

# Exploring Strategic Leadership in the Adoption Journey: A Qualitative Study of the Five Stages of Diffusion of Innovation Theory in Education

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This qualitative phenomenological study explored the experiences of strategic leaders in acquiring and sharing knowledge about innovative practices during the initial stages of adoption. It focused on their experiences in persuading key stakeholders and decision-makers of the value and benefits of adopting innovative practices in education, and determining how they contribute to the decision-making process regarding the adoption of educational innovations. The study drew on the leaders' experiences in assessing risks, benefits, and organizational readiness, utilizing their experiences to guide and support effective execution, and assessing the long-term impacts and sustainability of adopted innovations in education, thereby influencing future decision-making and strategic planning. Using purposive sampling, data were gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with selected school principals. Seventeen themes emerged from the participants' insights on innovative practices as strategic leaders: strategic leadership for innovation adoption, dynamic learning ecosystems, proactive knowledge acquisition by strategic leaders, effective communication strategies for persuading stakeholders in educational innovative adoption, overcoming challenges in persuading stakeholders for educational innovation, mitigating resistance, building consensus for educational innovation, overcoming barriers in the decision-making process, informed risk assessment, collaborative action, fostering sustainability, collaborative problem-solving, multi-faceted evaluation, building a culture of continuous improvement, data-driven decision making, leading the change, intentionality for sustainability, and continuous learning journey for effective diffusion of innovation. The findings contribute to understanding the complexities involved in the adoption and diffusion of educational innovations, highlighting the critical role of strategic leaders in navigating this process.

Keywords: Strategic Leadership, adoption, diffusion of innovation theory, phenomenological, Philippines

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## Introduction

In this competitive world, public schools strive to provide quality education by establishing a high standard of learning that meets the present needs of society. Such requirements should help prepare the teachers and students to become responsive and functional members of the community (Malechwanz, Lei, & Wang, 2016). To resolve this, the role of the school leaders in an educational

setting is found to be very relevant to teachers' performance, student achievement, and school improvement (Gemedá, & Tynjala, 2015). Despite the efforts of school leaders to implement strategic changes, resistance to change remains a significant challenge in public education. This resistance, often exhibited by teachers and other stakeholders, can hinder progress and impede the successful implementation of new initiatives. Ineffective communication between school leaders and teachers further exacerbates this issue, leading to misunderstanding and a lack of buy-in for proposed changes (Spillane et al., 2015). Moreover, public schools usually have budget and resource limits, making it difficult to execute strategic educational changes (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2017). In addition, disparities in organizational culture between school administrators and teachers can cause conflict and obstruct efforts to align strategic goals (Deal & Peterson, 2019). This contradiction in school culture can stymie collaboration and group efforts to enact change. Furthermore, high turnover rates among school administrators and teachers can disrupt school continuity and stability, making long-term strategic initiatives difficult to sustain (Louis, et al., 2018). These problems are strongly linked to principals' competency and empowerment to undertake instructional leadership duties (Tsegaye, 2018). These difficulties illustrate the difficulty of implementing strategic leadership and change management projects in public education settings, emphasizing the importance of holistic methods to address these obstacles. In the topic of strategic leadership and change management in public education, researchers have investigated numerous implementation strategies for effectively adopting change initiatives within schools. These tactics include providing instructors with professional development opportunities, encouraging collaborative decision-making processes, and building a culture of trust and transparency among all stakeholders. Research has looked into communication techniques and channels that might help school leaders and teachers communicate effectively (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2020). Regular staff meetings, an open-door policy, and the use of technology for information dissemination are all possible strategies.

Additionally, researchers have examined innovative resource allocation models to help schools maximize the impact of limited resources (Leithwood & Louis, 2021). These models encompass strategic budgeting, resource-sharing arrangements with community partners, and leveraging external funding sources. Moreover, studies have explored strategies for aligning school culture with strategic goals (Deal & Peterson, 2016). These strategies may involve leadership development programs, team-building activities, and cultural sensitivity training for school leaders and staff. Lastly, research has underscored the importance of succession planning in ensuring continuity of leadership and stability within schools (Louis et al., 2018). These efforts include identifying and grooming future leaders, providing mentorship and support for aspiring leaders, and implementing leadership transition protocols. Overall, these studies contribute to ongoing endeavors aimed at addressing the challenges associated with strategic leadership and change management in public education settings. One notable research gap pertains to teacher empowerment in change processes.

While extensive literature exists on the role of school leaders in driving change, there remains a lack of understanding regarding how to empower teachers as change agents within the school community (Harris & Muijs, 2016). Additionally, there is limited research on the long-term sustainability of change initiatives in schools. While many studies focus on the initial stages of change implementation, further research is needed to assess the long-term impact of these initiatives on school improvement over time (Heck & Hallinger, 2020). Furthermore, there is a pressing need for research that explores how change strategies can be adapted to diverse contexts within schools. This includes urban, rural, low-income, and high-performing schools, each of which may require tailored approaches

to effectively implement change (Honig & Hatch, 2015). Additionally, while there is evidence linking effective leadership and change management to improved student outcomes, further research is needed to better understand the specific mechanisms through which these leadership practices influence student learning and achievement (Leithwood et al., 2012).

