

Fostering a Culture of Engagement and Leadership Competence in Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) in South Cotabato

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Abstract

The study explores how leadership competence fosters participation in ISO-accredited private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in South Cotabato. It analyzes how leadership impacts institutional climates by assessing the effect of strategic planning, decision-making, professional development, and empowerment on workers' communication, commitment, collaboration, and recognition systems. Employing descriptive-correlation and comparative research design, data was acquired through standardized Likert scale questionnaires from 45 administrators and 126 employees in two PHEIs. The findings reveal a generally favorable opinion of leadership qualities and engagement in cultural activities, with the highest marks on professional progress. Nevertheless, the correlation study found a very weak correlation between leadership competence and cultural participation, suggesting that other factors might affect this interaction. However, results indicated a significant difference in the leadership competence and culture of engagement among employees when categorized by private higher education institutions. The study asserts that while leadership competence is crucial, we must also consider other elements to understand and fully foster cultural engagement.

Keywords: leadership proficiency, engagement-oriented culture, private tertiary education institutions



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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between leadership competency and the formation of an engaged culture in private higher education institutions (PHEIs) is a crucial issue of inquiry within the field of education. This study emphasizes the importance of leadership in PHEIs, particularly in South Cotabato, focusing on fostering a climate that can encourage their employees to receive positive feedback, mentorship, open communication, work-life balance, and a work environment. Leadership competency, characterized as the capacity of educational leaders to motivate, influence, and efficiently guide their institutions toward common objectives, is the focal point of our inquiry (Spillane et al., 2017). The need for this research stems from the enormous impact that PHEIs have on molding the future workforce and societal leaders. By giving insights into effective

leadership techniques, this study can directly aid educational administrators, policymakers, faculty members, students, and other stakeholders.

Literature on educational leadership stresses the vital relevance of successful leaders in fostering stakeholder involvement (Leithwood et al., 2018). Nonetheless, there is a visible gap in studies that explore this phenomenon within the local socio-economic and cultural milieu of South Cotabato. Previous endeavors to explore this subject have yielded useful insights, although they often neglected the delicate interplay between leadership competency and cultural engagement within the setting of South Cotabato's educational landscape. For example, past studies have provided thorough evaluations of the broad influence of leadership in educational environments (Leithwood et al., 2018). Nevertheless, these studies fail to

address the cultural, economic, and sociological aspects of promoting PHEIs in South Cotabato.

While several studies have outlined the theoretical foundations of leadership proficiency (Spillane et al., 2017), there is a shortage of empirical research concentrating on the direct effects of leadership competency on fostering a culture of engagement in PHEIs. This void in the literature underscores the urgent need for research that not only combines theoretical concepts with practical repercussions but also tailors its results to the specific issues and possibilities encountered by PHEIs in South Cotabato. Despite comprehensive studies on leadership competency and cultural engagement, a need for increased awareness and education on sustainable development goals is at stake.

Additionally, according to a transcript, there is a lack of understanding of how PHEI leaders foster a culture of engagement with the employees in South Cotabato who are coping with the new normal, highlighting challenges and positive responses. This absence underscores the research gap that this work attempts to remedy by delivering context-specific insights that are vitally absent in the present knowledge base.

The absence of this study poses considerable dangers to the academic sector and the efficacy of leadership in PHEIs. Without a nuanced awareness of how leadership attributes impact participation in these institutions, there is a potential loss in optimizing employee engagement, educational performance, institutional prestige, and stakeholder contentment. The failure to do this study could lead to missed opportunities for building leadership behaviors, thereby impeding the promotion of an engaged culture important for the overall development of employees, stakeholders, students, and the larger educational community in South Cotabato.

By establishing the precise leadership attributes that encourage stakeholder involvement, this research hopes to offer practical insights for educational leaders,

consequently enriching employee engagement, educational outcomes, and institutional performance in South Cotabato.

