ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 5| May 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

LEADERSHIP PERSPECTIVES OF FILIPINO SCHOOL HEADS IN DIVERSE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXTS: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

Charlyn Mae B. Balbuena[1], Jason Philip B. Capacio[1]
Jose Marie E. Ocdenaria, PhD[2]
[1]Authors, [2]Co-Authors; PhD in Educational Leadership, University of the Immaculate Conception

Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra21375
DOI No: 10.36713/epra21375

ABSTRACT

Culturally adaptive leadership strategies highlight the effectiveness of Filipino leaders in multicultural educational settings, especially in diverse workplaces where there is a greater need for effective communication, trust, and cultural sensitivity. Although multicultural leadership has been the subject of much research, existing studies emphasize challenges rather than exploring how Filipino leaders manage conflict and build positive relationships across cultures. In response, this study aims to explore their lived experiences and gather insights into effective leadership practices in international educational settings. Adopting a qualitative multiple-case study approach, this research examined the leadership perspectives of Filipino school leaders operating in multicultural educational contexts in Thailand, China, and the UK. The findings indicate that Filipino school leaders manifest effective leadership in multicultural education through cultural sensitivity, inclusive collaboration, and trust. Notably, this group can lead diverse teams and navigate various cultural contexts by drawing upon cultural and emotional intelligence principles, thereby instilling a spirit of respect, communication, and co-creative solutions.

KEYWORDS: *Filipino School Heads, Multicultural Leadership, Cultural Intelligence, International Education*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of leadership has been studied, reviewed, adapted, and developed throughout history. Its role is vital in an organization as it carries out the most generic societal purpose, maintaining stability and regulation. Additionally, 45% of an organization's increased performance (Gutterman, 2023) relies on the effectiveness of its team management. Experienced leaders can adapt to specific contextual changes, and the more diverse the experience is in terms of multicultural conditions, the richer the help leaders get in communication, effective leadership, and handling multinational teams (Lu, Swaab, & Galinsky, 2021). In the education setting, the worldwide shift to multiculturalism influences multiple population groups through ethnic backgrounds, which requires education systems to develop comprehensive responses to achieve equal educational opportunities. Educational managers in Thailand, in particular, need to practice multicultural leadership, which enables better responses to diversity while promoting equality throughout all social groups (Chongcharoen, 2020). Similarly, multicultural leadership influences teacher performance levels in Indonesian junior high schools under the principal's direction for enhancing professionalism, as it illustrates that multicultural leadership and teacher professionalism positively impact teacher performance (Soraya & Supadi, 2023).

In line with this, there is a need for context-specific leadership strategies that cater to the diverse needs in several educational settings. Groenewald et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of context-specific leadership, intersectionality, globalization's impact on leadership, and how they shape the education system. However, this feat is not easily achieved. One of the main concerns in managing a multicultural environment is the language barrier (Schweimler, 2022), as well as cultural norms and decision-making. In some cases (Knap-Stefaniuk, 2023), where diverse orientations value hierarchy, authority, and tenure, conflict arises as skills and capabilities are questioned. With the increase in competitiveness and the lack of workforce in the global industry, companies hire competent people to fill the role, creating multicultural teams in the organization. Filipinos accepted the challenge and portrayed the role of leaders in their area of study. Despite the complexity of the task and the magnitude of the responsibility given, there are still those who excel and embrace the challenge. Filipino leaders are more effective when it comes to communication due to the enhanced exposure to the English language, which is considered the world's lingua franca, and it helps them navigate through different cultures and races; the issue, however, falls on cultural sensitivity and adaptability (Guzmán-Rodríguez, L. et al. 2023). As such, Filipino leaders in multicultural organizations experience considerable challenges when working with cross-cultural diversity, given differences in trust, communication, and leadership orientations. Such challenges affect cohesiveness, efficiency, and organizational performance in general among the teams. Filipino leaders, particularly in educational settings like Doha, Qatar, and the United States, often struggle to adapt to new cultural environments. They must follow mandates and policies,

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control the local culture, integrate the educational programs, and consider the available resources. These challenges compel them to understand institutional policies, cultural norms, curriculum indicators (Del Rosario & Ancho, 2020), and often the lack of adequate resources to effectively provide leadership in international schools.