As educational systems undergo continuous reforms and adaptations to meet evolving needs and challenges, understanding how strategic leadership influences school head and teacher culture becomes increasingly important (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2017). Furthermore, it is believed that there is a pressing necessity for research in this area to address persistent challenges facing public education systems worldwide. These challenges include improving student outcomes, closing achievement gaps, and fostering positive school cultures conducive to teaching and learning (Fullan, 2014). Investigating the dynamics of strategic leadership and change management in public schools can offer insights and strategies to address these complex issues. The urgency of this research is underscored by the rapidly changing educational landscape and the increasing demands placed on schools and educational leaders. Public schools face constant pressure to adapt to new policies, technologies, and societal expectations while maintaining high standards of teaching and learning. Understanding how strategic leadership can effectively navigate these changes and shape positive teacher cultures is essential for ensuring the long-term success and sustainability of public education systems.

This study aimed to answer the following research objectives: to explore the experiences of the strategic leaders when acquiring and sharing knowledge about innovative practices during the initial stages of adoption; to determine experiences of strategic leaders in persuading key stakeholders and decision-makers of the value and benefits of adopting innovative practices in education; investigate the contribution of the strategic leaders to the decision-making process regarding the adoption of educational innovations, drawing on their experiences in assessing risks, benefits, and organizational readiness; analyze how strategic leaders utilize their experiences to guide and support effective execution during the implementation phase of educational innovations; examine how strategic leaders assess the long-term impacts and confirm the sustainability of adopted innovations in education, influencing future decision-making and strategic planning; and describe their experiences that are worth sharing.

Furthermore, this research was seen through the lens of the Diffusion of Innovation Theory in Education of Rogers (1993). The theory explains how a new thought progresses via stages of adoption by various people who participate in or start adopting the new idea. This theory is relevant to the research because it sheds light on how new ideas, technology, or practices propagate and are embraced in a social system, including educational settings. It also provides educators with tools for promoting the adoption and successful implementation of innovative approaches in education, ultimately contributing to better teaching and learning outcomes.

## **Methods**

This qualitative research, following Creswell (2013), aimed to construct a narrative description of social phenomena, employing techniques such as observations, interviews, and document reviews to gather comprehensive data (Mack et al., 2005). Utilizing a phenomenological approach (Giorgi et al., 2017), the study investigated school principals' experiences with implementing new educational

techniques. Purposive sampling was employed, selecting principals with over three years of experience (Hull, 2012), ensuring depth of insight. The research aimed to understand participants' perspectives, reducing power dynamics between researcher and participants and providing valuable insights beyond the local context (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009)

Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability are essential components in assuring the trustworthiness of qualitative phenomenological studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was addressed by confirming participant qualifications and assuring the reliability of data sources. Dependability, or the consistency and reproducibility of outcomes, was obtained by outlining study protocols for future replication. Techniques such as audit trails and peer review improved confirmability, which is the ability to demonstrate that interpretations are supported by evidence. Transferability, the degree to which findings may be applied to multiple situations, was ensured by clearly describing study boundaries and making data available for comparison (Stake, 2000).

The researcher used the Collaizi's framework in thematic analysis. It consists of seven fundamental processes that help researchers through the systematic study of qualitative data. To get a full knowledge, researchers first immerse themselves in the data, thoroughly familiarizing themselves by reading and re-reading. Following that, they start developing first codes by labeling data segments that represent important concepts or patterns. These codes are then sorted and structured to aid in the discovery of prospective themes that capture reoccurring concepts or phenomena in the data. Researchers evaluate and define these themes via a review and refinement process to ensure they appropriately convey the substance of the data. Once defined, each theme is given a name and a clear explanation to emphasize its significance and connection to the research topic. The final step is to create a comprehensive report that discusses the highlighted themes and is supported by relevant data snippets. This report presents a nuanced examination of the qualitative data, offering insights and interpretations that add to the larger study question. Collaizi's approach stresses the systematic and iterative character of thematic analysis, giving researchers a solid framework for examining and comprehending complicated qualitative data.

During the investigation, the researcher adhered to certain ethical norms. Following the proposal, the researcher submitted the manuscript for Chapters 1 through 3 to the Research Ethics Committee for review and validation that the researcher's research methodology met the requirements set by the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (PHREB). Before conducting the study, the researcher followed the research guidelines imposed by the committee. After compiling all of the normal requirements, the researcher addressed a letter to the Davao Occidental division office, requesting permission to perform the study. When the letter was approved, the researcher visited all public schools to conduct the survey. Consent forms were provided to participants for inspection and signature if they agreed to the study's terms and conditions. The consent forms said that participation is entirely voluntary and that there are no hazards if individuals choose not to participate. They could also withdraw or refuse to respond to items from the tool. The researcher promised the participants that no information gathered would be disclosed to anyone unless prior approval was obtained from the authorities.

