

Positive Psychology's Perspective on Academic Leaders' Experiences with Inclusive Education

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Abstract: This study focused on the leadership experiences, difficulties, and tactics of academic leaders in order to examine how they applied the concepts of positive psychology to establish inclusive learning environments. The study gathered insights from 20 academic leadership personalities from Western Mindanao and North Eastern Mindanao into how inclusion went beyond official policies through qualitative research techniques, such as semi-structured interviews with eighteen academic leaders. To identify recurrent themes in the participant accounts, reflexive thematic analysis was used. Important conclusions showed that well-being programs, strengths-based leadership, intentional nurturing of belongingness, and hope-oriented activities were how positive psychology was operationalized. These initiatives helped create inclusive cultures that are characterized by student and staff participation, psychological safety, cooperation, and respect for one another. Positive psychological qualities

including resilience, optimism, empathy, and thankfulness were also highlighted in the study as essential tools for leaders to overcome institutional obstacles and sustain inclusive efforts. It came to the conclusion that everyday leadership actions guided by positive psychology concepts are crucial to inclusive education, rather than only policies or institutional frameworks. These qualities are exhibited by academic leaders, who successfully translate inclusion from policy to practice.

Keywords: Academic Leadership; Inclusive Education; Positive Psychology; Inclusive Leadership; Positive School Leadership

INTRODUCTION

Globally, inclusive education is becoming more widely acknowledged as a part of fair and high-quality education. Therefore, you must implement inclusive education in order to be acknowledged as a school. Globally, studies show that positive education, which is based on positive psychology, contributes to inclusive learning environments by fostering psychological resilience, well-being, and strengths [1]. When compared to previous curricula, educational systems in nations like Bhutan that incorporate well-being into their curricula have seen improvements in student well-being and academic outcomes over time [2]. Additionally, by encouraging growth mindsets and resilience in Chinese students, positive education interventions based on Seligman's PERMAH framework (Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment, and Health) have demonstrated encouraging results [3].

But there are challenges in doing this on a significant scale. Positive education implementation frequently requires institutional support, systematic training, and explicit policies—all of which schools around the world now lack [4]. According to recent research, educators often oppose the transition from traditional, test-focused methods to well-being-centered approaches, particularly when faced with institutional pressure and time constraints [5]. Without well-thought-out strategic frameworks, schools find it difficult to sustainably incorporate positive values. Furthermore, looking at inclusive education in a broader sense shows that inclusive classrooms with different students working together produce better social and academic outcomes without disadvantaged children [7-8]. Furthermore, reviews demonstrate that marginalized students can be empowered by positive education in inclusive educational settings [7]. These constructive frameworks support teamwork, inclusivity, resilience, and a sense of belonging—all of which are essential in inclusive environments. Positive psychology paradigms that are derived from the West may ignore cultural norms like interdependence, modesty, and collectivism, according to academics [8]. This implies that rather than depending solely on foreign models, positive psychology applications in Asia must take into account regional cultural quirks.

The dynamics of inclusive leadership and education from a positive psychology perspective are still poorly understood in the Philippines. A contextual inquiry into leaders' lived experiences can shed light on how they adapt global positive psychology principles to local realities, even though some Philippine studies have examined the relationship between teacher well-being and inclusive attitudes. Kilag et al. [9] drew on local leadership research regarding managing diversity and inclusive school communities in the Philippines. Seligman's positive psychology framework, especially the PERMA model, and complementary constructs from Positive Organizational Behavior (PsyCap) and Positive School Leadership served as the main sources of inspiration for this study. Together, these frameworks helped to interpret leadership practices, well-being initiatives, and strengths-based strategies within inclusive education. By using positive psychology to analyze academic leaders' real-world experiences navigating inclusive education, this study aims to close these disparities. It highlights how resilience, optimism, and thankfulness affect leaders' reactions to difficulties while also examining how leaders incorporate values like hope, wellbeing, and strengths-based methods into their leadership.

