



Unpacking the Role of Instructional Leadership in Teacher Professional Development

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Abstract

This qualitative study aimed to unpack the role of instructional leadership in teacher professional development. Ten teachers and three PAU Excellencia Global Academy Foundation, Inc. coordinators participated in the study. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed three main themes. First, instructional leadership practices were found to be critical in promoting teacher learning and development. The participants emphasized the importance of leaders modelling effective teaching practices, providing feedback, and facilitating collaboration and learning opportunities. Second, the study showed that the quality of teacher-administrator relationships was essential in promoting teacher professional growth. The participants highlighted the significance of trust, open communication, and mutual respect in building positive relationships. Lastly, the study revealed that teacher professional development is a continuous and ongoing process that requires sustained support from school leaders. The participants emphasized the need for ongoing professional development opportunities, such as workshops, mentoring, and coaching. These findings have important implications for educational leaders and policy-makers in promoting effective teacher professional development. School leaders should prioritize instructional leadership practices that model effective teaching practices and facilitate collaborative learning opportunities. They should also foster positive teacher-administrator relationships and provide ongoing professional development opportunities to support teachers in their professional growth. By doing so, they can promote a culture of continuous learning and development in their schools, ultimately leading to improved student learning outcomes.

Keywords *Instructional leadership; Teacher professional development; School administrators*

INTRODUCTION

Leadership has been identified as a crucial element in improving educational outcomes and student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004; Wahlstrom et al., 2010). Effective leadership involves the ability to motivate and inspire teachers to perform at their best, ultimately leading to better student outcomes. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the role of school leaders in promoting teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Özdemir, 2019).

Research on instructional leadership has highlighted its importance in improving teacher performance and student outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Instructional leadership involves a focus on improving teaching and learning through curriculum development, teacher support, and instructional strategies. This type of leadership has been found to be particularly effective in promoting teacher professional development, enhancing teacher efficacy, and improving student learning outcomes (Yusof, 2019).

However, despite the recognized importance of instructional leadership in improving teacher performance, little research has been conducted in the private school setting. The private school setting presents a unique context that may differ from public schools in terms of resources, management, and accountability (Kilag, et al., 2022). Therefore, it is essential to explore the impact of instructional leadership on teacher performance in this context.

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The research question for this study is: How does instructional leadership affect teacher performance in a private school setting? This qualitative study will be conducted at PAU Excellencia Global Academy Foundation, Inc., a private school in the Philippines, and will involve 10 teachers and 2 school administrators. The study will use semi-structured interviews and document analysis as data collection methods.

The study findings are expected to contribute to the existing knowledge on the impact of instructional leadership on teacher performance in a private school setting. This study's significance lies in its potential to provide insights into the current issues surrounding instructional leadership and teacher performance in private schools, which can inform policies and practices that promote effective instructional leadership and teacher performance in this context.

The objectives of this study are to examine the role of instructional leadership in improving teacher performance, identify the factors that hinder instructional leadership in promoting teacher performance, and explore the strategies that can be used to enhance instructional leadership in a private school setting.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Instructional leadership has been identified as a key factor in promoting teacher professional development and improving student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2004; Robinson et al., 2008). Several studies have explored the relationship between instructional leadership and teacher learning, and the impact of instructional leadership on the development of professional learning communities (PLCs).

Leithwood et al. (2004) identified several instructional leadership practices that were associated with improved student outcomes, including setting goals and expectations, providing intellectual stimulation, and providing individualized support. Similarly, Robinson et al. (2008) found that effective instructional leadership practices included promoting a clear and shared vision, providing support and resources, and monitoring and evaluating teacher performance. These studies suggest that instructional leadership plays a critical role in supporting teacher professional development and improving student outcomes. Instructional leadership practices that promoted a culture of continuous learning and provided professional development opportunities were positively associated with teacher learning and improvement.

Similarly, Dede and Richards (2018) found that instructional leadership practices that focused on coaching and feedback were effective in promoting teacher growth and development. These studies highlight the importance of providing ongoing professional development opportunities and support to teachers as a means of promoting their growth and development.

