

# Leading and Teaching: The Journey of School In-Charge in Managing Schools in Rural Areas of Kapalong, Davao del Norte

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**Abstract:-** School leadership in rural settings often requires a complex balancing of instructional and administrative responsibilities, especially in schools led by a school in-charge rather than a fully itemized principal. In the Philippine setting, the school in-charge is often designated in schools without principal items, which makes the role both necessary and demanding. This paper examines the journey of school in-charge personnel in managing rural schools in Kapalong, Davao del Norte, with emphasis on how they navigate the dual role of teacher and school leader. Using a narrative literature review approach, the paper synthesizes Philippine policy documents, studies on school leadership, and research on rural and multigrade educational settings. The review shows that the work of school in-charge personnel is shaped by dual-role strain, role ambiguity, limited staffing, resource constraints, and the geographic and social realities of rural communities. At the same time, the literature suggests that school in-charge leaders develop adaptive, people-centered, and community-linked leadership practices to sustain school operations and support teaching and learning. The paper argues that in rural areas such as Kapalong, school leadership must be understood not only as a technical function but also as a deeply contextual and relational practice. Strengthening rural school leadership therefore requires clearer policy support, leadership development, mentoring, and localized systems that recognize the realities of teaching while leading.

**Keywords:** *School In-Charge, Rural School Leadership, Kapalong, Davao del Norte, Instructional Leadership, Multigrade Schools, School Management.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

School leadership is widely recognized as a major factor in the quality of teaching and learning. In the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), school heads are described as crucial in ensuring an enabling and supportive environment for effective teaching and learning, and the standards frame their work across five domains: leading strategically, managing school operations and resources, focusing on teaching and learning, developing self and others, and building connections. DepEd further grounds the role of school heads in Republic Act No. 9155, which defines a school head as a person responsible for administrative and instructional supervision of a school or cluster of schools. These policy foundations show that school leadership in the Philippines is expected to be both managerial and instructional, not merely administrative.

In practice, however, not all public schools have fully itemized principals. Under DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2007, the Schools Division Superintendent may designate Teachers-In-Charge in schools without principal items, and those designated must have at least three years of teaching experience and undergo a screening process by the Division Office. This policy explains why the school in-charge role remains important in many public schools, especially in geographically isolated or resource-limited communities. In such settings, one person may be expected to lead the school, supervise instruction, coordinate with stakeholders, and still maintain classroom teaching duties.

This reality becomes more complex in rural contexts. Kapalong, a landlocked municipality in Davao del Norte, has 14 barangays, a land area of about 830 square kilometers, and a 2020 population of 81,068. Its size and barangay distribution

suggest a context where distance, access, and community linkage may significantly shape school operations. Rural school leaders often work in settings where formal support structures are thinner, resources are more limited, and leadership depends heavily on local relationships and adaptability. Research comparing rural and non-rural principals shows that while leadership tasks may be similar across settings, rural leaders tend to rely more on informal distributed leadership and adaptive, people-centered practices.

The Philippine literature also increasingly shows that school in-charge and multigrade school heads face a particularly demanding professional journey. A qualitative study on school in-charge personnel described their lived experiences in balancing both school leadership and classroom teaching, while another study on multigrade school heads found that they struggle with balancing teaching and administrative duties amid staffing shortages and limited resources. These studies suggest that the journey of a rural school in-charge is not simply a story of compliance with policy; it is a story of negotiation, resilience, improvisation, and service.

In the context of Kapalong, Davao del Norte, this topic becomes important because rural schools are often sustained by leaders who must perform beyond their formal designation. Examining the journey of school in-charge personnel helps reveal how leadership is actually practiced on the ground, especially when formal structures do not fully match school realities. Thus, this paper seeks to answer the question: How is the journey of school in-charge personnel in managing rural schools understood through existing literature on dual roles, rural leadership, and contextualized school management?

