

The Adventist Teaching and Learning Environment: A Narrative of Principals' Best Practices

Glen Mar M. De Lana
Lipa Adventist Academy
gmdelana26@gmail.com

Ann Roselyn Mae F. Jalop
Srisongkramwittaya School
roselynjalop0124@gmail.com

Date Submitted:
December 31, 2025

Date Accepted:
January 26, 2026

Date Published:
February 1, 2026

DOI:
10.5281/zenodo.18446668

ABSTRACT

This descriptive-narrative qualitative paper explored the best practices of Seventh-day Adventist school principals within the South Central Luzon Conference of the Philippines. The study employed semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis to address a research gap in Adventist school leadership and to preserve the knowledge of experienced principals. Grounded in the Servant Leadership Theory, evidence showed strong agreement with the Handbook for Principals, highlighting effective spiritual modeling, integration of faith and mind, and situation-sensitive responses to maintain educational standards in adversity. The study also emphasized the influence of servant leadership and personal experience on their practice.

Furthermore, this research underscored the importance of establishing supportive school cultures that promote teamwork among teachers, students, and parents. The results indicate that effective principals focus on providing professional growth opportunities for their staff, recognizing that teacher development directly impacts student success. This collection of best practices is valuable for Adventist school administrators and policymakers.

Finally, these findings can serve as a foundation for future research and development efforts not only in the Adventist educational system but also in other faith-based institutions. It recommends enhancing the learning and teaching environment and supporting students' holistic development in faith-based settings. The study expands understanding of effective leadership in Adventist education and helps establish educational quality and spiritual growth in these unique contexts.

Keywords: *Adventist Education School Leadership, Faith-Based Educational Leadership, Best Practices, Spiritual Leadership, Instructional Leadership*

INTRODUCTION

School leadership is critical to establishing the quality of teaching and learning environments in today's changing educational landscape. Principals, as the key leaders in educational institutions, are responsible for creating settings that promote academic performance while also supporting students' holistic complete development¹. This responsibility extends to preserving and incorporating spiritual principles into the curriculum and school culture in faith-based educational systems, such as those found in Seventh-day Adventist schools. School principals' roles, reflected in their time management, are becoming more complex across Asia due to the different cultural, social, and economic contexts in which they work. Adventist schools in this region have the dual challenge of meeting global educational standards while maintaining their distinctive religious identity. According to research, good leadership in Asian Adventist schools frequently requires striking a careful balance between upholding traditional values and implementing innovative practices that meet the needs of modern pupils. As a result, there is an increasing need to document and share the best practices of principals who have successfully navigated these complexities.

In the Philippines, Adventist schools have unique difficulties and possibilities that affect their teaching and learning environments. The Philippines' education system is distinguished by its diversity, with schools differing greatly in terms of resources, student demographics, and community support³. Principals of Philippine Adventist schools must deal with issues such as limited resources, teacher retention, and variable levels of parental involvement, all while capitalizing on benefits such as strong community links and a growing desire for values-based education. The success of these schools is frequently dependent on principals' abilities to innovate and adapt best practices within these limits. The South Central Luzon Conference (SCLC) as one of the administrative arms of the North Philippine Union Conference (NPUC), encompassing Adventist schools in the provinces of Quezon, Batangas, and Laguna, plays a crucial role in the local educational landscape. While united by a shared mission, each school in SCLC faces unique challenges, including maintaining operations, curriculum changes, and compliance with government policies⁴. It is crucial to address those challenges to keep the existence of Adventist schools amid an increasingly competitive academic industry where each institution strives for academic excellence.

Several studies have already been conducted to explore various topics within the context of Adventist schools. The implementation of K-12 has been conducted in an Adventist secondary school in the Philippines. Other studies focused on the impact of Adventist education⁵, faith development of students in an Adventist campus, the perceived gain in enrolling in an Adventist elementary school⁷, and the experiences of retired principals of Adventist schools. Some others investigated the job satisfaction of teachers in Adventist schools, and motivational resources influencing Adventist public school teachers to integrate faith and learning. Although there was a study on best practices in an Adventist school, the focus was on the special needs' education program. Given the limited studies, there is a dearth of literature exploring the principals' best practices in Adventist schools in terms of spiritual and instructional leadership. And this is the gap that this study aims to fill in. This study sought to aggregate the best practices of Adventist school administrators in the SCLC, Philippines, providing useful insights and recommendations to improve the effectiveness of school leadership across the country.