While multicultural team studies have gained attention recently, these studies focus more on the challenges Filipinos face and lack investigation into how Filipino leaders manage conflict and act with culturally strategic measures for building trust and cooperation. Moreover, substantial literature has addressed multicultural team characteristics and leadership issues. However, Filipino leaders' experiences in these settings are underrepresented. Namely, investigations hardly ever focus on how the proposed trust-increasing strategies depend on cultural disparities, language difficulties, and other leadership expectations – an apparent research limitation since it hinders the understanding of leadership performance in multicultural groups.

Purpose of the study

This research examines the leadership perspectives of Filipino school heads in diverse international contexts, specifically in Thailand, China, and the UK. The research investigates how they face the challenges when leading multicultural teams: language barriers, trust-building, and cultural differences, and how they influence their leadership strategies. Additionally, the study seeks to gather recommendations from these leaders on the approaches for enhancing leadership effectiveness in multicultural educational settings.

Research Questions

The following research questions have been formulated to guide this study:

1. What are the leadership perspectives of Filipino school heads when leading multicultural teams in diverse international contexts?
2. How do Filipino school heads address language barriers, trust-building, and cultural differences in leadership practices?

Theoretical Underpinning

The theoretical basis of this study stems from expert opinions in their relevant academic domains. People who demonstrate Cultural Intelligence (CQ) exhibit exceptional communication abilities with those from diverse cultural backgrounds, according to Earley and Ang (2003). The ability of individuals to function in cognitive, motivational, and behavioral aspects, along with metacognitive dimensions, is their aptitude. This correlates to how Filipino school heads engage cultural differences, adjust their leadership strategies, and garner trust in multicultural contexts. Conversely, the Transformational Leadership Theory introduced by Bass (1985) and Burns (1978) deals with the leadership style that inspires, motivates, and connects with their members, making them reach their maximum potential and meet the desired goals. This theory is relevant in understanding how Filipino school heads build effective relationships with their subordinates, promoting collaboration and inclusivity within diverse teams. By integrating these two theories, along with the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory by Graen & Uhl-Bien, (1995) which deals with the quality of the leader-follower relationship which impacts team interdependence, trust, and facilitation of leadership, this study investigates Filipino leadership techniques that employ cultural intelligence and transformational approaches for international multicultural leadership development.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative method to explore Filipino school heads' perspectives in leading multicultural teams in an international setting, and a multiple case study strategy was utilized. The case study approach, therefore, fits the research objectives since it allows a detailed description of authentic leadership practices, an examination of both practices and challenges, and the possibility of capturing holistic leadership propositions in real practices (Creswell, 2013). The study focused on Filipino school heads from international settings in Thailand, China, and the UK. The research team selected subjects purposefully, targeting school leaders with multicultural team leadership experience. These participants were included based on three selection criteria: Filipino nationality, a minimum of 2 years of work experience as a school head, and leading multicultural teams in context.

Data were obtained via semi-structured, in-depth interviews on online platforms, including Google Meet or Zoom. The interview process followed open-ended questions to explore leadership approaches, the challenges encountered by school leaders, and the solutions proposed to address these challenges. The interview protocol included specific sub-questions regarding cultural barriers, trust development, and effective communication methods.

Research Site and Participants

The study investigated three Filipino school leaders with at least two years of experience assigned overseas. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to include only those individuals who best met the study criteria relevant to the study objectives. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with a predefined set of questions and potential responses from each participant. The researchers developed a set of open-ended and structured questions related to leaders' personal experiences of using online platforms to extract information.

Participant 1 was an experienced teacher who had taught for 29 years in Jiangxi, China, and served as department head. She taught in China for nine years and was in a leadership role for nearly three years.

The second case participant was an executive head teacher in London, United Kingdom. He began teaching in the UK in 2001

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and took his first headship in 2010. As his write-up notes, he has been a lead inspector for the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) since 2012. He therefore brings significant experience in leading schools and inspecting schools.

