

## **EMPOWERING SCHOOL LEADERS THROUGH THE S.A.L.A.S. FRAMEWORK**

**(Systematic Advancement in Leadership and Accountability Structures in School)**

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**Abstract:** This qualitative study examined how the S.A.L.A.S. framework (Systematic Advancement in Leadership and Accountability Structures in School) influenced governance practices in a rural elementary school in the Davao Region. Guided by transformational leadership and School-Based Management, the study focused on teachers' experiences before and during the implementation of the framework. Three teachers of different ranks participated. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation and were interpreted using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis. The findings produced three interrelated themes: institutionalized participatory governance; hierarchical leadership and limited teacher ownership before S.A.L.A.S.; and a transformative school culture anchored in shared accountability and collaboration. Prior to implementation, governance was described as centralized, directive, and compliance-oriented. Under S.A.L.A.S., teachers reported greater involvement in planning, consultation, decision-making, problem-solving, and accountability processes. The framework also strengthened collegial relationships by combining the experience of senior teachers with the ideas of younger teachers. The study concludes that S.A.L.A.S. functions as a practical governance reform that can increase teacher ownership and professional commitment. Its application may inform school leadership development and participatory governance initiatives, although findings remain context-specific because they were drawn from a small group in a single school. These changes show that governance innovation can operate as both structural reform and cultural transformation.

**Keywords:** participatory governance; school-based management; transformational leadership

## **Introduction**

School governance plays a central role in maintaining educational quality and managing institutions effectively. In the elementary school examined in the Davao Region, governance challenges included limited resources, weak coordination, and insufficient teacher participation in policy and decision-making. Teachers were frequently uncertain about administrative directives, while the school principal faced difficulty navigating bureaucratic requirements. These conditions affected teacher motivation, community confidence, and the school's capacity to support student outcomes.

The S.A.L.A.S. framework was introduced as an intervention intended to encourage participatory, transparent, and accountable leadership. Grounded in transformational leadership and School-Based Management (SBM), it promotes joint decision-making, teacher committees, shared responsibility, and clearer accountability structures. The innovation is significant because it seeks to move teachers from passive implementation toward active involvement in school governance.

Although governance is widely recognized as a major concern in education systems (World Bank et al., 2021), and participatory school governance has been formally emphasized in the Philippines (Department of Education, 2022), less attention has been given to how leadership reforms shape teachers' perceptions, professional relationships, and sense of ownership in small or rural schools. International discussions also stress the need to reimagine school leadership as more inclusive and collaborative (UNESCO, 2024). Existing research has examined the lived experiences of school leaders and teachers (Almagro et al., 2025; Dube, 2025; Dio & Despi, 2025), yet context-specific evidence on governance innovation in resource-constrained elementary schools remains limited.

School governance should therefore be understood not only through formal structures and policies but also through the perspectives of teachers who enact those arrangements in everyday practice. Teachers can explain how participation, accountability, and collaboration operate in real settings because their daily work continually shapes decisions and implementation (Rodrigues et al., 2025). Research on collaborative decision-making likewise suggests that meaningful involvement can strengthen organizational commitment and problem-solving (Kyomugisha, 2025).

A qualitative approach was appropriate for examining S.A.L.A.S. because it enabled close attention to how teachers interpreted their responsibilities, relationships, and contribution to governance. Within an interpretive view of SBM, teachers are treated as co-governors rather than merely as policy implementers. The effectiveness of such reforms depends heavily on how teachers understand participation, accountability, and collaboration in their own context (Dio & Despi, 2025).

## **Research Objectives**

This study sought to examine how governance under S.A.L.A.S. affected teachers' experiences in a school in the Davao Region. It emphasized teachers' interpretation of

participatory leadership and accountability practices rather than measuring governance only as a formal structure. Specifically, the study aimed to:

- 1) investigate teachers' experiences of governance before and during the implementation of S.A.L.A.S.;
- 2) describe how participatory and accountability processes affected teachers' roles and commitment to school governance;
- 3) analyze the impact of leadership reforms on collaboration and teaching professionalism; and
- 4) interpret how governance reforms shaped leadership innovation in a rural elementary-school setting.

These objectives reflect a qualitative emphasis on meaning-making rather than predetermined outcomes (Almagro et al., 2025; Rodrigues et al., 2025).

### **Theoretical Lens**

The study was grounded in transformational leadership and School-Based Management. Transformational leadership explains how leaders develop a shared vision, involve followers in decision-making, build trust, and strengthen professional motivation. These processes are central to S.A.L.A.S. because the framework seeks to change both formal governance practices and the quality of relationships between teachers and school leaders.

SBM served as an interpretive framework in which decision-making authority is located closer to the school and teachers are treated as co-creators of governance. From this perspective, the effects of SBM depend on how participation, accountability, and collaboration are understood and practiced in a particular setting (Dio & Despi, 2025). Together, the two lenses supported interpretation of teachers' experiences under S.A.L.A.S.

