

Teachers' intercultural leadership competence through collaborative learning strategies

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Abstract

This study determined the intercultural leadership competence of teachers through collaborative learning strategies in the Labo East District. Utilizing a quantitative descriptive-correlational design, data were collected from 311 public elementary teachers using a validated questionnaire and analyzed via weighted mean, Spearman's rho, and frequency ranking. Results revealed that educators possess strong intercultural leadership, rating Much Competent in learner diversity (4.13), Very Much Competent in community linkages (4.21), and personal growth (4.25). Furthermore, teachers consistently engaged in collaborative learning across all dimensions (means 4.21 to 4.54). Statistical analysis confirmed uniformly positive and significant relationships ($p=.000$) between collaborative engagement and leadership competence, peaking notably between sharing knowledge and personal growth ($p=.555$). Despite this dedication, professional advancement is obstructed by systemic constraints rather than motivational deficits, specifically inconsistent learner participation, limited parental involvement, and difficulties in conducting action research. Rejecting the null hypothesis, the study concludes that while teamwork serves as a vital survival mechanism against instructional demands, navigating complex student diversity necessitates specialized external training. To strategically address these empirical gaps, the study proposes Project C.A.R.E. for pilot-testing at Malasugui Elementary School. Funded through the MOOE, this intervention utilizes Co-Op Research Pods, Home-School Bridge Interventions, and a Localized Contextualization Bank to sustainably elevate teacher competence. Finally, the study strongly recommends that educational leaders meticulously optimize Learning Action Cell sessions, establish supportive community assistance programs with local government units, and systematically mandate formal inclusive education training to structurally alleviate heavy administrative burdens effectively without causing excessive career burnout for educators across districts.

Keywords: Intercultural leadership competence, collaborative learning strategies, community linkages, Learning Action Cell (LAC), Project C.A.R.E.

1. Introduction

The 21st-century classroom's diversity demands intercultural leadership competence, defined as the ability to interact effectively across cultural boundaries while promoting collaboration (Deardorff, 2006). Globally, educational systems require teacher-leaders who actively foster equity and mutual understanding (Leithwood et al., 2020). To support this, collaborative professional learning is proven to develop these leadership competencies alongside instructional capacity (Hilton et al., 2015). In the Philippines, educational reforms increasingly position teachers not just as knowledge transmitters, but as leaders modeling intercultural competence and inclusive practices (Brooks and Sutherland, 2014). This mandate is rooted in the Philippine

Constitution (1987) and Republic Act No. 10533, which call for accessible and inclusive education. Consequently, the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), institutionalized via DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017, highlights Domains 3 (Diversity of Learners), 6 (Community Linkages), and 7 (Personal Growth) as vital for interculturally responsive leadership. Furthermore, the institutionalization of Learning Action Cells (LAC) via DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016 provides a structured, collaborative platform for teachers to address these instructional challenges together.

These national mandates are highly relevant in Labo East District, Camarines Norte, where teachers navigate diverse socio-economic backgrounds, varying local dialects, and multi-grade classrooms characterized by unequal resource access. However, despite these frameworks, a gap remains between collaborative practice and actual leadership development, particularly in navigating cultural and social diversity (Ancho and Arrieta, 2021). Local LAC sessions often prioritize routine compliance over leadership capacity-building. Furthermore, systemic barriers, such as limited resources, insufficient training, and the lack of contextualized frameworks, hinder teachers from maximizing their roles as intercultural leaders (Delos Santos, 2023; Miramon et al., 2024).

To address these gaps, this study aims to determine the level of intercultural leadership competence and the extent of collaborative learning engagement among elementary teachers in Labo East District. By examining the significant relationship between these variables and identifying specific challenges, this study provides an empirical basis for a proposed intervention to improve teachers' intercultural leadership competence through collaborative learning strategies.

