



Article

Culturally Informed Leadership and Management Practices in Philippine State Universities and Colleges: Navigating Institutional Excellence through Localized Governance and Academic Culture

Boyet L. Batang¹, Frederick Villa², Arvin Natividad², Angelina Gonzales³, John Cabansag⁴, & Oscar G. Bangayan¹

¹Isabela State University, ²Southern Luzon State University, ³Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University & ⁴Apayao State College

Correspondence: boyet.l.batang@isu.edu.ph

Abstract

This qualitative multiple-case study explores culturally informed leadership and management practices in Philippine State Universities and Colleges (SUCs), focusing on four institutions: Isabela State University, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, Southern Luzon State University and Apayao State College. The study aims to understand how academic leaders integrate local cultural knowledge and community-rooted governance within formal academic systems, and how these practices influence institutional performance, stakeholder engagement, and academic culture. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key university officials, document analysis, and field observations. Thematic analysis revealed three major findings: (1) SUC leaders ground their leadership in Filipino cultural values such as pakikipagkapwa and bayanihan, promoting relational governance and trust; (2) culturally-informed leadership enhances institutional cohesion, fosters stakeholder participation, and affirms local identity within academic culture; and (3) leaders face significant challenges in integrating these practices into formal bureaucratic structures due to policy rigidity, limited institutional capacity, and internal resistance. The study concludes that culturally informed leadership is both a lived reality and a necessary paradigm in Philippine higher education. It serves as a strategic response to the socio-cultural diversity of SUCs and promotes governance that is ethical, inclusive, and contextually relevant. For such leadership to be sustained and institutionalized, structural reforms, policy integration, and cultural literacy within higher education systems must be prioritized. The study contributes to the growing discourse on localized leadership and the decolonization of academic governance in the Global South.

Keywords: Culturally informed leadership, localized governance, Philippine State Universities and Colleges, pakikipagkapwa, community-rooted practices

Suggested citation:

Batang, B., Villa, F., Natividad, A., Gonzales A., Cabansag J., & Bangayan, O. (2025). Culturally Informed Leadership and Management Practices in Philippine State Universities and Colleges: Navigating Institutional Excellence through Localized Governance and Academic Culture. *International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion*, 7(SI2), 751-770. <https://doi.org/10.63931/ijchr.v7iSI2.243>

Publisher's Note: IJCHR stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Introduction

Leadership and management practices in higher education institutions (HEIs) significantly influence institutional performance, academic culture, stakeholder engagement, and governance sustainability. In the Philippines, State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) occupy a unique space in public service and nation-building, not only as centers of learning and research but also as cultural and administrative hubs deeply embedded in their local communities. However, the prevailing leadership models adopted by many SUCs are primarily derived from Western frameworks, often overlooking the rich cultural, historical, and relational dynamics that define governance and leadership in the Philippine context (Magno, 2018; Agulay, 2020).

Leadership is not merely an administrative function, but a deep cultural act shaped by local traditions, community expectations, and socio-political structures. In the Philippines, values such as *bayanihan* (communal unity), *pakikipagkapwa* (shared identity), *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), and *delicadeza* (sense of propriety) significantly affect how authority is exercised, decisions are made, and relationships are maintained in institutional settings (Pascual, 2016; de Guzman & Torres, 2019). These culturally embedded practices influence interpersonal interactions, broader resource allocation systems, conflict resolution, accountability, and leadership legitimacy. However, these cultural elements are rarely considered in formal leadership models or higher education policies (Navarro & Soriano, 2021).

The dominant leadership paradigms applied to HEIs, such as transformational (Bass & Riggio, 2006), servant (Greenleaf, 2002), and distributed leadership (Spillane, 2006), offer valuable frameworks for promoting participation, ethical governance, and innovation. However, these models are often abstracted from the socio-cultural and historical realities of developing countries like the Philippines. SUCs, especially those in regional and rural areas, operate within highly localized systems where cultural traditions, local politics, community affiliations, and regional histories are decisive in shaping institutional dynamics (Alfredo, 2022; Bernardo & Mendoza, 2021). In this setting, leadership is not exercised in isolation from cultural contexts but is continuously negotiated through relationships with local stakeholders, alum networks, tribal communities, and local government units (Yambot, 2019; Cabansag, 2020).

