

GILE Journal of Skills Development

Leadership Lessons from Westeros: A Qualitative Case Study on Game of Thrones as a Springboard for School Leadership Learning among Filipino Gen Z In-Service Teachers

Marwin Elarco Obmerga

Freelance Academic, Manila, Philippines

 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5300-3593>

Abstract

As Generation (Gen) Z enters the teaching profession, understanding the foundational skills (propaedeutics) required for future effective school leadership is critical. Considering their emergent organisational behaviour patterns, Game of Thrones (GOT) offers rich narratives and tropes that illustrate strategic planning, navigating tensions, and cultivating relational influence, providing a compelling lens for informal leadership learning. This qualitative case study explored twelve (12) purposively selected Filipino Gen Z in-service teachers, examining how engagement with GOT television series informs their preliminary preparation for school leadership. Semi-structured interviews captured participants' reflections, which were analysed through Thematic Analysis. The study advances a nuanced *Typology of GOT Popular Culture-driven Propaedeutics for School Leadership Learning* among Filipino Gen Z in-service teachers, foregrounding three (3) interrelated themes: the *Logistics of School Leadership*, the *Politics of School Leadership*, and the *Rhetorics of School Leadership*. These themes captured how participants made sense of operational decision-making, power negotiations, alliances, moral tensions, and persuasive communication through familiar GOT episodes, and how such sensemaking functioned as an accessible springboard for reflecting on school leadership aspects. Theoretically, the findings enrich modern leadership learning and preparation by illustrating how popular culture mediated contexts can cultivate early leadership cognition, ethical discernment, and strategic awareness among emerging educational leaders. Practically, the study demonstrates how thoughtfully curated popular culture elements may be harnessed within formal and informal professional learning spaces to align with Gen Z teachers' interpretive routines, thereby strengthening their readiness for future leadership and influence within contemporary educational organisations.

Keywords: school leadership, propaedeutics, Generation Z, popular culture, Game of Thrones

1. Introduction

The Generation Z (hereafter “*Gen Z*”), comprising individuals born between 1997 and 2012 (Dimock, 2019), represents a new cohort now igniting positive impacts in the educational sector (Obmerga, 2025; Obmerga & Yambao, 2025; Aggarwal et al., 2020). Their gradual yet visible integration into the workforce signals not merely a demographic shift but a deeper cultural and intellectual reconfiguration of how work, influence, and professional identity are conceptualised (Schroth, 2019). Within education, the immediate predecessors of this age-group, the millennials, once disrupted and subsequently redefined pedagogical, managerial, and leadership practices as they ascended through institutional hierarchies (Bogosian & Rousseau, 2017). In much the same way, the entry of Gen Z is expected to give rise to a novel organisational reality, marked by an alternative consciousness towards diversity, fluidity, and participatory forms of governance (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015).

This emerging generational dynamic bears profound implications for educational leadership and succession planning. As millennial academic managers are poised to occupy the upper echelons of institutional leadership in the near future (Obmerga & de Guzman, 2024), the Gen Z in-service teachers now entering the professional sphere will inevitably constitute the next generation of educational leaders. In this light, the preparation of this new cohort cannot simply rely on replicating traditional models of leadership training that served earlier generations. As Anderson and collaborators (2017) emphasise, the leadership strategies and developmental paradigms effective for one generation may not be transferable to another. Each generational group is marked by its own experiential lexicon; its own ways of engaging with authority, collaboration, and innovation. Hence, educational institutions must proactively design leadership preparation mechanisms that are agile enough to accommodate the sociocultural and cognitive dispositions of the Gen Z (Demirbilek & Keser, 2022).

Whether examined internally through school-based professional learning communities or externally through higher-level capacity-building programmes, there exists a growing recognition of the need to reimagine leadership preparation as a developmental continuum (Bălan & Vreja, 2018). This continuum should not commence abruptly with formal training, but should rather begin with a formative, propaedeutic phase; one that equips future leaders with the conceptual scaffolds necessary to make sense of leadership before entering formalised programmes. The term propaedeutic, derived from the Greek *propaideuein* meaning ‘to teach beforehand,’ refers to an introductory or preparatory form of learning that precedes and grounds formal study (Krasnova, 2013). In the context of leadership development, propaedeutic learning constitutes the stage where nascent leaders begin to develop rudimentary understandings of influence, ethics, and organisational dynamics through indirect, experiential, or mediated encounters such as observation of leadership practices, reflective dialogue with peers, and personal interpretation of complex social situations. Such praxis involves not merely the acquisition of terminologies or theories, but the cultivation of an interpretive lens through which leadership phenomena are first perceived and later formalised in structured learning settings.

An emergent and highly promising pathway for such propaedeutic leadership learning lies within the domain of popular culture. Popular culture encompasses the constellation of artefacts, rituals, and systems of meaning that characterise a society’s dominant lifeways at a particular historical juncture (Rhodes & Parker, 2008). It bridges traditional and digital media,

including books, television series, films, games, art, and music, and embeds itself into the everyday practices and collective consciousness of a generation (Thompson, 2007). Its persistence and ubiquity make it a powerful site for *informal* education, one capable of shaping not only linguistic and behavioural patterns but also moral and cognitive orientations (Godsil et al., 2016). Here, *informal* denotes the reflexive, experiential nature of propaedeutic learning, emphasising sensemaking over prescribed instruction, whether occurring inside formal programmes or through broader, mediated experiences. Through its characters, plots, and moral dilemmas, popular culture offers its audience symbolic encounters with the complexities of human conduct, authority, and relational ethics: concepts that lie at the very core of leadership.

Grindstaff (2008) noted that the saturation of popular cultural elements within a generation's consciousness signifies their deep pedagogical potential, as these elements come to serve as interpretive anchors for understanding the social world. Jubas (2023) further asserts that popular culture can function as a powerful springboard for exploring complex social or organisational constructs, even before learners formally encounter them in academic settings. Previous educational inquiries have drawn upon popular narratives such as J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* (Yu et al., 2022) and J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (Urlick, 2014) as informal yet potent tools for cultivating leadership awareness. These prior studies provide narrative simulations of ethical decision-making, alliance formation, and the exercise of influence: concepts transferable to real-world educational leadership contexts.

For the Gen Z cohort, one of the most formative and resonant cultural artefacts during their adolescence and early adulthood has been George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* ("*ASOIAF*", 1996–present), later adapted by a U.S.-based premium cable television network, Home Box Office (HBO), into the globally acclaimed television series *Game of Thrones* ("*GOT*", 2011–2019). Set in the fictional medieval realm of Westeros, *GOT* chronicles the contest for the Iron Throne among houses of divergent motives, values, and leadership styles (Flint, 2019). The series' narrative complexity, moral ambiguity, and thematic focus on governance, legitimacy, and strategic influence render it a fertile text for interpreting leadership in its nascent and experiential form. Yu and Campbell (2021) argued that its depiction of power dynamics, ethical dilemmas, and the consequences of decisions provides learners with heuristic models for reflecting on leadership in both personal and organisational contexts.

As Gause (2005) observes, recurring motifs in television narratives often encapsulate microcosms of organisational life, enabling critical reflection through metaphorical interpretation. Güven and Keleşoğlu (2014) similarly posited that the visual and symbolic richness of popular culture constitutes a natural repository of insights for teachers, particularly when studied through qualitative research designs that illuminate its deeper social meanings. Yet, despite this potential, there remains a paucity of empirical work that situates popular culture, specifically *GOT*, as a propaedeutic avenue for leadership preparation. This gap is especially evident in developing educational contexts in the Global South, such as the Philippines, where leadership development models remain largely derivative of Western epistemologies and where locally meaningful, culturally embedded alternatives have yet to be systematically explored.

Against this backdrop, the inquiry sought to illuminate how popular culture, through the medium of *GOT*, may serve as a preparatory foundation for understanding leadership among Filipino Gen Z in-service teachers. Anchored on a qualitative case study design, this study

explored how GOT functions as a propaedeutic learning stimulus that informs leadership preparation practices among this emergent cohort. By examining this case, the study uncovered how Gen Z teachers' engagement with the GOT narrative provides foundational insights into influence, decision-making, and ethical stewardship; concepts juxtaposed to effective school leadership in contemporary educational organisations. Accordingly, this inquiry addressed the central question: “*What leadership learning lessons can be derived when Game of Thrones is employed as a propaedeutic medium for school leadership development among Filipino Gen Z in-service teachers?*”

2. Theoretical Framework

This inquiry was anchored in Multimedia Learning Theory (Mayer, 2020; Bandura, 2001) and Self-Directed Learning Theory (Garrison, 1997), which together elucidate how GOT popular culture functions as a propaedeutic learning stimulus for leadership among Filipino Gen Z in-service teachers. Multimedia Learning Theory posits that learning is optimised through multimodal engagement where words, images, and emotions coalesce to shape cognition. Extending Bandura's (2001) view of symbolic modelling, media narratives such as GOT become powerful vehicles for vicarious learning, enabling individuals to observe leadership dynamics, ethical tensions, and decision-making complexities within simulated social contexts. Through these portrayals, learners actively construct meaning, forming cognitive scripts of leadership that mirror the realities of influence and stewardship within educational organisations.

Complementing the underpinning above is the Self-Directed Learning Theory, which emphasises the learner's autonomy in identifying, interpreting, and applying insights from experiential or mediated encounters. Gen Z teachers, characterised by self-reliance and preference for informal, interest-driven learning, engage with GOT not merely as entertainment but as a reflective exercise that allows them to internalise leadership principles through self-initiated interpretation. The convergence of these theories underscores that leadership learning can occur informally yet meaningfully through media engagement, where self-directed reflection transforms cultural consumption into formative preparation. Within this framework, GOT serves as a pedagogical prelude: a propaedeutic space wherein future educational leaders cultivate foundational awareness of ethical, strategic, and interpersonal dimensions of leadership practice.