LITERATURE

Equity, accessibility, and meaningful engagement for diverse learners are key components of the global movement for inclusive education. Instead of just putting students with disabilities in regular classrooms, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) emphasizes that inclusive education entails changing school cultures, policies, and practices to

systematically remove barriers to learning ^[10]. Leadership that reorients institutional values and expands definitions of success beyond conventional academic achievement is necessary to bring about this change. When inclusion is framed as a systems-level change, it emphasizes the crucial role of academic leaders, whose attitudes, choices, and actions impact how inclusion is conceived and carried out throughout educational institutions. Joyno ^[15] created a trustworthy tool that captured culturally grounded aspects of inclusive education in the Philippine context, such as inclusive surroundings, parent-school relationships, and instructional leadership. These results imply that inclusion is intricately linked to relational and cooperative processes, necessitating leaders to modify tactics in accordance with institutional norms and community settings rather than depending exclusively on general inclusion models.

A theoretical framework for comprehending how leadership might promote inclusive education through strengths-based methods is provided by positive psychology. Instead than focusing only on correcting deficiencies, positive psychology aims to foster human qualities, wellbeing, and optimal functioning. When it comes to education, this viewpoint suggests that inclusive settings thrive when teachers and students actively foster hope, optimism, and psychological well-being. Through their research on Positive School Leadership (PSL), Cherkowski et al. ^[11] further developed this viewpoint by identifying elements like moral purpose, relational emphasis, positive orientation, and spiritual connectedness. This positively impacts school culture and fosters inclusive settings for both staff and students.

By relating individual psychological qualities to organizational outcomes, Positive Organizational Behavior (POB) expands on these concepts. Psychological capital (PsyCap), which includes optimism, resilience, efficacy, and hope, is a crucial leadership resource, according to Goel et al. ^[12]. By providing a useful framework that enables leaders to maintain motivation, flexibility, and group well-being in challenging institutional settings, PsyCap is consistent with positive psychology. During the COVID-19 epidemic, Edara et al. ^[13] showed that religiosity among Filipino teachers was positively correlated with resilience, optimism, well-being, and contentment at the local level. Their findings highlighted faith-rooted optimism as a culturally embedded psychological resource that promotes educators' perseverance during times of crisis, as optimism partially mediated the association between religiosity and well-being while well-being entirely mediated satisfaction.

The incorporation of positive psychology into inclusive education leadership is further supported by international research that emphasizes organizational coherence, relational trust, and well-being ^[14]. According to research from both Western and Asian educational systems, leaders that place a high priority on relational trust, emotional intelligence, and employee well-being are better at maintaining inclusive practices over time ^[15]. When leadership concentrates just on structural compliance without addressing the psychological and relational aspects of change, inclusive reform initiatives frequently fall short. According to Cuduz ^[16], leaders must establish emotionally secure spaces where teachers feel appreciated, encouraged, and free to be creative in order to promote inclusiveness. This viewpoint is consistent with systems thinking, which acknowledges the interdependence of institutional outcomes, organizational culture, and human well-being. Additionally, cross-national research indicates that leadership behaviors based on empathy, moral purpose, and group accountability strengthen educators' dedication to inclusive objectives ^[17]. These results support the idea that positive psychological characteristics should be seen as strategic leadership tools rather than just as individual dispositions. Instead of becoming a side project, inclusive education becomes ingrained in institutions' daily operations when leaders consciously foster optimism, resiliency, and shared meaning.

In the Philippines, community-based projects provide more examples of how inclusive leadership is implemented. Sese and Guillermo ^[18] highlight the Tinatangi Project, a community-based program for kids with intellectual and developmental impairments, as an example of inclusive leadership by establishing secure and supportive environments that empower families and foster a sense of belonging. In a similar vein, Gelizon ^[19] investigated how Filipino elementary teachers incorporate diversity in classroom activities using Anti-Bias Education (ABE). ABE places a strong emphasis on the deliberate development of belonging, acknowledging diversity, and critically

reflecting on bias—principles that are strongly related to positive psychology. By redefining diversity as an educational and societal asset rather than a limitation, leaders that support ABE-based practices institutionalize inclusion ^[20].