The third case participant was a foreign teacher coordinator at one of the schools in Bangkok, Thailand. She was at the institution for 16 years, 15 of which she served as the foreign teacher coordinator, helping with the institution's academic and administrative plan and ensuring quality educational practices.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data by identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns in the data collected. This approach enabled the researchers to gain an in-depth insight into the experiences and perceptions of the participants. Analysis based on patterns showed real flexibility in the data process, allowing researchers to evaluate explicit and implicit senses of research outcomes. Braun and Clarke (2006) characterized thematic analysis as a well-established methodology with the flexibility of application within qualitative research in meeting study needs, in this case, monitoring leadership perspectives in global settings.

Trustworthiness

The aim of ensuring trustworthiness within qualitative research was to maintain the integrity and consistency of the study. Reliability, in this case, focused on justifying the precision of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This part of the research discussed its dependability based on credibility, transferability, and confirmability.

Ethical Considerations

In the conduct of the research, the following ethical components were considered:

Social Value. The research analyzed leadership perspectives among Filipino school heads who led multicultural educational institutions across international settings. The study explored school transformation practices as best practices to benefit new educational administrators and future school managers. The successful implementation of this research led to the dissemination of valuable results to educational divisions, which guided the upcoming school leaders. The research insights enabled leaders to enhance their leadership approaches while supporting better school management quality. The research strived to deliver worth to participants, the educational community, and society.

Informed Consent. A letter of request for permission to carry out the study was sent at the beginning of data collection activities to the designated Division Research Focal Person—permission was granted by authorities to acquire approval from public and private school heads to conduct semi-structured in-depth interviews. The study sought verbal and written consent collected from research subjects to explain their involvement and responsibilities. The consent procedure gave study participants essential knowledge about the study goals and complete information regarding voluntary engagement, confidentiality practices, and time expectations (30 to 90 minutes). The study explained to participants that recorded audio would be used in interviews, along with their permission to use the chosen method, virtual.

Vulnerability of the Research Participants. This study's evaluation process focused on assessing potential risks for participants. The mature experience of participating school leaders reduced concerns about their research vulnerability. All participants joined voluntarily, and their identities and responses remained anonymous during the research process. All participants' safety and welfare were ranked as the primary concern from start to finish during the research activities.

Risks, Benefits, and Safety. Under ethical standards, participants were made aware of possible dangers, including physical harm, psychological damage, and the consequences of economic problems and legal issues. The approach contained measures to give participants complete information regarding the research purposes and advantages. The interview process allowed participants to feel comfortable through placement in convenient spaces and provided question-asking opportunities during sessions. The option to withdraw from the study remained available to all participants at any point, and participants received complete protection and confidentiality regarding their personal information.

Privacy and Confidentiality. The participants maintained complete freedom to participate in this study. The research team briefed all participants about data protection practices and ensured full anonymity of collected information. Each personal identifier was detached from participant data while they received assurance about the lack of connection between their information and institutional or individual identification. Participation comfort increased because the study maintained privacy standards that protected participants' anonymity.

Justice. The researchers used the principle of justice to select participants by choosing people based on data collection needs instead of ease of access. The study treated participants fairly while showing complete respect for their input without discrimination. They stayed focused on the research questions while conducting interviews to safeguard the honesty of their school leaders' experience sharing.

Transparency. Transparency was a primary value throughout this study, through which researchers presented a detailed explanation of research methods to participants, other researchers, and users of research findings. A transparent publishing methodology revealed all research methods, procedures, and results, while the appendices provided documents for easy access to comprehend study findings. Researchers protected the research quality while participants received encouragement to respond honestly because it improved the outcome of the research investigation.

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Qualification of the Researcher. The researchers were dedicated to performing this study while following research protocols to the highest standard as PhD students. The research advisor provided guidance as the researchers received academic mentorship to deliver the survey with the utmost competence and care. The researchers welcomed all ideas for research improvement to enhance quality and maximize its usefulness for Filipino school leaders in diverse environments.

Adequacy of Facilities. The researchers maximized available facilities while conducting the study by using internet access for scholarly reading, data analysis software, and technological resources, including cellular phones, laptops, and cameras for interviews. This research benefited from professional expertise and institutional backing, such as the University Learning Resource Service Center, which confirmed the appropriate resources needed for the work.