## **Results**

## **Research Question 1. What are the experiences of strategic leaders when acquiring and sharing knowledge about innovative practices during the initial stages of adoption?**

### Theme 1: Strategic Leadership for Innovation Adoption

The central theme of proactive and purposeful leadership encapsulates the essence of strategic leadership for innovation adoption in education. Strategic leaders play a pivotal role in driving the adoption journey of innovative practices, emphasizing continuous learning, collaboration, and effective dissemination of knowledge within educational institutions. As participant 1 mentioned:

*“My experience as a strategic leader has taught me the importance of actively seeking and acquiring new knowledge about innovative practices, Ma'am. It's crucial for the growth of our school. As a strategic leader, I continuously learn through attending conferences, and seminars, and being a member of research groups in our district, which has enabled me to gain valuable insights.” -IDI-P1-L16-21*

Through active engagement in acquiring new knowledge, forming collaborative teams, gathering feedback, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement, strategic leaders navigate challenges and guide their institutions toward successful innovation adoption. Their commitment to professional development, along with their ability to overcome resistance and align innovations with institutional needs, underscores the importance of strategic leadership in shaping the future of education through the integration of innovative practices.

### Theme 2: Dynamic Learning Ecosystems

The qualitative analysis of participants' responses unveils a central theme: "Strategic Leadership for Dynamic Learning Ecosystems." This theme underscores the proactive and multifaceted role of strategic leaders in cultivating dynamic learning environments within educational institutions. As Participant 2 shared:

*“As a leader or school head, it's essential not to remain stagnant with old learnings. Continuous learning is necessary, especially now with various programs from the Department of Education. We must actively seek learning opportunities, whether through reading, social media platforms like Facebook, or attending seminars and workshops.” -IDI-P2-L23-27*

Participants emphasize the strategic leaders' commitment to continuous learning through various avenues such as conferences, seminars, and social media platforms, highlighting their proactive stance in acquiring knowledge about innovative practices. Moreover, strategic leaders play a pivotal role in identifying the needs of their institutions and collaborating with teachers or teams to implement innovations effectively. They prioritize feedback integration from stakeholders and engage in reflective practices to drive continuous improvement. Utilizing diverse learning platforms, strategic leaders ensure they stay informed about trends and best practices, facilitating strategic planning for the successful implementation of new initiatives. Overall, this theme highlights the essential role of strategic leadership in fostering dynamic learning ecosystems conducive to innovation and growth in education.

### Theme 3: Proactive Knowledge Acquisition by Strategic Leaders

Strategic leaders demonstrate proactive knowledge acquisition through various methods, including formal learning opportunities like pursuing higher degrees and attending seminars, as well as informal strategies such as online research, colleague collaboration, and self-directed exploration. As Participant 4 in FGD averred:

*“INSET training for new teachers and expert-led training sessions are essential. We hold LAC sessions twice a month and also organize seminars or trainings.” -FGD-P4-L61-63*

These leaders are motivated by a desire to identify and implement impactful innovations, stay current on educational trends, and enhance their professional development. However, challenges like time constraints, information overload, and evaluating online credibility can hinder their efforts. Ultimately, proactive knowledge acquisition empowers strategic leaders to confidently make informed decisions, select suitable practices, and effectively guide staff through the adoption of beneficial innovations.

### **Research Question 2. What are the experiences of strategic leaders in persuading key stakeholders and decision-makers of the value and benefits of adopting innovative practices in education?**

#### Theme 1: Effective Communication Strategies for Persuading Stakeholders in Educational Innovation Adoption

The analysis reveals a central theme which is Effective communication is the linchpin for strategic leaders to successfully persuade stakeholders about adopting educational innovations. As Participant 2 discussed:

*“When persuading them, ma'am, I focus on building trust by emphasizing the benefits of the projects. So far, they usually agree with me. My strategy involves holding meetings with them to ensure they experience firsthand the implementation of the project and understand its significance.” -IDI-P2-L79-82*

This communication needs to be transparent, laying bare the innovation's purpose and potential benefits. Building trust is also crucial, achieved through open forums where stakeholders can ask questions and express concerns. Strategic leaders further strengthen their case by ensuring the innovation aligns with the school's mission and demonstrably improves student outcomes. Finally, effective communication is a two-way street. Leaders need to be receptive to stakeholder feedback and demonstrate a willingness to adjust the innovation based on these concerns. Proactive communication, through open forums or meetings initiated by the leader, fosters a collaborative environment where stakeholders feel heard and valued. By employing these multifaceted communication strategies,

strategic leaders can navigate the complexities of persuading stakeholders and ultimately achieve buy-in for educational innovations.

## Theme 2: Overcoming Challenges in Persuading Stakeholders for Educational Innovation

Analyzing responses from the FGD reveals a central theme which is overcoming challenges in persuading stakeholders for educational innovation. Participants encountered resistance, particularly from veteran educators, but emphasized clear communication and project goal alignment as key strategies. This theme captures the initial reluctance of some stakeholders, particularly older teachers, to adopt new practices. It highlights the perceived disruption innovation can bring to established routines. As Participant 1 disclosed:

*“Yes, ma'am, I've experienced that during the persuasion process. The most challenging part is when their opposing views are very strong. What I do is listen to their concerns and points of view, and I encourage open dialogue to discuss the issues or problems properly.” -FGD-P1-L108-11*

Collaboration and compromise were also highlighted, with leaders finding solutions through meetings and discussions to address concerns and resource constraints, like budget limitations. Even difficult stakeholders were navigated by providing platforms for dissent and exploring alternative approaches. This data suggests that successful leaders not only champion innovation but also possess strong communication and collaboration skills to navigate the complexities of stakeholder persuasion.