The development of PLCs is another important aspect of instructional leadership that has been explored in the literature. PLCs are groups of educators who work collaboratively to improve teaching and learning (Vescio et al., 2008). Vescio et al. (2008) found that instructional leadership practices that emphasized collaboration, reflection, and shared decision-making were effective in promoting the development of PLCs. Similarly, Crowther et al. (2011) found that instructional leadership practices that supported collaborative inquiry, shared leadership, and collective learning were associated with the development of strong PLCs.

In addition, other studies have explored the impact of specific instructional leadership practices on teacher professional development. For example, Liou and Daly (2014) found that instructional leadership practices that promoted teacher empowerment, such as involving teachers in decision-making and providing them with autonomy, were effective in promoting teacher learning and development. Instructional leadership practices that focused on building trust, providing support, and promoting a culture of openness and collaboration were effective in promoting teacher professional development.

Overall, these studies suggest that instructional leadership is critical in promoting teacher professional development and improving student outcomes. Effective instructional leadership practices include setting goals and expectations, providing support and resources, promoting a culture of continuous learning, and fostering collaboration and shared decision-making. Providing ongoing professional development opportunities and support to teachers, as well as promoting the development of PLCs, are also important aspects of instructional leadership (Sasan, 2021). However, further research is needed to understand the specific mechanisms by which instructional leadership influences teacher professional development and to identify the most effective practices and strategies for promoting teacher growth and improving student outcomes.

Leithwood et al. (2004) found that instructional leadership is positively associated with student achievement. Instructional leadership can be described as the ability of school leaders to improve teaching and learning through teacher support, curriculum development, and instructional strategies. Additionally, Wahlstrom et al. (2010) found that school leaders who focus on instructional leadership are more likely to see improvements in student achievement. Instructional leadership also positively impacts teacher satisfaction, morale, and retention (Glickman et al., 2010).

One challenge in promoting instructional leadership is the varying perceptions and understanding of what it entails. According to Robinson et al. (2011), instructional leadership is often viewed as a set of competencies rather than a shared responsibility among leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders. This misalignment of expectations can hinder effective implementation of instructional leadership practices.

Another factor that may hinder instructional leadership is limited resources, such as time and budget constraints. School leaders who are expected to perform multiple roles, including instructional leadership, may struggle to find time for all their responsibilities. Budget constraints may also limit the resources available for teacher professional development and other initiatives related to instructional leadership.

To overcome these challenges, some strategies have been identified. For example, collaboration and shared leadership among school leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders have been found to be effective in promoting instructional leadership (Glickman et al., 2010). Professional development opportunities for school leaders and teachers can also improve their understanding and implementation of instructional leadership practices (Robinson et al., 2011).

Private schools, in particular, may face unique challenges in promoting instructional leadership due to factors such as smaller budgets and fewer resources compared to public schools (Ni, et al., 2018). However, private schools may also have more autonomy and flexibility in implementing instructional leadership practices, which may lead to more innovative and effective approaches (Dimmock & Yong 2013).

Overall, the literature suggests that instructional leadership plays a crucial role in improving teacher performance and student achievement. However, challenges such as varying perceptions of instructional leadership, limited resources, and multiple roles for school leaders may hinder effective implementation. Strategies such as collaboration, professional development, and autonomy can be effective in promoting instructional leadership. Understanding these factors and strategies can contribute to the improvement of instructional leadership practices in private school settings.

A study by Hallinger and Heck (2010) found that instructional leadership has a significant impact on teacher effectiveness and student achievement. In their study, they found that effective instructional leaders create a supportive environment for teachers, provide ongoing professional development, and establish clear expectations for student learning. They also found that instructional leadership plays a critical role in shaping school culture and improving the quality of

instruction.

Leithwood et al. (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of 27 studies and found that instructional leadership had a significant positive impact on student achievement. They found that effective instructional leaders foster a culture of high expectations for student achievement, promote teacher collaboration, and provide ongoing support and feedback to teachers.

