE- Standard Error of Estimate; Strength of Relationship: $\pm.80$ – ±1.0 High Relationship; $\pm.60$ – $\pm.79$; Moderately High Relationship; $\pm.40$ – $\pm.59$ Moderate Relationship; $\pm.20$ – $\pm.39$ Low Relationship; $\pm.01$ – $\pm.19$ Negligible Relationship

to “Team Builder” ($\beta=0.43$) and “Interpersonal Skills” ($\beta=0.36$) in predicting teachers’ level of commitment. Furthermore, the unstandardized B-coefficients for “Innovative thinking” ($B=0.28$), “Team Builder” ($B=0.34$), and “Interpersonal Skills” ($B=0.25$) represent the amount of increase in teachers’ level of commitment associated with each respective variable. The findings are strongly supported by the study of Sutiyo *et al.* (2022), which found that school leaders’ innovation leadership directly influenced teachers’ commitment. The implication of the findings underscores that there is a profound impact when school principals connect with teachers’ professional needs, provide innovative ideas, and offer professional growth activities, leading to high teacher commitment to their work.

Phase II: Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of the interviews yielded seven themes that describe innovative leadership of school principals. Theme 1: Collaborative Strategic Leadership in Innovation. This is exhibited by the school principal through a strong practice of visionary and strategic leadership, characterized by forward thinking, modern strategies, practical planning approaches, and a collaborative innovation culture. For instance, Teacher 4 articulated that the principal “consistently demonstrates innovation, creativity, and forward thinking in every aspect of school

management and development.” The excerpts exemplify that strategic thinking is not an occasional occurrence, but a pervasive quality of the school principal embedded in the leadership style. Similarly, Teacher 9 casually observed that the visionary stance of the school principal was evident through the active cultivation of an innovative school culture: “Visionary leadership by fostering a culture of innovation, implementing progressive programs, and leveraging modern strategies to enhance student learning and school achievement.” The deliberate efforts of the school principals may lead to creating an environment where new ideas and advanced methods are not only welcomed but actively promoted to improve educational performance or outcomes. Additionally, the practical application of the principal’s vision is seen in the meticulous approach to strategic planning. Teacher 10 affirmed, stating, “I can say that our school principal is a good planner; she foresees how to accomplish certain objectives.” The accounts highlight the capacity of the school principals to not only envision the future direction of the school but also to strategize and anticipate steps in the realization of educational goals.

School principals champion vision realization by a collaborative, innovative culture and actively collaborate with the teachers. Teacher 8 highlighted an account that school principals encourage a joint effort to implement modern teaching strategies and even extend

by empowering teachers to be proactive problem solvers; the school principal explicitly “encourages collaboration among teachers to implement modern teaching strategies and adapt to changes.” This was agreed by Teacher 7, “Our current principal encourages the teachers to propose and create an intervention in our school.” This signifies the school principals’ trust in teachers’ professional judgement and capacity for generating practical solutions leading to collaborative work strategies to improve the school learning environment, as also highlighted by Teacher 1, that school principals encourage, “collaborative strategies to improve the school’s learning environment. The account highlights that working together is only as strong as the leadership that recognizes the contributions of the team’s composition.

Principals demonstrate visionary and strategic leadership, fostering a collaborative, innovative culture. These innovative leadership practices can foster a culture of innovation, drive progressive programs, and leverage contemporary strategies to enhance overall educational performance. As Bagano *et al.* (2024) suggest, collaborations have the potential to stimulate innovation, facilitate the exchange of knowledge, and foster the development of state-of-the-art educational initiatives and programs.

Theme 2: Transformative Future-Focused Integrated Development. School principals envision the future of the school and the strategies implemented to achieve the vision strongly support the overarching theme, which is a strategic blend of vision-driven leadership, continuous professional development and growth, technological advancement, and stakeholders’ involvement and collaboration. These accounts highlight the school principal’s ability to reshape the school environment towards a progressive development underpinning an integrated strategy.