Conceptual Framework. This study is anchored in the transformational leadership theory of Burns (1978) and the organizational culture theory of Schein (1985). Transformational leadership theory proposes that leaders can change their followers' moral and ethical outlooks and encourage them to do better than expected by providing a supportive environment, setting a goal, and offering individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation. On the other hand, organizational culture theory suggests that the rules, beliefs, and practices shared within an institution impact the behavior and attitudes of its members, determining their degree of involvement and contentment.

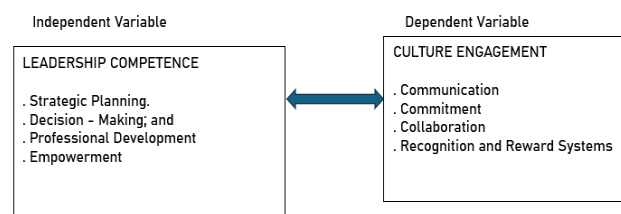


Figure 1
Conceptual Paradigm of the Study

Statement of the Problem. Generally, the study aims to investigate the relationship between leadership competence and a culture of engagement within ISO-accredited private higher education institutions in South Cotabato. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of leadership competence exhibited by the administrators of ISO - accredited private higher educational institutions (PHEIs) in South Cotabato in terms of:
 - 1.1 Strategic Planning
 - 1.2 Decision-Making
 - 1.3 Professional Development; and,
 - 1.4 Empowerment?
2. To what extent is the employees' culture of engagement among PHEIs concerning:

- 2.1 Communication
- 2.2 Commitment
- 2.3 Collaboration; and,
- 2.4 Recognition and Reward Systems?

3. Is there a significant relationship between leadership competence and a culture of engagement among employees in ISO-accredited private HEIs in South Cotabato?
4. Is there a significant difference in the culture of engagement of employees when categorized by Private Higher Education Institutions?
5. Is there a significant difference in leadership competence when categorized by Private Higher Education Institutions?

Hypotheses. At 0.05 level of significance, the following hypotheses were tested by the study:

Ho₁. There is no significant relationship between leadership competence and a culture of engagement among employees in ISO-accredited Private Higher Education Institutions in South Cotabato.

Ho₂. There is no significant difference in the culture of engagement of employees when categorized by Private Higher Education Institutions.

Ho₃. There is no significant difference in leadership competence when categorized by Private Higher Education Institutions

Significance of the Study. The study examines how leadership competency promotes participation in South Cotabato private higher education institutions. This knowledge may help educational leaders and administrators improve leadership development and strategic decision-making. Academics and staff can use the study's conclusions for personal and professional growth. Additionally, it underlines the necessity of community participation in tertiary education, uncovering the prospect of greater cooperation between academic institutions and local communities. The study addresses an essential need in the existing

research by delivering extensive and exact information on how leadership qualities and participation interact at private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in South Cotabato. The findings provided a framework for further research and provided policymakers with evidence-based insights to design successful leadership and engagement techniques in higher education. The study's importance goes beyond individual institutions, potentially stimulating substantial enhancements across the educational spectrum and contributing to societal advancement by creating environments where leaders, educators, employees, stakeholders, and students can flourish and bring about positive transformation.

LITERATURES

This literature review explores the relevance of leadership in establishing a culture of involvement in South Cotabato's private higher education institutions. It concentrates on the transformative potential of leadership talents, including planning, strategizing, inspiring, and organizing. The evaluation deconstructs existing data to demonstrate the particular restrictions and potential in South Cotabato's socio-economic and cultural environment. The assessment gives a foundation for future study and practice to strengthen educational leadership and institutional effectiveness

Theoretical Foundations of Leadership in Higher Education. Transformational leadership theory (Burns, 1978) and organizational culture theory (Schein, 1985) are vital for higher education institutions. Transformational leaders inspire and motivate followers, resulting in increased academic performance, stronger staff dedication, and higher student happiness. Organizational culture, shaped by beliefs, values, and conventions, impacts faculty engagement, student learning results, and institutional adaptability. These theories underline the significance of leadership attributes and organizational culture in establishing a thriving academic community, particularly in locations like South Cotabato.

