

Metatheories of Indigenous Leadership: Modelling a Culturally Responsive Competency Theory — A Narrative Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

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This narrative literature review synthesizes recent scholarship (2020–2025) to advance a culturally responsive leadership competency theory for Indigenous educational contexts. Drawing on propositions from Trait Theory, Organizational Behavior, Planned Change, and Cultural Leadership, the review integrates demographic traits, organizational development, policy adherence, motivation, and cultural competence into a unified framework. Findings indicate that educational attainment and linguistic competence serve as foundational predictors of leadership effectiveness,

while organizational development mechanisms institutionalize competencies and sustain resilience. Policy adherence enhances trust and accountability, and motivation operates as a psychological driver of engagement. Cultural competence anchored in Indigenous values such as *Pakikipagkapwa* (shared identity), *Bayanihan* (collective effort), and *Paglilingkod* (service) moderates these pathways by embedding authenticity and cohesion into leadership practice.



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While existing studies often examine leadership traits, organizational processes, and cultural responsiveness in isolation, this review consolidates these previously fragmented strands into a single, integrative and culturally grounded competency framework. By doing so, it responds to calls in leadership and Indigenous education scholarship for models that bridge evidence-based leadership theory and Indigenous epistemologies. Methodological advances, including Structural Equation Modeling and mixed-method designs, provide empirical rigor and contextual depth. Overall, leadership effectiveness emerges as a dynamic interplay of technical, relational, and cultural dimensions, interpreted through evidence-based and culturally grounded approaches.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership in education has undergone a profound transformation, shaped by the dual imperatives of organizational effectiveness and cultural authenticity. Traditional models emphasized administrative efficiency and managerial competence, but contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes that effective leadership must also embody cultural responsiveness, relational trust, and motivational capacity. This shift is particularly salient in Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd), where leaders are tasked not only with ensuring institutional accountability but also with safeguarding cultural epistemologies, values, and practices (Richardson & Khawaja, 2025; Sarkar & Bhatia, 2021; Schirmer, B. R. 2021).

In Indigenous and ASEAN educational contexts—such as those found in the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand—leadership is inherently relational and community-embedded, grounded in shared identity, collective responsibility, and service. Indigenous Filipino values such as *Pakikipagkapwa* (shared identity), *Bayanihan* (collective effort), and *Paglilingkod* (service) frame leadership as a moral and communal practice rather than a purely individual or positional role (Dayson et al., 2024). Despite the regional relevance of these perspectives, ASEAN-based and Indigenous-authored scholarship remains underrepresented in dominant leadership frameworks.

In these contexts, leadership becomes a multidimensional construct—simultaneously technical, cultural, and ethical—requiring competencies that transcend conventional managerial frameworks. Global scholarship published between 2020 and 2025 reflects this transformation, offering diverse insights into how demographic traits, organizational development skills, policy adherence, motivation, and cultural competence interact to shape leadership effectiveness. Yet, much of the literature remains fragmented, often focusing on isolated predictors or descriptive case studies without integrating these dimensions into a unified theoretical framework.

Trait Theory highlights the predictive power of personal characteristics such as age, education, and linguistic competence (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Organizational Behavior emphasizes the mediating role of organizational development skills (Watanabe et al., 2024), while Planned Change underscores the importance of policy adherence and motivation. Cultural Leadership foregrounds the necessity of cultural competence rooted in Indigenous values (Dayson et al., 2024; Urgan et al., 2025). However, when these theories are applied uncritically, they risk reinforcing a Western-centric hierarchy of knowledge that marginalizes Indigenous epistemologies rather than engaging them as foundational interpretive frameworks.

Despite these advances, few studies synthesize these strands into a cohesive theory that accounts for both empirical rigor and cultural authenticity. To address these gaps, this narrative literature review advances a unified, culturally responsive leadership competency framework that synthesizes previously fragmented theoretical and empirical strands into a coherent explanatory model.

Guiding this review are three critical questions: (1) How do demographic traits, organizational development, policy adherence, motivation, and cultural competence interact to shape leadership effectiveness? (2) Under what socio-economic and cultural conditions are these mechanisms strengthened or attenuated? (3) What intervention sequences yield durable improvements in organizational resilience and cultural authenticity?