The principals’ transformative journey is unequivocally rooted in a vision-driven leadership where they articulate long-term goals and a vision for the school’s future. One clear long-term perspective is when Teacher 1 articulates that “our TechVoc School has become a Center of Excellence in Technical and Vocational Education.” This underscores the school principals’ high-level vision and an incremental transformation. Teacher 2 further emphasizes by highlighting the principals’ practices to align the school with the DepEd’s broader vision and mission, ensuring that the institution is of a “future-oriented and comprehensive nature.” The proactive stance of the school principal also envisions the school as “where learners can grow academically and skillfully.” These accounts provide a blueprint to foster learners’ academic and skillful growth.

To realize transformative development, a critical pillar for a future-ready education is the continuous growth and empowerment of teachers through professional development training. School principals ensure that teaching practices and learning environments are up-to-date, effective, and responsive to future educational needs.

Teacher 3 highlighted that “the principal also emphasizes the ongoing professional development of teachers to ensure they are using the most effective teaching methods.” This account directly addresses the need for an adaptive teaching force coupled with fostering a culture of collaboration and various training opportunities. Part of a broader strategic initiative of the school principals is the implementation of various strategies, such as curriculum realignment and enhancement through technological advancement, upgraded facilities, and emphasis on training the trainers for development. Teacher 10 recalls an account that teachers’ training includes “Strategies such as curriculum enhancement and alignment, technology integration, and facility upgrades.” The principal’s integrated approach to cultivating a cohort of teachers capable of guiding future-ready learners is through investing in professional development journeys. Parallel to professional development, technological advancement, and integration, the school principal integrates digital tools to enhance learners’ skills while emphasizing the professional development of teachers. Teacher 3 observed that the “Strategies to achieve the vision include embracing technology, such as digital tools in the classroom, to enhance learning,” which highlights the purposeful use of technology. The integration of technology supports the principals’ broader vision of cultivating a learning environment, as Teacher 8 stated that “Envisions a school that nurtures academic excellence and holistic development for all students.” This account supports that the school principal envisions a learning environment that fosters academic excellence and holistic student growth. Additionally, teacher 9 observes the implementation of “strategic programs such as technology integration in teaching, just like the new Performance Management Education System that we have in the Department of Education.” Signifying this proactive adoption, the principal implements various strategies like curriculum realignment and enhancement through technological advancement, upgraded facilities, supported by the narrative of Teacher 10 “technology integration and facility upgrades.”

Finally, the success of transformative integrated development hinges on robust stakeholder involvement and collaboration. The principal ensures that stakeholders are actively involved in the development, implementation, and evaluation of school programs, activities, and projects. This approach may help build a strong support system, providing direction for the school that reflects its needs and the insights of the entire community. Teacher 5 mentioned that “I can say that she involved the other stakeholders by tapping the GPTA officers (General Parents and Teachers Association).” Illustrating this inclusive approach, the principal leads efforts to transform the school. Ensures that the school’s basic setup is well-organized, appealing, and a well-managed institution where stakeholders are actively involved in school programs. This commitment to inclusion is deliberate, as Teacher 7 explained that the school principal ensures the

active involvement of stakeholders in school planning, promoting an inclusive and progressive decision-making process, “always makes sure that the community is always being involved.” Finally, the strengthening of community partnerships to realize resources and opportunities for the benefit of the entire school is always practiced by the school principals, as observed by Teacher 8. “Community engagement and partnerships are also strengthened to provide additional resources and opportunities for the school.” Collective ownership ensures integrated development and the sustainability of the school.

In essence, the teachers clearly described how their school principals proactively construct a Transformative Future – Focused Integrated Development. Principals’ ways to envision the future of the school, and the strategies implemented to achieve the vision, are demonstrated through a synergy of vision-driven leadership, commitment to professional development and growth of the teachers by empowering them, embrace a strategic technological advancement and integration to enhance learning and building a support system in stakeholders involvement and collaboration to ensure an integrated approach to integrated development. Farhan (2024) highlights that a correct match between a leadership approach and existing visionary leadership with an innovative mindset can result in a unique community identity that fosters lasting development.