Leadership Competence in Higher Education, Leadership competency involves important attributes such as reaching goals and achievements, leadership and leading change, honesty, and fairness (Johanim et al., 2022). These elements play a critical role in shaping institutional outcomes, particularly in the context of educational institutions. Competencies in leadership and driving change, as well as honesty and justice, have been found to affect work performance significantly and positively among institutional leaders (Zhukova, 2022).

Furthermore, the construction of leadership abilities in students inside professional pre-higher education institutions is crucial for their professional development and career progression (Nikkot, 2023). The emphasis on outcome-based management in educational institutions, focusing on specified and measurable results, dedication towards obtaining established outcomes, and standardized evaluation further underscores the necessity of leadership qualities in driving institutional success (Tarasov, 2019). Leadership competence among higher education administrators is determined by many variables. Research reveals the impact of leadership variables, organizational culture, and individual emotional competencies. Leadership characteristics, including attitude, determination, and motivation, have a crucial role in enhancing teacher competence in higher education institutions (Aina et al., 2023).

Additionally, organizational culture, characterized by producing, collaborating, and controlling, considerably impacts the development of leadership competence (Sakura, 2023). Moreover, emotional competence, such as developing trust, having an open mind, and active listening, is necessary for administrators to lead effectively in academic situations (Melva, 2023). These factors together contribute to the various developments in leadership competency among higher education administrators, underscoring the relevance of a holistic approach to leadership development in academia.

Importance of Various Leadership Competencies. Recent studies have identified important leadership attributes required for success in numerous sectors. Visionary thinking, agility, understanding the value of data, data-driven decision-making, knowledge of strategy, and accepting change are critical competencies for managing digital transformation (Jestine et al., 2023). In the realm of health research, abilities such as knowledge management, incorporating various stakeholders, training, change management, and communication are vital for effective leadership (Rodríguez et al., 2021).

Additionally, leadership attributes, including knowledge, visionary thinking, communication, intrapersonal abilities, and interpersonal skills, are valued for organizational development in certain contexts, like Thailand and Myanmar (Nang et al., 2021). For small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), attributes such as innovativeness, pro-activeness, decisiveness, flexibility, risk-taking, and ethical behavior are crucial for SME leaders' performance and organizational success (Chitra & Sabhoo, 2018). Entrepreneurial leadership in midsize organizations involves abilities including innovativeness, pro-activeness, decisiveness, flexibility, foresight, risk-taking, and ethical behavior, among others (Dorothy et al., 2018). The top leadership attributes necessary for successful leadership across varied enterprises and industries include honesty, recognizing the proper talent, work competence, and social and self-awareness. Moreover, the CRAFT leadership qualities of creativity, resilience, agility, focus, and trust have been identified as necessary for leaders to address crises effectively (Hemant et al., 2022).

Culture of Engagement. Various studies emphasize the value of varied leadership abilities such as strategic planning, decision-making, and professional advancement. Research conducted in Thailand by an educational quality assessment agency indicated that the top leadership characteristics identified as crucial included professional knowledge, decision-making/problem-solving, and development (Chitra & Sabhoo, 2018).

In addition, a study in Malaysia among academic personnel indicated the relevance of leadership decision-making about strategic planning, indicating a substantial positive correlation (Phusima et al., 2018). Furthermore, a study in Jordan focused on strategic leadership traits such as strategic planning and communication, demonstrating their impact on the effectiveness of public institutions (Intan et al., 2016). The culture of involvement in higher education is critical for institutions' success in fulfilling their societal contracts. This engagement involves intellectual relationships, learning, and discovery that transcends academic borders, emphasizing the value of expertise in non-academic settings (Navares & Rago, 2023). Strategies to promote involvement include building a sense of community among staff and students in online programs, supporting shared knowledge growth, and interacting within a community of practice framework, "Remote Community Engagement in Higher Education. Advances in social networking and online communities".

Furthermore, efforts to promote engagement in education have led to the introduction of game-like elements, entertaining learning, and gamification to encourage student involvement and motivation. Cultural contributions to higher education.

