

# Assessing the Leadership Styles of School Heads in Public Elementary Schools at Lugus District-Sulu: Teachers' Perspectives

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**ABSTRACT.** This study explored the leadership styles of school heads in public elementary schools in Lugus District, Division of Sulu, as perceived by teachers. It focused on autocratic, democratic, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership styles, and examined differences and relationships in teachers' perceptions when grouped according to selected demographic variables. A descriptive-exploratory research design with a quantitative approach was utilized. A total of 100 teachers were selected through purposive sampling during the School Year 2025–2026. Data were gathered using a modified standardized questionnaire and analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics, including frequency, percentage, weighted mean, standard deviation, independent samples t-test, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and Pearson correlation. The results indicate that democratic and transformational leadership styles are highly practiced, while autocratic leadership is least observed and laissez-faire leadership is moderately practiced. No significant differences were found when respondents were grouped according to age, civil status, and length of service. However, significant differences were identified in autocratic leadership based on gender and in transformational leadership based on educational attainment. Correlation analysis further revealed a significant positive relationship between democratic and transformational leadership, and a significant negative relationship between autocratic and democratic leadership. Overall, the findings suggest that leadership practices in the district are largely participative and developmental, emphasizing collaboration, empowerment, and professional growth among teachers.

**KEYWORDS:** *leadership styles, school heads, democratic leadership, transformational leadership, autocratic leadership, laissez-faire leadership, teachers' perceptions, Lugus District, Sulu*

## ARTICLE DETAILS

JEAS-00080; Received: January 5, 2026; Accepted: January 19, 2026; Published: February 3, 2026

### CITATION:

Abdulgafur, F. B., & Asiri, M. S. (2026). Assessing the Leadership Styles of School Heads in Public Elementary Schools at Lugus District-Sulu: Teachers' Perspectives. *Journal of Education and Academic Settings*, 3(1). DOI: 10.62596/r3qjep14

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a crucial factor in shaping the culture, performance, and overall effectiveness of schools. In educational settings, the leadership style of school heads significantly influences teachers' motivation, commitment, and instructional practices, which ultimately affect students' academic achievement (Wahab, Fuad, Ismail, & Majid, 2014).

School heads function not only as managers of resources but also as instructional leaders who support teachers in achieving educational goals. Their leadership approach influences the quality of the teaching–learning process, promotes teachers' professional growth, and contributes to the attainment of school improvement objectives (Kılınç, Polatcan, Savaş, & Er, 2022).

Within the Philippine education system, particularly in public elementary schools, school heads are expected to exhibit leadership that responds to both administrative and instructional responsibilities. They play a key role in establishing an environment that promotes collaboration, accountability, and continuous improvement. However, leadership styles may vary based on individual characteristics, experience, and contextual factors, and these variations can influence teachers' perceptions, job satisfaction, and performance (Mariano & Oco, 2024).

In geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas such as Lulus District in the Province of Sulu, the role of school heads becomes even more significant. In these settings, leaders must address challenges related to limited resources, socio-economic conditions, and cultural diversity.

Existing research emphasizes the influence of various leadership styles—such as transformational, transactional, democratic, and laissez-faire—on teacher performance and overall school outcomes. Transformational leadership, which encourages and motivates teachers to go beyond expectations, has been linked to higher levels of engagement, job satisfaction, and innovation in teaching (Metaferia, 2024; Kılınç et al., 2022).

In contrast, transactional leadership focuses on structure, rules, and reward systems, contributing to organizational efficiency and accountability, although its effectiveness may differ depending on the context (Turner, 2016). Democratic leadership, on the other hand, encourages participation and shared decision-making, which can strengthen collaboration and improve the school climate. Meanwhile, laissez-faire leadership, characterized by limited supervision, has been associated with lower levels of teacher satisfaction and engagement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

In the Division of Sulu, educational leaders work within conditions that demand resilience and adaptability due to ongoing challenges such as limited instructional resources, socio-political instability, and diverse cultural environments. Although national policies and leadership frameworks guide the practices of school heads, their actual leadership approaches may differ based on local circumstances.