Theme 3: Responsive Dynamic Initiatives. Principals demonstrated their leadership through continuous development, inclusive practices, and strategic, project-based planning. These initiatives collectively foster a vibrant learning environment to continuously improve teachers and effectively meet the diverse needs of the learners.

Continuous Professional Development was still the cornerstone of the principals’ dynamic approach to promoting innovative initiatives for learners and educators, utilizing enhanced teaching strategies, upgraded skills, and fostering a culture of sustainable professional growth. Teacher 1 articulates the principals’ initiatives “focus on enhancing teaching strategies, upgrading skills, and fostering a culture of continuous professional growth.” This commitment is further evidenced, as observed by Teacher 3, that the principals consistently introduce innovative activities that are included in the professional development, “there are Professional Development Programs in which the workshops, seminars, and training are introduced to ensure teachers are consistently growing professionally.” The accounts suggest that professional development offers avenues for school principals’ initiatives for learning and innovative acquisitions of teachers. The principal also fosters a culture of innovation and collaboration through various initiatives. The workshops and mentorship programs are effective ways to promote teamwork and peer learning. Teacher 8 recalls an account that their principal strengthened, “Collaborative workshops and mentorship programs have been established to foster teamwork and

peer learning among teachers.”

The principals champion a culture of innovation initiatives that prioritize supporting learners who are out of school or facing academic challenges through Inclusive and Need-Based Innovation initiatives. This demonstrates principals’ commitment to creating a life-changing, supportive strategy that ensures growth by equipping learners and educators to navigate future challenges and thrive in a dynamic learning environment. Teacher 4 eloquently highlighted this dedication, stating, “Our principal ensures that both students and teachers are prepared to face life’s challenges and thrive in an ever-changing educational landscape. His commitment to innovation and excellence truly sets the foundation for a brighter, more promising future for everyone in the school community.” This underscores the holistic vision of the principal in preparing the school for future challenges. As concretely narrated by Teacher 5, the principal initiates program implementation that supports learners in addressing their individual needs, while also providing teachers with the necessary training to ensure quality education. Teachers were sent to attend seminars for the Special Needs Education (SNED) Program. Then, Teachers are encouraged to provide activities for students that meet their needs.” The accounts highlight the commitment of the principal to providing equitable education for all students.

The principal continuously leverages the benefits of innovative development by emphasizing Project-Based Strategic Planning, ensuring that all projects are appropriately documented, well-planned, and thoroughly prepared. Through the strategic foresight of the school principal, the school’s success is guaranteed through thoughtful and proper execution. Teacher 2 describes the principal’s approach, stating, “Our principal involves project-based learning; in fact, we have our projects here, she makes sure we all have the papers so that we are prepared for everything.” The account reflects a methodical and organized approach to project execution and management that ensures success. Teacher 3 further emphasizes the integration of technology through proper planning, stating, “Incorporating technology into the classroom ensures that teachers have the tools and training to use digital platforms effectively for teaching and assessments.” The account also suggests that project-based planning is not just about efficient execution and teacher empowerment but also leverages the potential of the entire school system in a structured manner.

Collectively, the principals’ leadership is characterized by Responsive Dynamic Initiatives that foster a sustainable learning environment despite limited resources and unexpected challenges. This is evident through continuous professional development, inclusive and need-based innovation, and project-based strategic planning. The interconnected practices collectively ensure an innovative-thinking approach, ultimately enhancing both teaching and learning effectiveness. This is affirmed by Phakamach (2025) that, despite numerous challenges,

leadership for professional education in the digital age is an act of guiding an educational group or organization that requires knowledge and the ability to define a vision and communicate that vision to others, fostering innovation and new knowledge that enables acceptance of change and inspires members to commit to achieving educational administration objectives.