METHODS

The study used a descriptive-narrative qualitative research approach to investigate principals' best practices in Adventist schools. This design is ideal for recording detailed accounts of experiences and practices, allowing for a comprehensive knowledge of the subject matter being studied¹². The qualitative descriptive-narrative approach is best for this study since it aims to chronicle and describe the lived experiences of Adventist school principals. This approach enabled the collection of rich, in-depth data from principals' narratives, providing insights into what strategies and practices they used to build effective teaching and learning environments.

The data were collected from eight (8) participants, presented in the table below. Using the following inclusion criteria: (a) being a school principal at an Adventist school for at least 9 years; (b) a principal in a school with 25 years of existence; and (c) principals who are 30 years old and above; and (d) at least a licensed professional teacher.

A semi-structured interview guide was created to allow for in-depth interviews with school principals. The guide included open-ended questions aimed at delving into key areas of leadership practices, problems encountered, and the impact of faith on their roles. It also included follow-up questions to elicit deeper insights if appropriate. This study adheres to the tradition of descriptive-narrative inquiry qualitative research, which tries to record the participants' experiences, stories, and reflections in their natural surroundings. The researcher collected data via semi-structured interviews and did document analysis to shed light on the leadership practices and methods that contributed to effective teaching and learning environments in Adventist schools. Before data collection, the researcher secured permission from the institutions through a formal letter.

In the data analysis, content analysis and narrative analysis were utilized. The content analysis was used since it was specific to the context of the institutions under study, while the narrative analysis addressed the research questions. The researcher used secondary data to find out the history of the schools/principal practices. Data triangulation was also utilized through documentary analysis, participants' responses, and thematic analysis of those two. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, the researcher, who is part of the institution where the data were collected, used the bracketing technique. Bracketing is used in qualitative research to minimize the influence of a researcher's personal beliefs, assumptions, or biases during the data collection and analysis process. The goal is to ensure that the study authentically represents participants' experiences rather than the researcher's preconceived notions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Participants' Description of Their Spiritual and Instructional Leadership

A. Spiritual Leadership

Participants uniformly characterized spiritual leadership as foundational to their roles, which aligns with Greenleaf's (2002) servant leadership framework emphasizing leading through service and spiritual authenticity. The participants put a premium on spiritual life manifested in the significance they attach to prayer and divine connections. One participant shared: "As a principal, I am always praying and asking God for guidance in every decision I make. Before I do something important, I pray first and ask the Lord if this is His will" (PA). The participants describe their leadership style as Christ-centered characterized by Jesus' qualities, like humility, compassion, and love. Participant A shared: "I try to lead like Jesus did, with humility, compassion, and love. As leaders, we must be servants too, just like Jesus washed the feet of His disciples." Moreover, the participants shared that they cultivate spirituality among teachers and students through communal prayers, devotionals, and worship. Lastly, the participants' leadership is characterized by their dependence on the guidance and providence of the Holy Spirit. They also recognize that being a principal is tough due to the associated responsibilities, not to mention the insufficient remuneration. Participant D affirmed this by saying: "*Ang dami-dami kasing responsibilities ng principals... Pero ayos naman, kaya pa rin. Dahil ako ay Adventist, kahit mababa ang salary... hindi ako umaalis dito sa ating school.*"

B. Instructional Leadership

The instructional leadership of the participants is grounded on the following: commitment to the philosophy of Adventist education; keeping school activities aligned with spiritual and academic goals; promoting service-oriented values among students and teachers; and upholding Christ-centered education as a core mission. The participants underscore their institutions' commitment to the philosophy of Adventist education, which is Christ-centered, bible-based, service-oriented, and holistic. Participant G shared: "*Our school is Christ-centered, with integrated values of faith and learning. We align all programs and activities to Adventist principles globally and denominationally.*" Instructional leadership has been discussed in terms of mentoring teachers, leading by example, and directly participating in curriculum design and implementation. This corresponds with transformational leadership principles, where leaders guide instructional improvement through shared vision and pedagogical support. Principals often juggled classroom teaching with administrative duties, reflecting the distributed leadership model advocated by Harris and Jones (2020).