Despite a growing recognition of the need for culturally responsive and inclusive governance in education (Shields, 2010; UNESCO, 2021), there is a noticeable lack of empirical studies that examine how Filipino university leaders incorporate cultural knowledge, local customs, and community-rooted values into institutional decision-making. The current body of research emphasizes managerial competence,

performance-based metrics, and strategic planning, often at the expense of understanding the socio-cultural foundations that sustain effective leadership in Philippine HEIs (Lumby & Coleman, 2007; Bernardo & Mendoza, 2021). Moreover, there is limited investigation into how these culturally informed practices align with or challenge national education policies and global standards for academic excellence.

This study addresses that gap by examining academic leaders' lived experiences, leadership philosophies, and governance strategies in selected Philippine SUCs. Specifically, it explores how these leaders draw from cultural norms and localized governance practices to navigate institutional performance, stakeholder engagement, and academic culture challenges. The research is conducted in four public higher education institutions: Isabela State University, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, Southern Luzon State University, and Apayao State College. These institutions were purposefully selected for their regional and cultural diversity, representing Northern Luzon, Southern Tagalog, and the Cordillera regions, areas where localized governance and deeply rooted community identities play an influential role in institutional leadership.

By interrogating leadership through a cultural lens, the study aims to illuminate alternative approaches to managing universities that are contextually grounded and capable of fostering inclusive, ethical, and responsive leadership in Philippine higher education. The following central problem guides the study: What are the culturally informed leadership and management practices employed in Philippine SUCs, and how do they contribute to institutional excellence through localized governance and academic culture? To answer this question, the study explores three sub-problems: (1) What are the existing leadership and management practices in SUCs that reflect culturally informed values and localized governance? (2) How do these practices influence institutional performance, faculty development, and stakeholder participation? (3) What challenges do SUC leaders face in integrating cultural knowledge within formal administrative systems?

The study's relevance extends beyond theoretical contribution; it seeks to inform leadership development programs, policy reforms, and institutional planning in SUCs by offering a nuanced understanding of how culture, leadership, and academic governance intersect. In doing so, it contributes to the growing movement toward contextualized educational leadership that honors the lived realities of institutions in the Global South.

Research Questions

1. What are the existing leadership and management practices in Philippine State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) that reflect culturally informed values, traditions, and local governance principles?
2. How do culturally informed leadership approaches influence institutional performance, stakeholder engagement, and the promotion of academic culture in SUCs?
3. What challenges do higher education leaders face in integrating localized cultural knowledge and community-rooted governance practices within formal academic and administrative systems?

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design to explore culturally informed leadership and management practices within selected Philippine State Universities and Colleges (SUCs). A multiple-case approach was deemed appropriate as it allows for an in-depth understanding of leadership behaviors and governance philosophies across diverse institutional and cultural contexts. The goal was to uncover how higher education leaders integrate local cultural values into their leadership practices and how these practices influence institutional performance and stakeholder engagement. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with key academic leaders, including university presidents, vice presidents, deans, and department heads. These interviews were complemented by document analysis of institutional policies, leadership manuals, and strategic plans to understand formal and informal governance mechanisms better. Field observations were also conducted to capture contextual leadership behaviors, relational dynamics, and institutional rituals reflective of localized academic culture.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-step process. This method allowed for identifying recurrent patterns and culturally situated themes emerging from the participants' narratives. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation of data sources was employed, and member checking was conducted to validate the interpretations with participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional review board, and all

participants provided informed consent. Confidentiality, voluntary participation, and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process.

Locale and Participants of the Study

The study was conducted in four public higher education institutions that exemplify regional diversity and cultural richness in the Philippine higher education landscape. These were Isabela State University (ISU), Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University (DMMMSU), Southern Luzon State University (SLSU), and Apayao State College (ASC). Isabela State University, located in Cagayan Valley, operates in a multilingual and multicultural setting dominated by Ilocano and Ibanag influences. Based in La Union, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University blends Northern Luzon traditions and active political engagement within academic communities. Southern Luzon State University, situated in Quezon Province, is known for integrating Tagalog heritage into academic leadership and embracing participatory governance. Apayao State College, located in the Cordillera region, represents a unique case in integrating indigenous knowledge systems and tribal governance principles into academic administration.

A total of sixteen participants from each institution were selected through purposive sampling. These included university presidents, vice presidents for academic affairs, deans, and senior academic managers with at least three years of leadership experience. These participants were chosen for their direct engagement in institutional governance and their ability to provide insights into the intersection of culture, leadership, and policy within their universities.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is anchored in a culturally responsive leadership paradigm, which merges transformational leadership theory with indigenous governance perspectives. Transformational leadership, as defined by Bass and Riggio (2006), emphasizes vision-driven, ethical, and people-centered leadership that motivates institutional change and innovation. However, this study recognizes that leadership is also deeply shaped by local values and indigenous cultural systems in the context of the Philippine SUC. Drawing from the works of Agulay (2020), Pascual (2016), and de Guzman and Torres (2019), the framework incorporates Filipino socio-cultural constructs such as *pakikipagkapwa* (relational personhood), *bayanihan* (community solidarity), and *delicadeza* (ethical sensitivity) as central to effective leadership.