### **Research Method**

The study employed a qualitative design to explore teachers' perceptions of leadership and governance through S.A.L.A.S. Three teachers holding different ranks participated in the study. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation, allowing the researcher to compare participants' accounts with observed governance practices.

The interview guide used open-ended questions aligned with the research objectives and designed to encourage reflection and meaning-making. The questions examined experiences before implementation, present participation in decision-making, changes in collaboration and accountability, effects on motivation and collegial relationships, and perceptions of S.A.L.A.S. as a leadership innovation.

**Table 1. Research Objectives and Interview Guide Questions**

| Research Objective                                                                                                       | Research Guide Question                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Investigate teachers' experiences of governance before and during the implementation of S.A.L.A.S.                    | How would you explain your experiences of school leadership and governance before the implementation of S.A.L.A.S.?                                                                                  |
| 2. Describe how participatory and accountability processes affected teachers' roles and commitment to school governance. | What is your understanding of your participation in decision-making and governance processes now?                                                                                                    |
| 3. Analyze the impact of leadership reforms on collaboration and teaching professionalism.                               | What differences do you observe in the ways teachers and school leaders collaborate, communicate, and hold one another accountable?                                                                  |
| 4. Interpret how governance reforms shaped leadership innovation in a rural elementary-school setting.                   | In what ways do the governance approaches in S.A.L.A.S. affect your motivation and relationships with colleagues? How would you define S.A.L.A.S. as an innovation in leadership and accountability? |

*Source: Interview guide developed by the authors.*

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021). Rigor and trustworthiness were supported through triangulation of interviews and observations, member checking, an audit trail, and reflexive journal writing. Credibility was strengthened by comparing data sources and confirming participants' accounts. Dependability was addressed by documenting the research process, confirmability by grounding interpretations in participants' accounts rather than researcher assumptions, and transferability by providing a detailed description of the setting, participants, and governance processes.

## **Results**

### **Theme 1: Institutionalized Participatory Governance**

All participants perceived S.A.L.A.S. as embedding participation in routine governance procedures. Participation was understood as more than attendance at meetings; it included involvement in planning, consultation, and decision-making. Teachers at different career stages emphasized discussion and shared responsibility as central features of the framework.

*"Being asked for my ideas and helping shape the final decision."*

### **Theme 2: Hierarchical Leadership and Limited Teacher Ownership Before S.A.L.A.S.**

Before S.A.L.A.S., leadership was described as centralized and directive. Decision-making authority rested mainly with administrators, while teachers' roles were largely confined to implementation. Participants associated this arrangement with limited

motivation and weak ownership, characterizing the earlier leadership culture as compliance-driven rather than participatory.

### **Theme 3: Transformative School Culture Anchored in Shared Accountability and Collaboration**

Participants viewed S.A.L.A.S. as fostering a more collaborative culture marked by transparency and mutual responsibility. Teachers described solving problems together rather than assigning blame. They also regarded the combination of experienced teachers' practical knowledge and younger teachers' ideas as a central element of the school's transformation.

### **Discussion**

The findings support a distributed view of leadership, in which leadership practice is shared across members of the organization rather than concentrated in one formal position (Spillane, 2006). Under S.A.L.A.S., teachers reported that governance responsibilities were distributed across ranks, consistent with Harris's (2014) argument that distributed leadership can strengthen participation and organizational capacity.

The contrast between experiences before and during S.A.L.A.S. also illustrates the limitations of top-down management. Centralized leadership was associated with disengagement and low ownership, a pattern consistent with research linking directive school management to reduced professional agency (Bush, 2019). Conversely, active involvement in governance appeared to build ownership and self-motivation, supporting participatory and collaborative governance theory (Ansell & Gash, 2008).

The emergence of collaboration, transparency, and shared accountability reflects a transformational leadership process in which trust, empowerment, and common values contribute to change (Leithwood et al., 2020). S.A.L.A.S. affected not only formal decision structures but also interpersonal relationships, allowing teachers to view themselves as contributors to governance rather than recipients of instructions. This relational change is important because sustainable governance reform depends on both procedural arrangements and professional culture.

The findings should be interpreted within the study's boundaries. The participants were three teachers from a single elementary school, so the results are context-specific and are not intended for statistical generalization. Nevertheless, the detailed qualitative account offers transferable insights for schools facing similar challenges in participation, coordination, and accountability.

### **Conclusion**

The study indicates that S.A.L.A.S. functioned as a governance reform by making teacher participation, shared leadership, and accountability more visible in school practice. Compared with the earlier centralized approach, the framework increased teachers' involvement in planning and decision-making, strengthened ownership, and supported a more collaborative professional culture.

In practice, school leaders and policymakers may use the participatory elements of S.A.L.A.S. to expand teacher involvement in planning, committee work, and problem-solving. Leadership development programs should therefore include facilitative,

transformational, and distributed leadership skills. The study also contributes contextual evidence to distributed leadership and participatory governance by applying these perspectives in a rural, resource-constrained education setting.

Future research should examine the framework over a longer period and across multiple schools. Larger and more diverse studies could explore its relationship with student performance, teacher retention, organizational effectiveness, and the sustainability of shared accountability practices.

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