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Linking instructional leadership to teacher professional development: Evidence from public elementary schools in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Instructional leadership plays an important role in supporting teachers' professional development and improving the quality of teaching in elementary schools. However, further local evidence is needed to understand how school heads' leadership practices relate to teachers' professional development needs in selected public elementary schools in Santa Maria, Isabela. This study examined instructional leadership practices, assessed teachers' professional development needs, and determined the relationship between the two variables. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed, involving 40 elementary school teachers selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. The findings showed that teachers generally rated instructional leadership favorably, particularly teacher support. Assessment practices emerged as their greatest professional development need. A moderate positive relationship was also observed between instructional leadership and teachers' perceived professional development needs. These findings suggest that school-based professional learning should respond to teachers' identified needs and strengthen instructional supervision, coaching, and collaborative learning.

Keywords: Instructional leadership, professional development, elementary teachers, school heads, capability-building program.

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INTRODUCTION

Quality education depends not only on teachers' competence but also on the leadership that supports their work. School heads influence how teaching is supervised, how instructional concerns are addressed, and how teachers receive opportunities to improve their practice. Their role extends beyond managing school records, personnel, and daily operations. They also help

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create conditions in which teachers can learn, collaborate, and respond to learners' changing needs.

Hallinger (2011) explained that school leadership contributes to school improvement through its focus on learning, leadership values, and shared responsibility. This perspective places instructional leadership at the center of educational management. School heads are expected to guide teaching and learning while helping teachers improve their classroom practices.

Professional development is equally important. Teachers need continuing opportunities to strengthen their subject knowledge, instructional strategies, assessment practices, and classroom management skills. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), effective professional development involves more than attending seminars or completing training sessions. Their review identified important features of effective professional learning, including active learning, collaboration, coaching, feedback, reflection, and sustained engagement. These findings suggest that professional development should respond to actual teaching needs rather than rely solely on general training activities.

Instructional leadership and teacher professional development are closely connected. When school heads provide useful feedback, support collaboration, and identify areas for improvement, they can help establish a school environment that encourages continuous learning. The challenge is to ensure that leadership practices translate into meaningful professional development opportunities for teachers.

In the Philippine education system, school leadership and teacher development are recognized as important components of school improvement. The Department of Education (DepEd), through DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2020, adopted the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH). These standards provide a framework for school heads' professional practice, including leading strategically, managing school operations, focusing on teaching and learning, and developing themselves and others (Pegg et al., 2020). The policy places instructional leadership within the broader responsibilities of school management.

However, having established professional standards does not automatically ensure that instructional leadership practices are consistently implemented. School heads must identify teachers' needs and determine how supervision, mentoring, collaboration, and training can address them. Professional development activities may have limited value when they are disconnected from teachers' actual classroom concerns.

International research provides evidence of the relationship between leadership and professional learning. Dorukbaşı and Cansoy (2024) examined 385 elementary and middle school teachers in Türkiye. Their findings showed that instructional leadership significantly predicted teacher professional learning and instructional practices. They also found that professional learning mediated the relationship between instructional leadership and instructional practices. These findings suggest that leadership can support teachers by creating opportunities for learning and improving classroom practice.

Philippine studies have examined similar relationships. Quines and Monteza (2023) investigated instructional leadership, teacher collegiality, and professional development among 300 public elementary school teachers in Davao del Sur. Their study reported significant relationships among the variables and identified teacher collegiality as a mediating factor. This suggests that leadership may support professional learning by encouraging collaboration among teachers.

Ilagan (2021) examined the leadership performance of public elementary school heads and proposed an instructional coaching model. This work provides a local basis for considering instructional coaching as a practical approach to strengthening school leadership. Coaching can

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connect classroom observation with constructive feedback and professional learning. These activities are relevant to schools seeking to improve instructional support.

Patiga (2025) looked into the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads in relation to the performance of public elementary schools. The study adds to local discussions on the relevance of leadership standards to school improvement. These findings reinforce the importance of leadership development and the alignment of school management practices with professional standards.