3. Methods

3.1. The Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach, specifically a *single-case study* design, to explore how GOT functions as a propaedeutic learning stimulus for leadership among Filipino Gen Z in-service teachers. The single-case study design was deemed most appropriate because the inquiry focuses on a bounded, culturally and contextually specific phenomenon, the interpretive engagement of a distinct cohort with a particular media text, rather than on comparing multiple cases (Yin, 2018). This design facilitates an in-depth, holistic examination of participants' reflections, experiences, and meaning-making processes, enabling the construction of a *Typology of GOT Popular Culture-driven Propaedeutic for School Leadership Learning*, grounded in rich data.

3.2. The Research Participants

The phenomenon was explored in-depth through the perspectives of twelve (12) Filipino Gen Z in-service teachers (Table 1), who were purposively selected according to the following inclusion criteria: (a) natural-born Filipino citizen; (b) belonging to the older segment of Gen Z (born 1997 to 1999); (c) currently employed in a teaching capacity, regardless of discipline, within an educational institution; (d) not yet occupying a formal leadership role or an informal designation entailing leadership responsibilities within their respective academic organisations; (e) familiar with the history and lore of George R. R. Martin’s ASOIAF or having viewed the GOT television series produced by HBO; and (f) willing to actively participate in the study. This purposeful selection ensured that participants could provide informed and meaningful insights regarding the potential of GOT as a propaedeutic tool for leadership development, while maintaining a bounded and contextually coherent case for investigation.

The participants hailed from twelve (12) distinct educational institutions across the regions of the Philippines, comprising six (6) public and six (6) private basic (elementary and high school) educational institutions, with each participant representing a unique organization. The final sample size was determined based on the point of data saturation, initially recruiting nine (9) participants and subsequently including three (3) additional participants to verify and confirm the emerging themes, ensuring that no new insights were forthcoming. The author had no prior connection with any participant or institution. Recruitment was conducted via a post on a Philippine-based Reddit thread, to which individuals responded voluntarily. No monetary incentives were provided to participants for their involvement in the study.

TABLE 1. THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS ($N = 12$)

Code	Age	Gender	Highest Educational Attainment	Disciplinary Teaching Focus	Tenure in the Educational Organisation	No. of Years Watching the GOT Series and Reading the ASOIAF Novels
P1	25	M	B	Science	1 y	10 y
P2	25	M	B	Language Arts	1 y	8 y
P3	25	F	B	Mathematics	1 y 5 m	7 y
P4	24	M	B	Science	1 y 1 m	9 y
P5	25	F	B	Science	2 y	10 y
P6	25	F	B	Mathematics	2 y 1 m	10 y
P7	24	M	B	Social Studies	7 m	9 y
P8	25	M	B	Mathematics	11 m	10 y
P9	25	F	M	Language Arts	1 y 1 m	9 y
P10	24	M	B	Language Arts	5 m	6 y
P11	25	F	M	Social Studies	10 m	10 y
P12	24	M	B	Social Studies	1 y	9 y

Legend: M: Male; F: Female; B: Bachelor’s degree; M: Master’s degree; y: year(s); m: month(s)

Source: Constructed by the sole author

3.3. The Instrumentation

A two-pronged instrument was developed to collect relevant data from the study participants. The first component involved the creation of participants’ *robotfoto*, a Dutch term denoting a cartographic sketch, which served to capture baseline characteristics and contextual information

about each participant (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). The second component comprised a semi-structured interview guide featuring open-ended questions derived from a set of *A priori* constructs aligned with the key dimensions of propaedeutic learning, GOT/ASOIAF engagement, popular culture, and school leadership identified in the literature.

To ensure comprehensive coverage of all dimensions within the *A priori* question development, an aide mémoire was employed during the interviews as a reference guide. Sample questions included: “*What aspects of GOT/ASOIAF make it suitable for leadership appreciation and learning?*”, “*Is there a particular character from your viewings or readings who you consider a potential source of inspiration for your future leadership practices?*”, and “*Can you recall any line or scene that, in your view, exemplifies leadership?*” This question development approach facilitated both structured data collection regarding participant characteristics and rich, reflective narratives that illuminated the preparatory (propaedeutic) learning potential of popular culture for leadership development. Additionally, the semi-structured interview guide was subjected to expert validation by two (2) qualitative research specialists, both of whom concurred that the formulated questions were sufficiently aligned with the study’s aims and possessed the capacity to elicit rich, in-depth accounts capable of illuminating the phenomenon under investigation.

3.4. The Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained from each participant to ensure ethical compliance and voluntary engagement. Selected participants attended an initial briefing session during which the nature of the study, the scope of their involvement, and the anticipated procedures were clearly explained. Following this, individual in-depth interviews and storytelling sessions were conducted to elicit rich, contextualised narratives. All interviews and probing sessions (Robinson, 2023) were audio-recorded and were then transcribed verbatim, preserving participants’ wording, pauses, and emphasis to maintain the integrity of the data for subsequent thematic analysis. Each session lasted approximately 1.5 hours, allowing sufficient time for participants to articulate their reflections on GOT/ASOIAF and its potential as a propaedeutic medium for leadership learning. Upon conclusion of the interviews, debriefing sessions were held to provide participants with the opportunity to express their emotions, clarify points, and pose questions regarding the study, thereby ensuring both ethical sensitivity and the integrity of the data collected.

3.5. The Ethical Considerations

All participants were provided with detailed written and verbal information regarding the objectives, procedures, phases, and scope of their involvement in the study. They were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any stage of the data-gathering process without any adverse consequences. In addition, each participant signed a formal informed consent form, which had been rigorously reviewed and approved by the Ethical Review Board of their respective institutions prior to the commencement of the study. These measures ensured adherence to the highest standards of ethical research practice, safeguarding participants’ autonomy, confidentiality, and well-being throughout the inquiry.

3.6. The Mode of Analysis

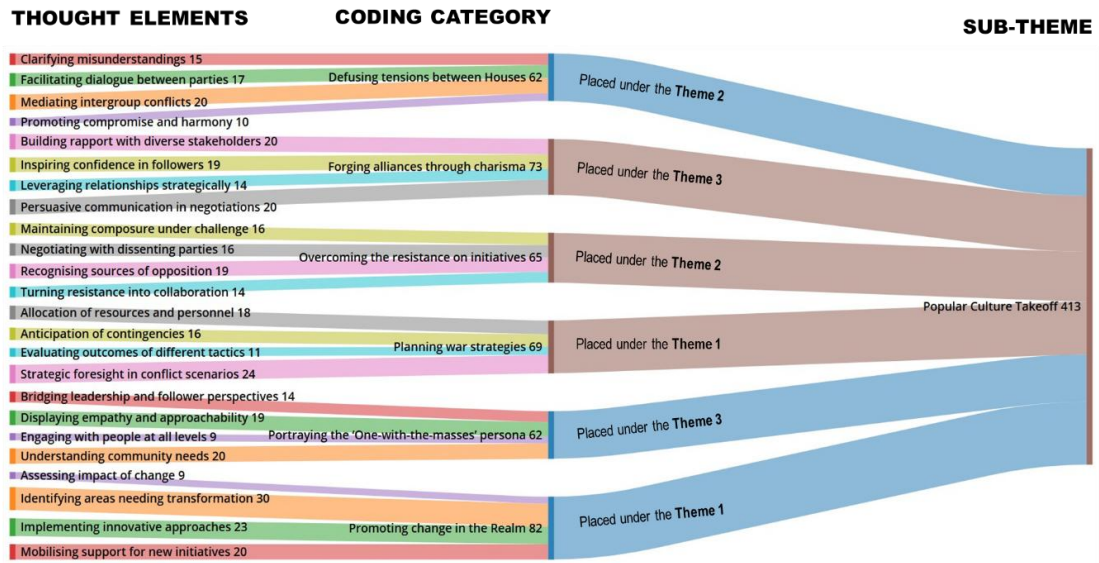
Data were analysed using Thematic Analysis (“TA”) as articulated by Braun and Clarke (2013), an elicitation method well-suited for exploring the depth and complexity of qualitative narratives within a bounded case study. TA was chosen for its flexibility in identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns of meaning. The process followed Braun and Clarke’s six-phase framework: (a) familiarisation with the data, through repeated reading of transcripts and reflection on participants’ narratives; (b) initial coding, whereby meaningful units of text were labelled according to alignment with *A priori* codes (propaedeutic learning, popular culture, GOT/ASOIAF, and school leadership) and emergent ideas; (c) searching for themes, organising codes into potential thematic clusters that captured recurring patterns of leadership learning; (d) reviewing themes, ensuring coherence within and distinctiveness between themes while maintaining fidelity to participants’ interpretations; (e) defining and naming themes, articulating the essence of each leadership construct; and (f) producing the report, integrating the thematic findings into a structured typology.