1.1. Objective of the Study

This study determined the teachers' intercultural leadership competence through collaborative learning strategies in Labo East District by addressing five specific inquiries. First, it assessed the level of teachers' intercultural leadership competence based on the diversity of learners, community linkages and professional engagement, and personal growth and professional development. Second, it evaluated the extent of their engagement through collaborative learning strategies, specifically in terms of discussing challenges in curriculum delivery; sharing knowledge, skills, and experiences; addressing teaching-learning issues and concerns; planning, implementing, and evaluating school-based interventions; and conducting collaborative problem-solving and action research. Furthermore, the study investigated whether a significant relationship exists between the teachers' level of intercultural leadership competence and their extent of engagement in these collaborative strategies. Finally, it identified the challenges educators encounter in this process to provide an empirical basis for a proposed intervention designed to improve teachers' intercultural leadership competence through collaborative learning.

2. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative method, specifically utilizing a descriptive-correlational research design, to systematically collect and statistically analyze numerical data without manipulating variables (Creswell and Creswell, 2022). The descriptive aspect objectively measured the teachers' level of intercultural leadership competence, assessed the extent of their engagement through collaborative learning strategies, and systematically identified the challenges they encounter. Simultaneously, the correlational component was utilized to determine the significant relationship between these two primary variables, providing critical insights into whether higher levels of collaborative engagement are significantly linked to stronger intercultural leadership competence. Ultimately, this specific design was highly suitable for identifying relationship patterns within a naturally occurring educational setting, as it is widely recognized in the field of education for its effectiveness in examining the connections between teacher practices and professional competencies (Gay et al., 2012).

2.1. Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Technique

The respondents of this study comprised 311 public elementary school teachers across all grade levels, from kindergarten to Grade 6, in the Labo East District of Camarines Norte. To ensure comprehensive coverage and minimize sampling bias, the study employed a total enumeration technique, inviting all 311 teachers, including both newly appointed and experienced educators, to participate. This district was selected because its diverse teaching population actively interacts with learners from varied cultural, socio-economic, and linguistic backgrounds, generating comprehensive data that accurately reflects the actual conditions necessary to ground the proposed intervention. As frontliners in the delivery of the MATATAG curriculum, these respondents require not only instructional competence but also intercultural sensitivity to shape inclusive learning environments. Their significance to this research lies in their dual role as classroom implementers and active participants in structured professional development; under the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) (DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017), they are explicitly expected to demonstrate competence in addressing learner diversity, establishing community linkages, and pursuing professional growth. Simultaneously, their mandated participation in Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions (DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016) positions them as vital contributors to school-based collaboration, creating a critical intersection of professional standards and collaborative structures that makes this specific population highly relevant for investigating the relationship between intercultural leadership competence and collaborative learning strategies.

2.2. Data Gathering Procedures

The data gathering and instrumentation followed a rigorous, ethical, and structured process designed to ensure validity, reliability, and the protection of respondents' rights. Prior to data collection during the 2025–2026 school year, formal approval and coordination were secured from the Schools Division Superintendent of Camarines Norte, the Public Schools District Supervisor of Labo East, and school principals. Informed consent was obtained from all 311 total enumerated respondents, assuring them of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw without penalty, while adhering to secure data storage and disposal protocols. The primary instrument utilized was a structured, researcher-made questionnaire grounded in official Department of Education policies, specifically the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) under DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017 (Creswell and Creswell, 2022; DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017) and the Learning Action Cell (LAC) Framework under DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016 (DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016). Divided into three parts, the questionnaire measured intercultural leadership competence across three PPST domains using a five-point Likert scale (DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017), evaluated engagement in collaborative learning strategies through researcher-made items aligned with the LAC framework (DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2016), and identified collaboration challenges using a checklist adapted from existing literature (Avalos, 2011; Hord, 2009) alongside contextual Philippine realities. To guarantee psychometric soundness, the instrument underwent expert content validation by five educational specialists and a pilot test among 20 non-participating teachers from Labo West District. Reliability analysis via IBM SPSS Statistics yielded high Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding the 0.70 academic threshold across all sub-variables (Taber, 2018), confirming the instrument's high internal consistency and optimal suitability for the actual study.