Overall, a culture of engagement in higher education encompasses collaborative learning, societal impact, and innovative teaching approaches to prepare students for active citizenship and contribute to broader cultural dimensions. Organizational culture and employee engagement levels play a vital role in higher education institutions, affecting features like energy, dedication, and absorption among academic and administrative staff. The cultural dimension of higher education institutions extends beyond academia, infrastructure, and activities and even shapes political culture and national identities.

Leadership and Culture of Engagement: Empirical Evidence. Empirical data reveals that leadership credibility strongly influences organizational culture, which in turn affects

work engagement (Ashish et al., 2023) and (Veronika et al., 2022). Studies have indicated that organizational culture components are connected to employee engagement elements like vigor, commitment, and absorption, having a favorable effect on engagement within and outside organizations (Pakize, 2023).

Furthermore, servant leadership has been found to predict organizational culture and improve work engagement, with organizational culture serving as a mediator in this relationship (Muhammad et al., 2022). These findings illustrate the vital importance of leadership in developing organizational culture and increasing employee engagement, underscoring the relevance of credible leadership practices and a healthy culture for boosting overall job engagement levels in organizations. Empirical data from several studies reveals the substantial impact of leadership and organizational culture on enhancing employee engagement. Research by Saurage-Altenloh et al. (2023) demonstrates that leadership culture sorts, such as mentoring, risk-taking, and coordinating, directly influence employee engagement levels. Additionally, Dunan (2023) emphasizes the favorable impact of leadership on staff performance and engagement. Moreover, Bilalli Abduraimi et al. (2023) found a high connection between organizational culture components and employee engagement dimensions. Villiger (2023) highlights how leadership styles and workplace culture at HOPE International led to excellent employee engagement through trust, respect, and transparent communication. Lastly, Srimulyani and Hermanto (2022) confirm that credible leadership positively improves corporate culture, which in turn enhances employee work engagement. These studies collectively demonstrate the crucial relevance of leadership and culture in driving employee engagement.

METHODS

Research Design. This study employed a descriptive, correlational, and comparative research design. This design was used to describe and examine the relationship between

Leadership Competence, and a Culture of Engagement in an ISO-accredited Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI) in South Cotabato. A structured Likert scale survey questionnaire was adapted to collect data from a large sample of private school leaders, administrators, and employees in two (2) colleges in South Cotabato.

Population and Sampling. The study was conducted and limited to two (2) different private colleges located in Koronadal City, South Cotabato, Region XII, Philippines. This focus allows for an in-depth understanding of the economic, and educational contexts influencing leadership practices and a culture of engagement among employees within these specific PHEIs. A random sampling was utilized to gather respondents.

There are one hundred seventy-one (171) respondents who volunteered in the study. Forty-five (45) leaders participated: twenty-eight (28) from GVCFI and seventeen (17) from RMMC have demonstrated significant impacts on their institutions' cultures. They were School Administrators, Principals, Deans, and Directors. One hundred twenty-six (126) employees participated: seventy-six (76) from GVCFI and fifty (50) from RMMC across various departments and roles to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the engagement culture. They were faculty members, administrative staff, support staff, and teachers who interacted with a broad segment of the institutional community. All participants are from two ISO-accredited colleges who willingly volunteered to participate in the study. The total number of leaders and employees from both colleges was unknown since information was not provided about the exact number of leaders and employees.

Instrumentation. The study utilized a validated five (5) – point Likert-Scale (Pimentel, 2010) survey questionnaire adapted according to the context of the research. The survey measured two (2) primary aspects:

1. **Leadership Competence.** Questions assessed the perceived leadership competence in strategic planning, decision-making, professional development, and empowerment of educational leaders within ISO-accredited PHEIs of South Cotabato.
2. **Culture of Engagement.** This part of the survey gauges the level of a culture of engagement among employees within the institutions including communication, commitment, collaboration, recognition, and reward system.