3.6.1. The Inductive Thematisation Trail (Focusing on the Shared Sub-themes)

This segment presents the thematisation trail of the thematic analysis, with particular emphasis on the inductive development of shared sub-themes that cut across the major themes reported in the Findings. Attention to this section is essential, as it elucidates the granular analytic details that collectively constitute the study’s major themes, which are discussed at a higher level in the main Findings. Since the primary results focus on the major themes, this segment provides the necessary analytic depth that underpins their construction. To visualise the complex relational flow of these analytic movements, Sankey Diagrams were utilised for each shared sub-theme (Figures 1–3). The Sankey Diagram was chosen over traditional matrices or hierarchical trees due to its capacity to represent both the magnitude and directionality of thematic progression, depicting how thought elements flowed seamlessly into higher-order coding categories. This visualisation effectively conveyed the interdependence among codes and their eventual convergence into the broader sub-thematic structure, offering a transparent, data-grounded view of sub-thematic density and conceptual transition. It should be noted, however, that the arrangement and colour coding of the Sankey diagrams (Figures 1–3) were software-generated; accordingly, textual signposts have been placed at the top of each figure to clearly denote the *thought elements*, *codes*, and *sub-themes*. The flow of the categorisation of codes under their respective major themes is likewise made explicit within the figures and reinforced through the accompanying explanation.

The trajectory of thematisation in this qualitative inquiry unfolded through a recursive and reflective analytic process anchored in Braun and Clarke’s (2013) TA. Meaning units of text were first broken down into thought elements, clustered through interpretive coding, and progressively abstracted into broader (sub)thematic categories. This process generated three (3) shared sub-themes: *The GOT Popular Culture Takeoff*, *The Future Leadership Intake*, and *The Enduring Takeaway*, each cutting across the overarching thematic dimensions of the inquiry: *The Logistics, Politics, and Rhetorics of School Leadership*. Collectively, these shared sub-themes across themes illuminate how Filipino Gen Z in-service teachers internalised and recontextualised leadership principles drawn from GOT narratives into their own developing philosophy and praxis of school leadership.

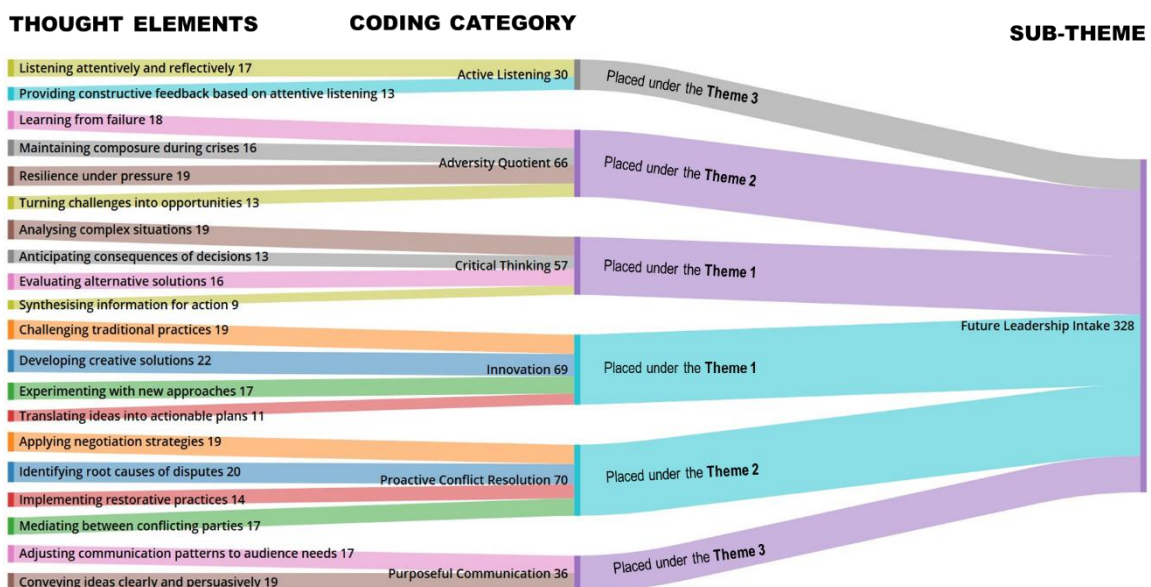
FIGURE 1. THE SANKEY DIAGRAM DEPICTING THE GOT POPULAR CULTURE TAKEOFF SUB-THEME



Source: Constructed by the sole author

The first shared sub-theme across themes, *The GOT Popular Culture Takeoff* (413 thought elements), captured participants' initial interpretations of leadership concepts through the GOT popular culture springboard. It foregrounded leadership as a strategic and adaptive act shaped by context, alliances, and resistance. Six major coding clusters emerged from this domain: *Planning War Strategies* (69) [Theme 1], *Promoting Change in the Realm* (82) [Theme 1], *Overcoming Resistance on Initiatives* (65) [Theme 2], *Defusing Tensions Between Houses* (62) [Theme 2], *Forging Alliances Through Charisma* (73) [Theme 3], and *Portraying the "One-with-the-masses" Persona* (62) [Theme 3]. These coding clusters collectively revealed that participants viewed leadership as inherently political and tactical, mirroring the manoeuvrings of GOT characters navigating volatile alliances and moral ambiguity.

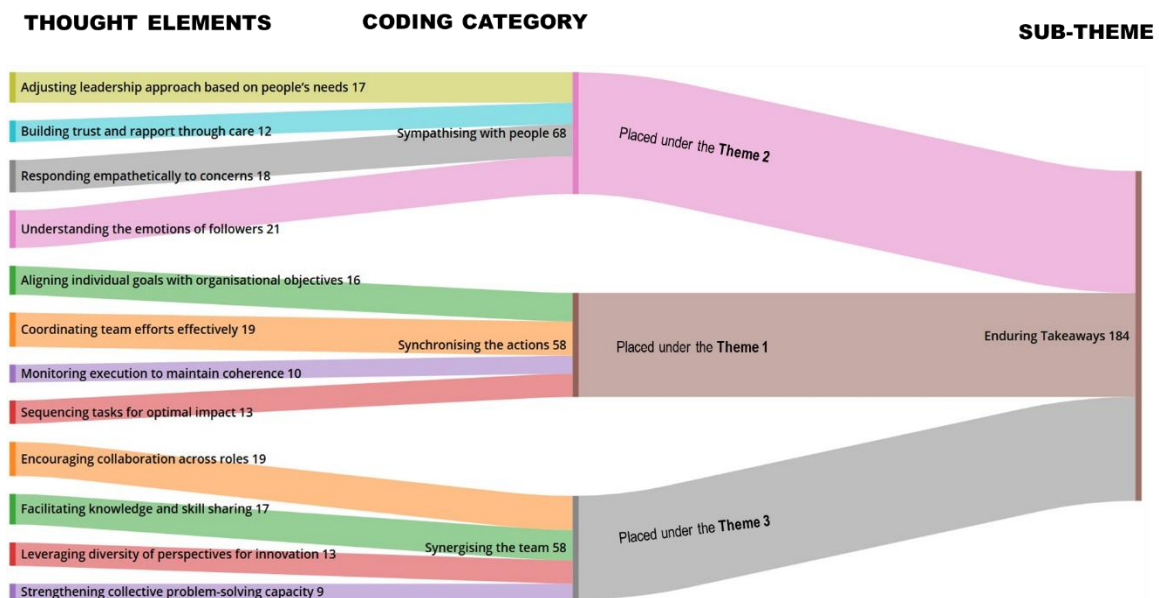
FIGURE 2. THE SANKEY DIAGRAM DEPICTING THE FUTURE LEADERSHIP INTAKE SUB-THEME



Source: Constructed by the sole author

The second shared sub-theme across themes, *The Future Leadership Intake* (328 thought elements), captured participants' internalisation of transferable leadership competencies reflected in the series' narrative arcs. This cluster represented the anticipatory dimension of leadership formation, centred on skills and dispositions deemed vital for future educational leaders. The emergent coding categories, *Critical Thinking* (57) [Theme 1], *Innovation* (69) [Theme 1], *Adversity Quotient* (66) [Theme 2], *Proactive Conflict Resolution* (70) [Theme 2], *Purposeful Communication* (36) [Theme 3], and *Active Listening* (30) [Theme 3], illustrated how participants translated narrative lessons into actionable insights. They drew inspiration from episodes that portrayed crisis management, moral decision-making, and relational leadership, transforming these scenes into conceptual footholds for their own developmental trajectories as future school leaders. The increasing conceptual density from these codes indicated a cognitive shift from passive spectatorship to active appropriation, demonstrating how participants critically negotiated fictional representations into real-world leadership reflections.

FIGURE 3. THE SANKEY DIAGRAM DEPICTING THE ENDURING TAKEAWAYS SUB-THEME



Source: Constructed by the sole author

The final shared sub-theme across themes, *The Enduring Takeaway* (184 thought elements), represented the culminating phase of meaning consolidation wherein participants distilled abstract insights into enduring leadership dispositions. It comprised three coding focal areas: *Synchronising the Actions* (58) [Theme 1], *Sympathising with People* (68) [Theme 2], and *Synergising the Team* (58) [Theme 3]. These encapsulated the relational and ethical dimension of leadership praxis, signifying an understanding that the sustainability of leadership effectiveness depends on harmony, empathy, and collective efficacy.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the *Future Leadership Intake* sub-theme refers to prospective leaders' anticipatory and forward-looking capacities, including foresight, strategic imagination, and preparatory action in response to emerging challenges in the educational organisation. In contrast, the *Enduring Takeaway* sub-theme captures leadership dispositions that could persist across time and contexts, such as moral consistency, relational trustworthiness, and resilience under sustained pressure. Thus, the former is concerned with

navigating what lies ahead, whereas the latter reflects the capacity to remain effective and credible despite prolonged uncertainty and change in the school setting.