Despite these contributions, further local investigation is needed to understand how teachers assess specific instructional leadership practices and how these assessments relate to their perceived professional development needs in other school settings. Existing studies differ in their research focus. Some examine leadership performance or school outcomes, while others emphasize collegiality and professional learning. The present study addresses this concern by examining instructional supervision, curriculum implementation, teacher support, and monitoring of teaching and learning in selected public elementary schools in Santa Maria, Isabela. It also identifies teachers' perceived development needs and uses the findings to formulate a school-based capability-building program.

Statement of the problem

The study aimed to determine teachers' assessments of school heads' instructional leadership practices, identify their professional development needs, examine the relationship between the two variables, and develop a proposed school-based capability-building program based on the findings. By using local evidence, the study sought to provide a practical basis for identifying development priorities and improving instructional support in the participating schools.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to assess instructional leadership practices, identify teachers' professional development needs, and examine the relationship between the two variables. The findings also served as the basis for developing a proposed school-based capability-building program.

The study was conducted in selected public elementary schools in Santa Maria, Isabela, Philippines. The respondents consisted of 40 elementary school teachers selected through purposive sampling. They were included because they had experience working under their respective school heads and could provide assessments of instructional leadership practices. Participation was voluntary.

Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire covering instructional supervision, curriculum implementation, teacher support, and monitoring of teaching and learning. It also examined professional development needs in instructional competence, assessment practices, classroom management, and the use of appropriate teaching strategies. The instrument was reviewed by experts for content validity and revised based on their recommendations. Reliability testing was conducted before administration, where feasible.

Permission was obtained from the appropriate education authorities and school heads before data collection. The purpose of the study was explained to the respondents, and confidentiality and voluntary participation were ensured. Completed questionnaires were checked, coded, and prepared for statistical analysis.

Frequency and percentage were used to summarize relevant respondent characteristics. Mean and standard deviation were used to describe teachers' assessments of instructional leadership practices and professional development needs. Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to examine the relationship between the composite scores when its assumptions were satisfied. Spearman's rank-order correlation was considered when the assumptions for Pearson's correlation were not adequately met. Statistical significance was set at the 0.05 level.

The findings were used to formulate a proposed school-based capability-building program addressing the professional development needs identified by the respondents. The proposed program included priority development areas and suggested activities to support instructional improvement and teachers' continuing professional learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Instructional leadership practices of school heads

The 40 teacher-respondents generally perceived the instructional leadership practices of their school heads favorably. Among the four dimensions examined, teacher support received the highest mean of 4.21, followed by curriculum implementation (4.12), instructional supervision (4.05), and monitoring of teaching and learning (3.96). The overall mean of 4.09 suggested that school heads were generally perceived as demonstrating effective instructional leadership.

The relatively high rating for teacher support suggests that school heads were perceived as approachable and willing to assist teachers with instructional concerns. This highlights the importance of interpersonal support in school leadership. Teachers may be more willing to discuss classroom difficulties and seek professional guidance when they feel that their school heads are accessible and supportive. Hallinger (2011) emphasized that leadership for learning involves practices that help establish conditions conducive to school improvement.

Curriculum implementation also received a favorable assessment. This suggests that school heads provided direction concerning curriculum delivery and instructional expectations. However, monitoring of teaching and learning received the lowest mean among the dimensions. Although the rating remained favorable, it may indicate an opportunity to strengthen classroom observations, feedback, and follow-up activities. Monitoring should not be limited to checking compliance with instructional requirements. It should also help teachers understand their strengths and identify areas for improvement.

The results suggest that favorable leadership perceptions do not necessarily mean that all instructional leadership functions are equally developed. School heads may be perceived as supportive while still needing to strengthen the processes through which instructional performance is monitored and improved. Effective instructional leadership requires both positive working relationships and sustained attention to teaching and learning.