2.3. Statistical Treatment of Data

Data analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21, employing specific statistical techniques aligned with each research question to ensure reliable and meaningful results. To address SOP 1 and SOP 2, descriptive statistics via weighted means and five-point Likert scales, ranging from Not Competent at All to Very Much Competent and Never to Always, respectively, were utilized to measure teachers' intercultural leadership competence levels and the frequency of their collaborative learning

engagement. To determine whether a significant relationship existed between these variables for SOP 3, Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation

$$\rho = 1 - \frac{6\sum d_i^2}{n(n^2 - 1)}$$

was employed as a non-parametric inferential test at a 0.05 significance level, selected because the data violated the assumption of normality. Finally, for SOP 4, frequency counts and ranking were applied to summarize and order the primary challenges encountered by the educators.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Level of Teachers' Intercultural Leadership Competence

The teachers obtained an overall weighted mean of 4.13 (Much Competent) in intercultural leadership competence along the diversity of learners, demonstrating strong capabilities in managing diverse student demographics through collaborative knowledge-sharing. The highest-rated indicator (4.25, Very Much Competent) involved leading colleagues to evaluate differentiated strategies for student differences, affirmed by Serrano and Fallado (2025) and Leithwood (2021) regarding the efficacy of collaborative equitable leadership. Conversely, the lowest-rated indicator (4.04, Much Competent) pertained to modeling skills responsive to learners in difficult circumstances, such as geographic isolation or disasters, which Herrera (2024) and Okken et al. (2022) note are complicated by resource gaps and challenging classroom environments. Overall, this functional foundation of inclusive instructional leadership confirms that active professional learning communities successfully sustain teachers' intercultural competence over time (Dzerviniks, 2024; Hu and Hemchua, 2023).

Table 1. Teachers' Intercultural Leadership Competence along Diversity of Learners

Indicators		Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1.	Lead colleagues to evaluate differentiated strategies to enrich teaching practices that address learners' differences in gender, needs, strengths, interests and experiences.	4.25	VMC
2.	Model exemplary teaching practices that recognize and affirm diverse linguistic, cultural, socioeconomic and religious backgrounds to promote learner success.	4.16	MC
3.	Lead colleagues in designing, adapting and implementing teaching strategies that are responsive to learners with disabilities, giftedness and talents.	4.06	MC
4.	Model a range of high-level skills responsive to the special educational needs of learners in difficult circumstances, including: geographic isolation; chronic illness; displacement due to armed conflict, urban resettlement or disasters; child abuse and child labor practices.	4.04	MC
5.	Show comprehensive skills in delivering culturally appropriate teaching strategies to address effectively the needs of learners from indigenous groups.	4.13	MC
Overall Weighted Mean		4.13	MC
<i>Rating Scale:</i>			
<i>Descriptive Interpretation:</i>			
4.20 - 5.00	-	Very Much Competent (VMC)	
3.40 - 4.19	-	Much Competent (MC)	
2.60 - 3.39	-	Competent (C)	
1.80 - 2.59	-	Fairly Competent (FC)	
1.00 - 1.79	-	Not Competent at All (NCA)	

Teachers achieved an overall weighted mean of 4.21 (Very Much Competent) in community linkages and professional engagement, demonstrating strong capability in aligning school initiatives with community realities (Delos Santos, 2023; Ramos and Bauyot, 2024). The highest-rated indicator (4.32, Very Much

Competent) involved modeling exemplary practices to make learning environments responsive to community contexts, supported by peer empowerment and collaborative leadership (Leithwood, 2021; York-Barr and Duke, 2004). Conversely, the lowest-rated indicator (3.98, Much Competent) pertained to initiating community-based partnerships and outreach programs, reflecting logistical complexities, bureaucratic processes, and resource constraints (Herrera, 2024; Kilag and Sasan, 2023).

Table 2. Teachers' Intercultural Leadership Competence along Community Linkages and Professional Engagement

Indicators		Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1.	Model exemplary practice and empower colleagues to establish and maintain effective learning environments that are responsive to community contexts.	4.32	VMC
2.	Lead in consolidating networks that strengthen relationships with parents/guardians and the wider school community to maximize their involvement in the educative process.	4.30	VMC
3.	Lead colleagues in the regular review of existing codes, laws and regulations that apply to the teaching profession, and the responsibilities as specified in the Code of Ethics for Professional Teachers.	4.28	VMC
4.	Evaluate existing school policies and procedures to make them more responsive to the needs of the learners, parents and other stakeholders.	4.16	MC
5.	Initiate community-based partnerships and outreach programs that promote inclusivity, intercultural understanding, and shared responsibility in education.	3.98	MC
Overall Weighted Mean		4.21	VMC
<i>Rating Scale:</i>			
<i>4.20 - 5.00</i>		<i>Descriptive Interpretation:</i>	
<i>3.40 - 4.19</i>		<i>Very Much Competent (VMC)</i>	
<i>2.60 - 3.39</i>		<i>Much Competent (MC)</i>	
<i>1.80 - 2.59</i>		<i>Competent (C)</i>	
<i>1.00 - 1.79</i>		<i>Fairly Competent (FC)</i>	
		<i>Not Competent at All (NCA)</i>	