Community Involvement. The research process depended heavily on community engagement because this fostered equal respect between researchers and research volunteers. Filipino school leaders in multicultural environments had their viewpoints and operational methods valued and respected. Results from this study were presented to school heads and principals so that they could develop leadership practices that promoted educational management enhancement in their assigned divisions and communities.

RESULTS

This chapter details the results of a study entitled Leadership Perspectives of Filipino School Heads in Diverse International Contexts: A Multiple Case Study. The study explores the leadership perspectives of Filipino school heads in multicultural school settings in Thailand, China, and the United Kingdom. Data were obtained via semi-structured in-depth interviews and analyzed thematically.

The setting of the study and participants

In context, the premises of this multiple case study were three Filipino school leaders serving in educational leadership positions internationally for at least two years. The participants were purposefully sampled to ensure relevance to the research aims. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, in which some questions were open-ended and structured to facilitate rich, experience-based responses. Below are the profiles of the participants presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of the participants

No	Code	Sex	Position	Years in Service	Type of School	Study group
1	IDI1	F	Department Head	3 years	Sino-Canadian Program	IDI
2	IDI2	M	Head Teacher	15 years	State School	IDI
3	IDI3	F	Foreign Teacher Coordinator	15 years	Private Educational Institution	IDI

The three cases are elaborated as follows

Case 1: A department head in Jiangxi, China, with 29 years of teaching experience, including nine years in China and nearly three years in her present leadership position.

Case 2: An executive headteacher in London, United Kingdom, who has been teaching in the UK since 2001, became a head teacher for the first time in 2010 and has acted as an OFSTED Lead Inspector since 2012.

Case 3: A foreign teacher coordinator at a school in Bangkok, Thailand, has served continuously for 16 years, including 15 years in a leadership position, contributing to both academic and administrative leadership.

Similarities and differences

The table below analyzes perspectives on leadership gleaned from three different case studies of Filipino school heads operating in multicultural and international settings. It examines the similarities and differences in themes across the cases and explains how Filipino leadership manages cultural complexity. The comparison highlights similarities in leadership values—collaboration, inclusivity, and cultural sensitivity—and differences specific to leadership styles and school context. This analysis originates from accessing advantageous learning frameworks in cultural adaptability and relational leadership that support effective educational leadership in global contexts.

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Table 2. Similarities and Differences of Leadership Perspectives of Filipino School Heads in Diverse International Contexts

Themes on Leadership Perspectives of Filipino School Heads	Case unit		Remarks
	Similarities	Differences	
Cultural Sensitivity and Cross-Cultural Collaboration	Case 1	Case 2, 3	Highlighted how leaders adjust to different cultural expectations.
Inclusive and Empowering Leadership	Case 1	Case 2, 3	Emphasized empowering team members through inclusion and recognition.
Adaptive and Flexible Leadership Styles	Case 2	Case 1, 3	Flexibility shown in adapting approaches based on team needs and dynamics.
Balancing Hierarchical Respect with Democratic Values	Case 3	Case 1, 2	Balanced top-down expectations with efforts to involve others in decision-making.
Emotional Intelligence and Relational Leadership	Case 1	Case 2, 3	Showed empathy, compassion, and strong relational connections with multicultural staff.
Participatory and Collaborative Decision-Making	Case 3	Case 1, 2	Highlighted the importance of collective input and shared responsibility in leadership.

Cross-Case Analysis

Based on the analysis presented in Table 2, beyond simply following cultural norms, Filipino school heads have adjusted their leadership styles to include and reflect Filipino values such as respect and community in their adaptations. In this way, they show leadership flexibility across the contexts. Their cultural awareness resonates with Cultural Intelligence (CQ), that is, being able to function effectively in diverse scenarios (Earley & Ang, 2003). They create environments in which every team member feels valued and included, their contributions matter, and collaboration is the outcome. In doing so, they also demonstrate transformational leadership, particularly through individualized consideration, to promote growth and inclusion. They emphasize overcoming challenges and empowering organizations to thrive—it highlights how shared leadership practices improve the efficacy of Filipino leaders, especially in a multicultural setting, finding common ground between cultures and realizing the potential of adaptive integration, ultimately empowering teams to drive goal achievements further.