METHODOLOGY

The primary objective of this literature review is to develop a culturally responsive leadership competency theory by synthesizing global evidence across continents and theoretical traditions. By embedding Indigenous values such as *Pakikipagkapwa* (shared identity), *Bayanihan* (collective effort), and *Paglilingkod* (service), this review advocates for leadership models that are empirically validated and culturally resonant, ensuring that educational leadership serves both institutional goals and community aspirations (Richardson & Khawaja, 2025; Sarkar & Bhatia, 2021; Schirmer, 2021).

This narrative literature review employed a comprehensive and interpretive approach to synthesize global scholarship on leadership competencies and cultural responsiveness in education. Unlike systematic reviews that prioritize exhaustive coverage and statistical aggregation, the narrative method was chosen for its capacity to integrate diverse theoretical strands and contextual insights into a unified framework (Sarkar & Bhatia, 2021; Schirmer, 2021).

Arigorous search strategy was implemented across major academic databases—Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar—using Boolean operators and targeted keywords such as “*leadership competencies*,” “*culturally responsive leadership*,” “*Indigenous education leadership*,” “*organizational development in schools*,” “*policy adherence and motivation*,” and “*Structural Equation Modeling in leadership research*.” The initial search yielded 214 records; after removal of duplicates ($n = 47$) and screening of titles and abstracts, 89 full-text articles were

assessed for eligibility, resulting in a final corpus of 52 studies included in the synthesis.

Inclusion criteria required that studies examine leadership competencies within educational contexts, address cultural responsiveness or Indigenous values, and employ empirical methods (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed). Exclusion criteria eliminated editorials, commentaries, non-empirical reports, and non-English publications. After screening titles, abstracts, and full texts, 52 studies were selected for analysis. Screening decisions were guided by a predefined inclusion–exclusion matrix to enhance transparency and replicability, with uncertainties resolved through iterative re-reading and criterion cross-checking rather than inter-rater adjudication, consistent with narrative review practice.

Data extraction captured author details, methodological design, sample characteristics, key findings, and theoretical contributions, which were organized into five thematic domains: demographic traits, leadership competencies, organizational development skills, policy adherence and motivation, and cultural competence. Special emphasis was placed on studies utilizing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and Sequential Explanatory Mixed Methods designs, as these approaches provide empirical rigor and contextual depth by modeling direct and indirect effects and complementing quantitative findings with qualitative narratives (Richardson & Khawaja, 2025; Adams et al., 2025).

Thematic analysis was then applied to identify recurring propositions, conceptual linkages, and theoretical convergence across studies. To minimize interpretive bias and over-generalization, analytic memos were maintained, negative or contradictory findings were explicitly considered, and causal language was confined to theoretical propositions rather than empirical claims. Methodological limitations commonly noted in the reviewed studies—such as reliance on cross-sectional designs and self-reported measures—were critically examined and incorporated into the interpretation of findings.

Ethical approval was not required for this study, as it involved no human participants or original data collection. Nevertheless, ethical standards for scholarship were upheld through accurate citation, faithful representation of original findings, and reflexive acknowledgment of the author's interpretive role in synthesizing the literature.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were employed exclusively for non-empirical tasks such as formatting, grammar refinement, and reference standardization. AI was not used to identify, screen, or interpret literature, generate original research data, or influence analytic decisions. To mitigate risks of algorithmic bias, all AI-assisted outputs were manually reviewed, cross-checked against source materials, and subject to human judgment at every stage of the review process. All intellectual content, interpretations, and conclusions remain the responsibility of

the author.

Consistent with narrative review standards, this study does not follow a preregistered protocol or PRISMA reporting checklist. Instead, transparency and rigor were addressed through explicit documentation of search scope, inclusion–exclusion criteria, thematic domain classification, and reflexive analytic memorizing. The purpose of the review is theory development and conceptual integration rather than statistical aggregation or effect-size estimation. This approach follows established guidance for high-quality narrative literature reviews, which emphasize interpretive coherence, theoretical contribution, and contextual sensitivity over procedural replication.