The significance of narrative, culture, and context in forming inclusive education leadership is further highlighted by comparative international and regional research. Research from a variety of educational institutions shows that shared meanings, group storytelling, and culturally sensitive leadership techniques preserve inclusive cultures ^[21]. Through lived experiences rather than impersonal policy directives, narrative-based approaches enable educators and leaders to make meaning of inclusion. Incorporating inclusivity into institutional identity is more beneficial for leaders that encourage discussion and introspective practice. Scholars stress the necessity of tailoring global inclusion frameworks to local beliefs and social realities in non-Western contexts ^[22]. This supports the claim that inclusive leadership needs to be culturally mediated rather than universally standardized. These narratives emphasize that inclusive cultures are constructed through continuous communication and relational engagement, processes that academic leaders can actively promote ^[23]. According to Sikolohiyang Pilipino, the results are culturally grounded manifestations of positive psychology, reflecting Filipino cultural values like *kapwa* (relationality), empathy, faith-based optimism, and collective responsibility ^[24]. By using this indigenous psychological perspective, academic leaders can include inclusion into institutional structures and relational practices by adapting global positive psychology ideas in culturally appropriate ways.

METHODS

1. Research Design

This study examined how academic leaders used positive psychology concepts to promote inclusive education using an exploratory qualitative research design and qualitative methodology. Because exploratory research provides for flexibility and open-ended inquiry into emergent viewpoints and experiences, it is especially well-suited for studying understudied topics like the junction of inclusive practices, positive psychology, and leadership ^[25].

2. Sampling and Participants

Purposive sampling was used in this study to choose 20 academic leadership personalities from Western Mindanao and North Eastern Mindanao with pertinent, first-hand knowledge of academic leadership. Academic leaders are people in official positions with institutional responsibilities for making decisions, implementing policies, or coordinating programs related to teaching, learning, and inclusion. Examples of these positions include program coordinators, department chairpersons, deans, research directors, curriculum heads, and registrars. Participants were selected based on their firsthand knowledge of advancing inclusive projects and their capacity to explain how positive psychology concepts inform their leadership approaches. A non-probability technique called purposeful sampling is used to obtain detailed information from a particular set of people who are knowledgeable about the subject ^[26].

3. Research Instruments

In order to investigate academic leaders' opinions on incorporating positive psychology into inclusive education, this study used qualitative data gathering techniques, concentrating on semi-structured interviews. Through open-ended questions that linked individual values, institutional responsibilities, and educational environments, the interview guide sought to be consistent while permitting deeper insights.

4. Data Gathering Procedure

In order to learn more about the viewpoints, experiences, and difficulties of eighteen academic leaders, this study employed a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews. Interviews lasted 30 to 50 minutes, were recorded with consent, and were conducted at mutually convenient times and locations. Participants were carefully chosen based on their leadership roles. The institutional research ethics committee granted ethical approval, and participants gave signed informed consent.

Pseudonyms were used in transcripts and reports to ensure confidentiality and anonymity [27].

5. Data Analysis

In the data analysis process, Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis involved inductive coding of interview transcripts to identify meaning units linked to participant narratives. Initial codes were developed manually to highlight recurring ideas, which were then clustered into candidate themes through iterative comparison. A thorough familiarization with the transcripts aided in understanding participant comments. Member checking allowed participants to review initial themes, ensuring thematic accuracy and leading to slight adjustments in descriptions while preserving core conclusions [28]. Additionally, the structure of themes was aligned with participant stories to minimize researcher bias, aided by analytical memoranda and reflexive journaling.

RESULTS

Research Objectives 1. To explore how academic leaders apply principles of positive psychology in building inclusive education environments.

Question 1. How do you incorporate positive psychology principles, such as encouraging hope or promoting well-being, in your approach to inclusive education?

Leadership Focused on Hope as a Framework for the Future

According to participant narratives, encouraging hope is an interpretive process that revolves around future-focused meaning-making, and academic leaders present inclusion as a continuous process of growth rather than a final outcome. They seek to establish a setting that inspires students to overcome obstacles in their personal and academic lives. Leaders use affirmations and positive reinforcement to help students see setbacks as transient. Program coordinators, for instance, use introspective exercises and inspirational talks to highlight the importance of "every small progress." Department chairpersons, on the other hand, exhibit resilience by showing how obstacles may be turned into opportunities.

"In my experience, giving struggling pupils hope enables them to understand that their shortcomings do not define who they are. I usually tell them that perseverance is more important to learning than speed. Since everyone learns differently and at a different rate, competency-based activities are now more dependable since they increase student engagement and meaningful learning."