Table 1
5-Point Likert Scale, (Pimentel, 2010)

Legend:	Qualitative Interpretation
1.00-1.79	Strongly Disagree
1.80-2.59	Disagree
2.60-3.39	Neither Agree nor Disagree
3.40-4.19	Agree
4.20-5.00	Strongly Agree

Data Analysis. Appropriate statistical tools were used to analyze the data collected. Mean and standard deviations were used to quantify the level of leadership competencies in strategic planning, decision-making, professional development, empowerment, and the extent of employee engagement including communication, commitment, collaboration, and recognition and reward system within the culture of engagement. Kendall Tau B was used to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between leadership competence and the culture of engagement among employees. In addition, an independent t-test using Mann-Whitney U was used to determine the significant difference in the culture of engagement among employees and leadership competence when categorized by Private Higher Education Institutions. The hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

The results focused on the relationship between leadership competence and a culture of engagement in an ISO-accredited college in South Cotabato. The data gathered were

analyzed and interpreted according to the sequence of the statement of the problems

Table 2
Descriptive Analysis of Leadership Competence in terms of Strategic Planning

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Q1: The administrator frequently involves employees in the strategic planning process.	4.18	0.614	Agree
Q2: The administrator effectively communicates the strategic plan to employees.	4.11	0.438	Agree
Q3: The strategic plan aligns well with the institution's goals and objectives.	3.98	0.690	Agree
Q4: The administrator regularly reviews and updates the strategic plan.	3.69	0.900	Agree
Q5: The administrator effectively allocates resources to support the strategic plan.	3.98	0.583	Agree
Q6: The administrator communicates progress towards achieving the strategic plan.	4.18	0.535	Agree
Q7: The administrator encourages employees to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategic plan.	4.18	0.650	Agree
Grand Mean	4.04	0.474	Agree

The interpretation of the responses in the strategic planning is shown in Table 2. The scores on all seven items come within the range of "agree" with a grand mean score across all the criteria of 4.04 (SD = 0.474). Generally, the participants frequently believed that the administrator's efforts in strategic planning were successful.

Table 3
Descriptive Analysis of Leadership Competence in terms of Decision-Making

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Q1: The administrator frequently seeks input from employees when making decisions.	4.18	0.614	Agree
Q2: The administrator considers the impact of decisions on employees and stakeholders	4.11	0.438	Agree
Q3: The administrator communicates the reasoning behind decisions.	3.98	0.690	Agree
Q4: The administrator often involves employees in implementing decisions.	3.69	0.900	Agree
Q5: The administrator considers alternative viewpoints when making decisions.	3.98	0.583	Agree
Q6: The administrator communicates the outcome of decisions to employees.	4.18	0.535	Agree
Q7: The administrator takes responsibility for the outcomes of decisions.	4.18	0.650	Agree
Grand Mean	4.14	0.512	Agree

The interpretation of the decision-making responses is shown in Table 3. The scores on all seven items come within the range of "agree". The grand mean across all criteria is 4.14 (SD = 0.512), demonstrating a general agreement that the administrator's decision-making process was successful and inclusive.

Table 4
Descriptive Analysis of Leadership Competence in terms of Professional Development

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Q1: The administrator participates in training and development opportunities.	4.22	0.471	Strongly Agree
Q2: The administrator models continuous learning and growth.	4.24	0.570	Strongly Agree
Q3: The administrator provides employees with opportunities for learning and growth.	4.27	0.580	Strongly Agree
Q4: The administrator often seeks feedback from employees on leadership practices.	4.07	0.654	Agree
Q5: The administrator provides mentorship and coaching to employees.	4.11	0.532	Agree
Q6: The administrator supports employees in achieving their professional goals.	4.29	0.549	Strongly Agree
Q7: The administrator encourages and supports employee-led initiatives for improvement.	4.33	0.603	Strongly Agree
Grand Mean	4.22	0.411	Strongly Agree

The interpretation of the responses in the professional development is shown in Table 4. The scores of five indicators come within the range of "strongly agree", whereas items four and five falls under the interval for "agree". The grand mean score is 4.22 (SD = 0.411), suggesting that participants firmly feel that the administrator is competent in supporting and nurturing professional progress within the organization.