Figure 1

Unified conceptual model of culturally responsive leadership effectiveness

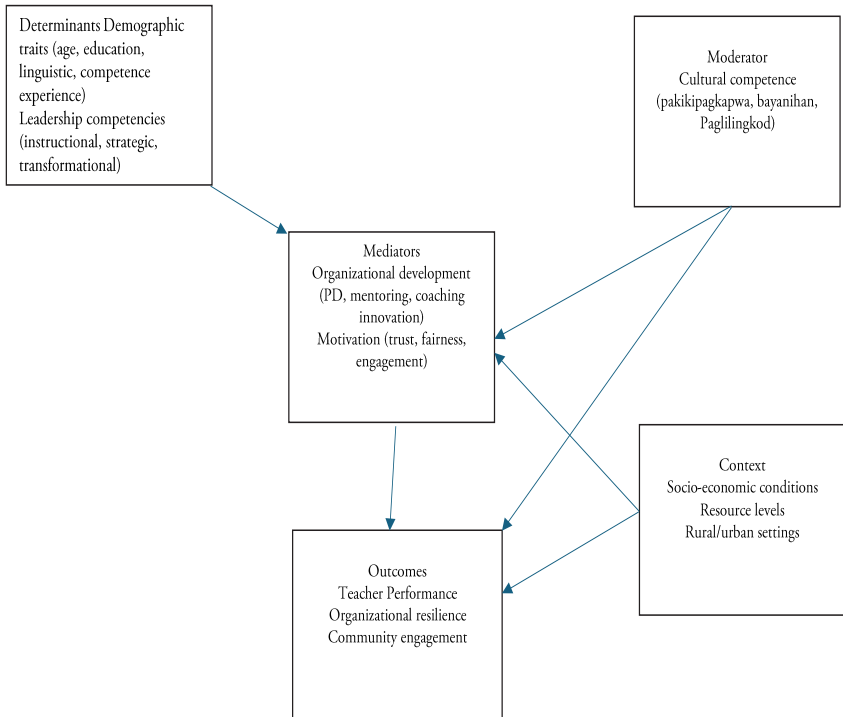


Figure 1. Unified conceptual model of culturally responsive leadership effectiveness. Determinants (demographic traits; leadership competencies) influence outcomes via Mediators (organizational development; motivation),

with Cultural competence moderating pathways and Context (socio-economic conditions, resource levels, rural/urban) shaping effect strengths; Outcomes include teacher performance, organizational resilience, and community engagement. SEM and Sequential Explanatory designs can test/interpret these pathways.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Traits and Core Leadership Competencies.

Across the reviewed studies, demographic traits—especially educational attainment and linguistic competence **consistently associated** with leadership effectiveness in educational settings. Leaders with stronger qualifications more consistently demonstrate instructional and strategic capacities, while bilingual or multilingual leaders show enhanced communication, trust-building, and stakeholder engagement in culturally diverse schools (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020; Richardson & Khawaja, 2025). Rather than establishing causal prediction, the reviewed literature suggests that these traits function as enabling conditions that support the development and enactment of leadership competencies within specific contexts. In practice, these traits feed forward into competency development that later expresses itself through organizational routines and change initiatives. The evidence suggests that qualifications and language facility are not merely background variables; they predict competency profiles that matter for outcomes and provide legitimacy when leading culturally complex reforms (Leithwood et al., 2020; Richardson & Khawaja, 2025).

Organizational Development. Findings consistently show that leadership competencies achieve durable impact when institutionalized through professional development (PD), mentoring/coaching, and innovation systems. Instructional and strategic leadership correlate with improved performance via PD structures that embed practices at scale (Watanabe et al., 2024). Innovation-oriented routines (e.g., collaborative inquiry cycles, technology-supported feedback) heighten adaptability and resilience, ensuring that competency gains are not person-dependent but system-dependent (Richardson & Khawaja, 2025). In culturally diverse settings, organizational development also acts as the carrier through which culturally responsive practices become everyday routines rather than episodic initiatives (Urgun et al., 2025). Within this review, organizational development is conceptualized as a theoretical linkage between individual leadership competencies and institutional outcomes, rather than an empirically verified mediating mechanism. This distinction underscores the interpretive nature of the synthesis and avoids overstatement of causal relationships.