## Theme 3: Mitigating Resistance

This theme emphasizes the challenges strategic leaders face during persuasion for educational innovation. Leaders encountered resistance in various forms, including strong opposing views, stakeholder concerns about budget limitations and implementation details, and even stubbornness. As Participant 5 mentioned:

*“Indeed, some stakeholders can be difficult to persuade, especially if they are adamant and involve others in their dissent. In such cases, I give them the opportunity to voice their concerns during meetings or presentations to clarify their preferences. Additionally, when faced with financial challenges, we occasionally solicit support from barangay officials or stakeholders.” -IDI-P5-L125-130*

However, participants employed diverse communication strategies to overcome these hurdles. They fostered open dialogue, actively listened to concerns, maintained professionalism, and focused on solution-oriented discussions. Building consensus involves leveraging data and evidence to support the innovation's value. Collaboration and stakeholder engagement played a role, with participants addressing budgetary concerns through negotiation or joint planning. Finally, transparency and upfront planning, including laying out the entire plan with a focus on potential benefits and resource allocation,

minimized resistance from the outset. This analysis explores how strategic leaders navigated these challenges to secure stakeholder buy-in for educational innovation adoption.

**Research Question 3. How do strategic leaders contribute to the decision-making process regarding the adoption of educational innovations, drawing on their experiences in assessing risks, benefits, and organizational readiness?**

**Theme 1. Building Consensus for Educational Innovation**

This qualitative research explores strategic leadership in the adoption journey of educational innovations. The analysis reveals a core theme which is Building Consensus for Educational Innovation. Participants emphasized collaboration with stakeholders, open communication, and transparent decision-making. As Participant 4 explained:

*“There are sometimes conflicting views on curriculum alignment, ma'am, because during planning, everything seems okay, but during decision-making, stakeholders may have differing opinions on whether the innovation aligns with standards. So, I collaborate with experts and other educators to ensure alignment and identify enhancements. Once it's sorted out, I discuss it with stakeholders, teachers, and parents involved in the innovation.” -FGD-P4-L188-193*

Leaders play a crucial role in ensuring innovation aligns with school goals and student needs while navigating challenges like resource allocation and conflicting viewpoints. This collaborative and risk-aware approach fosters consensus among stakeholders, ultimately leading to a smoother adoption process for educational innovations.

**Theme 2. Overcoming Barriers in the Decision-Making Process**

The qualitative research data on strategic leadership in educational innovation adoption reveals a central theme which is Overcoming Barriers in the Decision-Making Process. Leaders grapple with uncertainties, conflicting viewpoints (curriculum, budget), and resource allocation challenges. As Participant 5 explained:

*“Yes, ma'am, usually they just ask if it's sure to be long-term because they don't want to waste budget and efforts from teachers and children. In those cases, I focus on building trust and continue engaging with them.” -FGD-P5-L195-197*

However, effective strategies emerge: communication, transparency, collaboration with experts, and building trust with stakeholders all contribute to overcoming these barriers and guiding the successful adoption of educational innovations.

### Theme 3. Informed Risk Assessment

This qualitative research investigates how strategic leadership fosters a balanced approach to educational innovation adoption. The core focus lies in how leaders navigate the complexities of informed risk assessment. This includes evaluating potential benefits alongside potential risks and resource needs. As Participant 5 mentioned:

*“Occasionally, team members may express concerns about the viability or potential overwhelm of proposed innovations. In such cases, I clarify the long-term plans and address their concerns transparently. By fostering open communication and emphasizing the common goal of benefiting the students, we can navigate conflicts and reach consensus in decision-making.” -IDI-P5-L194-198*

However, student-centered outcomes remain paramount. The analysis explores how leaders prioritize student learning outcomes while engaging diverse stakeholders (teachers, parents, students) throughout the decision-making process. Additionally, the research considers the importance of sustainability when adopting innovations, ensuring their long-term viability and positive impact on student learning.

### **Research Question 4. During the implementation phase of educational innovations, how do strategic leaders utilize their experiences to guide and support effective execution?**

#### Theme 1: Collaborative Action

The data analysis suggests a central theme which is transforming experience into Collaborative Action in strategic leadership for effective implementation of educational innovations. Strategic leaders leverage past experiences, both positive and negative, to inform their approach. Participant 3 shared:

*“Proper collaboration is indeed key, ma'am. You shouldn't just rely on your fellow teachers; if possible, meet with different groups or schools to see if this innovation is feasible. From my experience, before introducing and implementing new innovations in the school, you must ensure it fits within the school's budget, stakeholders' support, teachers' willingness to adjust, and whether it has a long-term positive impact. Once it meets all these standards, then proceed with the innovation implementation.” -FGD-P3-L227-233*

This experience fuels their strategic decision-making, particularly around fostering collaboration with stakeholders like teachers, parents, and other school heads. Through open communication and shared goals, collaboration becomes the key action driven by strategic leadership. Ultimately, the aim is to achieve effective implementation of educational innovations by harnessing the collective knowledge and resources of the school community.