Teachers, who are directly engaged in classroom instruction, have firsthand experience of how leadership practices are carried out. Their perspectives offer important insights into how leadership styles affect teaching practices, professional development, and overall school operations.

Although a considerable amount of research has been conducted on educational leadership, most studies have focused on urban or well-resourced settings, with limited attention given to rural and conflict-affected areas such as Lulus District in Sulu. Many existing studies emphasize leadership outcomes rather than examining teachers' perceptions as a primary basis for evaluation (Mariano & Oco, 2024).

In addition, contextual factors—including cultural dynamics, resource constraints, and environmental conditions—may shape how leadership styles are practiced and perceived (Kılınç et al., 2022). These considerations point to the need for localized research that reflects the unique realities of leadership in geographically isolated educational settings.

This research supports Sustainable Development Goals 4 (Quality Education) and 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), highlighting the importance of responsive and effective leadership in advancing inclusive and equitable education.

This study sought to examine the leadership styles of school heads in public elementary schools in Lugus District, Sulu, as perceived by teachers. It also explored differences and relationships in these perceptions when respondents were grouped according to selected demographic variables.

## **2. METHODS**

### **2.1. Research Design**

This study used a descriptive–exploratory research design within a quantitative framework to investigate the leadership styles of school heads in selected public elementary schools in Lugus District, Division of Sulu. The design allowed for the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of data related to teachers’ perceptions of leadership practices.

According to Creswell (2014), a research design serves as a structured plan for addressing research problems through appropriate methods and procedures. In a similar vein, David R. Krathwohl (1993) explained that descriptive research supports the organization and validation of observed phenomena, while Venson (2004) emphasized its ability to describe and interpret existing conditions

### **2.2. Research Locale**

The research took place in Lugus District, Division of Sulu, particularly in selected public elementary schools. The participating schools were Alu Duyung Elementary School, Laud Alu Primary School, Bas Nunuk Elementary School, Bas Mangakallay Elementary School, Boli Pongpong Primary School, Lahud Primary School, Lugus Central School, Parian Kawayan Elementary School, Rugasan Elementary School, and Gapas Primary School. These schools were chosen to represent varied educational contexts within the district.

### **2.3. Participants of the Study**

A total of one hundred (100) public elementary school teachers from the selected schools participated in the study during the School Year 2025–2026. These respondents were directly engaged in classroom instruction and possessed firsthand experience of the leadership practices of school heads.

**Table 1. Distribution Of Respondents According to School**

Selected Elementary Schools (Lugus District, Sulu)	Teacher-Respondents
Alu Duyung Elementary School	10
Laud Alu Primary School	10
Bas Nunuk Elementary School	10
Bas Mangakallay Elementary School	10
Boli Pongpong Primary School	10
Lahud Primary School	10
Lugus Central School	10
Parian Kawayan Elementary School	10
Rugasan Elementary School	10
Gapas Primary School	10

Total	100
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## 2.4. Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, was used to select the respondents. Participants were included based on their availability and relevance to the objectives of the study. This approach enables the researcher to deliberately choose individuals who have the knowledge and experience needed to provide meaningful insights (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

## 2.5. Research Instrument

Data were gathered through a modified standardized questionnaire based on the instrument developed by Bass & Avolio (1994), designed to assess leadership styles. The instrument included 40 structured items covering four domains: autocratic, democratic, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership.

Table 2. Scale Used for Interpreting Responses

Point	Scale Range	Interpretation
5	4.50 – 5.00	Always
4	3.50 – 4.49	Often
3	2.50 – 3.49	Sometimes
2	1.50 – 2.49	Seldom
1	1.00 – 1.49	Never

## 2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Before the data collection process, approval to conduct the study was secured from the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and the Schools Division Superintendent. Permission was also granted by the principals of the selected schools. The researcher personally distributed and collected the questionnaires to ensure that responses were complete and accurate.

## 2.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were followed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was secured from all respondents. Participants' privacy was protected by maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, with no identifying information disclosed.