Policy Adherence, Distributed Leadership, and Motivation. Evidence indicates that policy-aligned leadership strengthens credibility and predictability, which in turn fosters teacher motivation and reduces resistance to change.

Distributed leadership models show how policy-driven strategies—implemented collaboratively—produce shared ownership, amplify learning-focused change, and support resilient implementation (Adams et al., 2025). Empirically, motivation is not just an outcome; it is a mediator between policy adherence and learning-focused organizational change—linking structural fairness and clarity to commitment and engagement (Adams et al., 2025; Richardson & Khawaja, 2025). The literature reviewed suggests that motivation is frequently discussed as an intervening construct connecting leadership practices and organizational responses; however, this role remains largely theoretical and context-dependent rather than empirically settled.

Motivation as a Psychological Mechanism. Studies converge on motivation as a central psychological mechanism through which leadership practices translate into sustained performance. Motivational climates are stronger when leaders provide individualized support, cultivate collaboration, and embed routines that recognize effort and growth (Watanabe et al., 2024). In systems terms, motivation is both a mediator (linking structures to outcomes) and a feedback signal (indicating whether policies and development strategies are perceived as fair, supportive, and culturally resonant) (Adams et al., 2025; Richardson & Khawaja, 2025).

Cultural Competence. Cultural competence moderates the relationships among competencies, organizational development, and outcomes—embedding authenticity, trust, and inclusion in daily practice. Evidence from the Philippines shows that leadership anchored in Indigenous values—Pakikipagkapwa (shared identity), Bayanihan (collective effort), and Paglilingkod (service)—strengthens legitimacy and community engagement (Dayson et al., 2024). Importantly, these values do not simply reinforce Western-derived leadership constructs; they can also reshape or challenge assumptions about individual authority, efficiency, and performance embedded in mainstream leadership theory. Organizational learning benefits when cultural competence is trained and institutionalized, not left to individual discretion; training programs improve adaptability and readiness for change in culturally diverse schools (Urgun et al., 2025). In distributed leadership contexts, cultural competence ensures that collaboration is inclusive, decisions are contextually grounded, and learning goals reflect community aspirations (Adams et al., 2025).

Methodological Synthesis: SEM and Mixed-Methods. Methodologically, studies using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) confirm key pathways: demographic traits → competencies → outcomes via organizational development and motivation; policy adherence influences motivation and effectiveness directly and indirectly (Richardson & Khawaja, 2025). **Within this review, references to SEM are treated as illustrative of methodological potential rather than confirmatory evidence for the proposed framework.** Mixed-method designs complement SEM by contextualizing why certain pathways are stronger in

particular cultural and organizational settings, highlighting how distributed practices and values-based leadership shape adoption and fidelity (Adams et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This narrative review confirms that leadership effectiveness in education is a multidimensional construct shaped by demographic traits, organizational development, policy adherence, motivation, and cultural competence. Rather than establishing empirical causality, the review synthesizes existing scholarship to propose how these dimensions may be conceptually related within Indigenous educational contexts. Evidence from recent scholarship (2020–2025) demonstrates that these dimensions do not operate in isolation; rather, they interact through mediated and moderated pathways that determine organizational resilience and cultural authenticity.

Demographic traits such as educational attainment and linguistic competence provide the foundation for leadership competencies (Leithwood et al., 2020; Richardson & Khawaja, 2025). Organizational development acts as a critical mediator, institutionalizing competencies through professional development, mentoring, and innovation systems (Watanabe et al., 2024). Policy adherence strengthens perceptions of reliability and fairness, while motivation functions as a psychological mechanism that channels commitment into sustained engagement (Adams et al., 2025). In this review, these relationships are interpreted as theoretically grounded linkages rather than empirically validated mediating pathways. Cultural competence—rooted in Indigenous values such as *Pakikipagkapwa*, *Bayanihan*, and *Paglilingkod*—moderates these pathways by embedding authenticity and trust into leadership practice (Dayson et al., 2024).