The Institutional Infrastructure of Well-Being

Participants emphasized the significance of wellbeing for faculty members as well as students. Together, these actions show how leaders operationalize well-being as an institutional strategy, presenting psychological support as a structural element of inclusive leadership rather than as an add-on service. While faculty representatives revealed that they frequently promote mindfulness exercises in the classroom, several research directors talked about how they employ flexible policies to lessen academic stress. Leaders have seen that by putting well-being first, they foster a welcoming environment where people feel appreciated and supported.

"Because life is more than just attending school, we encourage our teachers to follow up with kids outside of the classroom. Sometimes it's as simple as asking, 'How are you doing today?'" They feel seen by that straightforward inquiry. Furthermore, the act of asking is inherently compassionate, regardless of how straightforward the question may seem."

Increasing Community and Belonging

Using concepts from positive psychology, participants stressed the value of creating a sense of belonging to improve inclusive education. Academic experts suggested tactics including utilizing inclusive language, praising various accomplishments, and forming peer support groups. They observed that student and teacher engagement and resilience are enhanced by community involvement. Program directors emphasized strategies that encourage ownership and inclusivity, especially for underrepresented students, include letting students participate in decision-making and

praising their accomplishments.

"Students are more engaged and expressive when they feel like they belong. I constantly tell my team that making every student feel like they are a genuine member of the school community is just as important as granting them access. What turns access into true involvement is a sense of belonging."

Question 2. Can you share an example of how strengths-based leadership has helped you promote inclusion within your institution?

Acknowledging and Utilizing Personal Strengths

Participants saw that acknowledging the abilities of instructors and students promotes inclusivity and increases confidence and participation. Leaders stressed that recognizing individual abilities improves learning and opportunity availability by moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach in the Philippine educational system. While some department heads assigned jobs based on competencies, others carried out informal strengths-mapping to make sure all members felt appreciated regardless of background or academic standing.

"I invited one of our quietest kids to assist with our school's learning resources and suggested him to the SSLG moderator as their publicator after realizing that he had a talent for graphic design, such as utilizing Canva. His self-assurance increased, inspiring other pupils to realize that everyone can make a significant contribution."

Creating Cooperative Teams

Strengths-based leadership, according to participants, encourages better staff-student collaboration. By matching people with complimentary skills, leaders were able to build more cohesive and effective teams. While some highlighted significant achievements in scientific projects, others spoke of extracurricular initiatives like the SSLG that thrived as a result of combining a variety of abilities. This emphasizes the Strengths-Based Collaboration theme, which emphasizes that inclusive leadership maximizes group potential and promotes workplace engagement when leaders concentrate on strengths rather than flaws.

"I came to see that inclusive education involves more than simply students—it also involves team management. Teams such as our instructors, staff, and parents themselves must be included. Collaboration comes easily when we place people where they excel. As a result, it becomes simpler to strive toward the goals we establish."

Developing Others' Leadership

Offering leadership chances based on individual abilities promotes a sense of inclusion and ownership among staff and students, according to the participants. Students are more motivated when they are given assignments that suit their skills, especially those who might otherwise be timid. When their expertise is acknowledged, faculty members also feel empowered, which boosts morale and fortifies collegial ties. This embodies the idea of inclusive leadership, which encourages opportunities for people to lead by leveraging their special talents while simultaneously embracing diversity. Overall, it has been demonstrated that following strengths-based leadership concepts greatly improves motivation, engagement, and teamwork among people in a variety of roles.

"Teachers no longer feel like they are merely following orders when they are trusted with tasks that play to their strengths; instead, they feel like true leaders. I became aware of this when I was designating a curriculum chair and letting my faculty members choose the best candidate for the role. I find it more satisfying to ask them based on their observations rather than essentially depending on a track record. Regarding the latter, I overheard in whispers that they felt heard and valued, which is, in my opinion, the pinnacle of empowerment."

Question 3. In what ways do you encourage a positive and inclusive culture among your staff and students?