Teachers achieved an overall weighted mean of 4.25 (Very Much Competent) in personal growth and professional development. The highest-rated indicator (4.39, Very Much Competent) involved acting as role models and advocates for the dignity of the teaching profession to build a positive culture, supported by positive workplace environments and effective leadership modeling (Dreer, 2024; York-Barr and Duke, 2004). Conversely, the lowest-rated indicators (4.16, Much Competent), pertaining to supporting professional networks, evaluating practice, and leading PPST-based reforms, reflected macro-level logistical and administrative complexities (Herrera, 2024; Kilag and Sasan, 2023). Overall, this strong foundation demonstrates that effective professional learning empowers educators to expand their leadership and champion broader, impactful changes within their profession (Sancar et al., 2021).

Table 3. Teachers' Intercultural Leadership Competence along Personal Growth and Professional Development

Indicators		Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1.	Model a learner-centered teaching philosophy through teaching practices that stimulate colleagues to engage in further professional learning.	4.36	VMC
2.	Act as a role model and advocate for upholding the dignity of teaching as a profession to build a positive teaching and learning culture within and beyond the school.	4.39	VMC
3.	Take a leadership role in supporting colleagues' engagement with professional networks within and across schools to advance knowledge and practice in identified areas of need.	4.16	MC
4.	Demonstrate leadership within and across school contexts in critically evaluating practice and setting clearly defined targets for professional development.	4.16	MC
5.	Lead reforms in enhancing professional development programs based on an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers.	4.16	MC
Overall Weighted Mean		4.25	VMC
<i>Rating Scale:</i>			
<i>4.20 - 5.00</i>		<i>Descriptive Interpretation:</i>	
		<i>Very Much Competent (VMC)</i>	

3.40 – 4.19	-	Much Competent (MC)
2.60 – 3.39	-	Competent (C)
1.80 – 2.59	-	Fairly Competent (FC)
1.00 – 1.79	-	Not Competent at All (NCA)

3.2. Extent of Teachers' Engagement through Collaborative Learning Strategies

Teachers achieved an overall weighted mean of 4.54 (Always) in discussing challenges in curriculum delivery, proving that Learning Action Cell sessions serve as vital everyday mechanisms for instructional success and mastery of the MATATAG curriculum (Lopez, 2024; Delos Santos, 2023). The highest-rated indicator (4.67, Always) involved participating in LAC sessions to collaboratively address curriculum difficulties, while the lowest-rated indicator (4.43, Always), active involvement in identifying curriculum gaps and suggesting improvements, reflected localized adaptations such as contextualizing learning activity sheets for rural Bicolano learners (Herrera, 2024; Kilag and Sasan, 2023). Ultimately, active professional learning communities consistently enhance practical teaching competence and elevate overall teacher performance across the district (Hu and Hemchua, 2023; Valdehueva et al., 2023).

Table 4. Extent of Teachers' Engagement through Collaborative Learning Strategies along Discussing Challenges in Curriculum Delivery

Indicators		Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1.	Participation in LAC sessions to collaboratively address difficulties in implementing the MATATAG curriculum	4.67	A
2.	Contribution of ideas during LAC discussions to improve lesson planning, delivery, and assessment based on learner needs	4.53	A
3.	Engagement in reflective dialogue with colleagues to align teaching strategies with curriculum standards and competencies	4.54	A
4.	Active involvement in identifying curriculum gaps and suggesting practical strategies for improvement.	4.43	A
5.	Collaboration with peers in analyzing learner performance data to address challenges in achieving learning targets.	4.51	A
Overall Weighted Mean		4.54	A
<i>Rating Scale:</i>			
		<i>Descriptive Interpretation:</i>	
4.20 - 5.00	-	Always (A)	
3.40 - 4.19	-	Often (O)	
2.60 - 3.39	-	Sometimes (S)	
1.80 - 2.59	-	Rarely (R)	
1.00 - 1.79	-	Never (N)	