TABLE 2. THE TYPOLOGY OF GAME OF THRONES (GOT) POPULAR CULTURE-DRIVEN PROPAEDEUTIC FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP LEARNING AMONG FILIPINO GEN Z IN-SERVICE TEACHERS

Major Thematic Area	Overarching Sub-components of the Thematic Areas (Shared Sub-themes)		
	The GOT Popular Culture Takeoff	The Future Leadership Intake	The Enduring Takeaway
(1) The <i>Logistics of School Leadership</i>	Planning war strategies; Promoting change in the Realm*	Critical Thinking; Innovation	Synchronising the actions
(2) The <i>Politics of School Leadership</i>	Overcoming the resistance on initiatives; Defusing tensions between Houses**	Adversity Quotient; Proactive Conflict Resolution	Sympathising with people
(3) The <i>Rhetorics of School Leadership</i>	Forging alliances through charisma; Portraying the ‘One-with-the masses’ Persona	Purposeful Communication; Active Listening	Synergising the team

*Realm – A terminology in GOT that denotes the kingdom

**House – A terminology in GOT that represent a noble (greater or lesser) family

Source: Constructed by the sole author

In tracing how these shared sub-themes intersected with the study’s major themes, a clear mapping emerged (Table 2). Codes under *Planning War Strategies* and *Promoting Change in the Realm* (from *The GOT Popular Culture Takeoff*); *Critical Thinking* and *Innovation* (from *The Future Leadership Intake*); and *Synchronising the Actions* (from *The Enduring Takeaway*) were aligned with the *Logistics of School Leadership*, signifying strategic and operational competencies necessary for educational governance. The *Politics of School Leadership* theme encompassed codes such as *Overcoming Resistance on Initiatives*, *Defusing Tensions Between Houses*, *Adversity Quotient*, *Proactive Conflict Resolution*, and *Sympathising with People*, denoting the intricate balancing of power, diplomacy, and emotional intelligence in managing institutional and interpersonal challenges. Meanwhile, the *Rhetorics of School Leadership* theme was constituted by *Forging Alliances Through Charisma*, *Portraying the “One-with-the-masses” Persona*, *Purposeful Communication*, *Active Listening*, and *Synergising the Team*, highlighting leadership as a meaningful and relational enterprise underpinned by charisma, collaboration, and communicative clarity.

3.7. The Trustworthiness and Rigour

The study ensured trustworthiness through adherence to Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, and was further guided by the COREQ checklist (Tong et al., 2007) to enhance transparency and methodological rigour. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement with participants and member-checking, allowing them to review and clarify interview transcripts, coding decisions, and theme finalisations to ensure accurate representation of their perspectives. Transferability was addressed by providing rich, contextualised descriptions of the participants, their educational

settings, and their engagement with GOT, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to similar contexts. Dependability was maintained through a detailed audit trail documenting each stage of data collection, coding, and thematic development, while adherence to COREQ standards ensured definitive reporting of research team characteristics, study design, and data analysis procedures. Confirmability was enhanced through reflective journaling by the researcher and peer debriefing, ensuring that interpretations were grounded in the data rather than researcher preconceptions. Collectively, these strategies reinforced the rigour and integrity of the study, ensuring that the emergent typology of leadership learning propaedeutics authentically reflects participants' reflective engagement and interpretive insights.

4. Results and Discussion

The rich and nuanced individual and collective narratives generated in this study culminated in the *Typology of GOT Popular Culture-driven Propaedeutic for School Leadership Learning among Filipino Gen Z in-service teachers*. This typology shows how participants interpreted and internalised leadership concepts before formally taking on leadership roles. The resulting typology highlights three (3) interconnected domains, *Logistics*, *Politics*, and *Rhetorics of School Leadership*, which participants identified as critical areas for development as emerging school influencers. These thematic areas work through familiar GOT episodes, images, and symbols as their *Takeoff* points, guiding participants to identify specific leadership *Intakes* they can develop while awaiting formal leadership roles. These experiences culminate in an enduring overall *Takeaways* that participants are encouraged to embrace throughout their time in the organisation (See Table 2). Collectively, the typology underscores an overarching insight: that proactive engagement with these preparatory leadership lessons allows Gen Z teachers to cultivate awareness, strategic thinking, and relational acumen, laying a foundation for future formal leadership role readiness within their respective educational organisations.

4.1. The Exposition of Theme 1: *The Logistics of School Leadership*

In the first theme, the participants consistently highlighted that strategic planning, tactical foresight, and problem-solving, as depicted in GOT, resonate strongly with their emerging understanding of school leadership. The first theme foregrounds participants' interpretations of leadership as the management of systems, routines, and resource-dependent decisions that sustain everyday school functioning. Unlike the second theme, *The Politics of School Leadership*, which centres on power relations and strategic alliances, and third theme, *The Rhetorics of School Leadership*, which emphasises persuasion and symbolic communication, this theme is grounded in operational reasoning and pragmatic judgement. Participants drew on GOT narratives depicting supply management, succession planning, crisis response, and coordination under constraint, using these storylines to reflect on timetable structuring, workload distribution, and policy enactment in schools. The theme thus captures leadership learning as procedural sensemaking, where competence is measured by foresight, organisation, and the capacity to align limited resources with institutional goals rather than by influence or discursive skill.

Scenes depicting war councils, alliances, and counterstrategies vividly illustrated how characters' decisions, both actions and inactions, carry long-term consequences, reinforcing the importance of meticulous planning. As one participant reflected: "*I always reminisce about the characters' discussions in the war councils and rooms. Every time I think of those scenes,*

particularly when Queen Daenerys Targaryen was assessing how to succeed in her cause, I realise that every move must be properly planned or everything will fall” (P3). Similarly, Lord Tyrion Lannister’s orchestration of the defence of King’s Landing during the Battle of Blackwater Bay (Season 2, Episode 9, “Blackwater”) demonstrated that even under intense scrutiny and doubt, effective leaders can leverage resources strategically and take calculated risks. A participant noted: “Lord Tyrion’s planning during the Battle of Blackwater Bay taught me that leadership is not just about position, but about anticipating outcomes and preparing even when others doubt your capacity” (P6).

Beyond strategic foresight, participants emphasised critical thinking, adaptability, and proactive change as essential preparatory leadership skills. While still acclimatising to their roles as teachers, they recognised that organisational challenges inevitably increase in complexity over time. One participant stated: “I am already a critical thinker as a classroom teacher. But I believe that I will develop my critical thinking skills even further before I handle leadership positions” (P5). GOT episodes such as future Night’s Watch Lord Commander Jon Snow defending the Wall against the Wildlings (Season 4, Episode 9, “The Watchers on the Wall”) and leading the Battle of the Bastards (Season 6, Episode 9, “Battle of the Bastards”) exemplify resilience and the capacity to unify diverse teams under high-stakes conditions, highlighting the need for courage and coordination. As P7 observed: “Witnessing the Night’s Watch member Jon Snow take charge at the Wall made me realise that leadership requires both bravery and the ability to unite people under a shared purpose.” Likewise, Khaleesi Daenerys Targaryen’s diplomatic negotiations with the Dothraki (Season 1, Episode 10, “Fire and Blood”) and her campaigns in Slaver’s Bay (Season 3, Episodes 4–10, “And Now His Watch Is Ended” to “Mhysa”) emphasised ethical persuasion and vision alignment as key leadership skills.

Moreover, the participants also recognised the value of observational learning and situational awareness. Lady Sansa Stark’s political navigation of Winterfell’s future, particularly in Season 6, Episode 9, “Battle of the Bastards” and Season 7, Episode 7, “The Dragon and the Wolf”, and Lady Arya Stark’s adaptive journeys, notably in Season 6, Episode 5, “The Door” and Season 7, Episode 4, “The Spoils of War”), emphasised that leaders must exercise patience, assess evolving contexts, and continually develop personal competencies to concretise logical acumen. One participant reflected: “Lady Sansa Stark’s approach taught me that sometimes leading effectively requires listening first, observing carefully, and then acting decisively” (P9), while another noted: “Lady Arya’s journey reminded me that leadership is not static; one must continually adapt and develop skills to meet changing circumstances” (P10).

Furthermore, the participants highlighted the importance of discernment in applying creative initiatives and rallying followers around a unified vision, akin to the coordinated actions of kings, queens, and commanders in GOT. As P4 explained: “There are several things that I want to change and implement in our school. Like most successful scenarios in GOT, I need to discern where my creative ideas are applicable. I plan to learn more about it”, while P1 emphasised: “Leadership is a game of compelling people to believe and support your cause. Similar to the roles the king, queen, lord, ladies, and commanders have been playing throughout the GOT series... with the aid of the GOT show, I could reflect on it more even before I started doing such activities.”

Collectively, the *Logistics of School Leadership* theme demonstrates how GOT's rich narrative and symbolic repertoire, grounded in identifiable episodes, fosters strategic thinking, critical analysis, adaptability, and sound decision-making, forming a foundational propaedeutic platform for Filipino Gen Z in-service teachers as they prepare to assume future leadership roles within educational organisations.

4.2. The Discussion of Theme 1

This case study yielded the *Typology of GOT Popular Culture-driven Propaedeutic for School Leadership Learning* among Filipino Gen Z in-service teachers, encapsulating the preparatory pathways through which participants could derive early insights into leadership before formally assuming positions of influence. Within this underpinning, the *Logistics of School Leadership* theme reflects the participants' orientation toward developing a systematic approach to organisational influence, emphasising deliberate planning, critical reasoning, and strategic foresight.

The participants drew extensively from the symbolism of war rooms and council meetings depicted in GOT (HBO, 2011–2019), noting how these strategic assemblies exemplify structured decision-making during moments of armed conflict or rebellion. Such depictions resonate with classical notions of strategy, akin to Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, which continues to inform leadership development by instilling principles of tactical planning and measured execution (Dimovski et al., 2012). In contemporary organisations, planning remains a foundational pillar for effective initiative implementation, ensuring coherence, alignment, and efficiency in achieving objectives (Caillods, 2015).