The researcher ensured honesty and integrity during data collection, analysis, and reporting, in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines.

## 3. RESULTS

Table 3. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	25 years old and below	11	11%
	26–35 years old	28	28%
	36 years old and above	61	61%
Gender	Male	27	27%
	Female	73	73%
Civil Status	Single	27	27%
	Married	68	68%

	Widowed/Separated	5	5%
Length of Service	5 years and below	21	21%
	6–10 years	32	32%
	11–15 years	14	14%
	16 years and above	33	33%
Educational Attainment	Bachelor’s Degree	84	84%
	Bachelor’s with Master’s Units	14	14%
	Master’s Degree	2	2%

The findings show that most respondents are aged 36 years and above, indicating a teaching workforce with considerable experience. Female teachers comprise the larger portion of the sample, reflecting the typical gender distribution in the profession. In addition, a majority of respondents are married, which may suggest stability in their personal lives.

With regard to professional experience, many respondents have six to ten years or more of service, highlighting sustained engagement in their teaching careers. However, most hold a bachelor’s degree, which may indicate limited progression to graduate-level education.

### *Extent of Leadership Styles*

**Table 4.** Autocratic Leadership

No	Statements	Mean	SD	Description
1	Makes decisions independently without seeking teachers’ input	1.65	1.29002	Seldom
2	Enforces rules in a strict manner	1.80	1.45449	Seldom
3	Requires unquestioned compliance from teachers	1.88	1.43041	Seldom
4	Relies on authority when making decisions	1.88	1.45838	Seldom
5	Places strong emphasis on obedience	2.36	1.77252	Seldom
6	Limits opportunities for questioning or feedback	1.90	1.48051	Seldom
7	Seldom assigns decision-making responsibilities to others	2.02	1.52408	Seldom
8	Prioritizes outcomes over teacher involvement	1.72	1.23975	Seldom
9	Favors centralized control in leadership	1.88	1.38739	Seldom
10	Adopts a more directive rather than supportive approach	1.96	1.49017	Seldom
Weighted Mean		1.909	1.32055	Seldom

Autocratic leadership is perceived at a low level, indicating that school heads seldom rely on strict authority or centralized decision-making. Teachers generally perceive leadership as participative rather than directive.

**Table 5.** Democratic Leadership

No	Statements	Mean	SD	Description
1	Promotes active participation among teachers	4.80	0.60302	Always
2	Considers and values teachers’ input in decision-making	4.70	0.50252	Always
3	Provides opportunities for open expression of ideas	4.54	0.64228	Always

4	Encourages collaboration and teamwork	4.54	0.64228	Always
5	Seeks consultation before making decisions	4.52	0.64322	Always
6	Demonstrates and promotes mutual respect	4.52	0.64322	Always
7	Encourages shared responsibility among teachers	4.48	0.64322	Often
8	Recognizes and appreciates teachers' contributions	4.56	0.67150	Always
9	Supports open and effective communication	4.68	0.58396	Always
10	Applies group-based approaches in problem-solving	4.58	0.66939	Always
Weighted Mean		4.592	0.44	

Democratic leadership is highly practiced, indicating strong participation, collaboration, and shared decision-making between school heads and teachers.

**Table 6. Transformational Leadership**

No	Statements	Mean	SD	Description
1	Inspires teachers to perform at a higher level	4.58	0.63850	Always
2	Establishes a clear vision for the school	4.54	0.64228	Always
3	Motivates teachers to achieve organizational goals	4.48	0.70324	Often
4	Encourages innovative and creative practices	4.48	0.67390	Often
5	Acts as a role model for teachers	4.50	0.67420	Always
6	Supports teachers' professional development	4.56	0.64071	Always
7	Encourages teachers to pursue further education	4.58	0.57172	Always
8	Provides recognition for teachers' performance	4.52	0.61101	Always
9	Builds trust among teachers	4.52	0.61101	Always
10	Empowers teachers in decision-making and practice	4.46	0.64228	Often
Weighted Mean		4.522	0.51768	Always

Transformational leadership is strongly evident, indicating that school heads inspire, motivate, and support professional growth among teachers.