Establishing Secure and Helpful Environments

Participants underlined that psychological safety is crucial for inclusive education because it

enables people to express their genuine opinions and worries without worrying about being judged. Teachers who successfully manage their personal and professional life increase student involvement and engagement. This is connected to a comfort mechanism that is reinforced by actions like freedom fences and open-door policy, which show that opposing viewpoints are respected. These settings increase participation and a sense of belonging by encouraging contributions from all members, fostering mutual trust, and reducing power-distance anxiety. In the end, this strategy creates a more inclusive learning environment by changing the roles of educators from that of authoritative figures to those of community conversation facilitators.

"Your voice matters here, we remind our teachers and pupils. Even if you don't agree with us, your opinions are valuable to us. I let websites like the school freedom wall function because of this. I never issued a note prohibiting the page and looking for methods to remove it, despite some instructors' objections. We will provide kids with a forum where they feel more comfortable voicing their issues if they are too scared to approach them face-to-face."

Honoring Diversity and Success

Participants stressed that by recognizing each person's distinct contributions, celebrating accomplishments in a variety of contexts—be they academic, athletic, artistic, or even personal virtues—directly promotes inclusion. This demonstrates how recognition practices extend beyond formal ceremonies to include straightforward yet significant actions like school page highlights, bulletin board features, or verbal acknowledgments during meetings. Leaders successfully expand the definition of success by institutionalizing recognition across several domains, guaranteeing that no group feels left out or ignored. These systems boost morale, validate personal value, and reinforce the school community's collective identity as a place where every effort is valued.

"We honor individuals who put forth effort and dedication in addition to the top performers. Everyone can see that their input counts in this way. Highlighting various accomplishments conveys the idea that excellence is not limited to academic pursuits. For this reason, when a student contributes to the school in any way—be it artistic, debating, boyscouting, or anything else that boosts the school's spirit—it must be posted on our school journalist page."

Setting an Example of Respect and Positivity

Participants emphasized how the school culture is strongly influenced by their own behavior as leaders. Leaders set behavioral norms for employees and students to follow by consistently exhibiting positivity, justice, and inclusivity. Teachers can live out the principles they want to instill by doing things like calling students by name, praising their efforts, and politely resolving disputes. The institution's inclusive climate is strengthened by this modeling, which also encourages all community members to internalize and put these values into practice in their day-to-day interactions.

"Students pick much more knowledge from our actions than from our words. They will follow if they witness us treating everyone with dignity. The same is true for teacher performance: excellence rather than rigidity is echoed when you teach with love rather than merely adhering to the lesson plan. Teachers can then use this as a tool to take the same path. In a sense, like an expanding trend."

Research Objectives 2. To understand how the use of positive psychological traits shapes academic leaders' experiences, challenges, and strategies in implementing inclusive education practices.

Question 1. How have traits like resilience, optimism, or gratitude helped you navigate challenges in promoting inclusive education?

Resilience in the Face of Institutional Difficulties

Recognizing unavoidable obstacles including scarce resources and administrative assistance, participants highlighted the significance of resilience in advancing inclusive education. They proposed that seeing these difficulties as chances for introspection and development encourages perseverance in honing projects and identifying substitutes. In addition to being a personal quality, leaders can use this resilience as a strategic tool to turn institutional resistance into chances for planning and negotiation,

which helps communities maintain inclusive practices.

"Proposals for inclusion were occasionally turned down due to financial issues or just because superiors didn't want them. Because I had to keep going for the purpose of SPED inclusion, resilience prevented me from quitting up. I made revisions, made adjustments, and resubmitted until it was ultimately accepted."

Optimism as a Source of Inspiration

According to the participants, optimism is crucial for maintaining morale and motivation in inclusive education initiatives. They distinguished between true optimism and false optimism, pointing out that changes like community involvement and legislative modifications may take longer than anticipated, leading to disappointment. By keeping a positive outlook, leaders not only maintained their own zeal but also motivated coworkers and students, creating a culture of perseverance and hope. This strategy encouraged a dedication to long-term objectives and inclusive practices by reframing failures as transient difficulties. In the end, optimism reinforced commitment, teamwork, and a common goal for an inclusive learning environment, acting as both a personal coping mechanism and an essential leadership tool.

"Despite the glacial pace of progress, I maintain my optimism. Because in some ways, change might be the most frightening thing for a philosophy teacher. As a result, I maintain my optimism, which inspires my team to maintain their faith in the larger goal of fostering an inclusive society."