## Theme 2: Fostering Sustainability

Fostering sustainability is the core function of strategic leadership during educational innovation implementation. Leaders navigate unforeseen challenges by adapting to policy shifts, managing resources, and ensuring smooth transitions during staff turnover. Participant 2 explained:

*“Sometimes, ma'am, especially when resources are lacking, like funds or relevant training opportunities, which aren't always available. Strategic planning is essential to manage resources and plan for the long-term sustainability of the innovation.”*

-FGD2-P2-L255-258

Further, they also maintain stakeholder engagement through motivational strategies and open communication, addressing any resistance from teachers. This focus on adaptability, stakeholder engagement, and project continuity creates a supportive environment where educational innovation can not only be implemented effectively but also endure for the long term.

## Theme 3: Collaborative Problem-solving

Collaborative problem-solving emerged as the central theme for successful educational innovation implementation. Strategic leaders fostered this by leveraging past experiences to anticipate challenges and guide solutions. As Participant 3 disclosed:

*“There's also the budget, ma'am. Initially, we thought only this much budget was needed, but during implementation, it was insufficient. So, ma'am, we also solicit and adjust the MOOE budget to accomplish the innovation.”* IDI-P3-L276-278

They demonstrated adaptability by adjusting plans based on stakeholder concerns (like budget limitations or declining participation) and resource availability. Furthermore, leaders fostered a sense of shared ownership among stakeholders by recognizing efforts, maintaining open communication, and adapting implementation strategies to address concerns and maintain momentum for the innovation's continued success.

**Research Question 5. Based on their experiences, how do strategic leaders assess the long-term impacts and confirm the sustainability of adopted innovations in education, influencing future decision-making and strategic planning?**

### Theme 1: Multi-faceted evaluation

Strategic leaders in education rely on a multi-faceted evaluation approach to ensure the long-term success of adopted innovations. This involves continuous monitoring of student outcomes, program effectiveness, and stakeholder feedback. As Participant 5 elaborated:

*“Project assessment requires regular monitoring and reviewing of students' academic performance, conducting simple assessments to identify strengths and weaknesses, and determining areas for enhancement or change. When evaluating for long-term impact on students and the school, we ensure alignment with our school's mission and goals, collaborate with experts and stakeholders, and prioritize teacher training to keep them well-equipped. Through this approach, the long-term effects on the students become clear.” -IDI-P5-L335-341*

Leaders then use these insights for data-driven decision-making, which may include adjustments to teaching practices, resource allocation, or professional development programs. Assessment strategies such as standardized tests, student work analysis, and stakeholder surveys all contribute to a comprehensive evaluation process, ultimately fostering sustainable educational innovation.

### Theme 2: Building a Culture of Continuous Improvement

Building a Culture of Continuous Improvement for Educational Innovation thrives on open communication throughout the innovation process. Leaders who foster this environment ensure long-term sustainability by establishing a clear vision for innovation, one that aligns with the school's goals and prioritizes equity and inclusion. As Participant 5 willingly shared:

*“Have a clear vision and goals, ma'am, and communicate and take responsibility for all your actions. Regardless of challenges during implementation, don't abandon your team; stay committed and be willing to adapt to changes for the success of the innovation and projects.” -FGD-P5-L425-428*

Sharing best practices further strengthens this culture by enhancing strategic capabilities and guiding future innovation efforts, ultimately leading to lasting positive impacts on student learning.

### Theme 3: Data-driven decision making

The main theme that emerges from this data is data-driven decision-making as the cornerstone for successful educational innovation adoption. This theme is supported by several sub-themes that highlight the importance of using data throughout the process. Participant 4 discussed:

*“Collaborate, communicate, and listen to those around you, ma'am. Don't be ashamed to show your softer or firmer side, depending on the situation during planning and implementing innovations. Recognize your colleagues when innovations or programs succeed, as it boosts morale and encourages them. Be transparent always to build trust.”*  
FGD-P4-L427-433

Data-driven evaluation through student engagement metrics, learning outcomes, and feedback allows leaders to effectively measure the impact of the innovation. Monitoring progress with tools like M&E and seeking feedback from stakeholders provides valuable insights to inform adjustments. By empowering stakeholders through clear communication and collaboration, leaders can leverage everyone's expertise to ensure successful implementation and continuous improvement.

### **Research Question 6. What experiences of strategic leaders are worth sharing?**

#### Theme 1: Leading the Change

This research on strategic leadership in educational innovation adoption revealed several interconnected themes that contribute to successful change. These include setting a clear vision and goals to provide direction, fostering effective communication to keep everyone aligned, and embracing change management to navigate challenges. As Participant 2 elaborated:

*“Indeed, having a clear vision, communicating effectively with people, being willing to adapt to changes, and accepting advice during decision-making are essential aspects, in my opinion.”* -IDI-P2-L387-389

Establishing a well-defined direction provides focus and motivates the team throughout the adoption process. Strategic leaders also leverage collaborative leadership, empowering teams and fostering open communication. Finally, stakeholder engagement, through building strong relationships and seeking feedback, ensures a comprehensive approach for successful innovation adoption.