Theme 4: Consistent Empowerment and Cultivation of Teacher Excellence. The principals are proactive in providing teachers with opportunities through program initiatives that enhance their professional skills and, simultaneously, foster teamwork. Career advancement is also encouraged to ensure that teachers have the opportunity for career growth. As Teacher 1 illuminated this, stating that “By implementing programs that enhance professional skills, encourage teamwork, and promote career advancement. The leadership of our principal ensures that teachers continuously improve their expertise and work together to create a better learning environment.” This account fosters an environment that enables educators to share their ideas and create a high-quality learning experience for students. Additionally, the principal facilitates professional growth through workshops, where teachers can freely exchange resources, strategies, and teaching ideas. Teacher 3 explicitly highlighted the observation that “Our principal has been very proactive in ensuring opportunities to grow professionally and collaborate effectively.” The consistency of these efforts is crucial, as Teacher 4 added that principals “regularly organize training, workshops, and monitoring sessions to enhance our skills and knowledge.” Underscoring the consistent nature of these opportunities builds a foundation for teachers’ competence and growth.

A significant finding is the prioritization of a collaborative culture of teamwork among teachers, ensuring that teachers have consistent opportunities to connect, share ideas, and support one another, thereby allowing them to grow and improve together. Teacher 2 narrated an observation, stating that “with regards to the principal’s way of providing teachers’ opportunities and collaboration, she also makes sure that we collaborate well.” Principals are also consistent and effective in providing opportunities for educators to work together by allowing them to share suggestions and best practices in teaching. This results in a supportive network of teachers who learn from one another and collaborate to enhance their work. Teacher 9 affirmed this, noting the principals’ “very consistent, effective, and efficient when it comes to allowing us to collaborate in school, and very open to suggestions and sharing our best practices.”

The principal consistently exhibits leadership by recognizing the teachers’ strengths and providing opportunities to collaborate in activities. This involves identifying and empowering educators who demonstrate dedication and potential. Teacher 5 articulated this well, stating that the principal “is a leader who believes in utilizing the strengths and potential of her teachers, taps

the people whom she believes would be a great help in its materialization.” This constant support is coupled with a commitment to fairness and equity in providing opportunities for growth and collaboration. Teacher 6 emphasized this impartiality, noting that “My principal did not show any favoritism to anyone. So, she gave opportunities and full collaboration to teachers, especially those teachers who act as coaches in the fields of academics and sports, who give pride to the school.” This account validates that principals encourage a culture of merit that significantly contributes to achieving sustained performance, further cultivates a culture of excellence.

School principals play a vital role in consistently empowering teachers and cultivating their excellence through various initiatives centered on professional growth, a collaborative culture of teamwork, and recognition of individual strengths. Consistent actions create a supportive environment where teachers continuously develop, innovate, and contribute their best, leading to an enhanced quality of education. Cojorn and Sonsupap (2024) reveal that a collaborative professional development program has an impact on teachers’ ability to develop higher-order thinking. In this study, the collaborative approach has a significant impact on promoting cognitive diversity, addressing the need for teachers to learn how to perform their tasks independently.

Theme 5: Positive and Supportive School Environment. Principals recognized the diversity and well-being of teachers through various leadership practices, characterized by strong empathy and emotional support, as well as a commitment to promoting open communication.

The participants consistently described their principal as an empathetic leader who provides significant emotional support to teachers when necessary. This is evident in the principals’ balance of firm leadership with genuine empathy as observed by Teacher 2, “The school principal is, although she has that strong personality. She is also an empathetic leader, meaning she knows when a teacher is in trouble or has something on her mind.” This account illustrates that the principal goes beyond management duties to connect with and understand the personal challenges of the teachers, recognizing the diversity of teachers, ensuring they feel supported and heard. This is also supported by a narrative of Teacher 5, who noted that the principal “supports school activities that promote diversity, which allows teachers to share their experiences and perspectives. By doing so, teachers can be heard, and they will feel valued. I can say that she supports those teachers in need.”