Three dimensions structure this framework: cultural embeddedness, localized governance practices, and institutional excellence. Cultural embeddedness profoundly

influences rooted values and traditions on leadership behaviors and organizational norms. Localized governance practices refer to integrating regional political structures, community participation, and tribal or municipal collaborations into the decision-making processes of university leaders. Lastly, institutional excellence encompasses how culturally informed leadership impacts faculty development, stakeholder engagement, academic outcomes, and the university's ability to fulfill its mandates. By employing this framework, the study foregrounds the importance of culture in shaping leadership approaches that are contextually relevant, ethically grounded, and socially responsive to the communities SUCs serve.

Results and Findings

Existing Leadership and Management Practices in Philippine State Universities and Colleges

The findings of this study reveal that leadership and management practices in Philippine State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) are significantly shaped by local cultural values, community-rooted traditions, and collaborative governance frameworks. Drawing from the lived experiences of academic leaders in Isabela State University, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, Southern Luzon State University, and Apayao State College, three dominant themes emerged: leadership rooted in community-based engagement and *pakikipagkapwa* (shared personhood); the integration of local traditions and cultural symbols into institutional identity; and collaborative governance with local stakeholders and indigenous authorities. The participants consistently emphasized that culturally informed leadership is not merely a philosophical stance, but a day-to-day practice expressed through consultation, cultural inclusion, and community partnership. These leadership strategies reflect an adaptive and context-sensitive approach, where decisions are grounded in empathy, respect for cultural identity, and responsiveness to local governance structures. The following sections elaborate on these themes, supported by direct responses from participants and interpreted considering relevant literature on culturally responsive and transformational leadership in higher education.

Leadership Rooted in Community-Based Engagement and Pakikipagkapwa

Leadership practices in SUCs are often shaped by the Filipino relational value of *pakikipagkapwa*, or shared personhood, which centers on empathy, mutual respect, and social harmony. Unlike hierarchical or purely bureaucratic approaches, culturally informed academic leaders practice relational governance, intentionally engaging with various internal and external stakeholders before implementing institutional decisions. This engagement occurs through formal structures such as academic

councils and informal venues like *kumustahan* gatherings, campus walkthroughs, and open-door consultations.

Such practices are rooted in the belief that leadership must be attuned to the community's pulse. Leaders do not act unilaterally; instead, they co-construct policies and programs with the people they serve. This relational leadership fosters trust, reinforces institutional legitimacy, and cultivates a sense of shared ownership among faculty, staff, students, and even local communities.

Participant Responses:

"Before we finalize policies, I talk to our faculty, students, and local officials. Leadership, for me, is always shared." Dean, Southern Luzon State University

"We do not impose from the top down. We ask. We listen. That is how you get trust." Vice President for Academic Affairs, Isabela State University

"There is no one-size-fits-all rule here. We ask our indigenous elders how to handle student concerns that involve cultural beliefs." Program Chair, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University

These responses illustrate that SUC leaders adopt a culturally resonant leadership style that values humility, inclusion, and consultation. Such practices resonate with the indigenous Filipino worldview that leadership is a social relationship, not merely a position. By integrating *pakikipagkapwa* into governance, leaders create safe dialogue and collaboration spaces, fostering a culture of mutual accountability. This model strengthens institutional coherence and enhances responsiveness to local concerns, positioning SUCs as academic and community leaders.

Integrating Local Traditions and Symbols in Institutional Culture

In many SUCs, leadership extends beyond administrative functionality into cultural stewardship. Leaders demonstrate cultural sensitivity and rootedness by consciously integrating local symbols, languages, rituals, and traditions into the identity and operations of their institutions. This cultural integration is manifested during institutional ceremonies, campus events, and community extension activities where local dialects are used, regional attire is worn, and indigenous practices are honored.

Such leadership practices are not merely ceremonial but pedagogical and symbolic acts that convey respect for the region's cultural identity. They help decolonize institutional practices, build cultural pride among students and faculty,

and create a learning environment that values local knowledge systems alongside global standards.