#### Theme 2: Intentionality for Sustainability

Intentionality for Sustainability goes beyond simply adopting an innovation. It requires strategic planning with contingency plans to address challenges. Leaders must intentionally collect data to track progress and measure impact, fostering a culture of innovation that encourages continuous improvement. As Participant 5 mentioned:

*“If any problems arise during implementation, we shouldn't give up on the innovation right away, ma'am. I stand firm and commit to seeing it*

*through because the time spent planning and making decisions involves many people. We should be willing to adapt to changes and go with the flow because the ultimate goal is the success of the children and the school.” -FGD-P5-L394-398*

Leaders strategically plan for potential challenges and have contingency plans in place. Also, Implementation strategies are designed with long-term sustainability in mind. Building external partnerships with organizations that offer resources and expertise strengthens the innovation's long-term viability. Finally, intentional advocacy and communication secure buy-in from stakeholders and ensure long-term funding for the innovation's success.

### Theme 3: Continuous Learning Journey for Effective Diffusion of Innovation

This qualitative study, exploring strategic leadership through the lens of the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, reveals a central theme: Continuous Learning Journey for Effective Diffusion of Innovation. Leaders themselves embark on a lifelong learning journey, actively seeking knowledge and growth to understand evolving educational trends. Participant 4 disclosed:

*“Never stop asking for feedback from your team, ma'am, as it's crucial for improving your leadership skills and decision-making. Establishing strong relationships with stakeholders is also important because they are your allies. Don't ever stop schooling, ma'am, as continuous learning is essential for intellectual and professional growth, a necessity for a future leader. Always listen to the people around you, but don't rely solely on their opinions as it can lead to downfall. Trust yourself.” -IDI-P4-L427-433*

It emphasized the importance of continuous learning for leaders in education. This includes staying updated on trends, pursuing formal education, and learning from feedback. They cultivate adaptability, fostering strong relationships with teachers, stakeholders, and learners. This collaborative approach, coupled with continuous learning and utilizing feedback, allows them to lead by example. Through ongoing reflection, adaptation, and trust-building, strategic leaders navigate uncertainty and ensure the successful diffusion of innovation, ultimately contributing to the betterment of their schools and students.

## Discussions

### Experiences of Strategic Leaders when Acquiring and Sharing Knowledge about Innovative Practices During the Initial Stages of Adoption

The current status of education has reached a crisis point. Reform proposals emphasize the need for restructuring schools and empowering educators. This requires that all practitioners assume leadership roles in making decisions relating to educational activities.

The result of the study confirms the article by Onjoro, Arogo, and Embeywa (2015) which resonates strongly with the essence of strategic leadership for innovation adoption. The article underscores the pivotal role of leadership, motivation, and mentoring in enhancing the efficiency of classroom teachers and workers within educational institutions.

Motivation and mentoring are two strategic leadership elements that are critical for increasing efficiency and promoting creativity in educational environments. Leaders that actively encourage their teams to accept innovative methods and build a culture of continuous learning demonstrate the proactive and purposeful leadership indicated in the paragraph. Institutions that employ such leadership techniques may negotiate hurdles, achieve successful innovation uptake, and, ultimately, positively affect the future of education (Hambrick & Wowack, 2021).

Additionally, it was found out that Foss, Schmidt, and Teece's (2023) study on ecosystem leadership closely aligns with the theme of "Strategic Leadership for Dynamic Learning Ecosystems". They explored how leaders navigate complex environments, fostering collaboration and adaptation. It emphasizes the dynamic nature of ecosystems, requiring leaders to continuously adapt and learn. This resonates with the proactive stance of strategic leaders in acquiring knowledge and staying informed about innovative practices.

### **Experiences of Strategic Leaders in Persuading Key Stakeholders and Decision-Makers of the Value and Benefits of Adopting Innovative Practices in Education**

One of the themes emerged is the effective communication strategies employed by the leader. Researches clearly demonstrate that leader communication strategies are critical in building and maintaining the employee commitment required by the preceding scenarios (Goleman, 2018; Goleman, 2020). To add, leadership and communication are inextricably linked. Research shows that organizational leaders communicate 70-80% of the time (Wajcman & Rose, 2021). Furthermore, Zorlu and Korkmaz (2021) stated that organizational structures have become more complex as a result of global, social, economic, and technological developments, and with the increasing need for division of labor, all employees in organizations must establish close relationships with one another and carry out their activities in harmony. In this context, communication inside the educational institution has become critical for the institution's success in achieving its goals. Aas and Brandmo (2016) stated that leadership is recognized as the most important organizational trait for efficiently managing the organization's communication process. Leadership and leaders play an essential role in the efficient communication process of businesses. Leaders play an important role in the efficient management of organizational communication because of their reputation as great communicators, among other qualities.