The Sustaining Character of Gratitude

Participants remarked that maintaining enthusiasm and dedication in inclusive education projects requires cultivating gratitude. Recognizing coworkers' and students' efforts on a regular basis, even for small accomplishments, promotes a happy environment and helps avoid fatigue. By praising minor accomplishments, leaders reinforce value and recognition, inspiring employees and students to make significant contributions. This strategy functions similarly to reverse psychology. Additionally, gratitude fosters a collaborative culture where people feel appreciated and encouraged and strengthens relationships. In addition to being a personal coping mechanism, this technique is a leadership tactic intended to boost morale, engagement, and a persistent emphasis on inclusivity.

"I show my appreciation by praising the minor efforts of my employees. I'm grateful, even if it's only a small improvement. I'm even thanking you for choosing me to participate because it's simple to express gratitude. And that comment alone has the power to make both of us happy; even a small act of appreciation can go a long way. In the end, this may foster a culture where individuals feel appreciated and inspired to make greater contributions."

Question 2. Can you describe a time when a positive psychological trait influenced how you responded to a difficult situation related to inclusion?

Conflict Resolution with Optimism

Participants emphasized that optimism had a big impact on how they handled and settled disputes inside their organizations. If optimism can serve as a driving force, it can also be a component in dispute resolution. They explained how they were better able to handle faculty conflicts, parental worries, and other issues pertaining to inclusive policies by keeping an optimistic and solution-focused perspective. Optimism enabled leaders to frame circumstances in terms of possibilities and potential positive outcomes rather than becoming mired in blame or negativity. Because, as they emphasize, advances require disagreement. This strategy maintained positive communication, promoted cooperative problem-solving, and assisted stakeholders in maintaining an open mind.

"In one instance during enrollment, a mom opposed the inclusion of a student with a disability because, in her opinion, it was a "disease." Optimism enabled me to frame the conversation around potential solutions. What would be accomplished if we provided the kid an opportunity rather than concentrating on their shortcomings and fostering an honest conversation about empathy and understanding?"

Implementing Policies with Resilience

Participants stated that resilience was essential to maintaining their attempts to promote inclusive education, especially in the face of early opposition from academic staff or administrative personnel. They explained how obstacles like worries about a heavier workload or a lack of experience with inclusive practices did not stop them from achieving their objectives. Rather, resilience inspired them to keep up their advocacy, provide more training, and give concise explanations to progressively increase comprehension and support. With perseverance, leaders were able to gradually change people's perspectives, transforming skepticism into collaboration and promoting a more welcoming school environment.

"Since this is a public school, many instructors first believed that the implementation of inclusive policies would increase their burden. I was able to meet them halfway, provide them further training, and demonstrate to them the advantages of inclusion for all students thanks to my perseverance."

Empathy in Meeting the Needs of Students

The importance of empathy in leadership was emphasized by the participants, especially when dealing with issues in inclusive education. Leaders stressed that they could react fairly and compassionately if they had empathy for students, particularly those from underprivileged backgrounds or those with learning disabilities. It was believed that empathy, patience, and flexibility were not just psychological qualities but rather a useful application of positive psychology in leadership. This strategy made it easier to put supportive interventions like attentive listening, peer mentoring, and customized learning plans into practice. These leaders created an atmosphere of respect and understanding by acting with empathy, which in turn promoted student involvement and reduced obstacles to learning.

"Rather than punishing a student who consistently missed class, I made an effort to find out why. I learned that he was caring for an ill dad when I listened. That experience made me realize how important empathy is to leadership. He was able to complete the course after I modified his prerequisites and provided flexible options."

Question 3. What personal strengths or attitudes do you draw upon when developing or implementing inclusive education strategies?

The Basis of Leadership: Empathy

Empathy was emphasized by participants as a crucial leadership quality that influences the creation and use of inclusive education solutions. Instead than depending on rigid, standardized processes, leaders can adapt programs and policies to address real needs by actively listening to the experiences of students, especially those from marginalized or underrepresented backgrounds. This knowledge makes it possible to develop relevant and successful treatments that increase student involvement and trust. Additionally, empathy strengthens ties with teachers, encouraging cooperation and a common dedication to inclusivity. Consequently, inclusive education becomes more egalitarian, responsive, and grounded in the practical experiences of all parties involved.