Participant Responses:

"We use local dialects in official events to honor our communities. It helps students feel connected." Vice President, Isabela State University

"Our extension activities are built around local livelihoods and customs—like farming practices, herbal medicine, and traditional crafts." Director, Extension Services, Apayao State College

"During our investiture, we wear cultural attire to affirm our heritage. It is not just a ceremony; it is our identity." Director, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University

These insights reflect that SUC leaders actively engage in cultural affirmation and identity-building. By incorporating local elements into institutional practices, they reinforce the idea that universities are not culture-neutral spaces but are embedded in specific historical and geographic contexts. This symbolic leadership affirms inclusion, promotes diversity, and enhances students' cultural confidence. Moreover, it aligns with the broader movement toward culturally responsive pedagogy and governance, which advocates for acknowledging and celebrating local epistemologies within formal education systems.

Collaborative Governance with Local Stakeholders and Government Units

Culturally informed leadership in SUCs is also characterized by a deliberate effort to partner with external stakeholders such as local government units (LGUs), indigenous communities, alum associations, and civic groups. These partnerships are built on mutual respect, shared vision, and long-standing socio-political ties. University leaders recognize that higher education institutions do not operate in a vacuum; they are deeply interwoven with their localities' socio-economic and political structures.

This collaborative approach reflects the Filipino value of *bayanihan* (communal cooperation), where success is seen as a collective endeavor. Leaders tap into local knowledge and community-based governance systems when designing programs, implementing outreach projects, or resolving institutional challenges. In indigenous

communities, this even includes seeking consent and guidance from tribal elders, thus honoring traditional authority and indigenous governance structures.

Participant Responses:

"We always coordinate with the local mayor before launching any community program. Their support is crucial." Campus Director, Southern Luzon State University

"In our province, academic initiatives succeed when tied to LGU development goals. We align our leadership with them." Vice President, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University

"When dealing with ancestral domains, we involve indigenous councils in every program design step." Dean, Apayao State College

These practices highlight the symbiotic relationship between SUCs and their surrounding communities. Culturally informed leaders understand that meaningful academic impact requires alignment with local development priorities and cultural sensitivities. Through collaborative governance, SUCs become agents of inclusive development, cultural preservation, and public accountability. This approach enhances program relevance and sustainability and fosters institutional trust and reputational capital among community stakeholders.

Leadership and management practices in Philippine SUCs reveal a deeply rooted cultural logic that shapes institutional behavior and governance. These practices are not only about efficient administration, but they are also acts of cultural negotiation, social engagement, and ethical leadership. By anchoring their leadership in values such as *pakikipagkapwa* and *bayanihan*, by honoring local traditions, and by collaborating with community leaders and local governments, SUC leaders exhibit a form of culturally informed leadership that is context-sensitive and morally grounded. This leadership paradigm not only upholds academic and institutional excellence but also affirms the university's role as a custodian of local identity, a partner in regional development, and a model of inclusive governance.

Culturally Informed Leadership Approaches Influence Institutional Performance, Stakeholder Engagement, and the Promotion of Academic Culture in SUCs

The participating State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) findings demonstrate that culturally informed leadership significantly contributes to institutional performance, deepens stakeholder engagement, and fosters an academic culture that reflects excellence and cultural identity. Drawing from interviews with university leaders at Isabela State University, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, Southern Luzon State University, and Apayao State College, it becomes evident that leadership rooted in Filipino values, such as *pakikipagkapwa*, *bayanihan*, and *delicadeza*,

enhances organizational trust, motivates faculty and staff, and nurtures a culture of accountability and inclusivity. Moreover, such leadership strengthens the institution's ties with its external stakeholders by honoring local customs, using culturally appropriate communication, and aligning institutional goals with community priorities. Through these culturally grounded practices, SUCs promote academic productivity and institutional unity and create learning environments that affirm cultural identity, advance relevant research, and empower local communities. The following sections elaborate on these themes through participant narratives and interpretive insights supported by existing literature on culturally responsive leadership.

Enhancing Institutional Performance through Trust-Building and Relational Leadership

Culturally informed leadership in State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) is grounded in relational values such as *pakikipagkapwa* (shared humanity), *malasakit* (compassionate concern), and *pananagutan* (accountability). Leaders who embody these values cultivate high trust, cohesion, and commitment within their institutions. This trust-based leadership style translates into improved institutional performance by promoting transparency, motivating staff, and fostering a sense of shared responsibility for institutional goals.

Rather than relying solely on top-down directives or formal authority, culturally grounded leaders engage in consistent, personal interactions with faculty, staff, and students, thus breaking down hierarchical barriers. This encourages initiative, collaboration, and innovation. Faculty members feel valued and supported, enhancing morale, a greater work ethic, and improved academic outputs, such as research productivity and program implementation.