Table 5
Descriptive Analysis of Leadership Competence in terms of Empowerment

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Q1: The administrator frequently delegates authority to employees.	4.07	0.688	Agree
Q2: The administrator provides employees with autonomy to make decisions.	3.82	0.716	Agree
Q3: The administrator fosters a culture of trust and accountability.	4.11	0.647	Agree
Q4: The administrator often involves employees in decision-making processes.	4.24	0.570	Strongly Agree
Q5: The administrator provides employees with opportunities for growth and development.	4.18	0.650	Agree
Q6: The administrator communicates expectations for employee performance.	4.22	0.636	Strongly Agree
Grand Mean	4.11	0.460	Strongly Agree

The interpretation of the responses in the empowerment of employees is shown in Table 5. The scores of four indicators come within the range of "agree", whereas items four and six fall under the interval for "strongly agree". The grand mean score of 4.11 (SD = 0.460) shows a firm general agreement that the administrator effectively empowers employees in a certain condition.

Table 6
Descriptive Analysis of Culture of Engagement in terms of Commitment

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Q1: I am proud to be part of this institution and its mission.	4.30	0.569	Strongly Agree
Q2: I am committed to achieving the institution's goals and objectives.	4.16	0.599	Agree
Q3: I am willing to go the extra mile for the institution's success.	4.21	0.598	Strongly Agree
Q4: I am dedicated to providing high-quality education and services.	4.18	0.697	Agree
Q5: I am loyal to the institution and its leadership.	4.39	0.606	Strongly Agree
Q6: I am motivated to contribute to the institution's growth.	4.28	0.546	Strongly Agree
Q7: I am inspired by the institution's vision and values.	4.25	0.592	Strongly Agree
Grand Mean	4.25	0.481	Strongly Agree

Table 6 illustrates the interpretation of the responses of employees' commitment to their organization. The scores in all five items comes within the range of "strongly agree", whereas items two and four fall under the interval of "agree". The grand mean score of 4.25 (SD = 0.481) implies that participants strongly agreed that they are extremely devoted to the institution.

Table 7
Descriptive Analysis of Culture of Engagement in terms of Communication

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Q1: I receive clear and timely communication from supervisors and colleagues.	4.29	0.504	Strongly Agree
Q2: I can express my thoughts and opinions freely.	3.90	0.702	Agree
Q3: I am kept informed about institutional policies and changes.	4.14	0.666	Agree
Q4: I have access to relevant information and resources.	4.10	0.662	Agree
Q5: I can provide feedback and suggestions.	4.22	0.578	Strongly Agree
Q6: I can communicate effectively with stakeholders.	4.17	0.581	Agree
Q7: I can use technology for communication and collaboration.	4.24	0.612	Strongly Agree
Grand Mean	4.15	0.493	Agree

Table 7 illustrates the interpretation of the responses of the employees' communication to their organization. The scores in all three items fall under the interval of "strongly agree", while four items fall under the interval of "agree". The grand mean score of 4.15 (SD = 0.493) shows that, usually, the respondents agree that communication within the company is effective.

Table 8
Descriptive Analysis of Culture of Engagement in terms of Collaboration

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Q1: I work well with colleagues and supervisors.	4.30	0.526	Strongly Agree
Q2: I collaborate effectively with other departments.	3.99	0.675	Agree
Q3: I build positive relationships with stakeholders.	4.12	0.665	Agree
Q4: I contribute to team efforts and projects.	4.13	0.611	Agree
Q5: I share knowledge and expertise.	4.23	0.493	Strongly Agree
Q6: I learn from colleagues and supervisors.	4.30	0.526	Strongly Agree
Q7: I support and assist others when needed.	4.26	0.568	Strongly Agree
Grand Mean	4.19	0.476	Agree

Table 8 illustrates the interpretation of the responses of the employees' collaboration with

their organization. The scores in all four items fall under the interval for "strongly agree", while three items fall under the interval for "agree". The grand mean score of 4.19 (SD = 0.476) shows that, usually, individuals believe that collaboration inside the organization is effective and useful.