2. Contextual factors that affect the participants' leadership practices

Leadership practices are significantly influenced by cultural, social, and economic environments. Principals recognize that they serve communities of diverse cultures that demand different practices. As noted by Medalla and Medalla (2019), much of the current landscape demands leadership practices that are culturally adaptive. The participants make some adjustments due to the cultural, social, and economic

background of their students and other stakeholders. Participant E shared: *"We respect the cultural background of each student but focus on a Christ-centered foundation."* In terms of social environment, the participants emphasize building good relationships with the students' family, local community, and sponsors and benefactors by utilizing traditional and non-traditional communication channels. In terms of the economic environment, the participants highlight financial issues that affect their leadership practices. Participant A shared: *"We have financial limitations, so we create simple fundraising programs."*

3. Personal Experiences the Participants Derived from Their Leadership Practices

The participants shared that their leadership practices propelled them toward personal growth and lifelong learning. Specifically, they commit to: continuous self-reflection and learning from experiences; openness to learning administrative skills on the job; recognizing personal growth through divine calling and responsibility; and maintaining humility and servant leadership. Many principals entered the role without any formal training, yet they grew into it through experience, faith, and mentorship. This finding mirrors Dite's (2020) work, which found that school leaders in faith-based institutions often experience leadership as an evolving vocation. Participant A shared: *"I was not trained to be a principal, but I'm learning little by little through experience. This job teaches me a lot. I listen to others and try to improve how I lead."* The integration of faith into their leadership identity was critical. This growing leadership identity strongly resonated with a notion articulated by Greenleaf (2002) that servant leaders grow through serving.

4. Principal Leadership Alignment with the Handbook for Principals of Seventh-day Adventist Schools

The results strongly align the participants' practices with the Handbook for Principals of Seventh-day Adventist Schools. Participants upheld spiritual leadership as central, consistent with the Handbook's call for Christ-centered school leadership. They try to maintain balance in their administrative tasks while following the Handbook. Participant F shared: *"I balance the Adventist identity with inclusive programming. I emphasize reflection, prayer, and Christ-centered leadership, fulfilling the Handbook's leadership expectations."* Balancing the adherence to the Handbook requires also the strict adherence to DepEd mandates as shared by Participant G: *"I follow both DepEd and Adventist Conference policies while maintaining spiritual identity in our school. I try my very best to model humility and service per the Handbook's guidelines."* They mentored teachers spiritually, planned collaboratively with them, and provided what the Handbook refers to as "example-driven" guidance.

5. Strategies for Maintaining Adventist Teaching-Learning Standards

Strategies were applied by principals to uphold the spiritual integrity of their schools when faced with financial, cultural, and social pressures. The participants' narratives reveal that principals adopt faith-driven, context-sensitive approaches to uphold the spiritual integrity of their schools. For instance, Participant A maintains daily devotionals and serves as a role model in Christian behavior to reinforce spiritual consistency across school operations. He said: *"It's very challenging, but we maintain daily devotionals, we try our best to model Christian behavior, and simplify programs to suit school capacity while staying mission-aligned."* Meanwhile, Participant E embeds spiritual themes directly into instruction and mentors teachers by modeling faith integration, even amidst financial challenges. Participant G, dealing with dual accountability to the Department of Education and the Adventist Conference, retains Bible-based content while balancing regulatory demands through servant leadership. These samples illustrate how principals sustain the Adventist identity of their schools through spiritual leadership, instructional alignment, and strong community partnerships.

Conclusion

Principals of Adventist schools exemplify spiritual leadership not only through their administrative roles but also by actively integrating faith-based mentoring and biblical values into the curriculum, fostering a holistic educational environment aligned with Adventist philosophy. Their leadership practices face challenges but are also shaped by cultural, social, and economic factors, necessitating adaptable and spiritually grounded approaches to contribute to community connections and address challenges. The principals' leadership journeys reflect personal and spiritual growth, showcasing resilience, emotional maturity, and a profound faith developed through their experiences. Their leadership styles closely correspond with the Seventh-day Adventist School Principals Handbook, evident in their strong dedication to holistic development, mission fidelity, faith integration, and Christ-centered leadership. Finally, principals use strategic, faith-based initiatives to address the difficulties in upholding Adventist teaching-learning standards by promoting community involvement, incorporate values-based education, and maintaining spiritual practices.