For the participants, the war room is not merely a narrative artefact but a cognitive springboard for cultivating critical thinking. Engaging with these scenes, they reflected on the necessity of anticipating consequences and evaluating potential courses of action before committing to decisions, recognising that critical thinking mitigates irreversible errors that may adversely affect stakeholders (Ay et al., 2015; Sonmez-Cakir & Adiguzel, 2020). They acknowledged that developing these cognitive faculties is a preparatory endeavour that can and should begin even before formal leadership responsibilities are assumed, particularly as the outcomes of contemporary educational organisations become increasingly complex and high-stakes (Mahapatra et al., 2022).

Another salient facet identified by participants is the promotion and management of organisational change, as dramatised in the shifting allegiances, reforms, and policy decisions across Westeros. Change, although potentially resisted by those unprepared, is essential for organisational responsiveness and sustainability (Fusch et al., 2020). Through reflecting on these narrative episodes, participants recognised the importance of understanding the implications of implementing change and the necessity of strategically aligning initiatives to minimise disruption and maximise acceptance (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015).

Finally, these narrative takeoff points fostered a deeper appreciation of innovation and proactive problem-solving. By observing how GOT characters adapt to dynamic circumstances, the participants acknowledged that cultivating inventive dispositions is indispensable for contemporary educational leadership, enabling leaders to respond strategically to rapid technological and societal shifts (Serdyukov, 2017). Moreover, this reflective engagement underscored the significance of rallying followers through coordinated, collaborative actions;

an essential aspect of Gen Z leadership identity, characterised by vocal advocacy, collective reasoning, and participatory engagement (Olaskoaga-Larrauri et al., 2022; Racolța-Paina & Irini, 2021; Schroth, 2019).

4.3. The Exposition of Theme 2: *The Politics of School Leadership*

The second theme is analytically distinct in its focus on power, influence, and relational manoeuvring within organisational life. In contrast to the first theme, *The Logistics of School Leadership*, which prioritises functional execution, and third theme, *The Rhetorics of School Leadership*, which centres on communicative framing, this theme attends to how leadership is negotiated through alliances, conflict, loyalty, and moral compromise. Participants interpreted Westerosi power struggles as mirrors of school-based dynamics involving hierarchy, informal authority, stakeholder resistance, and competing interests. These interpretations were consistently anchored in participants' reflections on navigating departmental politics, leadership succession, and decision-making under scrutiny. The theme therefore positions leadership learning as strategic sensemaking, where effectiveness emerges from reading contexts, managing tensions, and exercising judgement within complex human systems.

In the purview of the participants, while moments of peace and prosperity are quite rare in the world of GOT, the participants recognised that its overlapping plots, captured through enduring popular culture narratives, illustrate the inevitable friction among allies and the opposition from adversaries. They understood that leaders often encounter resistance, particularly when challenging long-held beliefs and routine practices. As one participant explained, Lord Eddard Stark's experience as Lord of Winterfell and Hand of the King to Robert Baratheon exemplified how integrity and moral conviction often invite defiance, especially in politically charged environments. *"He is an honourable leader, but he received various forms of defiance during his time in the capital. No matter what you say or do, people will be against you"* (P7). Another participant added that Lord Eddard's story reminded them that *"...integrity sometimes invites conflict; in schools, standing by what's right may not always be popular, but it is necessary"* (P3). This insight was vividly portrayed in Season 1, Episode 7, "You Win or You Die", where Lord Eddard attempted to navigate court intrigues, only to be betrayed by those he trusted. For participants, this scene mirrored the ethical tensions school leaders face when balancing institutional mandates with moral duty, emphasising that leadership inevitably requires moral stamina in the face of dissent.

Responding effectively to such challenges emerged as a competency participants intend to cultivate before assuming formal leadership roles. They recognised that fortifying one's resolve and developing resilience are crucial for navigating future adversities. As one noted, *"We may be way ahead of our time in receiving actual leadership, but the administrators should also consider the possibility that we must learn how to endure the pains of leading and managing teachers. We should learn to be firm since people admire courage and respect determination"* (P9). Another participant related this to Lord Tyrion Lannister's experience in the Battle of Blackwater (Season 2, Episode 9), observing that *"...even when Lord Tyrion was doubted, he still showed courage and strategic brilliance. It's like when young leaders are underestimated but still have to prove their capacity"* (P2). For these participants, Lord Tyrion Lannister's combination of humility and resolve represented the kind of adaptive confidence needed to manage scepticism and perform under pressure; traits they aspired to embody as future school leaders.

Similarly, participants reflected on inter-House conflicts as metaphors for the realities of organisational disputes. The long-standing enmity between House Stark and House Lannister (Season 1, Episodes 5–10, “The Wolf and the Lion” to “Fire and Blood”) and the intense clash between House Stark and House Bolton in the “Battle of the Bastards” (Season 6, Episode 9) illustrated for them the centrality of timely intervention and stabilisation in leadership. One participant noted that “...we all remember the conflict between House Stark and House Lannister, as well as the conflict between House Stark and House Bolton, because of their epic fight scenes and intriguing storylines. Such scenes are relevant to learning more about being a leader since these quarrels among teachers and factions do happen” (P8). Another explained that, like former Night’s Watch Lord Commander Jon Snow during the Battle of the Bastards, “A leader must decide quickly when disagreements spiral out of control. Delaying action only worsens division” (P10). These reflections suggested that while institutional politics can escalate, effective leaders act decisively to mediate tensions and prevent further fragmentation within the team.

Through these discussions, participants acknowledged the importance of early exposure to conflict resolution strategies. While formal models of mediation and negotiation can be introduced later as capacity-building measures, they believed that contextual understanding, especially when anchored to culturally familiar narratives, builds intuitive readiness. As P12 articulated, “We can always read about conflict resolution strategies once we are already leaders, but it can never replace the kind of knowledge and expertise that we can muster from learning about it quite early. Various types of conflict are recognisable in GOT.” This was echoed by another participant who reflected that “...even the smallest misunderstandings among characters in GOT grew into wars. It reminds me that in schools, unresolved issues between teachers or departments can also escalate if not managed early” (P5). Such insights highlighted how participants were beginning to appreciate leadership as an anticipatory act, one that involves diagnosing tensions before they expand into institutional crises.

Furthermore, the participants underscored the value of empathy and relational awareness in addressing resistance and fostering reconciliation. GOT repeatedly illustrates that the success or failure of leadership is inseparable from human agency, as seen in Lady Sansa Stark’s negotiation with Lord Petyr ‘Littlefinger’ Baelish in Season 7, Episode 7, “The Dragon and the Wolf”. One participant reflected that “...we cannot remove the people element from every leadership scenario. Looking back at GOT, every success and problem can be attributed to a person. Things will become manageable if you have people with acumen or relational skills. I must actively learn how to use sympathy to understand my future followers” (P6). Another added that “Lady Sansa showed that empathy doesn’t mean weakness; it’s about reading people’s motives and guiding them toward unity, even when trust has been broken” (P1). For these participants, relational intelligence, expressed through empathy, discretion, and timing, was recognised as the emotional core of political leadership in schools, distinguishing coercive authority from moral influence.

Taken together, the *Politics of School Leadership* theme demonstrates that GOT provides Filipino Gen Z in-service teachers with a narrative-based lens for interpreting power dynamics, resistance, and negotiation within organisations. By internalising these lessons early, participants cultivate resilience, foresight, and emotional intelligence; qualities that prepare

them to navigate the intricate political realities of educational leadership while remaining grounded in integrity and care.

4.4. The Discussion of Theme 2

The participants' preliminary understanding of school leadership, as derived from GOT (HBO, 2011–2019), coalesced into the *Politics of School Leadership* theme, highlighting the importance of mindful governance and the ability to manage tension-filled, conflict-prone situations; skills they recognised as essential for future leadership. Bolman and Deal (2008) noted that the political frame of leadership involves transforming undesirable circumstances into opportunities while mitigating divisive outcomes. Anchoring their reflections on the character of Eddard Stark, the Lord of Winterfell, participants identified a wealth of leadership lessons embedded in his honourable yet politically fraught trajectory. They collectively emphasised that even well-intentioned initiatives are often met with defiance and opposition, echoing Ford and associate's (2021) observation that leadership is inherently marked by resistance.

Through this narrative lens, participants acknowledged that a critical preparatory task is developing the resilience and resolve to navigate criticisms and opposition effectively before assuming formal leadership roles. As Widodo and colleagues (2022) argue, contemporary leaders require a well-honed adversity quotient alongside intelligence and emotional competence to manage organisational challenges. Gen Z teachers, in particular, are expected to cultivate skills for navigating complex relational dynamics, negotiating resistance, and responding to obstacles with poise (Töröcsik et al., 2014).

The participants further reflected on the recurring inter-House tensions and political manoeuvres in GOT as instructive exemplars of organisational discord and its management. These plots illuminated the need for proactive conflict resolution to preserve harmony and maintain institutional stability. As Harms and collaborators (2017) suggest, understanding and alleviating tensions is an essential competency in today's unpredictable organisational climate. For Gen Z school leaders, this entails learning to mediate generational divides and resolve disputes with strategic foresight.