Teachers achieved an overall weighted mean of 4.37 (Always) in sharing knowledge, skills, and experiences, treating collaboration as a fundamental professional habit (Hu and Hemchua, 2023; Sancar et al., 2021). The highest-rated indicator (4.45, Always) involved sharing effective teaching strategies, resources, and classroom innovations during collaborative sessions, which directly improves teachers' daily competencies and performance (Delos Santos, 2023; Valdehueva et al., 2023). Conversely, the lowest-rated indicator (4.30, Always), presenting best practices for curriculum contextualization, reflects the meticulous, research-intensive nature of adapting lessons to local Bicolano contexts (Herrera, 2024; Kopish and Zayimoğlu Öztürk, 2024).

Table 5. Extent of Teachers' Engagement through Collaborative Learning Strategies along Sharing Knowledge, Skills, and Experiences

Indicators		Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1.	Sharing of effective teaching strategies, resources, and classroom innovations during collaborative sessions.	4.45	A
2.	Exchange of practical experiences with colleagues regarding the integration of ICT and 21st-	4.39	A

century skills in instruction.				
3.	Presentation of best practices on how to contextualize, localize, or indigenize the curriculum to fit specific community contexts.		4.30	A
4.	Engagement in peer-to-peer coaching to mutually enhance instructional approaches and learner engagement techniques.		4.35	A
5.	Co-development of instructional materials and resources that reflect local culture and learner diversity.		4.35	A
Overall Weighted Mean			4.37	A
<i>Rating Scale:</i>		<i>Descriptive Interpretation:</i>		
4.20 - 5.00	-	Always (A)		
3.40 - 4.19	-	Often (O)		
2.60 - 3.39	-	Sometimes (S)		
1.80 - 2.59	-	Rarely (R)		
1.00 - 1.79	-	Never (N)		

Teachers achieved an overall weighted mean of 4.46 (Always) in addressing teaching-learning issues and concerns. The highest-rated indicator (4.77, Always) involved participating in Learning Action Cell (LAC) discussions to improve student assessment and reporting practices, which helps elementary teachers refine professional duties and accurately report progress (Lopez, 2024; Delos Santos, 2023). Conversely, the lowest-rated indicator (3.98, Often), pertaining to joint reflection with peers on teaching difficulties, reflects scheduling constraints, though teachers organically address professional complexities to foster resilience (Herrera, 2024; Dreer, 2024). Ultimately, dynamic instructional leadership and team-based problem-solving swiftly meet instructional challenges to maximize student success and overall instructional quality (Kilag and Sasan, 2023; Sancar et al., 2021).

Table 6. Extent of Teachers' Engagement through Collaborative Learning Strategies along Addressing Teaching-Learning Issues and Concerns

Indicators		Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1.	Collaboration with colleagues to identify and address barriers to learner inclusion and participation	4.48	A
2.	Development of remedial or enrichment activities for learners with diverse needs	4.54	A
3.	Participation in LAC discussions to improve assessment and reporting practices for learner progress	4.77	A
4.	Joint reflection with peers on teaching difficulties and identification of practical solutions.	3.98	O
5.	Cooperation in resolving classroom management or behavioral challenges through shared experiences.	4.54	A
Overall Weighted Mean		4.46	A
<i>Rating Scale:</i>		<i>Descriptive Interpretation:</i>	
4.20 - 5.00	-	Always (A)	
3.40 - 4.19	-	Often (O)	
2.60 - 3.39	-	Sometimes (S)	
1.80 - 2.59	-	Rarely (R)	
1.00 - 1.79	-	Never (N)	

Teachers achieved an overall weighted mean of 4.37 (Always) in planning, implementing, and evaluating school-based interventions, serving as proactive architects of student success through sustained professional learning and teamwork (Valdehueza et al., 2023; Sancar et al., 2021). The highest-rated indicator (4.42, Always) involved participating in the documentation and reporting of intervention outcomes for school improvement, reflecting organized compliance and data tracking to fulfill administrative duties (Serrano and Fallado, 2025; Lopez, 2024). Conversely, the lowest-rated indicator (4.29, Always), pertaining to the collective planning of inclusive instructional innovations and co-curricular projects, demonstrates deliberate, thoughtful pacing to craft meaningful, sustainable programs tailored to Bicolano learners (Herrera, 2024; Kilag and Sasan, 2023).