Table 9
Descriptive Analysis of Culture of Engagement in terms of Recognition and reward

Indicator	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Q1: My contributions and achievements are recognized and appreciated.	4.17	0.502	Agree
Q2: I feel rewarded for my hard work and dedication.	3.79	0.665	Agree
Q3: I see opportunities for career advancement and growth.	3.98	0.565	Agree
Q4: I receive incentives and benefits that enhance my job satisfaction.	3.99	0.639	Agree
Q5: I participate in recognition and reward programs.	4.07	0.524	Agree
Q6: I am motivated by the recognition and rewards	4.08	0.515	Agree
Q7: I feel valued and appreciated for my contributions.	3.90	0.709	Agree
Grand Mean	4.15	0.335	Agree

Table 9 illustrates the interpretation of the responses to the employees' recognition and rewards within their organization. The score in all items falls under the interval of "agree". The overall grand mean score of 4.15 (SD = 0.335) means that, on average, participants consider that recognition and reward systems within the institution are effective and contribute to their job satisfaction.

Table 10
Correlation Analysis Between Leadership Competence and Culture of Engagement

		Leadership Competence	Culture of Engagement
Leadership Competence	Kendall's Tau B	—	
	p-value	—	
Culture of Engagement	Kendall's Tau B	0.035	—
	p-value	0.745	—

Analysis was undertaken using Kendall's Tau B to assess the association between leadership competency and the culture of engagement among employees. The results are presented in Table 10. The analysis revealed a Kendall's Tau B correlation coefficient of $\tau_b = 0.035$ between leadership competence and the culture of engagement, with a corresponding p-value of 0.745. This correlation indicates a very weak positive relationship between the two variables. However, the relationship is not statistically significant, as the p-value ($p = .745$) is substantially larger than the significance

threshold of 0.05. The statistics reveal that there is no statistically significant association between leadership competence and the culture of engagement among employees.

Table 11

Independent t-test analysis on the significant difference in the culture of engagement among employees when categorized by Private Higher Education Institutions

	Statistic	p	Mean difference	SE difference	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Culture of Engagement	Mann-Whitney U	139	0.020	-0.340	0.550	0.0700

Note: $H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2$ vs $H_a: \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$

Assumptions

Normality Test (Shapiro-Wilk)

	W	p
Culture of Engagement	0.944	0.031

Note: A low p-value suggests a violation of the assumption of normality

An Independent t-test using the Mann-Whitney U test was employed to examine whether there is a significant difference in the culture of engagement among employees when grouped by different private higher education institutions. The results given in Table 11 produced a Mann-Whitney U statistic of 139 with a p-value of 0.020. This finding implies a statistically significant difference in the culture of engagement across the groups ($p < .05$). Therefore, reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and conclude that the culture of involvement differs greatly between the institutions. The assumption of normality was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test, giving a W statistic of 0.944 with $p = .031$. The low p-value reveals a breakdown of the premise of normality, suggesting that the distribution of the culture of engagement is not normal. Results indicated a significant difference in the culture of engagement among employees when categorized by private higher education institutions, as shown by the Mann-Whitney U test ($p < .05$).

Table 12

Independent t-test analysis on the significant difference in Leaders Competence when categorized by Private Higher Education Institutions

	Statistic	p	Mean difference	SE difference	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
Leaders Competence	Mann-Whitney U	1152	<.001	-0.220	0.320	-0.110

Note: $H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2$ vs $H_a: \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$

Assumptions

Normality Test (Shapiro-Wilk)

W	p
0.958	<.001

Note. A low p-value suggests a violation of the assumption of normality

An independent t-test using the Mann-Whitney U was employed to determine if there were any significant differences in leadership competency among the different Private Higher Education Institutions, as shown in Table 12. The analysis produced a Mann-Whitney U score of 1152 ($p < .001$), indicating a statistically significant difference in leadership competency among the groups. Since the p-value is much lower than a significance level of 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected, suggesting that leadership competencies significantly differ from one institution to another. The normality assumption was examined with the Shapiro-Wilk test, yielding a W statistic of 0.958 and $p < .001$, indicating a significant violation of the normality assumption and implying that leadership competence does not follow a normal distribution. The Mann-Whitney U test shows a significant difference in leadership competence among employees when categorized by Private Higher Education Institutions ($p < .001$).