Participant Responses:

"Because we have open communication, people feel they are part of the decision-making process. That makes them more committed to their roles." Dean, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University

"Faculty are more productive when they trust that the leadership is fair and rooted in values, we all believe in." Vice President for Academic Affairs, Southern Luzon State University

"Our accreditation success came from everyone pulling in the same direction. That unity was built over time by being inclusive and consistent." Director of Quality Assurance, Isabela State University

These accounts illustrate how relational leadership, embedded in Filipino cultural values, catalyzes institutional productivity and success. When leaders act with

integrity, approachability, and cultural empathy, they nurture an environment where people are intrinsically motivated to perform well. This relational capital becomes a foundation for organizational resilience, especially when facing resource limitations or policy shifts. Culturally informed leadership thus plays a strategic role in mobilizing human capital and aligning it with institutional visions.

Deepening Stakeholder Engagement through Culturally Sensitive Communication and Community Linkages

Stakeholder engagement in SUCs extends beyond the campus and involves meaningful interactions with parents, alums, local government units (LGUs), indigenous peoples, and civil society organizations. Culturally informed leaders build bridges with these stakeholders by using culturally appropriate language, honoring local customs, and involving them in institutional activities. These leaders understand that universities do not exist in isolation but are deeply embedded in local ecosystems.

Leadership practices that value consultation, humility, and respect for indigenous knowledge foster a culture of inclusion and partnership. Community members become more willing to support university programs, participate in collaborative initiatives, and advocate for the institution. As a result, SUCs that practice culturally responsive leadership enjoy broader public trust, better alum involvement, and more sustainable partnerships with LGUs and other agencies.

Participant Responses:

"We speak the local language during outreach programs and involve tribal elders in our extension activities. That is how we gain their support." Extension Director, Apayao State College

"Our partnership with the LGU works well because we align our goals with theirs. We respect their processes, and they respect our expertise." Director, Southern Luzon State University

"Alumni and community members feel they are part of the institution, not just outsiders. We invite them to major decisions and planning." Campus Administrator, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University

These responses underscore that cultural fluency and respect are potent tools for stakeholder engagement. By honoring community practices and inviting local participation, SUC leaders embed the university in the fabric of regional development. This mutual relationship increases institutional relevance, builds loyalty, and opens doors to external resources, including funding, political support, and collaborative

opportunities. Culturally informed leadership transforms stakeholders from passive beneficiaries into active co-creators of the institution's mission.

Promoting Academic Culture Through Identity Affirmation and Cultural Integration

Culturally informed leadership is critical in shaping and sustaining academic culture. Leaders who integrate local traditions, languages, and community values into academic life contribute to a learning environment that is both intellectually stimulating and culturally affirming. Such practices include incorporating indigenous knowledge into curricula, holding recognition ceremonies that honor local heritage, and promoting research that addresses community needs.

By embedding cultural narratives and ethical values into the academic ethos, leaders create a university culture where students and faculty feel a strong sense of identity and purpose. This approach challenges the dominance of Western academic models and encourages locally rooted scholarship, interdisciplinary collaboration, and place-based learning.

Participant Responses:

"We include local history and culture in general education subjects. This makes students proud of who they are." Dean of Instruction, Isabela State University

"We encourage faculty to do research based on the community's needs. That way, academic work becomes more meaningful." Research Director, Apayao State College

"Even our recognition events highlight local traditions and languages. This is how we promote both excellence and identity." Dean, Southern Luzon State University

These accounts reflect how culturally rooted leadership enhances academic life by integrating local context into institutional practices. Such leadership helps democratize knowledge, decentralize academic authority, and develop more inclusive curricular content. The resulting academic culture is performance-driven, identity-affirming, culturally literate, and socially relevant, hallmarks of truly transformative education.

Culturally informed leadership practices in Philippine SUCs profoundly impact institutional performance, stakeholder engagement, and academic culture. By fostering trust, encouraging shared accountability, and grounding leadership in local values, SUC leaders cultivate collaborative, inclusive, and high-performing environments. Their engagement with communities and recognition of cultural identities reinforce the university's role as a socially anchored and culturally reflective institution. In doing so, culturally informed leadership redefines excellence through

metrics or rankings and relevance, responsiveness, and rootedness in the communities the institutions serve.