In recognising these narrative takeoff points, participants identified the necessity of developing conflict management strategies and adopting a 'reframing and rehumanising' stance (Nan, 2011, p. 240) when engaging with contentious situations. Central to school leadership and organisations is the ability to navigate opposing perspectives and conflicting personalities (Saleh et al., 2025). While prior conflict resolution research has focused predominantly on previous generations of school leaders (Bhayana et al., 2021), the unique context of Gen Z necessitates proactive, empathetic, and context-sensitive approaches to leadership.

Ultimately, the theme posits that while organisational tensions and interpersonal conflicts are inevitable, effective leadership requires the cultivation of empathy, resilience, and strategic acumen. Participants recognised that developing an adversity quotient, learning conflict resolution, and exercising sympathy are not optional but foundational for shaping a leadership style capable of sustaining influence, fostering collaboration, and guiding stakeholders towards shared organisational goals (Holt & Marques, 2011; Kock et al., 2019).

4.5. The Exposition of Theme 3: *The Rhetorics of School Leadership*

The last theme highlights leadership as an act of meaning-making through language, symbolism, and narrative persuasion. Unlike the first theme, *The Logistics of School Leadership*, which is concerned with execution, and the second theme, *The Politics of School Leadership*, which centres on power negotiation, this theme emphasises how leaders shape belief, legitimacy, and collective direction through discourse. Participants drew on iconic episodes in GOT to examine how authority is constructed, challenged, or sustained through words and performative acts. These interpretations were explicitly connected to school contexts involving vision-setting, motivational communication, and ethical positioning. The theme thus frames leadership learning as discursive sensemaking, where influence is exercised through credibility, clarity, and the capacity to align narratives with shared values.

The participants highlighted the strategic cultivation of networks and alliances as a pivotal leadership lesson from GOT. While every character operates with vested interests, the ability to secure support consistently determined the success of their ventures. They perceived charisma as a vital trait for leaders, enabling them to manage diverse teams and unify multiple stakeholders. As one participant stated: *“If you look into various characters in the GOT series, no other character does the role of an actual leader oozing with charisma like Lord Tyrion Lannister. ...he understood the need for alliances and allegiances. That is real leadership!”* (P10). Another participant added that Lord Tyrion’s approach demonstrated that *“...charisma does not mean manipulation but the art of being heard and respected despite limitations”* (P5). Indeed, Lord Tyrion’s deft negotiation with Lord Varys’s network in Season 2, Episode 9, “Blackwater,” and his political manoeuvring at King’s Landing in Season 4, Episode 10, “The Children,” exemplify how charisma, coupled with strategic thinking, enhances a leader’s influence over a diverse constituency.

Additionally, the participants also recognised the necessity of effective communication and presence, especially in a generation accustomed to digital correspondence. They reflected on the importance of conveying clarity and vision, not merely echoing prevailing sentiments. As P11 observed: *“We must know how to communicate with the teachers under us, our fellow leaders, and higher school authorities. As I reflect on GOT, I realise how an authority figure's choice of words can make a difference in the clarity of a marching order to subordinates and the overall success of what he has in mind.”* P2 reinforced this insight by noting that *“...leadership now is not only about the message but how it is said—tone, empathy, and consistency matter, as seen in Queen Daenerys Targaryen’s speeches that inspire loyalty despite uncertainty.”* This lesson was illustrated in Season 1, Episode 10, “Fire and Blood,” when Queen Daenerys Targaryen addresses her followers in Slaver’s Bay, demonstrating that eloquence and transparency are central to earning trust and motivating action.

The importance of connecting with the grassroots also emerged as a critical dimension of leadership. Participants contrasted characters like future Night’s Watch Lord Commander Jon Snow (Season 5, Episode 8, “Hardhome”) and Queen Daenerys Targaryen (Season 3, Episode 4, “And Now His Watch Is Ended”) with King Stannis Baratheon (Season 5, Episode 10, “Mother’s Mercy”) and Queen Cersei Lannister (Season 6, Episode 10, “The Winds of Winter”), noting that successful leaders demonstrated empathy and attentiveness to their followers’ needs, while less effective ones remained isolated or authoritarian. As P6 articulated: *“I am sure our generation will find resonance from characters like King Jon Snow and Queen*

Daenerys Targaryen. They understood other people's plights, so the people follow them. Now, think of King Stannis Baratheon and Queen Cersei Lannister. They failed as leaders because the people do not understand them." P3 expanded on this by reflecting that "...empathy in leadership is not weakness; it is strategic awareness of what people feel and think, which determines whether they will walk with you or against you."

Furthermore, the participants also underscored the role of active listening in informed leadership. Scenes such as Lord Tywin Lannister advising King Tommen Baratheon (Season 4, Episode 10, "The Children") emphasised that wisdom stems from attentive listening and responsiveness. As P9 reflected: "*King Tommen was about to ascend the throne upon the death of his king brother. Lord Tywin explained that good kings are holy, just, and strong, but he realised that wise kings listen to others. Like King Tommen, we do not know many things in the school. We should listen more. What is the point in learning leadership if you do not know how to listen?*" Similarly, P7 remarked: "*Listening is not submission; it is understanding. Lord Tywin's advice to King Tommen shows that authority without ears is just ego. That lesson matters in schools where communication gaps cause most conflicts.*"

Finally, participants recognised that leadership extends beyond authority and personal ambition, requiring intentional efforts to foster synergy and cohesion within teams. They acknowledged the necessity of connecting with others, appreciating diversity, and cultivating collaboration to achieve collective goals. As P4 emphasised: "*A generation that usually prefers to work alone must definitely make many adjustments to connect well with others. ...we need to open ourselves to other people, tolerate individual differences, and find our common ground to learn how to create a vibrant team.*" Complementing this, P1 added: "*Think of the Night's Watch after Lord Commander Jon Snow's return. Their strength was never about rank but about trust and cooperation. That's how school leadership should feel: shared survival through shared purpose.*"

In essence, the *Rhetorics of School Leadership* theme demonstrates that GOT narratives provide Filipino Gen Z in-service teachers with a propaedeutic understanding of leadership through charisma, effective communication, empathetic engagement, and team cohesion. By internalising these lessons early, participants are better prepared to influence, connect, and lead effectively within complex educational environments.

4.6. The Discussion of Theme 3

Analysing GOT through the lens of preparatory leadership learning inductively generated the *Rhetorics of School Leadership* theme. Participants consistently highlighted the pivotal role of forging alliances and establishing connections with rank-and-file personnel as foundational to enhancing their communication and active listening skills as emerging school leaders. Effective communication and listening were identified as critical leadership facets for mitigating dissonance and fostering cohesion among followers (Longweni & Kroon, 2018; Saraih et al., 2022). The participants anchored their reflections on Lord Tyrion Lannister, the morally ambiguous yet strategically astute character, as a propaedeutic exemplar of charisma and relational influence. They asserted that charisma, particularly in alliance-building, constitutes a necessary skill for Gen Z leaders to navigate complex organisational landscapes, an aspect currently underexplored in leadership literature.

The participants also noted that securing alliances within an organisation must be complemented by developing practical communication skills, which underpin trust, rapport, and collaborative productivity (Musheke & Phiri, 2021). As digital natives, Gen Z teachers rely heavily on virtual connectivity, yet they acknowledged the indispensable value of face-to-face relational acumen to complement their technologically mediated interactions (Tankovic et al., 2022). Furthermore, participants drew leadership lessons from the contrasting depictions of characters such as Lord Commander/King Jon Snow and Queen Daenerys Targaryen, whose capacity to engage and empathise with their constituents exemplifies effective people-oriented leadership. Conversely, King Stannis Baratheon and Queen Cersei Lannister illustrated the pitfalls of disconnecting from followers, highlighting the consequences of neglecting relational responsibilities (Gonfa, 2019).

Crucially, participants recognised that active listening is a linchpin for maintaining follower engagement and enhancing decision-making, echoing Mackey and collaborator's (2018) assertion that detachment compromises leaders' capacity to intervene appropriately in work-related grievances. The integration of these takeoff points enabled participants to appreciate the significance of team synergy as a preparatory skill, even before formal leadership assumption. Contemporary educational institutions, with their structured regimens, require leaders who can harmonise collaborative efforts, thereby alleviating workloads and enhancing collective efficacy (Sanyal & Hisam, 2018). Gen Z teachers, though still prospective leaders, exhibited an awareness of collaborative dynamics, aligning with literature that identifies them as inherently cooperative and relationally attuned (Bencsik et al., 2016).

In sum, the theme underscores that developing charisma, communication skills, active listening, and team synergy constitutes an essential preparatory repertoire for aspiring Gen Z school leaders, providing a practical foundation from which to cultivate influence, relational competence, and strategic impact in complex organisational environments.

5. The Researcher's Reflexivity

In conducting this qualitative case study, the researcher maintained an ongoing process of reflexivity to account for the potential influence of personal engagement with GOT and ASOIAF on the interpretation of participants' experiences. While the researcher is both a viewer of the series and a reader of the books, which provided familiarity with the narrative, characters, and thematic arcs, measures were intentionally adopted to mitigate confirmation bias and ensure analytic rigor. These included adhering closely to participants' verbatim accounts and maintaining reflective memos to interrogate assumptions arising from prior knowledge of the GOT universe. Additionally, the researcher remained attentive to instances where personal interpretations could overshadow participants' perspectives, striving to privilege the participants' lived experiences over preconceptions. Moreover, for the interest of disclosure, the researcher is affiliated with the Philippine educational sector and holds experience as a published author and active peer reviewer in prestigious journals, with a particular focus on qualitative research methodologies, which informs the contextualisation and interpretation of the data. By maintaining this reflexive posture throughout data collection, coding, and thematic development, the study aimed to uphold the integrity and trustworthiness of the findings, ensuring that insights into the propaedeutic dimensions of leadership were grounded in participants' accounts rather than the researcher's familiarity with the popular culture content.