DISCUSSION

This study tries to examine the connection between leadership competence and engaged culture among employees in private higher education institutions (PHEIs) with ISO certification in South Cotabato. The study showed no significant correlation between leadership capability and the culture of engagement among workers. However, large variations were identified in the engagement of

employees and leadership competency when categorized by different PHEIs.

The study contradicts previous research that has shown a significant relationship between leadership behaviors and employee engagement (Ashish et al., 2023; Veronika et al., 2022). This discrepancy could be due to the unique socio-economic and cultural background of South Cotabato, which may limit the leader's ability to affect participation. Significant differences in participation culture and leadership competency across different PHEIs indicate considerable institutional variability. This diversity may be related, as shown in the study (Saurage et al., 2023; Dunan, 2023), to variations in organizational culture, leadership styles, and institutional policies. This aligns with Schein's (1980) organizational culture theory, which suggests that shared concepts and practices within an institution profoundly impact member behavior and attitudes.

The results show that it is generally consistent with previous research. While the significant differences in leadership competence and culture of engagement across institutions are consistent with past research (Pakize, 2023; Muhammad et al., 2022), the absence of a significant relationship between leadership competency and culture of engagement is surprising. Numerous studies have indicated that effective leadership is crucial for creating a culture of engagement (Nosheen et al., 2022; Romans & Tobaben, 2016). This difference in findings may be due to contextual factors specific to South Cotabato, such as social norms and economic conditions, which were not adequately captured in this study.

Several potential biases and confounding variables may have influenced the results. Self-reported data introduces the possibility of response bias, where participants may have provided socially desirable responses. Additionally, the study's focus on ISO-accredited colleges limits the generalizability of the findings to non-accredited schools. The sample size, while appropriate, may not fully represent the broader community of PHEIs in South Cotabato.

The study's limitations include its cross-sectional design, which prohibits causal conclusions, and its reliance on self-reported measures, which may be prone to bias. The findings may not be generalizable to other regions or types of higher education institutions due to the unique socio-economic and cultural context of South Cotabato. Future research should explore longitudinal designs and incorporate objective measures of leadership competence and engagement.

This study has several theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it suggests that the relationship between leadership ability and engagement may be more complex and context-dependent than previously assumed. Practically, the results underscore the importance of customized leadership development programs tailored to the unique cultural and socio-economic conditions of different institutions. Future research should consider these moderating factors that jointly influence the relationship between leadership competence and culture of engagement, including organizational culture, employee demographics, and external environmental factors. Research should also explore the impact of different leadership styles on engagement outcomes to identify the most effective ways to foster a culture of participation in specific educational contexts.

In conclusion, this study offers significant insights into the relationship between leadership competence and a culture of engagement in PHEIs in South Cotabato. Although no significant association was found between these two variables, the variation among institutions underscores the importance of contextual factors. These findings contribute to the existing literature and have practical implications for educational leaders and policymakers seeking to promote participation and leadership practices in higher education.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that public higher education institutions (PHEIs) in South Cotabato implement customized leadership development programs incorporating transformational leadership and

organizational culture theory. This will help establish a culture of involvement and improve transparency between administrators and staff. Additionally, PHEIs should develop comprehensive recognition and reward systems to enhance staff engagement and career growth. A collaborative atmosphere is also crucial for a vibrant academic community, and institutions can foster this by investing in inter-departmental projects, team-building exercises, and knowledge-sharing sessions. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation are essential to ensuring the effectiveness of leadership practices and engagement strategies. Regular reviews of leadership skills and staff engagement levels can provide insights into areas for improvement. By implementing these practices, PHEIs in South Cotabato can achieve more engaged and competent leadership, enhancing their educational success and institutional reputation.

Conflict of Interest. The researchers bear no conflict of interest.

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