Challenges Do Higher Education Leaders Face in Integrating Localized Cultural Knowledge and Community-Rooted Governance Practices

While culturally informed leadership offers numerous benefits to institutional performance and community engagement, academic leaders in Philippine State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) face distinct challenges when integrating localized cultural knowledge and governance practices into formal academic and administrative systems. The findings from Isabela State University, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, Southern Luzon State University, and Apayao State College reveal that these challenges are multifaceted and rooted in systemic, structural, and perceptual tensions. Leaders often struggle to reconcile national bureaucratic mandates with the community-rooted practices' flexible, relational, and context-specific nature. Institutional capacity limitations—such as lack of policies, personnel, and funding—further hinder the formalization of cultural integration in governance. Moreover, internal resistance and misunderstandings from faculty and staff, particularly those unfamiliar with or untrained in cultural frameworks, pose additional barriers. These challenges highlight the complexities of leading within dual systems—where formal academic requirements must be balanced with cultural authenticity and stakeholder sensitivity. The themes that follow unpack these dynamics in greater detail, grounded in participant responses and supported by relevant literature

Tension Between Bureaucratic Mandates and Cultural Flexibility

One of the primary challenges SUC leaders face is navigating the often-rigid structures of bureaucratic academic governance while trying to integrate flexible, context-sensitive cultural practices. National regulatory frameworks from agencies such as the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), the Civil Service Commission (CSC), and state audit bodies impose standardized rules and protocols prioritizing compliance, uniformity, and procedural formality. However, many culturally informed practices, such as informal consultations with community elders, decision-making based on customary law, or extended community rituals, do not neatly align with these bureaucratic systems.

This creates a leadership dilemma where university executives must constantly balance cultural responsiveness with administrative legality. The flexibility required

to honor local traditions is sometimes viewed as a threat to procedural objectivity and accountability, especially in hiring, procurement, and curriculum design.

Participant Responses:

“CHED policies are very standardized. Sometimes we want to localize our curriculum to include indigenous content, but it takes a long time to get it approved.” Curriculum Chair, Isabela State University

“We consult elders before implementing programs in tribal areas, but these do not always get documented formally. It is hard to report them as part of governance structures.” Dean, Apayao State College

“We are expected to follow strict administrative policies. However, our province often makes decisions through consensus with community leaders, not just board resolutions.” Vice President for Administration, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University

These responses reveal that institutional leaders often operate within a dual governance framework, formal policy on one side and informal, culture-based expectations on the other. The tension between these two systems complicates leadership, especially when cultural flexibility is misinterpreted as a lack of professionalism or procedural rigor. Culturally informed leadership, while essential, requires recognition and validation within formal governance frameworks to be truly effective and sustainable.

Limited Institutional Capacity for Cultural Integration

Many SUCs face institutional limitations when systematically integrating cultural knowledge into governance and academic programming. These limitations include a lack of trained personnel in cultural studies, a lack of institutional policies recognizing cultural diversity, and inadequate funding for heritage-driven or community-based initiatives. As a result, while leaders may be culturally aware and personally committed to community-rooted governance, their efforts often remain isolated or symbolic rather than embedded within institutional systems.

Additionally, most strategic plans and quality assurance frameworks prioritize academic excellence and accreditation metrics over cultural responsiveness. As such, programs that aim to integrate indigenous knowledge or promote culturally sensitive

governance often receive less institutional support, making them difficult to scale or sustain.

Participant Responses:

"We lack experts who can translate local culture into a formal curriculum. Even if we want to integrate culture, we need technical help properly." Dean, Southern Luzon State University

"Our university has no official policy supporting indigenous or community-rooted governance models. So, we do it informally." Extension Coordinator, Apayao State College

"Budget constraints make it difficult to support heritage activities or long-term partnerships with local cultural groups." Director for Planning, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University

These narratives highlight the structural and logistical barriers to institutionalizing culturally informed leadership. Without explicit policies, trained personnel, and dedicated resources, cultural integration becomes dependent on the individual initiative of leaders—often without institutional backing. For such practices to move beyond isolated success stories, universities must embed cultural responsiveness into their systems, plans, and structures.

Resistance and Misunderstanding from Internal Stakeholders

Another major challenge is internal resistance from faculty, staff, or administrators who may not share the same cultural sensitivity or appreciation for localized governance. Some stakeholders view culturally informed practices as "soft," irrelevant, or even regressive in a globalizing academic landscape that favors metrics, rankings, and technical skills. There may also be generational or disciplinary divides, where younger faculty or those trained in Western-oriented frameworks are less receptive to culture-based approaches.

Moreover, when leadership practices rely on cultural consultation or indigenous processes, they are sometimes perceived as political or unprofessional, particularly by those unfamiliar with their cultural significance. This resistance often

slows implementation or leads to misunderstandings that undermine leadership credibility and the legitimacy of culturally informed initiatives.

