
PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN MULTICULTURAL SCHOOLS

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Abstract: This study examines the leadership qualities and management practices that school principals use in culturally diverse educational settings. Its purpose is to map principals' perceptions of multicultural management, their preferred leadership orientations, their confidence, their inclusive practices and their exposure to relevant professional learning. A quantitative descriptive design was implemented through an online, twenty-six-item structured questionnaire. Purposive sampling produced forty-five valid responses from principals serving public, private, intercultural and bilingual schools. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences supported frequency distributions and percentages. The results show that 84.4 percent viewed multicultural management as a key element of their role to a great or some extent, while 77.8 percent felt confident or very confident in leading a multicultural school. Transformational leadership was selected by 37.8 percent and participative leadership by 26.7 percent, giving these collaborative orientations a combined share of 64.5 percent. Inclusive culture was commonly advanced through an integrated combination of policy implementation, daily modelling and student-led initiatives, selected by 64.4 percent. Multicultural families and community members participated always or often in decision making according to 66.7 percent of respondents. Dialogue and mediation together represented the preferred response to cultural conflict for 55.5 percent. Professional preparation presented a clear area for development, since 46.7 percent had received specialised training in multicultural education or diversity management and 64.5 percent reported staff training annually or occasionally. Additional profile data show that 55.6 percent held a master's degree, 40.0 percent had between eight and fifteen years of principal experience and 77.7 percent described their student body as highly or moderately diverse. The findings indicate a strong orientation toward collaborative and inclusive leadership alongside an opportunity to institutionalise sustained professional development. Educational authorities can translate this readiness into coherent training pathways, practical diversity management tools, dialogic conflict protocols and structures for family, community and student participation. Larger multi-site studies can extend the evidence through validated measures and comparative analysis.

Keywords: multicultural schools, school leadership, inclusive leadership, principals, diversity management

1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural, linguistic, religious and social diversity is a routine feature of contemporary school communities. This diversity enriches learning and also calls for leadership that converts equity and participation into daily organisational practice. Multicultural education frames difference as an educational resource, while current European policy places inclusive access, learner support and participation at the centre of school improvement (Banks, 1993; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2023; OECD, 2023). School principals therefore shape far more than administrative efficiency. They influence whether cultural identities become visible in curriculum, relationships, decision making and the wider ethos of the school.

Leadership in multi-ethnic settings requires cultural awareness, communication, empathy and the ability to align a diverse community around shared purposes (Blair, 2002; Leeman, 2003). It also depends on participatory structures that connect teachers, students, families and community organisations. Teachers translate policy into classroom practice, and their professional judgement becomes more coherent when leaders sustain dialogue, reflection and collective learning (Leeman & Ledoux, 2005). The principal's work consequently joins organisational direction with cultural mediation.

Culturally responsive school leadership offers a useful framework for this work. It emphasizes critical self-reflection, culturally responsive teacher development, inclusive school environments and authentic engagement with minoritized families and communities (Khalifa et al., 2016). Recent empirical and policy work further associates inclusive leadership with collaborative culture, professional development, community participation and positive diversity management (Gómez-Hurtado et al., 2021; Mansfield & Lambrinou, 2024). These dimensions make principals' perceived preparedness and actual management choices important subjects for descriptive inquiry.

The study aimed to describe how principals in multicultural educational settings understand their role and translate it into leadership practice. It examined three questions. The first concerned the salience of multicultural

management and principals' confidence. The second addressed preferred leadership styles, inclusive culture, stakeholder participation and conflict management. The third focused on the current pattern of specialised preparation and school-level staff training.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research employed a quantitative descriptive survey design. Purposive sampling targeted school principals with experience of culturally diverse student populations in public, private, intercultural and bilingual settings in Greece. The study retained 45 valid responses. Women represented 48.9 percent of the sample and men 40.0 percent, with the remaining participants selecting another gender category or privacy option. The largest age group was 36 to 45 years at 40.0 percent. A master's degree was held by 55.6 percent, and 40.0 percent reported 8 to 15 years of experience as a principal.