## II. METHOD

This paper used a narrative literature review design. Rather than presenting original interview or survey data, it synthesizes relevant literature to develop an academically grounded discussion of the experiences of school in-charge personnel in rural school contexts. The review focused on policy documents from the Department of Education, empirical studies on teacher-in-charge and multigrade school heads, and research on rural school leadership and stakeholder engagement in the Philippines and related settings.

The materials were selected because they directly addressed the key dimensions of the topic: designation and expectations of school in-charge personnel, leadership standards for school heads, teaching-administration role conflict, rural educational leadership, and stakeholder engagement in remote communities. These materials were then read and organized into recurring themes. The emerging themes formed the basis of the Results and Discussion sections: dual-role leadership, rural contextual constraints, adaptive leadership practices, and support needs for sustainable school management.

## III. RESULTS

### ➤ *The School In-Charge Role is Fundamentally a Dual-Role Position*

One of the clearest findings across the literature is that the role of school in-charge is inherently dual in character. Philippine policy allows the designation of Teachers-In-Charge in schools without principal items, which means that a classroom teacher may be tasked to perform leadership responsibilities usually associated with a school head. This creates a role that is structurally hybrid: part teacher, part administrator, and often fully accountable to both instructional and operational demands. The PPSSH itself presents school leadership as a broad responsibility that includes strategic leadership, operations, teaching and learning, staff development, and stakeholder relations, making the expectations of the role especially wide.

The qualitative study on the dual roles of school in-charge reinforces this structural reality. It describes school in-charge personnel as living through the challenge of balancing leadership and teaching at the same time. Rather than functioning as full-time principals, they are placed in a position where classroom teaching remains part of their identity and daily responsibility even while they are expected to manage school affairs. This reveals that the school in-charge role is not merely an interim administrative arrangement; it is a lived experience of overlapping accountabilities.

### ➤ *Rural School Contexts Intensify the Difficulty of Leading While Teaching*

The literature further suggests that rural settings deepen the complexity of the school in-charge role. Kapalong's physical size, dispersed barangays, and rural character make it a useful context for understanding how school leadership may be shaped by distance, community accessibility, and uneven resource distribution. In large rural municipalities, school leaders may need to invest more time in coordination, community engagement, transport-related concerns, and localized problem-solving than their counterparts in more urbanized settings.

This reading is consistent with broader research on rural school leadership. A comparative study of rural and non-rural principals found that while leadership tasks were similar, rural principals performed them in contextually different ways, relying more on informal leadership arrangements and adaptive, people-centered practices. Another study on educational leadership in the Southern Philippines found that meaningful school change is shaped by cultural, political, and organizational realities, and that some principals are more able than others to lead change depending on how they navigate those local conditions. These findings suggest that rural leadership is not weaker leadership; rather, it is leadership practiced under more context-sensitive and relational conditions.

The study on multigrade school heads adds an especially relevant insight. It found that school leaders in multigrade settings face significant challenges in balancing teaching and administrative duties amid staffing shortages and limited resources. Since many rural schools in the Philippines also operate with multigrade features or reduced staffing arrangements, the experiences described in that study strongly echo the likely realities faced by school in-charge personnel in rural Kapalong schools.

➤ *Adaptive and Relationship-Based Leadership Becomes a Survival Strategy*

Another major theme in the literature is that school in-charge personnel often survive and function through adaptive leadership rather than through ideal organizational conditions. When staffing is thin and formal leadership support is limited, leaders must become flexible in scheduling, resource use, classroom management, teacher coordination, and school-community relations. The multigrade leadership study described this as thriving through innovation, resilience, and effective management, while the rural principal literature emphasized adaptive and people-centered practices.

This is especially important because the PPSSH does not define school leadership as purely technical control. It includes developing self and others, focusing on teaching and learning, and building connections with stakeholders. In rural settings, these domains may become even more interdependent. A school in-charge may not be able to separate instructional leadership from relational leadership because school improvement often depends on teacher cooperation, parent trust, barangay support, and community goodwill.