In a study by Wahlstrom et al. (2010), they found that instructional leadership was a key factor in improving teacher effectiveness and student achievement. They found that effective instructional leaders provide support and resources to teachers, establish clear expectations for teaching and learning, and promote a culture of continuous improvement.

On the other hand, other studies argued that instructional leadership is an essential component of school leadership and is critical to improving teacher effectiveness and student achievement. They emphasized the importance of providing ongoing professional development and support to teachers, establishing clear expectations for student learning, and creating a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement.

Another study by Robinson et al. (2008) found that instructional leadership had a significant impact on teacher motivation and job satisfaction. They found that effective instructional leaders create a supportive environment for teachers, provide ongoing feedback and support, and establish clear expectations for teaching and learning.

Overall, the literature suggests that instructional leadership is a critical component of school leadership and has a significant impact on teacher performance and student achievement. Effective instructional leaders create a supportive environment for teachers, provide ongoing professional development and support, and establish clear expectations for teaching and learning.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used qualitative research methodology. A case study approach was used to investigate the experiences and perspectives of a specific school, PAU Excellencia Global Academy Foundation, Inc., and its ten teachers for instructional leadership and professional development. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with school administrators, including department heads and coordinators, to gather their perspectives on instructional leadership and its impact on teacher professional development. Focus groups were conducted with the teachers to explore their experiences with instructional leadership and professional development. Finally, school improvement plans, professional development plans, and other relevant school documents were analyzed to provide additional insight into the role of instructional leadership in teacher professional development.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who knew and had experience relevant to the research questions. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their rights as participants. They were also informed that participation was voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study without penalty. All data collected was kept confidential and anonymous to protect participants' privacy.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected from interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. The data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for emerging themes and patterns related to the research questions. In terms of ethical considerations, the study adhered to ethical principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity. Since the researcher was also the school's principal, steps were taken to ensure that the research did not compromise the participants' rights or privacy. For example, another staff member was involved in the data analysis to ensure objectivity and minimize the risk of bias.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Theme 1: Instructional leadership is perceived as essential for teacher professional development

"Instructional leadership is vital for teacher professional development. Without the support and guidance of our school leaders, we would not be able to improve our teaching practices and meet the needs of our students effectively." – Teacher 1

"Our school coordinators play a critical role in our professional development. They provide us with feedback and support that help us to improve our teaching practices and make a positive impact on our students." – Teacher 2

"Instructional leadership is about creating a culture of learning and continuous improvement. Our school leaders are instrumental in promoting this culture and fostering an environment of collaboration and support among teachers." – Coordinator 1

"Instructional leadership is the backbone of our professional development as teachers. Our school leaders provide us with the resources and support we need to stay up-to-date on the latest teaching methods and techniques, which in turn benefit our students." – Coordinator 2

The findings suggest that instructional leadership is essential for teacher professional development, with school leaders playing a critical role in supporting and guiding teachers in their efforts to improve their teaching practices and meet the needs of their students. Teachers and coordinators alike recognize the importance of instructional leadership in creating a culture of learning and continuous improvement, and emphasize the crucial role that school leaders play in promoting this culture and providing the necessary resources and support for teachers to succeed.

Teachers and coordinators agree that instructional leadership involves not only providing feedback and support, but also setting clear goals and expectations for professional development. As one coordinator stated, "We work with teachers to set goals and develop plans for achieving those goals. We help them to identify areas for improvement and to develop strategies for addressing those areas."

Teachers and coordinators also recognize that instructional leadership requires ongoing communication and collaboration. As one teacher noted,

"Our coordinators are always available to answer questions and provide support. They make themselves accessible and work with us to find solutions to any challenges we face."

Similarly, one coordinator emphasized the importance of building strong relationships with teachers,

"We try to get to know each teacher individually and understand their needs and strengths. This helps us to tailor our support and coaching to their unique needs."

Finally, teachers and coordinators agree that effective instructional leadership requires a focus on student learning outcomes. As one teacher put it,

"Ultimately, the goal of instructional leadership is to improve student learning. Everything we do as teachers should be focused on that goal."