Participant Responses:

"Some faculty question why we include elders in our program consultations. They think it delays things or is not academic enough." Department Chair, Apayao State College

"Not all staff are supportive of culture-based activities. Some think it is just for show or irrelevant to quality education." Dean, Southern Luzon State University

"There is a tendency to associate local practices with being outdated. However, they enrich our leadership and make us more inclusive." President, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University

These responses suggest that internal consensus remains challenging when institutionalizing culturally rooted governance. Leaders may face skepticism or passive resistance without shared cultural understanding or orientation. This underscores the need for internal cultural literacy campaigns, inclusive dialogues, and leadership development programs that bridge traditional values with academic professionalism.

Higher education leaders in Philippine SUCs encounter multiple challenges integrating localized cultural knowledge and community-rooted governance into formal institutional systems. These include reconciling cultural flexibility with bureaucratic demands, addressing institutional limitations in policy and capacity, and overcoming internal resistance or misunderstanding. Despite their commitment to culturally informed leadership, SUC leaders must navigate complex terrains where policy compliance, academic expectations, and cultural authenticity intersect. These challenges emphasize the need for institutional reforms recognizing cultural governance as legitimate and strategically worthy of structural support, policy integration, and academic legitimacy. Only through such systemic alignment can SUCs fully embody their dual mandate as centers of knowledge production and stewards of local heritage.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the deep cultural grounding of leadership and management practices in Philippine State Universities and Colleges (SUCs), revealing that leadership is not merely exercised through formal hierarchies or policy enforcement, but is significantly shaped by relational, symbolic, and community-rooted values. Across the four case institutions, Isabela State University, Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, Southern Luzon State University, and Apayao State College, leaders consistently integrate Filipino cultural values such as

pakikipagkapwa, *bayanihan*, *utang na loob*, and *delicadeza* into their institutional decision-making and engagement strategies.

First, culturally informed leadership practices are evident in how SUC leaders engage with their constituents and stakeholders. Leadership is anchored in relational processes emphasizing humility, shared decision-making, and trust-building. These practices reflect the indigenous value of *pakikipagkapwa*, where leaders view themselves as co-equal and empathetic members of a collective rather than authoritative figures detached from the community. Leaders conduct regular dialogues with faculty, students, and external partners. Practices that promote participatory governance and foster institutional coherence and trust. One Southern Luzon State University dean shared, “*Leadership, for me, is always shared,*” pointing to a leadership ethos that prioritizes inclusion and empathy over control.

Second, culturally informed leadership has a measurable impact on institutional performance, stakeholder engagement, and academic culture. Leaders who nurture relationships grounded in cultural values stimulate greater faculty motivation, institutional unity, and responsiveness to accreditation and research performance demands. The trust cultivated through consistent and ethical leadership encourages faculty and staff to take ownership of institutional goals. Moreover, by embedding culture into institutional ceremonies, academic programs, and community outreach, SUC leaders create inclusive academic environments where students and faculty feel a strong sense of identity and belonging. This identity affirmation enhances the relevance of education, fosters student pride, and aligns academic endeavors with societal needs. A research director at Apayao State College noted, “*We encourage faculty to do research based on the needs of the community. That way, academic work becomes more meaningful,*” illustrating how localized leadership can influence the direction of academic productivity and relevance.

However, integrating culturally informed leadership into formal academic and administrative systems is challenging. Leaders face a structural disconnect between national bureaucratic mandates, often rigid, technocratic, and metrics-driven- and community-rooted leadership’s relational, context-sensitive nature. National frameworks from CHED, CSC, and other regulatory bodies emphasize standardization and procedural compliance, often limiting the flexibility needed to honor local traditions or consult indigenous leaders. A dean from Apayao State College revealed, “*We consult elders before implementing programs in tribal areas, but these*

do not always get documented formally," highlighting how culturally significant practices are often excluded from formal institutional reports or quality assurance indicators.

Furthermore, SUC leaders encounter institutional limitations such as a lack of policies supporting cultural integration, insufficient funding for community-based initiatives, and limited technical expertise to translate cultural knowledge into formal curriculum and programming. Even when leaders are personally committed to cultural responsiveness, these efforts are often constrained by the absence of institutional structures that legitimize and support them.