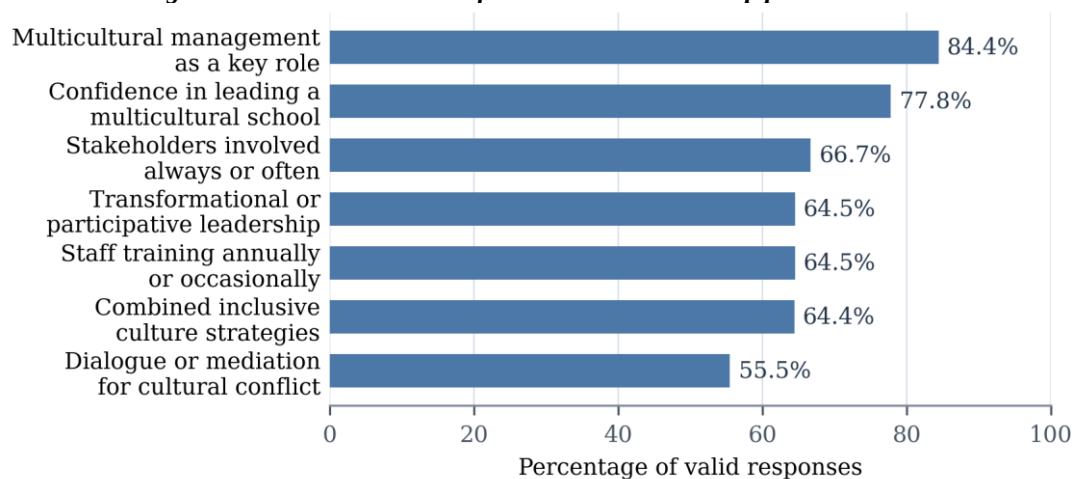
Data were collected through a structured questionnaire containing 26 closed-response items. The first six items recorded demographic and professional characteristics. The following 20 items addressed school diversity, perceived role, confidence, leadership style, training, inclusive policy and practice, stakeholder engagement, conflict management and professional development. The questionnaire was distributed online for two weeks, with a reminder after the first week. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained and responses were handled anonymously.

Analysis used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and centred on frequencies and valid percentages. The descriptive design supported a direct account of self-reported tendencies. Findings are reported for the 45-response core of the dataset, which also preserves a consistent denominator across the selected indicators.

3. RESULTS

The school contexts were strongly diverse. Highly diverse student populations were reported by 44.4 percent of principals and moderately diverse populations by 33.3 percent. Public schools represented 57.8 percent of the sample, private schools 22.2 percent, intercultural or bilingual schools 13.3 percent and other settings 6.7 percent. Specialised training in multicultural education or diversity management was reported by 46.7 percent. Multicultural management occupied a central place in respondents' professional identity. A share of 51.1 percent considered it a key part of their role to a great extent and 33.3 percent to some extent. Leadership confidence was also high, with 42.2 percent feeling very confident and 35.6 percent confident. Transformational leadership was the leading style at 37.8 percent, followed by participative leadership at 26.7 percent, instructional leadership at 20.0 percent and authoritative leadership at 15.6 percent.

Figure 1. Selected indicators of multicultural leadership practice



Source: my survey

Inclusive culture was most often supported through a combination of policy implementation, daily modelling and student-led initiatives, selected by 64.4 percent. A further 15.6 percent prioritised daily practice and modelling, 11.1 percent policy implementation and 8.9 percent student-led initiatives. Multicultural stakeholders participated always in decision making according to 40.0 percent of respondents and often according to 26.7 percent.

Guidance for diversity management drew on several sources. Personal experience and values ranked first at 28.9 percent, professional training accounted for 26.7 percent, national education policy for 24.4 percent and peer networking for 20.0 percent. Immediate dialogue was the preferred cultural conflict strategy for 31.1 percent, mediation and training for 24.4 percent, escalation-contingent intervention for 26.7 percent and administrative

action for 17.8 percent. Staff learning on cultural competence occurred annually or more frequently in 28.9 percent of settings and occasionally in 35.6 percent.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that principals largely recognise cultural diversity as a leadership responsibility and report substantial confidence in addressing it. This pattern accords with the shift from treating diversity as a peripheral programme toward embedding equity in school culture, curriculum and governance (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2023; OECD, 2023). It also supports earlier accounts that position the principal as a central interpreter of intercultural aims within the specific social context of the school (Blair, 2002; Leeman, 2003).