**Table 7. Laissez-Faire Leadership**

No	Statements	Mean	SD	Description
1	Provides teachers with a high level of autonomy	4.60	0.87617	Always
2	Demonstrates minimal supervision of teachers' work	4.56	0.90252	Always
3	Shows limited involvement in school activities	4.14	1.36345	Often
4	Allows teachers to make independent decisions	4.18	1.07666	Often
5	Offers minimal guidance in instructional tasks	4.16	1.29271	Often

6	Assigns responsibilities without consistent follow-up	4.02	1.41407	Often
7	Displays a passive approach when addressing concerns	4.18	1.31333	Often
8	Provides limited direction in school-related matters	4.02	1.31025	Often
9	Permits teachers to set their own standards	4.12	1.23321	Often
10	Maintains low visibility in daily school operations	4.04	1.37745	Often
Weighted Mean		4.202	1.05284	Often

Laissez-faire leadership is moderately practiced, indicating a balance between autonomy and limited supervision, though variability suggests differing teacher experiences.

**Table 8.** Differences in Leadership Perceptions According to Demographic Variables

Demographic Variable	Leadership Domain	Test Statistic	p-value	Decision
Age (ANOVA)	Autocratic	F = 0.058	0.944	Not Significant
	Democratic	F = 1.536	0.220	Not Significant
	Transformational	F = 0.772	0.465	Not Significant
	Laissez-Faire	F = 0.040	0.961	Not Significant
Gender (t-test)	Autocratic	t = -2.737	0.007	Significant
	Democratic	t = 0.825	0.411	Not Significant
	Transformational	t = 0.610	0.543	Not Significant
	Laissez-Faire	t = 1.806	0.074	Not Significant
Civil Status (ANOVA)	Autocratic	F = 2.479	0.089	Not Significant
	Democratic	F = 1.483	0.232	Not Significant
	Transformational	F = 0.578	0.563	Not Significant
	Laissez-Faire	F = 1.319	0.272	Not Significant
Length of Service (ANOVA)	Autocratic	F = 1.362	0.259	Not Significant
	Democratic	F = 0.084	0.969	Not Significant
	Transformational	F = 0.228	0.876	Not Significant
	Laissez-Faire	F = 0.740	0.531	Not Significant
Educational Attainment (ANOVA)	Autocratic	F = 0.742	0.479	Not Significant
	Democratic	F = 1.789	0.173	Not Significant
	Transformational	F = 2.828	0.044	Significant
	Laissez-Faire	F = 0.455	0.635	Not Significant

The results show that most demographic variables do not significantly influence teachers' perceptions of leadership styles. Across age, civil status, and length of service, no significant differences were observed in all leadership domains, indicating a consistent perception of leadership practices among teachers regardless of their background.

However, two notable exceptions emerged. First, a significant difference was found in autocratic leadership when grouped according to gender, suggesting that male and female teachers differ in how they perceive directive or authoritative leadership behaviors. Second, a significant difference was observed in transformational leadership based on educational attainment, indicating that teachers with higher academic qualifications may have different expectations or interpretations of inspirational and developmental leadership practices.

Overall, the findings suggest that leadership perceptions are largely uniform across demographic groups, with only specific variations influenced by gender and educational

attainment. This consistency may reflect a shared organizational culture and common leadership experiences among teachers within the district.

**Table 9.** Correlation of Leadership Styles

Variables	r	Sig.	Description
Autocratic & Democratic	-0.253	.011	Negative Low
Democratic & Transformational	0.531	.000	Moderate Positive
Others	—	> .05	No Correlation

Democratic and transformational leadership are positively related, while autocratic leadership is negatively associated with democratic leadership.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The results indicate that school heads in Lugus District predominantly demonstrate democratic and transformational leadership styles, while autocratic leadership is least evident. This reflects a leadership environment that values participation, collaboration, and professional support rather than strict authority. The low occurrence of autocratic practices suggests that school heads seldom rely on centralized decision-making and rigid control. These results are consistent with De Guzman (2017) and Cabrera (2018), who linked autocratic leadership to lower teacher morale, reduced job satisfaction, and decreased productivity. Rivera (2021) likewise emphasized that excessive control and limited participation may negatively affect teacher motivation and effectiveness.