Methodological advances, particularly Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and mixed-method designs, provide empirical rigor and contextual depth, confirming that leadership effectiveness is multi-determined and culturally contingent (Richardson & Khawaja, 2025; Adams et al., 2025). However, the applicability of SEM to Indigenous leadership research warrants critical scrutiny, as the reduction of relational, cultural, and moral constructs into measurable indicators risks oversimplifying Indigenous epistemologies.

In sum, effective educational leadership cannot be reduced to technical competencies alone. This review advances the proposition that leadership effectiveness may be understood as a dynamic interplay of personal, organizational, and cultural dimensions, while recognizing that this formulation remains theoretically grounded and requires longitudinal, comparative, and

context-sensitive validation. Embedding Indigenous epistemologies into leadership research thus demands not only methodological rigor but also epistemic humility—ensuring that leadership frameworks remain responsive to community values, cultural diversity, and the limits of dominant analytic tools.

DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Longitudinal Validation of Integrated Pathways. Future studies should move beyond cross-sectional designs and validate, over time, the integrated pathways identified in recent work—e.g., demographic traits → leadership competencies → outcomes via organizational development and motivation. Longitudinal SEM and panel designs can confirm causal directions and durability of effects across terms, schools, and districts (Richardson & Khawaja, 2025; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020).

Cross-Regional and Cultural Comparisons. Comparative research across regions (urban–rural; Indigenous–non-Indigenous) is needed to test generalizability and context sensitivity of leadership models. Studies should examine how policy infrastructures, socio-economic conditions, and community values moderate the effectiveness of distributed leadership and learning-oriented reforms (Adams et al., 2025; Dayson et al., 2024).

Measurement Harmonization for Key Constructs. There is a need to refine and harmonize operational definitions and measurement instruments for cultural competence, organizational learning, and motivational climate. **Developing context-aware tools that translate Indigenous values—such as *Pakikipagkapwa*, *Bayaniban*, and *Paglilingkod*—into observable leadership practices (e.g., collaborative decision routines, community consultation protocols, service-oriented leadership behaviors) would support both empirical testing and practical application.**

Integrating Indigenous Epistemologies into Quantitative Models. Quantitative frameworks (e.g., SEM, multilevel modeling) should incorporate variables grounded in local epistemologies to explore how Indigenous values shape leadership processes and outcomes. **At the same time, future research should critically examine the limits of such models, ensuring that the operationalization of Indigenous concepts does not reduce relational and moral dimensions of leadership to purely technical indicators.**

Mixed-Methods Expansion for Cultural Depth. Sequential explanatory mixed-methods designs should be more widely employed, using qualitative inquiry (interviews, focus groups, ethnographic cases) to interpret how leadership competencies are enacted in practice. **Community-based case studies and**

pilot interventions—such as school-based leadership training programs co-designed with Indigenous elders and educators—would provide concrete evidence of how culturally grounded leadership frameworks function in real settings.

Impact Evaluation of Leadership Development Interventions. Experimental and quasi-experimental studies are needed to assess the real-world impact of professional development, mentoring or coaching, and innovation routines on teacher performance, morale, and organizational resilience. **Future research should explicitly document translational pathways, detailing how research-based leadership competencies can be embedded into leadership training modules, instructional materials, and policy guidelines, and disseminated through community-based media, localized training manuals, and culturally responsive learning resources.** Attention to design fidelity, equity outcomes, and cultural relevance is essential to ensure that leadership development initiatives are both effective and contextually grounded.

DECLARATIONS

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest. Funding: This research received no external funding. Ethical Approval: Not applicable; this is a narrative literature review with no human or animal subjects.

Data Availability: All data are derived from published sources cited in the References. Originality: This manuscript is original and not under review elsewhere. Plagiarism Compliance: The manuscript complies with JPAIR's similarity threshold and plagiarism policy.

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