Table 7. Extent of Teachers' Engagement through Collaborative Learning Strategies along Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating School-Based Interventions

Indicators		Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1.	Involvement in collaboratively designing school-based interventions that address identified learning gaps	4.38	A
2.	Implementation of agreed-upon strategies or programs from LAC sessions in the classroom or school	4.40	A
3.	Participation in evaluating the effectiveness of interventions and recommending improvements	4.35	A
4.	Engagement in collective planning of instructional innovations or co-curricular projects that promote learner inclusion.	4.29	A
5.	Participation in documentation and reporting of intervention outcomes for school improvement purposes.	4.42	A
Overall Weighted Mean		4.37	A
<i>Rating Scale:</i> 4.20 - 5.00 - Always (A) 3.40 - 4.19 - Often (O) 2.60 - 3.39 - Sometimes (S) 1.80 - 2.59 - Rarely (R) 1.00 - 1.79 - Never (N)			

Teachers achieved an overall weighted mean of 4.21 (Always) in conducting collaborative problem-solving and action research, successfully blending rapid classroom troubleshooting with continuous professional inquiry (Hu and Hemchua, 2023; Sancar et al., 2021). The highest-rated indicator (4.30, Always), engaging in systematic collaborative inquiry to solve persistent teaching-learning issues, serves as a dynamic rapid-response hub that refines practical problem-solving skills (Lopez, 2024; Delos Santos, 2023). Conversely, the lowest-rated indicator (4.09, Often), participating in study groups or team-based research, reflects the rigorous, time-intensive nature of formal academic investigations that require educators to carefully balance immediate instructional duties with structured, meticulous long-term inquiry (Herrera, 2024; Kilag and Sasan, 2023).

Table 8. Extent of Teachers' Engagement through Collaborative Learning Strategies along Conducting Collaborative Problem-Solving and Action Research

Indicators		Weighted Mean	Interpretation
1.	Engagement in systematic collaborative inquiry with colleagues to analyze and solve persistent teaching-learning issues.	4.30	A
2.	Participation in study groups or team-based research aimed at improving teaching practices and learner outcomes.	4.09	O
3.	Dissemination of insights gained from collaborative study or research during LAC sessions to foster collective learning.	4.27	A
4.	Contribution to the design or facilitation of professional learning sessions within the school or district.	4.29	A
5.	Participation in professional networks (cross-school or district-level) to benchmark and adopt innovative teaching practices.	4.10	O
Overall Weighted Mean		4.21	A
<i>Rating Scale:</i> 4.20 - 5.00 - Always (A) 3.40 - 4.19 - Often (O) 2.60 - 3.39 - Sometimes (S) 1.80 - 2.59 - Rarely (R) 1.00 - 1.79 - Never (N)			

3.3. Relationship Between the Level of Teachers' Intercultural Leadership Competence and Extent of Engagement through Collaborative Learning Strategies

Using Spearman's rank-order correlation due to non-normal data distribution, the analysis revealed uniformly positive and statistically significant relationships ($p=.000$) between collaborative learning engagement and teachers' intercultural leadership competence across all domains. Correlation coefficients ranged from $\rho=.228$ to $\rho=.382$ for diversity of learners, $\rho=.336$ to $\rho=.516$ for community linkages and professional engagement, and $\rho=.321$ to $.555$ for personal growth and professional development. Notably, sharing knowledge, skills, and experiences demonstrated the highest correlation with personal growth ($\rho=.555$), while planning school-based interventions most strongly correlated with community linkages ($\rho=.516$). These moderate-to-strong positive associations indicate that increased engagement in collaborative learning strategies is associated with higher levels of intercultural leadership competence. These empirical findings underscore that peer-to-peer mentoring serves as a powerful catalyst for professional identity and leadership growth, aligning with Hu and Hemchua (2023) and Sancar et al. (2021) regarding the transformative impact of professional learning communities. Furthermore, action-oriented collaborative projects organically bridge schools and communities, echoing the insights of Leithwood (2021) and Ramos and Bauyot (2024). Meanwhile, the more modest correlations observed within the diversity of learners domain suggest that while organic peer dialogue forms a strong foundation, managing complex student profiles is most successfully achieved when paired with targeted, specialized external training, as supported by Herrera (2024) and Okken et al. (2022).