The principals’ leadership shows a motherly instinct through care, love, and support for the teachers in various challenging situations where they feel they are valued, providing an environment where teachers are motivated and supported. Teacher 6 “When it comes to the characteristics of our principal, she possesses the characteristics of being a good leader, ah, she shows

care, love, and support to our teachers when it comes to different situations, she is very open, Ma'am, maybe she has a motherly instinct, that is how we found out that she loved the teachers." This deep understanding makes teachers truly feel acknowledged both professionally and personally, as affirmed by Teacher 10, who said that the principal listens. She understands what you are experiencing inside and outside school."

Another significant practice of a school principal in strengthening interpersonal skills is promoting open communication. Participants described that the principal supports teachers' diversity and fosters a positive school environment through communication, open dialogue, and collaboration, while also providing attention to individual teacher development. Teacher 3 explained that the principal "cultivated a positive and supportive school that values teacher diversity through open communication and collaboration." This account fosters a positive and supportive work environment by encouraging open communication, collaboration, and recognizing everyone's unique strengths and ideas. Teacher 4 echoed this, stating the principal "has created a positive and supportive environment, promotes open communication, encourages collaboration, and ensures that everyone's voice is heard and respected."

Furthermore, the principal approach to open communication eliminates the fearful atmosphere and provides a sense of comfort that teachers can reach out to their principal whenever necessary. As Teacher 7 articulated, stating that the principal "encourages open communication, makes sure that teachers communicate with her with no fear atmosphere, and is approachable in times of need." The principal has built a high level of trust among the teachers, extending to both personal and professional concerns. Teacher 10 confirmed in a statement that "I can share my thoughts, even problems, knowing that I am seasoned, not only personal but also professional matters, because I feel there is a feeling that I do not hesitate to talk to her."

In essence, school principals successfully create a genuinely positive and supportive environment through consistent, empathetic support and open, transparent communication channels. Georgiadis *et al.* (2024) demonstrated that empathetic leadership enables understanding others' suffering and taking appropriate actions, fostering strong relationships and an awareness of teachers' needs.

Theme 6: Courageous Collaborative Growth. The school principals foster a culture of innovation and risk-taking through various leadership practices. This is manifested through a deliberate cultivation of a courageous, collaborative growth that embraces risks, fosters collective problem solving, ensures broad stakeholders' involvement, and synergistically leads innovation and development.

The principal actively promotes risk-taking with a growth mindset that is not only tolerated but encouraged and viewed as an essential component of the learning process

rather than a deterrent. Teacher 3 articulated, the principal "encourages a growth mindset and to take risks without the fear of failure because it is part of life," further noting that "the celebration of success and failure is also applied, successes are celebrated and highlighted to show that risk-taking can lead to positive outcomes, failure is part of the innovation process." This illustrates a balanced view that normalizes challenges and belief in learning in the pursuit of new ideas.

The principal promotes and trains teachers to take calculated risks, ensuring that new initiatives are thoroughly discussed and scrutinized. Teacher 9 highlighted this careful consideration by stating that "innovation is a check on the risk-taking part because she is a risk-taker, there are some instances that you think about the things that we need to take risks." This emphasis on thoughtful risk-taking is further complemented by regular feedback sessions, which are seen as crucial for continuous improvement and innovation. Teacher 7 observed that the school principal "leads by example and is very much willing to take the risk herself, holds feedback sessions every time there is an activity in school to suggest possible improvements." These suggest that risk-taking is paired with reflective learning that may transform challenges into opportunities for collective growth.