School reform cannot be achieved against the will of the teachers, but only with their consent. This sentiment is shared by all past and present school reformers, but what happens when teachers and

other stakeholders oppose reform, especially when the reform does not address external factors such as a school system's structure or administration ((Terhart, 2013). This is the dilemma with all organizational change theories and techniques in institutions: bosses desire change, but people who will have to do the work lower down do not want change - and the change they want does not come from their bosses (Corbo et al., 2016). Furthermore, Fuad et al. (2020) stated that the education system in the twenty-first century has emphasized innovation as a strategy for reforming the existing educational system. The necessity for curriculum quality improvement, as well as the desire to educate students with 21st-century competency abilities, have made innovation the central focus of the educational context. As a result, educational cultures that stimulate innovation should be heavily promoted. However, research on innovation cultures in educational settings is relatively limited. Researchers have also struggled to agree on universally recognized characteristics of innovation cultures in educational contexts.

### **Contribution of Strategic Leaders to the Decision-Making Process Regarding the Adoption of Educational Innovations, Drawing on their Experiences in Assessing Risks, Benefits, and Organizational Readiness**

Another theme is educational innovation. This invention is more than a passing fad; it is essential for educational institutions. Public schools have adapted to society's changing needs, transmitted important skills to pupils, and ensured education's long-term relevance and vibrancy in an ever-changing global environment. To increase their students' performance and achievement, school administrators must embrace educational innovation and acknowledge that it is both voluntary and a responsibility (Stasewitsch et al., 2020). Because education is so important, various educational reform initiatives have facilitated change processes in public education in order to increase teaching quality and promote change through educational innovations. Innovative projects or programs try to change attitudes, ideas, cultures, or teaching methods (Kauffeld et al., 2019; Benz-Gydat et al., 2021; Civis et al., 2019; Fullan, 2010; Jütte et al., 2017). Research has concentrated on improving teaching at many levels (Hasanefendic et al., 2017) and promoting student learning (Kaufeld et al., 2019, Feixas et al., 2018).

While significant financial and human resources have been deployed to develop and implement educational innovations (Kaufeld & Othmer, 2019; Benz-Gydat et al., 2021; Hannan et al., Jütte et al., 2017), some scholars have described educational innovations as difficult, technically, emotionally demanding, and complex (Towndrow et al., 2010). As a result, the question arises of whether educational innovations can lead to changes in higher education teaching.

Teachers have been regarded as the issue in education' for the last three decades (Gunter, 2003). However, evolving literatures appear to support the critical role of teachers in educational reforms. Muijs and Reynolds (2011) believed that instructors and teaching matter. Similarly, Harris and Muijs (2006) reported that higher levels of commitment and relationship among teachers resulted in a more substantial effect.

Decision-making/problem-solving groups are frequently formed with purposely varied memberships to increase the possibility that multiple organizational units or stakeholders would be represented in the decision-making or problem-solving process and outcomes (Tarraya, 2023). In the

Philippines, SBM-accredited schools provide opportunities for professional growth and development, with principals participating in leadership training and teachers participating in collaborative learning communities. Educators collaborate with parents and community members to develop educational goals and policies, creating a sense of common ownership and shared responsibility for school improvement. This collaborative approach helps to cultivate a healthy and inclusive school culture that values trust, collaboration, and continual development.

Furthermore, SBM accredited schools allow schools to respond flexibly and adaptively to changing educational environments and difficulties, fostering resilience and responsiveness in the face of shifting priorities and expectations. Overall, SBM enables school administrators and teachers to effectively lead by promoting creativity, cooperation, and continual improvement in educational practices and outcomes (Navarro et al., 2024). As school leaders improve their ability to make critical decisions, they must also prepare to confront the consequences of their actions, which is the next important skill - accountability. A school administrator must assume responsibility for their actions. Facing abrupt changes and inconsistencies is unavoidable during any school principal's tenure, but recovering quickly and continuing to lead a task amid a crisis requires resilience. School administrators must be resilient in persuading children, family, staff, and communities to follow safety protocols (Wharton-Beck et al., 2024).

Informed risk assessment also emerged as theme from the responses. School administrators should be prepared to respond to and recover from educational crises. When dealing with an educational crisis, crisis management measures are essential. According to Coccia (2020), during a chaotic sequence of events, leadership becomes most critical, visible, and desired, allowing an organization's leaders to make problem-solving decisions that benefit all stakeholders. As a result, during an educational crisis, school administrator leadership is typically critical. According to Smith and Riley (2012), leadership is crucial in establishing certainty, instilling optimism, and ensuring open, honest communication.

### **The Implementation Phase of Educational Innovations, Utilization of Experiences to Guide and Support Effective Execution**

Schools operate in demanding and rapidly changing environments. Therefore, school principals and teachers are expected to continuously innovate their school practices to maintain their educational quality (Serdyukov, 2017). In his theoretical work, Fullan (2016) argued that shared responsibility is essential for innovations to succeed. This sharing of responsibility in turn requires work on innovations to be collaborative (Hill et al., 2014), an approach that has been described as collaborative innovation in recent organizational literature (Bekkers & Noordegraaf, 2016; Sørensen & Torfing, 2016). School principals have to decide and direct, and assume overall responsibility for their school's educational quality and the establishment of essential innovation conditions (Fullan, 2016; Wildy & Loudon, 2000).