Table 9. Test for Significant Relationship Between the Level of Teachers' Intercultural Leadership Competence and Extent of Engagement through Collaborative Learning Strategies

Collaborative Learning Strategies	Teachers' Intercultural Leadership Competence					
	Diversity of Learners		Community Linkages and Professional Engagement		Personal Growth and Professional Development	
	ρ	p -value	ρ	p -value	ρ	p -value
Discussing Challenges in Curriculum Delivery	.267**	.000	.425**	.000	.423**	.000
Sharing Knowledge, Skills and Experiences	.342**	.000	.488**	.000	.555**	.000
Addressing Teaching-Learning Issues and Concerns	.228**	.000	.336**	.000	.321**	.000
Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating School-Based Interventions	.352**	.000	.516**	.000	.452**	.000
Conducting Collaborative Problem-Solving and Action Research	.382**	.000	.503**	.000	.482**	.000

**Correlation is significant @ 0.01 (2-tailed)

*Correlation is significant @ 0.05 (2-tailed)

3.4. Challenges Encountered by Teachers in Intercultural Leadership Competence through Collaborative Learning

Along the diversity of learners, teachers identified inconsistent learner participation due to family backgrounds, attendance issues, or resource inequities as the most pressing challenge (Rank 1, frequency of 208). Educators actively address these socioeconomic hurdles by designing flexible catch-up modules during Learning Action Cell sessions, reflecting how student backgrounds and resource gaps shape the realities of intercultural teaching (Serrano and Fallado, 2025; Okken et al., 2022). Conversely, limited understanding among colleagues about culturally responsive pedagogy received the lowest frequency (21, Rank 8), demonstrating that teachers possess a strong, shared conceptual foundation of inclusive principles that maximizes collaborative efficiency (Lopez, 2024; Hu and Hemchua, 2023).

Table 10. Challenges Encountered by Teachers in Intercultural Leadership Competence through Collaborative Learning along Diversity of Learners

	Indicators	Frequency	Rank
1.	Difficulty addressing learners' diverse cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds through shared strategies.	115	4
2.	Limited availability of contextualized and culturally inclusive instructional materials.	117	3
3.	Lack of sufficient training on differentiated instruction for learners with varied abilities and learning styles.	101	6
4.	Challenges in designing lessons that effectively integrate indigenous knowledge and local culture.	71	7
5.	Limited understanding among colleagues about culturally responsive pedagogy during LAC discussions.	21	8
6.	Difficulty balancing inclusive teaching approaches with large class sizes or multi-grade settings.	102	5
7.	Insufficient support in handling learners with special educational needs, disabilities, or exceptional talents.	122	2
8.	Inconsistent learner participation due to family background, attendance issues, or resource inequities.	208	1

Along community linkages and professional engagement, teachers identified limited parental involvement in collaborative school initiatives as the primary challenge (Rank 1, frequency of 170) due to demanding agricultural livelihoods, prompting educators to innovate flexible outreach strategies like home-to-school modules and weekend catch-ups (Herrera, 2024; Kilag and Sasan, 2023). Conversely, weak collaboration among teachers, school heads, and community representatives received the lowest frequency (21, Rank 8), reflecting strong internal synergy, effective grassroots communication, and seamless multi-stakeholder teamwork (Lopez, 2024; Ramos and Bauyt, 2024).