6. Conclusion

Scholars have argued that leadership learning and preparation theories and models that proved effective for previous generations of leaders do not necessarily guarantee efficacy for subsequent cohorts (Anderson et al., 2017). Consequently, it is imperative to identify approaches that address the distinctive sensibilities, values, and expectations of prospective leaders from Gen Z (Demirbilek & Keser, 2022). In this context, aspects of GOT popular culture provided a compelling springboard for exploring the preliminary leadership understanding, offering insights into the competencies and mindsets that Gen Z in-service teachers should cultivate as future school leaders. From these focal points, the study advances its theoretical contributions, practical implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

6.1. Theoretical Contributions

This study makes three significant theoretical contributions. First, whereas much of the extant scholarship has prioritised school leadership learning and preparation for millennial managers in anticipation of the impending retirement of prior generations' leaders and managers (Obmerga, 2024; Easton & Steyn, 2022), this inquiry uniquely focuses on the emergent Gen Z cohort, unpacking the school leadership learning domains that resonate most profoundly with their experiences and perceptions. Second, it addresses a notable gap in the literature by exposing the foundational parameters that Gen Z teachers should understand and progressively internalise as prospective leaders derived from the reflections of twelve participants from distinct educational institutions across the Philippines, synthesised with relevant literature and interpreted through the author's analytical lens. However, by virtue of the study's qualitative case study methodology, these findings offer only an indirect and partial insight into what these competencies are and how they may be developed. Third, the study introduces the *Typology of GOT Popular Culture-driven Propaedeutic for School Leadership Learning* among Filipino Gen Z in-service teachers, presenting a provocative lens that captures an unfiltered yet potent appreciation of leadership. This framework illuminates how informal cultural artefacts can serve as an initial incubator for leadership cognition and skill development, unmediated by formal training or pre-existing institutional biases.

6.2. Practical Implications

This inquiry yields practical implications anchored in the *Typology of GOT Popular Culture-driven Propaedeutic for School Leadership Learning* among Filipino Gen Z in-service teachers. These practical implications may hold particular value for Gen Z educators, regardless of disciplinary specialisation, who seek to develop a deeper understanding of school leadership, as well as for Gen Z teachers who are increasingly being identified and prepared within emerging school leadership pipelines. First, the *Logistics of School Leadership* theme underscores the importance of cultivating critical thinking and innovation. By reflecting on the popular culture takeoff points of planning war strategies and promoting change in the realm, Gen Z teachers can proactively synchronise their actions, experiment with strategic initiatives, and refine their problem-solving acumen even before assuming formal leadership roles. Second, the *Politics of School Leadership* theme highlights the necessity of developing an adversity quotient, conflict resolution skills, and the capacity for sympathy. Engagement with GOT narratives involving overcoming resistance on initiatives and defusing tensions between Houses equips emerging leaders to navigate opposition, anticipate organisational frictions, and relate

meaningfully to their colleagues, thus fostering a resilient and empathetic leadership approach. Third, the *Rhetorics of School Leadership* theme stresses the cultivation of effective communication, active listening, and team synergy. By examining character-driven lessons in forging alliances through charisma and portraying the ‘*One-with-the-masses*’ Persona, Gen Z in-service teachers can learn to connect with followers, establish rapport, and harmonise diverse viewpoints, thereby enhancing collective performance and cohesion within their educational institutions. Collectively, the typology can inform the design of skills and career development programmes for graduating teacher education students and newly inducted in-service teachers by deliberately highlighting key leadership competencies and reflective entry points for sustained professional and leadership growth. Furthermore, it may be applied within classroom settings, especially prior to the culmination of the baccalaureate degree stint of such educators, to inculcate a glimpse of leadership development through guided pre-engagement with familiar narratives and early onset experiential learning activities.

6.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The single-case study design enabled participants to articulate and clarify the participants’ perspectives and positionalities of the preparatory avenue for school leadership derived from GOT popular culture. Nonetheless, the inquiry was inherently constrained by limitations typical of qualitative case study research, including intersubjective responses, a small and purposively selected sample, and findings that are not generalisable beyond the study context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). While measures such as memoing, conformity to the COREQ guidelines, and being mindful to the researcher’s reflexivity were implemented to enhance trustworthiness and rigour, the interpretations remain bounded by the experiences and vantage points of the twelve participants. Furthermore, the scope of GOT popular culture considered was selective; other narrative arcs, subplots, or character portrayal interpretations with the GOT series may evoke alternative sensemaking of leadership learning propaedeutics, thereby limiting the extent of the already moderate generalisation.

Future research could expand and diversify this inquiry by employing alternative qualitative methodologies, such as metaphor analysis, portraiture, or cross-case studies, to capture broader dimensions of Gen Z in-service teachers’ informal leadership preparation or leadership learning. Future studies may also consider focus group discussions, as the primary interview protocol, to further explore cultural narratives and co-construction of meaning among the participants. Subsequent investigations may also explore other popular culture avenues, such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), which presents accessible leadership exemplars while reducing exposure to adult-themed content (Schmidt & Islam, 2022). Moreover, the integration of Artificial Intelligence features in research design and data collection and analysis presents an unprecedented opportunity to synthesise textual, visual, and audiovisual elements from popular culture, enabling richer coding schemes, thematic analyses, and pattern recognition across larger datasets. Finally, these findings could underpin sophisticated quantitative approaches, including scale development and model testing, to further operationalise the propaedeutic leadership learning among Gen Z in-service teachers, offering a methodologically pluralistic lens on their emerging conquest in school leadership.

References

- Aggarwal, A., Sadhna, P., Gupta, S., Mittal, A., & Rastogi, S. (2020). Gen Z entering the workforce: Restructuring HR policies and practices for fostering the task performance and organizational commitment. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 22(3), 25–35. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2535>
- Anderson, H. J., Baur, J. E., Griffith, J. A., & Buckley, M. R. (2017). What works for you may not work for (Gen)Me: Limitations of present leadership theories for the new generation. *Leadership Quarterly*, 28(1), 245–260. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.08.001>
- Ay, F. A., Karakaya, A., & Yilmaz, K. (2015). Relations between self-leadership and critical thinking skills. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 207, 29–41. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.10.147>
- Bălan, S., & Vreja, L. O. (2018). Generation Z: Challenges for management and leadership. *Proceedings of the 12th International Management Conference (Management Perspectives in the Digital Era)*, Romania, pp. 879–888. <https://ideas.repec.org/a/rom/mancon/v12y2018i1p879-888.html>
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory of mass communication. *Media Psychology*, 3(3), 265–299. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532785XMEP0303_03
- Bencsik, A., Horváth-Csikós, G., & Juhász, T. (2016). Y and Z generations at workplaces. *Journal of Competitiveness*, 8(3), 90–106. <https://doi.org/10.7441/joc.2016.03.06>
- Bhayana, C., Gupta, V., & Sharda, K. (2021). The role of shared leadership in managing conflicts in multigenerational teams: A research framework. *Business Perspectives and Research*, 9(2), 252–268. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2278533720964928>
- Bogosian, R., & Rousseau, C. (2017). How and why millennials are shaking up organizational cultures. *Rutgers Business Review*, 2(3), 386–394. <https://rbr.business.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/documents/rbr-020309.pdf>
- Bolman, L. G. and Deal, T. E. (2008). *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* (4th ed). Jossey-Bass.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*. Sage.
- Cabardo, J. R. O. (2016). Levels of participation of the school stakeholders to the different school-initiated activities and the implementation of school-based management. *Journal of Inquiry & Action in Education*, 8(1), 81–94. <https://digitalcommons.buffalostate.edu/jiae/vol8/iss1/5/>

-
- Caillods, F. (2015). Educational planning worldwide. *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2(7), 261–265. <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-08-097086-8.92064-6>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, D. J. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th ed.). Sage.
- Demirbilek, M. & Keser, S. (2022). Leadership expectations of Generation Z teachers working in educational organizations. *Research in Educational Administration & Leadership*, 7(1), 209–245. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/real/issue/69243/1021310>
- Dimock, M. (2019). Defining generations: Where millennials end and generation Z begins. *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>
- Dimovski, V., Marič, M., Uhan, M., Đurica, N., & Ferjan, M. (2012). Sun Tzu’s “The Art of War” and implications for leadership: Theoretical discussion. *Organizacija*, 45(4), 151–158. <https://doi.org/10.2478/v10051-012-0017-1>
- Easton, C., & Steyn, R. (2022). Leadership styles and effectiveness in the workplace: A perspective of the millennial generation. *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences*, 25(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajems.v25i1.4541>
- Flint, J. (2019). ‘Game of Thrones’ final sets HBO ratings record. *The Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/game-of-thrones-finale-draws-19-3-million-viewers-11558382378>
- Ford, J., Ford, L., & Polin, B. (2021). Leadership in the implementation of change: Functions, sources, and requisite variety. *Journal of Change Management*, 21(1), 87–119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14697017.2021.1861697>
- Fusch, G. E., Ness, L., Booker, J. M., & Fusch, P. I. (2020). People and process: Successful change management initiatives. *Journal of Social Change*, 12(1), 166–184. <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/jsc/vol12/iss1/13/>
- Garrison, D. R. (1997). Self-directed learning: Toward a comprehensive model. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48(1), 18–33. <https://doi.org/10.1177/074171369704800103>
- Gause C. P. (2005). “Edu-tainment”: Introduction-popular culture in the making of schools for the 21st century. *Journal of School Leadership*, 15(3), 240–242. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105268460501500301>
- George, D. (2016). Trust & growth in the workplace: An analysis of leadership in flat organizations. *University Honors Theses*, Paper 353, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.341>
- Godsil R. D, MacFarlane J., & Sheppard B. (2016). *PopJustice: Pop Culture, Perceptions and Social Change*. <https://perception.org/publications/popjustice/>
-