REFERENCES

- Fios, F., Marzuki, M., Ibadurrahman, I., Renyaan, A. S., & Telaumbanua, E. (2024). Innovative Leadership Strategies For School Principals: Building A Holistic Educational Environment Focused On Student Achievement In The Era Of Technology And Globalization. *International Journal Of Teaching And Learning*, 2(1), 266-281.
- Kumar, S. (2024). Teaching Amid Crisis. *The Journal of Adventist Education*, 86(1), 20-29.
- Cimene, F. T. A., Du, E. C., Alonsabe, O. C., Kurangking, J. A., Santander, M. E. D., Alvarez, J. B. G. C., ... & Uba, M. L. (2023). Navigating the educational landscape: Philosophy, trends, and issues in the Philippines. Beyond Book Publication.
- Medalla, D.V., & Medalla, B. M. (2019). Responding to K-12 Implementation: A Case Study of an Adventist Secondary School in the Philippines. *International Forum Journal*, 22(2), 46-67.
- Mergal, B. B. C., Pariñas, S. L., Estrada, M. R., & Botabara, M. J. B. (2020). Adventist Education: Its Impact on Professional Competence, Active Faith, Social Responsibility, Selfless Service, and Balanced Lifestyle of the Graduates of the Public Health Program of the Adventist University of the Philippines. *Adventist University of the Philippines Research Journal*, 51.
- Obaya, B. (2019). Faith Development among Elementary Students in an Adventist Campus: A Case Study. *International Forum Journal*, 22(2), 84-101.
- Ronia, C. F., & Fajanilan, L. M. (2022). Parents' Satisfaction and Perceived Gains from Enrolling their Children in an Adventist Elementary School. *Research Journal*, 1, 1-13.
- Susada, I. V. (2023). Continuing to the end: a narrative inquiry into the lives of retired principals of faith-based elementary schools in the Philippines. In 9th International Scholars' Conference Proceedings.
- Nyisingize, E. (2019). Determinants of Job Satisfaction Among Adventist Elementary and High School Teachers, Case of Silang, Cavite, Philippines. *East African Journal of Science and Technology*, 9(9).
- Ochoco, A. D. (2019). Motivational Resources Influencing Seventh-day Adventist Teachers in Public Schools to Implement Integration of Faith and Learning (IFL) in the Classroom. *Journal of Education, Psychology, and Humanities*, 2(1), 29-39.
- Collado, M. T. (2020). Best Practices of a Faith-Based Institution on Special Needs Education Program: An Appreciative Inquiry. *Journal of Education, Psychology and Humanities*, 3(2), 14-27.
- Doyle, L., McCabe, C., Keogh, B., Brady, A., & McCann, M. (2020). An overview of the qualitative descriptive design within nursing research. *Journal of research in nursing*, 25(5), 443-455.

- Alam, M. K. (2021). A systematic qualitative case study: questions, data collection, NVivo analysis and saturation. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 16(1), 1-31.
- Vears, D. F., & Gillam, L. (2022). Inductive content analysis: A guide for beginning qualitative researchers. *Focus on Health Professional Education: A Multi-Professional Journal*, 23(1), 111-127.
- Josselson, R., & Hammack, P.L. (2021). *Essentials of narrative analysis*. American Psychological Association.
- Bans-Akutey, A., & Tiimub, B.M. (2021). Triangulation in research. *Academia Letters*, 2, 1-6.
- Habibullah, K.M., Mohammed, B.U., & Hamza, M. (2023). Conceptual framework in reflexive bracketing techniques in qualitative methodology. *Research Review*, 4(02), 849-857.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (2002). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. Paulist press.
- Litz, D., & Blaik-Hourani, R. (2020). Transformational leadership and change in education. In *Oxford research encyclopedia of education*.
- Leithwood, K., Sun, J., & Schumacker, R. (2020). How school leadership influences student learning: A test of "The four paths model". *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 56(4), 570-599.
- Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2020). COVID 19-school leadership in disruptive times. *School leadership & management*, 40(4), 243-247.
- Dite, E. A. (2020). *Recruitment and retention of catholic school principals: The importance of school leadership in the success of catholic schools*. Seton Hall University.