Table 11. Challenges Encountered by Teachers in Intercultural Leadership Competence through Collaborative Learning along Community Linkages and Professional Engagement

	Indicators	Frequency	Rank
1.	Difficulty establishing consistent communication and partnerships with parents and community stakeholders.	72	5
2.	Limited involvement of parents or guardians in supporting collaborative school initiatives.	170	1
3.	Inadequate community awareness or appreciation of cultural diversity in education.	73	4
4.	Lack of structured programs for engaging local leaders, NGOs, or cultural organizations in school activities.	112	3
5.	Limited administrative or policy support in sustaining linkages beyond compliance with DepEd mandates.	39	6
6.	Insufficient resources or funding for community-based projects and outreach programs.	166	2
7.	Difficulty in aligning school initiatives with community values, traditions, and expectations.	34	7
8.	Weak collaboration among teachers, school heads, and community representatives in addressing learner diversity.	21	8

Along personal growth and professional development, teachers identified challenges in conducting or participating in action research related to diversity and inclusion as the primary obstacle (Rank 1, frequency 131), reflecting the rigorous, time-intensive nature of balancing formal academic inquiry with heavy daily instructional duties (Herrera, 2024; Kilag and Sasan, 2023). Conversely, limited motivation for continuous collaborative learning received the lowest frequency (Rank 8, frequency 41), underscoring the exceptional intrinsic motivation and deep professional commitment of educators who actively embrace peer collaboration as an energizing lifeline for growth (Dreer, 2024; Delos Santos, 2023).

Table 12. Challenges Encountered by Teachers in Intercultural Leadership Competence through Collaborative Learning along Personal Growth and Professional Development

	Indicators	Frequency	Rank
1.	Limited professional training opportunities on intercultural leadership and collaboration.	124	2
2.	Difficulty balancing collaborative learning activities with other professional and administrative responsibilities.	90	3
3.	Lack of confidence in facilitating or leading intercultural and collaborative discussions.	65	5
4.	Limited motivation or willingness among some teachers to participate in continuous collaborative learning.	41	8
5.	Inadequate mentoring or coaching support for developing intercultural competence.	64	6

6.	Challenges in conducting or participating in action research related to diversity and inclusion.	131	1
7.	Limited time for reflection and professional dialogue on intercultural experiences.	74	4
8.	Absence of a structured framework for monitoring personal and collective professional growth in LAC sessions.	48	7

3.5. Proposed Intervention to Improve Teachers' Intercultural Leadership Competence through Collaborative Learning Strategies

To address pressing district challenges, specifically action research struggles (Table 12), inconsistent student participation (Table 10), and limited parental involvement (Table 11), Project C.A.R.E. (Collaborative Action-Research and Community Engagement Framework) is proposed for pilot-testing at Malasugui Elementary School during SY 2026–2027. Grounded in strong statistical correlations from Table 9 ($p=.555$ and $p=.516$), the framework integrates three core components into regular Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions: Co-Op Research Pods to distribute action research workloads, Home-School Bridge Interventions using flexible modules and parent feedback to mitigate absenteeism and engage families, and a Localized Contextualization Bank funded by MOOE to curate digital, peer-reviewed resources. By unifying these strategies within existing schedules, Project C.A.R.E. sustainably enhances teachers' intercultural leadership competence, strengthens community bonds, and establishes a scalable baseline for district-wide implementation without causing career burnout.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Public elementary school teachers exhibit highly developed intercultural leadership competence and an unwavering commitment to collaborative learning, which significantly enhances their leadership and warrants rejecting the null hypothesis. While teamwork acts as a vital survival mechanism, mastering complex student diversity requires supplemental specialized training, as professional advancement is primarily obstructed by systemic socioeconomic constraints like poverty and heavy workloads rather than motivation deficits. To address these challenges, the proposed Project C.A.R.E. framework provides a strategic, data-driven solution, integrating co-op research pods, home-school interventions, and a localized resource bank, to sustainably elevate teacher competence and alleviate administrative burdens without causing professional burnout.

To address the study's conclusions, principals and supervisors may organize formal training on inclusive education, while school heads protect Learning Action Cell sessions for initiatives like Co-Op Research Pods. Additionally, Master Teachers may utilize structured peer mentoring, and administrators must partner with Local Government Units to mitigate student absenteeism and engage parents. Leadership at Malasugui Elementary School and the district office may fund and pilot-test the Project C.A.R.E. framework using MOOE prior to wider scaling, while future researchers are encouraged to employ mixed-methods designs or expand the locale across Camarines Norte.

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