The analysis identified the overlapping and diverging areas of school heads' leadership perspectives in managing multicultural personnel. One clear commonality found among all the cases was the need and importance of cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural collaboration, with leaders open and flexible to the specific needs and culture of the population in their context. As one school head described, *"I always try to put on my cultural glasses and then my glasses because that's how trust gets formed — you know where your teachers are coming from."* However, discrepancies occurred in their use of inclusive and participatory leadership, although Case 1 purportedly valued consensus building, Cases 2 and 3 were challenging to implement due to cultural or institutional constraints. *"Aka democratic right, and also being democratic is misunderstood in our school, so I still need to be firm,"* one school head observed.

Case 3's hierarchical approach was in minor contrast with Case 1, which shared the need to balance being a leader with being an older sister, in the balancing hierarchy and approachability theme: *"I am their leader, but also their 'ate' (elder sister). They no longer come to me just for work but also for personal matters."* Likewise, emotionally intelligent and affiliative leadership were widely practiced, especially by Case 2, who stated, *"You need to have empathy—without it, you can't lead a team from different backgrounds."*

In contrast, diversity-driven empowerment appeared to be a similar focal area for Case 1 but not so much for the other two cases. This school head said, *"I offer opportunities to people who are usually ignored because that's what happened to me."* Finally, although flexibility and responsiveness were common values, their implementation differed. Case 2 showcased a situational approach*: "For some people, I change my tone, my expectations, it really just depends on who I'm dealing with."* The differing degrees of how each theme played out highlight the effect of individual leadership styles and the unique culture mixes of their teams.

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Table 3. Similarities and differences in how Filipino school heads address language barriers, trust-building, and cultural differences in leadership practices

Themes on Leadership Perspectives of Filipino School Heads	Case unit		Remarks
	Similarities	Differences	
Overcoming Language Barriers	Case 1, 2, 3	N/A	All three demonstrate proactive approaches to overcoming language barriers through preparation, patience, and ongoing improvement.
Building Trust in Multicultural Team	Case 1, 2, 3	N/A	Trust-building in multicultural teams is often facilitated by clear communication, but cultural approaches to establishing trust can vary (personal rapport vs. job performance).
Adapting Leadership Communication to Cultural Norms	Case 1, 2, 3	N/A	Communication adaptability is crucial across all three cases, but the methods and areas of focus (listening, repetition, non-verbal cues) vary.
Fostering Respectful Cultural Interactions	Case 1, 2, 3	N/A	Fostering respect is a universal value; however, the methods vary across contexts. Case 1 emphasizes informal activities and relational engagement, while Case 2 and Case 3 focus on structured communication and respect through professional interactions.
Managing Cultural Diversity in Decision-Making	Case 1, 2	Case 3	The theme of decision-making involves balancing cultural expectations. Differences lie in how the leaders perceive and handle authority (top-down vs. consensus-based decisions).

Philippine school heads who interact with multicultural environments can break through the barriers brought by language, trust, and culture, showing high levels of cultural responsiveness. These themed discussion points exhibit the dual existence of cultural sensitivity and leadership efficacy among Filipino school leaders, who engage in transformational leadership qualities through high cultural intelligence. The one concentration standard in these cases is communicative clarity. Language barriers are addressed using translation tools, visuals, language training, and simple messaging. More importantly, they create psychologically safe spaces so that it is acceptable for team members to ask for clarification. Communication is essential, as is trust among the interacting parties. According to Filipino school heads, the three pillars of trust-building are open communication, empathy, and transparency. Interpersonal trust is valued through emotional bonding, inclusiveness, and professional trust, based on accountability and performance.