➤ *Stakeholder Engagement is Central to Rural School Management*

The literature on rural and remote Philippine schools consistently points to the importance of stakeholder engagement. A recent study on rural and remote schools in the Philippines found that stakeholder identification, planning, engagement, management, and monitoring were only moderately practiced, yet the authors emphasized that these practices are vital for improving educational outcomes, student success, and a more caring learning environment. For rural school in-charge personnel, this means that leadership cannot stop at internal school routines; it must extend outward to parents, alumni, local officials, and community members.

In practical terms, this outward-facing work is especially relevant for school in-charge personnel because they often lead schools with limited formal personnel and material resources. The ability to maintain partnerships, ask for local support, communicate school needs, and build collective ownership becomes a practical leadership skill. In rural settings, the school in-charge may therefore function not only as teacher and manager, but also as negotiator, organizer, and bridge between the school and the wider community.

➤ *The Journey of School In-Charge is Marked by Resilience, But Resilience Alone is Not Enough*

The reviewed studies portray school in-charge and rural school heads as resilient professionals. They adapt, improvise, and continue leading despite structural limitations. However, the literature also warns against romanticizing resilience. The study on school in-charge dual roles points to the lived burden of managing both leadership and teaching, while the multigrade school heads study highlights the need for policy support, collaboration, and more systematic assistance. In other words, resilience is a response to hardship, but it should not be treated as a substitute for proper staffing, mentoring, leadership preparation, and institutional backing.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The findings of this review suggest that the journey of school in-charge personnel in rural areas like Kapalong is best understood as a journey of role expansion under constraint. Formally, the school in-charge may be a teacher given leadership designation because no principal item exists. Functionally, however, that person is expected to perform much of what full-time school heads are expected to do under the PPSSH: manage operations, supervise instruction, lead improvement efforts, build relationships, and support teacher growth. This mismatch between designation and actual responsibility is one of the core tensions in the role.

The review also shows that rural context is not just background; it is part of the leadership experience itself. Kapalong's rural geography and barangay distribution help explain why school leadership there may demand stronger community engagement, flexible coordination, and high personal visibility from school leaders. Broader research on rural leadership supports this view by showing that rural principals often practice leadership in more informal, adaptive, and people-centered ways. For school in-charge personnel, this means that effective leadership is often less about bureaucratic perfection and more about contextual intelligence, trust-building, and responsiveness to local realities.

Another important implication is that leadership preparation for school in-charge personnel should be more deliberate. Since these leaders often emerge from the teaching force, many step into leadership without the protected time, reduced teaching load, or structured mentoring commonly associated with formal principalship. The literature strongly suggests that professional development for them should include instructional supervision, school operations, stakeholder engagement, conflict management, documentation, and resource mobilization in rural settings. Support must also be ongoing, not limited to initial designation.

Finally, the paper points to a larger insight: in rural schools, leading and teaching are often inseparable. For school in-charge personnel, teaching is not simply an old task retained from a previous position; it remains part of their leadership

identity. Their legitimacy often comes not only from policy designation but also from their direct involvement in classroom life and their relationships with teachers, learners, and families. This makes the school in-charge role both fragile and powerful: fragile because it is overloaded, and powerful because it is deeply embedded in the school community.

## V. CONCLUSION

The journey of school in-charge personnel in managing rural schools in Kapalong, Davao del Norte is a story of leadership exercised in conditions of limited formal advantage. The literature shows that these leaders carry dual responsibilities as teachers and administrators, navigate rural constraints such as distance and scarce resources, and rely heavily on adaptive and community-oriented leadership practices. Their work reflects commitment, flexibility, and resilience, but the findings also make clear that personal sacrifice alone should not sustain rural school leadership. Stronger policy recognition, contextualized leadership training, mentoring systems, and more stable structural support are necessary so that school in-charge personnel can lead effectively without compromising the quality of teaching and school management. In rural Philippine education, the school in-charge is not simply filling a vacancy; they are holding the school together.

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