Beyond individual risk-taking, the principal prioritizes collaborative brainstorming and problem-solving, ensuring that all teachers' voices and the journey to find an innovative solution are a shared endeavor. Teacher 4 affirmed this, noting that one key strategy used by the principal is "collaborative brainstorming, where teachers share insights and develop solutions together, so that all are heard." The principal promotes innovation by motivating teachers to try new methods in a safe space for trial and error. This also serves as a venue for teachers to discuss challenges and potential solutions. Teacher 8 described how "a culture of innovation and risk-taking is actively fostered through various strategies that encourage creative thinking and problem-solving." Further noting that "teachers are empowered to experiment with new teaching methods, and the principal supports their initiatives by providing a safe space for trial and error, ensuring they feel comfortable taking risks in their practice." This collaborative approach suggests a safe space for teachers to foster genuine solutions to problems and collectively take ownership.

The school principal fosters a collaborative approach to solving risk problems through stakeholder involvement and partnerships. This inclusive strategy ensures innovative capacity and strengthens its support systems involving external community members, who also serve as valuable sources of new ideas. Teacher 5 illustrates this, stating, "By seeking the aid of the stakeholders, such as the parents and the community." This inclusive leadership style cultivates a culture of fairness, inclusivity, and unity. Also, the principal promotes projects through well-structured plans that utilize inputs, as highlighted by Teacher 6: "One of the important factors to succeed

in any project is to have a good plan that is achievable and realistic. This will be achieved through the help of the faculty, teachers, officers, parents, student leaders, department heads, and the school principal.”

In short, through the integrated strategies of the school principal, fostering courageous risk-taking, promoting collaborative problem-solving, and ensuring broad stakeholder involvement, the principal consistently drives a culture of Courageous Collaborative Growth that propels the school forward. This is supported by the study of De Torres (2021), which shows that stakeholders’ involvement in school-initiated activities leads to an enhanced community partnership program. This study emphasizes the importance of collaborative work for a strong teacher-principal relationship, which can be further developed through activities that foster a harmonious relationship and promote effective collaboration among stakeholders.

Theme 7: Collective Action and Professional Cohesion. Principals demonstrated through a strong sense of teamwork that emphasizes collaborative decision making, inclusive practice across levels, and team building and faculty development.

The principals actively promote collaborative planning and decision-making as a cornerstone, ensuring that school key initiatives and goal efforts are developed, not only aligning the programs and activities but also sharing ownership among the staff. Teacher 1 articulates, establishing that this collaborative process is a fundamental approach of the principal, “Establishing collaborative planning and decision making.” That this effort is not only involving the teachers in the discussions but creating a system where school direction is shaped through collective inputs, “organizing team building activities and faculty development programs.”

The collective approach of the school principals extends to aligning teaching strategies and goal setting, evidenced by specific, organized activities. Teacher 8 highlighted that the principal “organizes regular team-building activities, where teachers from different departments work together to align their teaching strategies and set common goals.” This account magnifies the principles, facilitating the diverse perspectives of the teachers and staff, ensuring all voices are heard and integrated into a unified plan of action.

The principal values teamwork by encouraging collaboration and open discussion of suggestions among teachers and staff. This practice creates a supportive and dynamic environment for the community’s benefit. Cultivating an environment of inclusive collaboration across levels in the school values teamwork. Teacher 4 emphasized that the principal “fosters a strong sense of teamwork by encouraging collaboration and shared initiatives among teachers and staff, sharing expertise, and implementing innovative ideas.” This inclusive approach also extends to fostering mutual support and a shared commitment to growth. Teacher 10 notes that the school principals “created a collaborative and supportive school

environment where teachers and staff work together harmoniously, support each other’s growth.” The account exemplifies that nurturing a supportive culture environment is significant for individual development, contributing to school improvement.