Internal resistance also poses a challenge. Some faculty and administrators, particularly those trained in Western educational models or focused on global academic benchmarks, may view culture-based practices as peripheral or unscientific. Misunderstandings arise when stakeholders equate traditional consultation or indigenous ceremonies with inefficiency or political accommodation. As one president noted, *"There is a tendency to associate local practices with being outdated. However, they enrich our leadership and make us more inclusive."*

The discussion reveals that culturally informed leadership in Philippine SUCs is a powerful but complex phenomenon. It enhances institutional performance and inclusivity when properly contextualized and supported, yet it struggles to gain traction within bureaucratic and resource-constrained environments. The leadership philosophy practiced by SUC leaders reflects a decolonizing approach to education that reclaims local values, promotes community participation, and challenges the over-reliance on imported management paradigms. In this sense, culturally rooted leadership is both a strategy and an advocacy, navigating the demands of institutional excellence and the imperatives of cultural integrity.

To sustain and strengthen culturally informed leadership, SUCs must institutionalize these practices through policy integration, faculty training, cultural orientation, and the creation of dedicated spaces for community engagement. Only by aligning formal governance systems with the lived realities of the regions they serve can SUCs fulfill their dual mission: to provide quality higher education and to act as custodians of local culture and development.

Conclusions

Based on the results and findings of the study conducted across Cagayan State University, Mindanao State University, and Isabela State University, several conclusions can be drawn regarding integrating cultural studies perspectives and the practice of culturally grounded pedagogy in higher education. First, culturally responsive teaching strategies that draw on local knowledge, traditions, and lived

experiences significantly affirm students' cultural identities and foster mutual respect. This pedagogical approach enables learners to engage deeply with their heritage while simultaneously appreciating and understanding the diversity of others, forming a strong foundation for intercultural competence.

Second, dialogic teaching methods, including storytelling and open classroom discussions, have proven effective in creating safe, inclusive spaces where students can share, reflect on, and learn from one another's cultural backgrounds. These practices humanize classroom interactions and promote empathy, critical consciousness, and meaningful engagement with cultural differences. They support the development of globally competent individuals who are sensitive to cultural nuances and better equipped for diverse environments.

Lastly, implementing community-based and experiential learning projects such as cultural mapping, documentation of local traditions, and immersion with indigenous and rural communities further enhances the real-world application of intercultural values. These practices bridge theoretical instruction with lived cultural realities, allowing students to experience culture as dynamic, relevant, and integral to social development. In conclusion, when meaningfully embedded into teaching practices, culturally grounded pedagogy is a transformative educational strategy that enriches learning outcomes and prepares students to become socially aware, culturally respectful, and globally engaged citizens.

References

- [1] Alamon, A. (2017). *Nation, class, and resentment: The politics of inequality and resentment in the Philippines*. University of the Philippines Press.
- [2] Belarga, B., Guiquing-Clemente, B., Tulawie, A., Alih, C., Caban, R., & Manois, F. R. (2025). From page to praxis: The role of regional literature in shaping culturally grounded teaching methods in HEIs. *International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion*, 7(SI2), 356–371. <https://doi.org/10.63931/ijchr.v7iSI2.206>
- [3] Banks, J. A. (2006). *Cultural diversity and education: Foundations, curriculum, and teaching* (5th ed.). Pearson.
- [4] Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- [5] Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Multilingual Matters.
- [6] Camero, C. R., Alzate, L. J. A., & Gumpal, B. R. (2025). *Forging global citizens: A comparative study of intercultural pedagogical practices of higher educational*

- institutions in the Philippines. *Journal of Intercultural Education and Development*, 13(1), 14–29. <https://doi.org/10.32942/jied.v13i1.235>
- [7] Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), 241–266. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002>
- [8] Dela Cruz, L., Aguinaldo, I., Alzate, L. J., Camero, C., Abiado, K. R., & Gumpal, B. (2025). Fostering intercultural competence through culturally responsive pedagogy: Practices and perspectives in Philippine higher education institutions. *International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion*, 7(SI2), 36–50. <https://doi.org/10.63931/ijchr.v7iSI2.187>
- [9] Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. Macmillan.
- [10] Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum.
- [11] Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- [12] Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Sage.
- [13] Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experience: Experience is the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall.
- [14] Mendoza, S. L. (2019). Decolonizing the Filipino through cultural studies: A preliminary proposal. In L. T. Smith (Ed.), *Global cultural studies in the Asia Pacific* (pp. 119–136). Routledge.
- [15] Nieto, S. (2004). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (4th ed.). Allyn & Bacon.
- [16] Nieto, S., & Bode, P. (2018). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (7th ed.). Pearson.
- [17] Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2017). *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world*. Teachers College Press.
- [18] UNESCO. (2017). *Education for sustainable development goals: Learning objectives*. UNESCO Publishing.