The combined preference for transformational and participative leadership is especially relevant. Both approaches mobilise shared purpose, professional agency and dialogue. These features correspond closely with culturally responsive leadership, which links leader self-awareness with teacher development, an inclusive environment and community advocacy (Khalifa et al., 2016). They also reflect the collaborative culture and broad participation observed in successful diversity management cases (Gómez-Hurtado et al., 2021). The strong use of combined inclusive strategies suggests that many respondents already understand inclusion as an organisational system rather than a single isolated activity.

Stakeholder participation represents another promising feature. Two thirds of respondents involved multicultural families and community members always or often. Such engagement creates channels through which leaders can understand cultural knowledge, language practices and community priorities. It also supports shared authority and student voice, themes that recent culturally responsive leadership research connects with sustainable equity-oriented change (Mansfield & Lambrinou, 2024). Dialogue and mediation were selected by more than half of the principals for cultural conflicts, indicating a relational base that can be strengthened through consistent protocols and restorative practices.

Professional learning emerges as the principal development priority. Fewer than half of respondents had received specialised multicultural preparation, and staff training occurred annually or occasionally in approximately two thirds of settings. Effective principal development combines knowledge, values, communication and practical decision making (Stronge et al., 2008). Contemporary Greek evidence also links leaders' knowledge, values and training with stronger orientations toward inclusive practice (Tsirantonaki & Vlachou, 2024; Vlachou & Tsirantonaki, 2023). A coherent professional pathway could therefore combine intercultural communication, bias reflection, multilingual family engagement, culturally responsive pedagogy, data-informed equity review and dialogic conflict management.

The purposive sample, its modest size and reliance on self-report position the findings as exploratory and context-sensitive. The descriptive analysis maps prevalence within the participating group and provides a foundation for stronger designs. Future studies can use larger stratified samples, validated multi-item scales, school-context variables and inferential analysis. Interviews, observations and documentary evidence can also connect reported leadership orientations with enacted practice and stakeholder experience.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The present study provides an exploratory account of the leadership and management practices adopted by principals working in culturally diverse schools. The findings reveal that most participants recognise multicultural management as an important part of their professional role and report a high level of confidence in leading schools characterised by linguistic, cultural and social diversity. This combination of awareness and perceived competence constitutes a valuable foundation for developing inclusive and equitable school environments.

Transformational and participative leadership emerged as the most frequently preferred approaches. These models encourage shared responsibility, open communication and the active participation of teachers, students, families and community representatives in school life. The strong preference for collaborative leadership indicates that principals increasingly understand inclusion as a collective process. Their use of combined strategies, including policy implementation, daily modelling of inclusive behaviour and student-led initiatives, further demonstrates an effort to integrate multicultural principles into both formal school structures and everyday educational practice.

Stakeholder participation and dialogue also appear to play a central role in the management of culturally diverse schools. Many principals regularly involve members of the school community in decision-making, while dialogue and mediation are commonly selected for addressing conflicts related to cultural differences. Such practices can strengthen trust, mutual respect and a sense of belonging among students and families from different backgrounds. They can also support a positive school climate in which diversity is approached as an educational resource.

At the same time, the findings highlight the importance of systematic professional development. Fewer than half of the participants reported receiving specialised training in multicultural education and leadership. Educational

authorities should therefore provide sustained training programmes, practical policy tools, professional learning communities and structured opportunities for principals to exchange effective practices. Schools would also benefit from formal mechanisms that strengthen the voice of students, parents and community organisations. Given the descriptive design and the purposive sample of 45 principals, the findings should be interpreted as an initial representation of leadership practices within the participating schools. Future research could include larger and more diverse samples, validated leadership scales and mixed methods combining questionnaires, interviews and school observations. Such research would deepen understanding of how leadership practices influence inclusion, stakeholder participation, conflict management and the educational experiences of culturally diverse students.

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