Coordinators also emphasized the importance of data-driven decision making, with one coordinator noting,

"We use data to guide our instruction and to identify areas for improvement. This helps us to stay focused on our goals and to make evidence-based decisions about our professional development."

Taken together, these findings suggest that instructional leadership plays a critical role in supporting teacher professional development, and that effective instructional leadership involves setting clear goals, fostering ongoing communication and collaboration, and maintaining a focus on student learning outcomes.

Results should be clear and concise. The results should summarize (scientific) findings rather than providing data in great detail. Please highlight differences between your results or findings and the previous publications by other researchers.

Theme 2: Challenges in Implementing Effective Instructional Leadership

The study found that while instructional leadership can be a practical approach to supporting teacher professional development, it is not without its challenges. Many teachers and coordinators noted obstacles in implementing effective instructional leadership practices. One common challenge was a lack of time and resources to support teacher professional development. One coordinator noted,

"We all have busy schedules, and finding time for coaching and collaboration can be hard. We also don't always have the resources to provide the level of support we would like."

Another challenge was resistance to change among some teachers. Some participants reported that some teachers were resistant to new instructional practices and were reluctant to try new approaches. One teacher noted,

"Some teachers have been doing things a certain way for a long time, and it can be hard to convince them to try something new."

Finally, some participants noted that instructional leadership could be challenging to sustain over time. One coordinator stated,

"Instructional leadership is not something you can do once and then forget about. It requires ongoing effort and commitment. It can be hard to maintain that energy and focus over the long term."

These findings suggest that while instructional leadership can be a practical approach to supporting teacher professional development, it is not without its challenges. Lack of time and resources, resistance to change, and difficulties sustaining efforts over time can all pose obstacles to effective instructional leadership practices. The study found that instructional leadership practices of school administrators play a crucial role in shaping teacher professional development. All participants

acknowledged that school administrators who engage in instructional leadership practices create a continuous learning and improvement culture. According to one coordinator,

"The school leader's instructional leadership practices impact teacher professional development by setting the tone for learning and improvement. When the leader prioritizes and models learning and improvement, it becomes contagious, and everyone wants to do better."

This statement underscores the importance of instructional leadership practices in creating a professional learning and growth culture.

Moreover, the study identified specific instructional leadership practices that positively influence teacher professional development. These practices include setting clear expectations for teaching and learning, providing regular feedback and support to teachers, and creating opportunities for teacher collaboration and professional learning. Participants emphasized the significance of these practices in shaping teacher learning and growth. One teacher stated,

"The administrator's feedback on my teaching practice has been really helpful. It has helped me identify areas for growth and develop an improvement plan."

This quote highlights the importance of feedback for improving teaching practice. Furthermore, the study revealed that instructional leadership practices prioritizing teacher autonomy and agency positively influence teacher professional development. When school administrators provide opportunities for teachers to take ownership of their professional learning and growth, it creates a sense of empowerment and motivation among teachers. According to one coordinator,

"When teachers are given the autonomy to identify their own learning goals and opportunities, they become more motivated and engaged in their professional growth."

This quote emphasizes the importance of creating a culture of teacher agency in driving teacher professional development. The findings suggest that instructional leadership practices are critical in shaping teacher professional development. School administrators who engage in effective instructional leadership practices create a continuous learning and improvement culture, which positively influences teacher learning and growth.

Theme 3: Challenges to implementing effective instructional leadership practices for teacher professional development

Despite the positive influence of instructional leadership practices on teacher professional development, the study also identified several challenges that school administrators face in implementing these practices effectively. One significant challenge is the need for more resources and support for professional development. Participants noted that school administrators often have limited resources and face competing demands that make it challenging to prioritize professional development. One teacher commented,

"The school administrator wants to provide opportunities for us to learn, but there are limited resources, and they have to balance competing demands."

Another challenge identified in the study is the lack of time for professional development.

Participants acknowledged that teachers have limited time to engage in professional development due to the demands of teaching and other responsibilities. One coordinator stated,

"Teachers are busy with their classes, grading papers, and other responsibilities, so finding time for professional development can be challenging."