The global concern about environmental care, social awareness and sustainability has increasingly caught the attention of practitioners and researchers (Gianni et al., 2017, Oskarsson & Malmberg, 2005). In light of the current business situation, sustainable development emerged as a new competitive advantage, including sustainable initiatives and a wider perspective of profitability, that involves environmental and social values (Sroufe, 2017). The inclusion of these parameters within the

strategic management of organizations poses the basis for sustainability (Elkington, 1997). To this end, companies are required to innovate, change their organizational structure and integrate their strategies to overcome barriers and become more sustainability-oriented (Kennedy et al., 2020, Lozano et al., 2016). To meet the challenge of innovating effectively and maximizing the value of sustainability demands, it is necessary to have well-structured management systems (MSs) (Wagner & Andreas, 2012).

The importance of collaborative problem solving (CPS) is not unique to the 21st century, but its inclusion in recent conceptualizations of essential 21st century skills is well-founded (National Research Council, 2011). Many contemporary problems require or benefit from teams of individuals who have different expertise, backgrounds, and perspectives. Individuals must have CPS skills that are adaptive and can generalize to new tasks and environments, given the rapid rate technology advances and is adopted in settings like interdisciplinary research, the workforce, and the broader community (Graesser, et al. , 2018).

### **Assessing Long-Term Impacts and Confirm the Sustainability of Adopted Innovations in Education, Influencing Future Decision-Making and Strategic Planning**

In the wake of the No Child Left Behind legislation (NCLB, 2001), data-driven decision making has become a central focus of education policy and practice. Schools seek to meet the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements of NCLB face tremendous pressure to monitor carefully student performance on the high-stakes assessments that determine their success or failure. The complexity of disaggregating, analyzing, and reporting these testing data has increasingly led administrators to embrace commercial and home-grown data-driven decision making tools and support systems to help track and drive improvement in student performance. Recent research conducted at the Education Development Center's Center for Children and Technology (EDC/CCT) has found that school administrators use high stakes test data to understand general patterns of performance, identifying class-, grade-, and school-wide strengths and weaknesses so that they can allocate resources and plan professional development and other kinds of targeted intervention activities (e.g., after school remediation, summer school attendance, etc.).

### **Experiences of Strategic Leaders that are worth sharing**

Effective strategic leadership is regarded as a critical component of the success of any firm working in the ever-changing and complex environment of the twenty-first century. In the setting of information uncertainty and resource constraint, strategic leadership is required to tackle the realities of environmental turbulence and the constant need for appropriate organizational transformation in order to accomplish performance goals (Jaleha & Machuki, 2018).

According to Kezar (2021), when it comes to organizational reform, the values and perceptions of the organizational participants should be investigated. In support, Cao et al., (2020) argue that

organizational change is a phenomenon characterized by subjectivity rather than objectivity. Despite the lack of agreement in definitions, Park and Kim (2015) see change as a complex process of transforming the entire organization by focusing on the critical and interactive nature of the organizational components.

The empirical evidence on the relationship between organizational change and performance is inconclusive (Le & Kroll, 2017). In some studies, organizational change enhances performance (Zajac & Kraatz, 2013), while in others, identical changes reduce performance (Singh et al., 2016). Other investigations revealed no or mixed relationships (Zajac & Kraatz, 2013). Strategic is an organizational variable that is considered significant in influencing how organizational change improves performance leadership (Zhang & Rajagopalan, 2019). Scholars have also suggested that the specific ways in which strategic leadership influences organizational change and performance are still being explored (Jansen et al., 2019).

### **Implication and Future Directions**

The findings of this research underscore the importance of integrating strategic leadership principles with the Diffusion of Innovation Theory in addressing the experiences, challenges of adopting innovations in education

The following recommendations are proposed by the researchers based on the findings of the study:

***The Department of Education.*** They should prioritize programs and trainings focused on utilizing the Diffusion of Innovation theory to innovate school programs. Provide practical guidance on how to effectively introduce and integrate new ideas, practices, and technologies into educational settings, ultimately fostering a culture of innovation and continuous improvement across schools.

***Schools Division.*** They should facilitate localized professional development programs. These programs should address the specific needs and challenges of each school community, fostering a culture of ongoing growth and learning among school leaders and teachers.

***School Heads.*** They should champion a culture of data-informed decision-making within their schools. This involves providing support for data literacy training, fostering open communication, and leading by example in utilizing data to guide school improvement efforts.

***Stakeholders.*** They should be involved in facilitating communication and decision-making, continuous giving of feedback and foster a culture of shared responsibility for driving positive change in education.

***Learners.*** They should be involved in decision-making processes, soliciting their feedback and perspectives on educational innovations, and providing opportunities for them to actively contribute to school improvement initiatives. This could involve establishing student advisory councils or leadership opportunities that allow learners to collaborate with educators and administrators on innovation implementation strategies.

**Future Researchers.** They should conduct studies including the process of diffusion of innovation that track the implementation and impact of educational innovations over time. By conducting rigorous research, future researchers can provide valuable insights into the factors influencing innovation adoption and inform the development of evidence-based practices for promoting educational change.

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