"A Muslim student previously came to my office to voice concerns about the disregarded policy that permits them to leave class to attend to their religious rituals, particularly during Ramadan. I had to schedule a meeting with faculty members to discuss this problem and concern since empathy enabled me to listen to her worries. And the matter was settled. I acted on it right away because of empathy."

Driving Change with Patience

Participants stated that patience is an essential quality in promoting inclusive education programs, particularly as systemic change frequently faces opposition or moves slowly. They underlined that leaders can successfully traverse obstacles and maintain long-term initiatives by being persistent without becoming frustrated. Their ability to be patient allows them to concentrate on tiny steps forward, acknowledging little victories that add up to greater inclusivity. Leaders inspire professors and students to take a similarly persistent stance by setting an example of consistent dedication.

"Being included takes time and effort. Due to conflicting institutional priorities and structural

underrepresentation, growth is still constrained even after a year. I've discovered that even when things seem to be moving slowly, patience enables me to keep going. It's about little actions that add up over time."

Flexibility in Developing Strategies

Adaptability was highlighted by participants as a crucial leadership quality in advancing inclusive education. They clarified that adaptability in lesson plans, instructional tactics, and leadership techniques allowed them to successfully address unforeseen difficulties and the particular requirements of a diverse student body. Leaders could maximize student and staff involvement and results by modifying programs instead of strictly enforcing them. Additionally, this flexibility promoted a culture of continuous improvement in which ongoing decision-making was guided by situational demands and feedback. In the end, this kind of adaptability ensured that inclusive practices continued to be applicable, useful, and successful in various settings.

"I used to believe that a single software could be utilized in any situation. However, flexibility enabled me to adapt to the needs of the teachers and students. Rather than pressuring the strategy, I modify it. And I told the teacher that the section A lesson plan might not be suitable for section F. Therefore, it is imperative to make the appropriate adjustments for adaptation."

DISCUSSION

Research Objectives 1. To explore how academic leaders apply principles of positive psychology in building inclusive education environments.

The results show that academic leaders are applying positive psychology concepts to their leadership practices, including optimism, wellbeing, inclusion, and strengths-based leadership. This strategy fills a vacuum in the literature about how these psychological characteristics are used to support inclusion at the institutional level while also being consistent with theories of optimism, self-efficacy, and growth mindset. In line with Dweck's (2006) idea of the growth mindset, which views failure as a starting point for change, leaders create cultures where perseverance and growth are valued by encouraging staff and students to see setbacks as transient.

The development of a sense of community and belonging was another major issue. Leaders emphasized that when teachers and students feel like they are a part of a caring academic community, inclusion is strengthened. Through the creation of peer support groups, the celebration of various accomplishments, and the use of inclusive language, leaders built environments where minority students felt truly accepted. This result is consistent with the belongingness theory proposed by Baumeister and Leary in 1995, which holds that people have an innate need for intimate, fulfilling connections. Building a sense of community ensured that access to education resulted in meaningful participation and improved student engagement as well as institutional cohesiveness ^[29]. Leaders emphasized psychological safety and a sense of belonging by prioritizing well-being through supportive practices and wellness initiatives. This strategy promotes a culture of mental health and emotional safety by extending inclusivity beyond academic accessibility. By identifying each person's unique abilities, strengths-based leadership has become a major force behind inclusion, fostering increased participation and teamwork. This emphasis increases self-assurance and output, enabling people—particularly underrepresented employees and students—to demonstrate their abilities and make significant contributions to the community ^[30].

Participants also emphasized the need of modeling and exhibiting inclusivity and optimism in leadership practices. Leaders that made a conscious effort to be fair, appreciative, and respectful saw a knock-on effect throughout their organizations. People pick up behaviors by watching role models, according to Bandura's (1997) social learning theory. This study makes a unique addition by highlighting the special and proactive role of academic leaders in converting positive psychology from an abstract psychological framework into tangible, institution-wide inclusive practices, going beyond just validating established theoretical frameworks. The results show that academic leaders act as cultural architects, creating inclusive environments through policy interpretation, relational leadership, and strengths-based decision-making. This leadership-centered perspective advances existing

scholarship by demonstrating that inclusive education is sustained not only through individual dispositions but through strategic leadership actions that embed positive psychological principles into the structural and relational fabric of educational institutions. This is in contrast to previous studies that primarily focus on the well-being of teachers or students.