Moreover, the study identified a lack of awareness and understanding of effective instructional leadership practices as a challenge to implementing these practices. Participants noted that some school administrators might not have the knowledge or training necessary to effectively implement instructional leadership practices that support teacher professional development. One teacher stated,

"Some administrators may not be aware of the best practices in instructional leadership, which can make it difficult for them to provide effective support for our professional development."

Overall, the findings suggest that despite the positive influence of instructional leadership practices on teacher professional development, school administrators face several challenges in implementing these practices effectively. These challenges include a lack of resources and support, limited time for professional development, and a lack of awareness and understanding of effective instructional leadership practices.

Discussion

This study explored the role of instructional leadership in supporting teacher professional development in a private school setting in the Philippines. The study findings reveal that effective instructional leadership practices are crucial in promoting teacher professional development. The results align with previous research highlighting the importance of instructional leadership in improving teacher effectiveness and student learning outcomes (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Robinson et al., 2008).

The first theme from the study findings is the importance of school administrators' support in fostering a culture of continuous professional development. The study participants highlighted the value of administrators' active participation in providing professional development opportunities that are relevant and aligned with teachers' needs. This finding supports previous research suggesting that school administrators prioritizing professional development are more likely to create a culture of continuous learning and improvement (Lieberman & Miller, 2004; Louis & Marks, 1998).

The second theme from the study findings is the critical role of school administrators' feedback in teacher professional development. The study participants emphasized the value of administrators' constructive feedback in improving their teaching practices. This finding aligns with previous research highlighting the importance of feedback in improving teacher performance (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). The study findings suggest effective feedback practices should be ongoing, personalized, and aligned with teachers' professional goals and needs. The third theme from the study findings is the challenges school administrators face in implementing effective instructional leadership practices for teacher professional development. The study participants highlighted several challenges, including a lack of resources and support, limited time for professional development, and a lack of awareness and understanding of effective instructional leadership practices. These findings support previous research that has identified various challenges school administrators face in implementing effective instructional leadership

practices (Robinson et al., 2008; Waters & Marzano, 2006).

The study findings significantly affect school administrators, policymakers, and teacher educators. School administrators must prioritize professional development and support for their teachers, provide ongoing constructive feedback, and address the challenges in implementing effective instructional leadership practices. Policymakers should provide adequate resources and support for professional development initiatives that promote effective instructional leadership practices. Finally, teacher educators must include instructional leadership in their training programs to ensure aspiring administrators have the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively support teacher professional development.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and discussion, instructional leadership plays a crucial role in teacher professional development. The study highlighted that school administrators who exhibited instructional leadership qualities, such as providing effective feedback, modelling best practices, and supporting teacher collaboration, had a positive impact on teacher professional growth.

Moreover, the findings also showed that a collaborative approach to professional development, where teachers were given opportunities to share their experiences and learn from one another, was more effective than a top-down approach. This finding emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive school culture that encourages teacher collaboration and communication.

The study's results are consistent with previous research showing the importance of instructional leadership in promoting teacher professional development. Additionally, the findings contribute to the growing body of literature on the impact of collaborative professional development on teacher growth.

Overall, the study's findings have important implications for school leaders and policymakers who seek to improve teacher professional development programs. By prioritizing instructional leadership and creating collaborative professional development opportunities, schools can better support their teachers in their professional growth, ultimately leading to improved student outcomes.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

The main limitation of this study is its small sample size, which consisted of only ten teachers and two coordinators from one school. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be generalizable to other contexts. The study relied solely on self-reported data, which may be subject to bias and social desirability effects.

Further research could expand on this study by using a larger sample size and including multiple schools from different locations. It could also employ a mixed-methods approach to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of instructional leadership in teacher professional development. Future research could also explore the effectiveness of different instructional leadership approaches, as well as the impact of external factors such as funding and policy on teacher professional development. Furthermore, examining the long-term effects of instructional leadership on teacher professional development and student outcomes would be beneficial. Finally, additional research could investigate the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as students and parents, on the role of instructional leadership in teacher professional development.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

- The authors declare no conflict of interest.
- The authors have no competing interests to declare relevant to this article's content.

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