The principals’ role as a team builder is multifaceted, encompassing collaborative decision-making, fostering an inclusive and supportive culture across levels, and providing consistent opportunities for professional growth and interpersonal connection. These measures result in the provision of a supportive school environment where staff feel valued, connected, and aligned with a shared vision, strengthening collaboration and collective success for everyone. This is affirmed by Johnson’s (2022) article on the power of inclusive leadership, which states that, when principals are inclusive leaders, they can have a deeper understanding of their teachers’ work environment. By doing so, the teachers’ needs for support and upskilling will be addressed, and they will be more likely to choose to stay in teaching.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Results of Innovative Leadership Practices of School Principals

This part of the study showed the juxtaposition of findings of the innovative leadership practices of school principals in DepEd Region III, Philippines.

The school principals highly practiced “strategic thinking” ($\bar{x} = 3.69$, $SD = 0.44$), demonstrated with collaborative strategic leadership in an innovation culture, and a transformative future-focused integrated development emphasizing strategic, vision-driven leadership, technological integration and advancement, and stakeholders’ involvement and collaboration. leadership is characterized by shared responsibility, and collaboration among various stakeholders plays a pivotal role in fostering innovative initiatives within the educational setting (Philips *et al.*, 2023). School principals highly practiced “innovative thinking” ($\bar{x} = 3.64$, $SD = 0.46$), through responsive dynamic initiatives, particularly formulating new ideas at the supervisory level, supported by continuous professional development, inclusive needs-based innovation, and project-based strategic planning. Examining the innovative leadership practices of school principals in terms of action patterns reflects a highly practiced ($\bar{x} = 3.67$, $SD = 0.45$), consistent in planning that empowers teacher excellence by fostering professional growth and development within a collaborative culture of teamwork and recognition of teacher strengths. Consistency builds trust and stability, thereby enhancing innovative leadership through a more responsive learning environment (Promovenda *et al.*, 2023). School Principals highly practiced “interpersonal skills” ($\bar{x} = 3.73$, $SD = 0.40$), through a positive and supportive school environment, demonstrated with empathy characterized by emphatic emotional support, and promoted open communication. Georgiadis *et al.* (2024) suggest that empathy as a core competency in leadership fosters strong relationships and helps teachers understand their needs. School Principals who highly

practice risk-taking ($\bar{x} = 3.67$, $SD = 0.45$) recognize that success and failure are connected for growth, through a courageous, collaborative approach that embraces risk-taking, collaborative brainstorming, problem-solving, and stakeholders' involvement and partnership. Learning from mistakes is crucial for pursuing a vision, and viewing failures as learning opportunities fosters growth for both principals and teachers (Zavala, 2024; Caliskan, 2021). Ultimately, school principals highly practiced as team-builders ($\bar{x} = 3.74$, $SD = 0.43$), characterized by encouraging teacher professional growth and development through collective actions and professional cohesion, demonstrated collaborative planning and decision making, inclusive collaboration across levels, and a strong focus on team building and faculty development. Johnson (2022) suggests that principals who understand teachers' work environments can better address their support and upskilling needs, encouraging them to stay in teaching.

CONCLUSION

The study found that public secondary school principals are generally innovative. Their interpersonal skills, teambuilding abilities, and innovative thinking significantly influence teachers' innovative work behavior and level of commitment. Thematic findings, such as positive and supportive school environment, collective action and professional cohesion, and responsive dynamic initiatives, affirm that principals strategically drive meaningful improvement in schools by fostering teachers with highly innovative work behavior through building strength on exploring opportunities and their commitment to students.

To sustain the positive impact on teachers. Interpersonal relationships should always include training in empathy, effective communication, mentoring, and building trust with teachers. To sustain innovative thinking, strategies should include creative problem-solving, visionary leadership, and creating a culture that values new ideas and continuous improvement. Principals as team builders can be sustained by providing teachers with equal opportunity to professional growth and involving them in collaborative decision-making. There should always be intentional integration of practice on interpersonal skills, innovative thinking, and team building to maximize impact on teachers' innovativeness and commitment.

This study provided empirical evidence of the direct link between school principals' innovative leadership and the innovative work behavior and commitment of teachers, which leads to designing an actionable professional development program for principals.

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