Democratic leadership emerged as the most dominant style, with teachers reporting high levels of involvement in decision-making, open communication, and collaborative practices. This indicates that school heads actively engage teachers in school governance, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and ownership. These findings support Dizon (2018), who noted that democratic leadership enhances inclusivity and improves school climate. Similarly, Villanueva (2020) found that participative leadership strengthens organizational commitment and encourages innovation among teachers.

Transformational leadership was also highly evident, indicating that school heads motivate, inspire, and support teachers' professional growth. The results show that school leaders provide clear direction, promote continuous development, and empower teachers to take initiative. This aligns with Dela Cruz (2019), who highlighted that transformational leadership encourages innovation and leadership development among teachers. The strong presence of both democratic and transformational styles suggests that school heads adopt a balanced approach that integrates participation with inspiration.

Laissez-faire leadership, on the other hand, was moderately practiced, indicating that school heads allow a certain degree of autonomy among teachers. While this may support independence and flexibility, the variability in responses suggests that experiences of this leadership style are not consistent across all teachers. Santos (2019) warned that excessive autonomy without sufficient guidance may result in unclear direction and inconsistent implementation of school policies. Rivera (2021) also pointed out that limited supervision may reduce teacher motivation and overall effectiveness.

With regard to differences in perceptions, the results show that age, civil status, and length of service do not significantly affect how teachers view leadership styles. This suggests that teachers share relatively similar perceptions regardless of their demographic background, reflecting a consistent leadership culture within the district. However, a significant difference was found in autocratic leadership when grouped according to gender, indicating variation in how directive leadership is perceived. In addition, differences in transformational leadership were observed based on educational attainment, suggesting that teachers with higher qualifications may hold different expectations regarding inspirational and developmental leadership.

Correlation analysis further revealed a significant positive relationship between democratic and transformational leadership styles, indicating that school heads who encourage participation also tend to inspire and empower teachers. This suggests that these leadership approaches complement each other in practice. In contrast, a significant negative relationship between autocratic and democratic leadership styles was identified, showing that increased reliance on authority corresponds with reduced participatory behavior. This highlights the contrasting nature of these leadership approaches.

Overall, the findings indicate that leadership practices in Lugus District are largely participative and developmental, with minimal reliance on authoritarian approaches. The combination of democratic and transformational leadership supports collaboration, empowerment, and professional growth. However, the presence of laissez-faire tendencies highlights the need to balance autonomy with guidance to ensure consistency in leadership practices and effective school management.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The results indicate that school heads in public elementary schools in Lugus District, Sulu predominantly demonstrate democratic and transformational leadership styles, while autocratic leadership is least evident and laissez-faire leadership is moderately practiced. These patterns reflect a leadership environment that emphasizes participation, collaboration, and support for teacher development.

The findings also show that teachers' perceptions of leadership styles remain consistent across variables such as age, civil status, and length of service, suggesting a shared understanding of leadership practices within the district. However, differences were observed in autocratic leadership when grouped according to gender, and in transformational leadership based on educational attainment, indicating that certain demographic factors may influence specific perceptions of leadership.

Furthermore, the relationships among leadership styles suggest that democratic and transformational approaches often coexist, while autocratic leadership stands in contrast to more participative practices. Overall, the results highlight that effective school leadership in the district is characterized by a balance of participation, inspiration, and guided autonomy.

## **Acknowledgement**

The author affirms that this study is the product of independent academic work and personal analysis. All ideas, interpretations, and discussions presented in this research were

developed solely by the author. Artificial intelligence tools were used only to a limited extent for grammar checking and language refinement. These tools were not utilized to generate ideas, conduct analysis, interpret results, or compose the main sections of the paper. The author accepts full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the study, including its analysis, discussion, and conclusions.

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