Research Objectives 2. To understand how the use of positive psychological traits shapes academic leaders' experiences, challenges, and strategies in implementing inclusive education practices.

The results showed that academic leaders' navigation of inclusive education is greatly influenced by positive psychological qualities. These characteristics influenced not just their experiences in advancing equity but also the difficulties they faced and the methods they used to successfully resolve these problems. One of the most important characteristics in leaders' experiences with inclusive education was resilience. Resilient leaders continued to push for inclusion in spite of institutional impediments including scarce resources and systemic opposition, seeing challenges as chances for development. This result demonstrates how persistent perseverance helps long-term educational goals, which is compatible with Masten's 2001 definition of resilience as "ordinary magic."

Additionally, by encouraging confidence and drive in their communities, optimism influenced leaders' tactics. Even in situations where results were questionable, leaders who had a positive attitude encouraged teachers and students to adopt inclusive practices. Empathy was another essential quality that was highlighted^[31]. Leaders explained how developing empathy helped them better comprehend the difficulties faced by teachers and students, especially those from underprivileged or marginalized backgrounds. Leaders made sure that inclusion was both structural and compassionate by taking the time to listen and modify rules or procedures to suit individual needs. This result is consistent with Goleman's emotional intelligence paradigm from 1995, which views empathy as a fundamental skill of successful leadership. Leaders developed trust and strengthened a feeling of dignity and respect in their institutions by taking compassionate steps, such as providing flexible academic arrangements or just recognizing students' experiences^[32]. Additionally, gratitude was found to be a significant characteristic in the experiences of leaders.

Leaders strengthened healthy relationships and a feeling of shared purpose by acknowledging the efforts of their communities and colleagues^[33]. Emmons and McCullough's 2003 results that thankfulness strengthens interpersonal ties and fosters organizational collective resilience are consistent with this observation. Systemic biases, resistance to change, and a lack of resources were among the challenges mentioned by leaders. Optimism served as a future-focused cognitive framework that maintained motivation, resilience as a capacity for perseverance under pressure, and empathy as a relational mechanism directing compassionate decision-making in inclusive environments^[32-33]. According to the study's theoretical framework, academic leadership serves as a bridge between inclusive education and positive psychology. From a practical standpoint, it emphasizes the significance of leadership development initiatives that incorporate psychological health, interpersonal skills, and strengths-based governance.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights how academic leaders' approaches to creating and sustaining inclusive education are significantly impacted by positive psychological traits, such as resilience, optimism, empathy, and appreciation. These characteristics are thought to be crucial leadership tools that help leaders overcome systemic obstacles, promote teamwork, and create diverse workplaces. The study highlights the importance of academic leaders in implementing inclusive policies in institutions and promotes a strengths-based approach to leadership, relational engagement, and well-being-focused practices. It suggests moving inclusive education initiatives away from compliance-driven frameworks and toward positive psychology-based leadership development programs. To enhance leaders' ability to adapt to diversity and resource constraints, it is suggested that these characteristics be incorporated into training, institutional rules, and performance measures. According to the study, leadership that places a higher priority on psychological safety and human flourishing than merely structural reforms

is what leads to sustained inclusion. It is recommended that future study examine the long-term impacts of positive psychology-informed leadership on institutional outcomes in a variety of educational contexts, including comparative and longitudinal studies on practices, organizational culture, and policy implementation. In the end, the study contributes to the discourse surrounding inclusive education by emphasizing the significance of context-aware and psychologically informed leadership.

AI Use Statement

The authors certify that they developed and created every aspect of the research, including the study design, data collecting, thematic analysis, interpretation of findings, and conclusions. To increase readability and clarity, artificial intelligence-assisted techniques were only employed for grammar checking, language improvement, and consistency improvements. Data, topics, interpretations, and scholarly arguments were not produced by any AI system. The writers retain complete intellectual rights of all work..

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