In Cases 1 and 2, the characters strove to understand and bridge their differences. *"You do things so differently here, but I'm starting to understand,"* Participant 1 had mentioned, signaling personal growth. In Case 2, the head teacher acknowledged how foreign the new ways of thinking and customs were but showed respect for them: *"The customs here are strange to me, but I'm trying to respect them."* In comparison, Case 3 described the transformation of a person who initially struggled with language and cultural differences but demonstrated a strong willingness to adapt and learn. In the interview, she said, "*Back in the Philippines, I didn't get to talk to native speakers much... but as time went on, and as I did more interviews and meetings, my listening and understanding skills got better*," illustrating a clear trajectory of progressive change. While some teachers resisted this character's leadership due to cultural biases, she maintained a professional demeanor and employed individualized approaches to build meaningful connections: *"I don't say, 'I'm your boss.' Instead, I treat them as professionals… they understand that I give them feedback to help them improve."* The participant did not deny the presence of change; rather, she actively justified others' actions and sought to bring them into the fold.

For the participants, friendship and reciprocity were fundamental in overcoming barriers. They helped one another and built a bridge to cross the language and cultural divide. In Case 1, she reassured the other, *"I'm here to help; you're not alone in this."* Case 2 agreed to work through their struggles together: *"Let's stick together; we'll learn this together."* These statements indicated that mutual contributions and collaboration were key to progressing through their challenges. Case 3, however, revealed moments of relational difficulty, such as pride-related resistance among a few team members: *"You could feel the resistance. But I always tried to be professional and fair."* Nevertheless, the character remained committed to addressing these gaps through respectful one-on-one conversations and constructive feedback.
The participants experienced profound personal growth. They concluded their journeys with improved language abilities and deeper cultural understanding. One participant expressed, *"I can express myself well now, and I understand you so much better,"* suggesting real progress beyond earlier communication barriers. Similarly, one interviewee stated, *"I feel like I'm a different person now — I've learned so much,"* which captured the depth of their adaptive learning as a result of cultural and linguistic exposure. They also demonstrated character development from a leadership perspective. The respondents learned to overcome cultural resistance and promote cross-cultural understanding.

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Case 3 mentioned, *"This helped me know how to best approach each individual to ensure that understanding takes place and inclusivity in the team is achieved*." The experience shaped them into more empathetic and strategically minded leaders, rather than someone overwhelmed by cultural confusion. These cases collectively showed that mutual understanding and transformation were not automatic but were achieved through conscious effort and willingness from all parties involved.

DISCUSSION

Filipino school heads who led in a range of global settings were found to have exercised similar leadership styles, especially in adjusting to cultural norms, establishing trust, and overcoming limitations in communication. While all participants emphasized the significance of cultural competence, emotional intelligence, and inclusive leadership, the degree to which they translated these into action varied by case. Leadership flexibility was manifested in how the school heads facilitated the integration of Filipino values with the host country's practices through collaboration aimed at team cohesiveness. Communication techniques included the use of simple terms, visual communication, and engaging team members in discussing goals to establish common understanding and trust. Some school heads reported using well-organized team discussions and open conversations, while others relied on more informal yet steady styles of leadership that helped maintain unity and boost morale.

Across the cases, themes of cultural and emotional intelligence, trust-building, and communication consistently emerged as universal yet contextually specific. Headteachers who intentionally built cultural awareness and empathy reportedly facilitated transitions more successfully, particularly in schools with complex team dynamics or where linguistic diversity posed a significant challenge. These practices aligned with Transformational Leadership, which emphasizes motivating and inspiring teams, and with Change Management theory, which underscores strategic communication and adaptability. These findings suggest the need for leadership development programs that emphasize cross-cultural competencies, emotional and cultural intelligence (EQ and CQ), and context-specific strategies to strengthen leadership effectiveness in multicultural educational settings.

Implications for Educational Practice

This study underscores the need for cultural and emotional intelligence to lead diverse school communities. Filipino heads of schools in an international setting need to develop culturally responsive leadership that builds trust, inclusiveness, and open communication. School heads can develop positive relationships and create a more unified school community by being culturally competent and adapting leadership styles. The results imply that leadership programs must include training in cultural intelligence (CQ), emotional intelligence (EQ), and adaptive communication. Professional development focused on these capabilities may assist international school leaders in managing diversity, creating team success, and maintaining a positive school culture across multiple international contexts.

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