-
- Gonfa, B. D. (2019). Review of effects of poor leadership skill in organization: Evidences. *Arabian Journal of Business Management Review*, 9(381), 1–5. <https://www.scholarscentral.com/pdfs/41471/review-of-effects-of-poor-leadership-skill-in-organization-evidences.pdf>
- Grindstaff, L. (2008). Culture and popular culture: A case for sociology. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 619(1), 206–222. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40375803>
- Güven, I., & Keleşoğlu, S. (2014). A qualitative study towards infusing popular culture on teaching practice in the classroom. *Education and Science*, 39(171), 344–360. <https://doi.org/10.15390/ES.2014.1237>
- Harms, P. D., Credé, M., Tynan, M., Leon, M., & Jeung, W. (2017). Leadership and stress: A meta-analytic review. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 28(1), 178–194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.10.006>
- Holt, S., & Marques, J. (2011). Empathy in leadership: appropriate or misplaced? An empirical study on a topic that is asking for attention. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 105(1), 95–105. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-0951-5>
- Jubas, K. (2023). Using popular culture in professional education to foster critical curiosity and learning. *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 55(1), 240–258. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2022.2114690>
- Kelchtermans, G., & Ballet, K. (2002). The micropolitics of teacher induction: A narrative bibliographical study on teacher socializations. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, 18(1), 105–120. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(01\)00053-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(01)00053-1)
- Kock, N., Mayfield, M., Mayfield, J., Sexton, S., & De La Garza, L. M. (2019). Empathetic leadership: How leader emotional support and understanding influences follower performance. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 26(2), 217–236. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051818806290>
- Krasnova, M. (2013). Propaedeutics in education: A comparative historical flashback. *Nizhny Novgorod Linguistics University Bulletin*, 2(22), 148–157. <https://vestnik.lunn.ru/en/journal-archive/2013-year/issue-22/22-16/>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Sage.
- Longweni, M. & Kroon, J. (2018). Managers' listening skills, feedback skills and ability to deal with interference: A subordinate perspective. *Acta Commercii*, 18(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ac.v18i1.533>
- Mackey, J. D., McAllister, C. P., Maher, L. P., & Wang, G. (2018). Leaders and followers behaving badly: A meta-analytic examination of curvilinear relationships between destructive leadership and followers' workplace behaviors. *Personnel Psychology*, 72(1), 3–47. <https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12286>
-

-
- Mahapatra, G. P., Bhullar, N., & Gupta, P. (2022). Gen Z: An emerging phenomenon. *NHRD Network Journal*, 15(2), 246–256. <https://doi.org/10.1177/26314541221077137>
- Mayer, R. E. (2020). *Multimedia Learning* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Musheke, M. M., & Phiri, J. (2021). The effects of effective communication on organizational performance based on the systems theory. *Open Journal of Business and Management*, 9, 659–671. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojbm.2021.92034>
- Nan, S. A. (2011). Consciousness in culture-based conflict and conflict resolution. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 28(3), 239–262. <https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.20022>
- Obmerga, M. E. (2024). For whom the bell (*really*) tolls: A grounded theory of millennial academic supervisors' sensemaking of communitarian values as a springboard to enrich their transformational leadership attributes. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 27(2), 283–315. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2020.1862919>
- Obmerga, M. E. (2025). The impact of design thinking and innovative work behaviours on Filipino Gen Z novice science educators' safe laboratory teaching praxis. *Southeast Asian Journal of STEM Education*, 5(1), 58–72. https://www.seameo-stemed.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/SAJSE-Vol5-No1_Jan-2025.pdf
- Obmerga, M. E., & de Guzman, A. B. (2024). Birds of a feather flock together: Understanding Filipino millennial academic managers' mindset. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 52(5), 1206–1230. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432221114696>
- Obmerga, M. E., & Yambao, F. M. P. (2025). Understanding the early impacts of school mentors' ethics of care on Filipino Gen Z novice science educators' informal professional learning. *GILE Journal of Skills Development*, 5(1), 67–91. <https://doi.org/10.52398/gjsd.2025.v5.i1.pp67-91>
- Olaskoaga-Larrauri, J., Rodríguez-Armenta, C. E., & Marúm-Espinosa, E. (2022). Disagreement in the conceptualization of educational quality and job satisfaction. *MDPI Social Sciences*, 11, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11070287>
- Ozkan, M., & Solmaz, B. (2015). The changing face of the employees: Generation Z and their perceptions of work. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 26, 476–483. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s2212-5671\(15\)00876-x](https://doi.org/10.1016/s2212-5671(15)00876-x)
- Racolța-Paina, N. D., & Irini, R. D. (2021). Generation Z in the workplace through the lenses of human resource professionals – A qualitative study. *Quality - Access to Success*, 22(183), 78–85. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2549088698?sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals>
- Rhodes, C., & Parker, M. (2008). Images of organizing in popular culture. *Organization*, 15(5), 627–637. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508408093645>
-

-
- Robinson, O. C. (2023). Probing in qualitative research interviews: Theory and practice. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 20(3), 382–397. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2023.2238625>
- Saleh, M. N. I., Hanum, F., & Rukiyati. (2025). Approaches to implementing peace education in high schools for nonviolent conflict resolution. *Cogent Education*, 12(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2025.2553004>
- Sanyal, S., & Hisam, M. W. (2018). The impact of teamwork on work performance of employees: A study of faculty members in Dhofar University. *IOSR Journal of Business and Management*, 20(3), 15–22. <https://scholar9.com/publication-detail/the-impact-of-teamwork-on-employees-performance-a-7094>
- Saraih, E.F., Wong, S.L., Asimiran, S., & Khambari, M. S. M. (2022). Contemporary communication conduit among exemplar school principals in Malaysian schools. *RPTEL*, 17(4), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41039-022-00179-x>
- Schmidt, G. B., & Islam, S. (2022). *Leaders Assemble! Leadership in the Marvel Cinematic Universe*. Emerald Publishing.
- Schroth, H. (2019). Are you ready for Gen Z in the workplace? *California Management Review*, 61(3) 5–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0008125619841006>
- Serdyukov, P. (2017). Innovation in education: What works, what doesn't, and what to do about it? *Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching & Learning*, 10(1), 4–33. <https://doi.org/10.1108/jrit-10-2016-0007>
- Sonmez-Cakir, F., & Adiguzel, Z. (2020). Analysis of leader effectiveness in organization and knowledge sharing behavior on employees and organization. *SAGE Open*, 10(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020914634>
- Tankovic, A. C., Kapeš, J., & Benazić, D. (2022). Communication skills in generation Z as future tourism employees. *Communication Research and Practice*, 8(1), 86–102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2021.2017136>
- Thompson, P. M. (2007). The influence of popular culture and entertainment media on adult education. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2007(115), 83–90. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.270>
- Tisdell, E. J., & Thompson, P. M. (2007). Seeing from a different angle: The role of pop culture in teaching for diversity and critical media literacy in adult education. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 26(6), 651–673. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370701711349>
- Tong, A., Sainsbury, P., & Craig, J. (2007). Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research (COREQ): A 32-item checklist for interviews and focus groups. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, 19(6), 349–357. <https://doi.org/10.1093/intqhc/mzm042>
-

Töröcsik, M., Szűcs, K., & Kehl, D. (2014). How generations think: Research on Generation Z. *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae Communicatio*, 1, 23–45.

<https://acta.sapientia.ro/content/docs/how-generations-think-research-on-genera.pdf>

Urick, M. J. (2014). Wizards, hobbits, and kings: Leadership in Tolkien's Middle-earth and lessons for business leaders. *Journal of Leadership and Management*, 2(2), 21–29.

<https://tinyurl.com/yrwsjc2w>

Widodo, W., Irvandi G., & Chandrawaty, C. (2022). Adversity quotient promotes teachers' professional competence more strongly than emotional intelligence: Evidence from Indonesia. *Journal of Intelligence*, 10(44), 1–17.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/jintelligence10030044>

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (6th ed.). Sage.

Yu, H. H., & Campbell, T. M. (2021). Teaching leadership theory with television: Useful lessons from Game of Thrones. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 27(2), 141–175.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2020.1746137>

Yu, H. H., Lorenzo-Elarco, K. M., Murro, M. J., McAnany, E. L., & Anderson, H. R. (2022). Teaching leadership with popular culture: Practical lessons from Harry Potter. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 28(2), 156–181.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2021.1989735>

Declaration Statements

Conflict of Interest

The author reports no conflict of interest.

Funding

The author received no financial support for this article's research, authorship, and/or publication.

Data Availability

Data supporting the conclusions of this study can be made available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

AI Use

AI tools (Grammarly, Gemini, and ChatGPT-5) were used only for linguistic and stylistic support. No AI system was used to generate original scientific claims, data, or interpretations, which remain entirely those of the author.

Ethics Statement

Participation in the interviews was voluntary and based on informed consent. All responses were collected anonymously, and no personally identifiable information was recorded. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. The study complied with standard ethical guidelines for social science research.

Open Access Agreement

This article is published under a CC BY 4.0 license. This license allows reusers to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format, so long as attribution is given to the creator. The license allows for commercial use. For more information, please visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Corresponding Author

The corresponding author for this manuscript is Marwin Elarco Obmerga who can be contacted by email via meobmergarman@gmail.com.