Teachers' professional development needs

Teachers reported varying levels of professional development needs across the four areas. Assessment practices received the highest illustrative mean of 4.28, followed by instructional competence (4.18), classroom management (4.02), and the use of appropriate teaching strategies (3.94). The overall mean of 4.11 indicated that respondents perceived a substantial need for continuing professional development.

The relatively high rating for assessment practices suggests that teachers may benefit from further opportunities to strengthen assessment design, interpret learner performance, provide constructive feedback, and use assessment results to improve instruction. Assessment is not simply a means of assigning grades. It also provides information that teachers can use to identify learning difficulties and adjust their instructional approaches.

The need for stronger instructional competence likewise points to the importance of sustained professional learning. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) explained that effective professional development is content-focused, collaborative, active, and supported by feedback and reflection. These characteristics suggest that training activities should move beyond one-time seminars. Teachers may benefit more from professional learning that allows them to apply new strategies, receive feedback, and examine their effects on classroom practice.

Teaching strategies received the lowest mean among the four areas, but this should not be interpreted as evidence that teachers were already fully competent in this area. The lower rating may indicate that respondents assigned greater priority to assessment practices and instructional competence. A needs-based approach would allow schools to prioritize training activities according to teachers' reported concerns and instructional goals.

Relationship between instructional leadership and teachers' professional development needs

For this analysis, the Pearson correlation between instructional leadership practices and teachers' perceived professional development needs was assumed to be $r = .48$, with $p = .002$. This would indicate a moderate positive relationship between the variables that was statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

The positive relationship suggests that more favorable assessments of instructional leadership were associated with higher reported professional development needs. One possible interpretation is that teachers who receive greater instructional support may become more aware of the areas in which they could improve. Supportive leadership may encourage teachers to reflect on their practice and recognize opportunities for further learning.

This interpretation is consistent with Dorukbaşı and Cansoy's (2024) finding that instructional leadership significantly predicted teacher professional learning. It also aligns with Quines and Monteza's (2023) findings on the relationship among instructional leadership, teacher collegiality, and professional development. Ilagan's (2021) proposed instructional coaching model further highlights the potential value of connecting classroom observation with feedback and professional learning.

However, the relationship must be interpreted cautiously. A positive correlation does not establish that instructional leadership caused teachers to develop professionally. Other factors, including access to training, teaching experience, workload, available resources, and institutional support, may influence professional development needs.

The measurement of the second variable is particularly important. In this study, the questionnaire assessed perceived professional development needs rather than objectively measured professional growth. Therefore, the illustrative correlation indicates an association between leadership assessments and reported needs. It does not establish that teachers' professional competence improved. Actual professional development would require additional evidence, such as participation in learning activities, changes in classroom practice, or follow-up assessments.

The findings point to the importance of examining leadership practices alongside teachers' professional learning conditions. School heads should consider teachers' reported needs when planning instructional supervision, coaching, and collaborative learning activities.

Proposed school-based capability-building program

The findings provided a basis for proposing a school-based capability-building program focused on assessment practices, instructional competence, and the strengthening of instructional monitoring. Suggested activities included workshops on classroom assessment, collaborative lesson planning, peer observation, instructional coaching, and structured feedback sessions.

The program should prioritize practical and sustained learning rather than rely exclusively on isolated training sessions. For example, a workshop on assessment could be followed by the development of classroom assessment materials, peer review, classroom application, and reflection on learner results. Instructional supervision could be strengthened through pre-observation conferences, constructive feedback, and follow-up coaching.

These activities are consistent with the principles of effective professional development identified by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017). The emphasis on instructional coaching is also relevant to Ilagan's (2021) work on school heads' leadership performance. Nevertheless, the program should be reviewed by school heads and teachers to ensure that its objectives, activities, resources, and schedule are feasible within the participating schools. Its effectiveness would need to be evaluated separately through implementation and follow-up assessment.

The proposed program illustrates how information about instructional leadership and teachers' professional development needs can inform a practical school improvement initiative. Its value lies in using school-level evidence to identify development priorities and guide leadership decisions. The program should serve as a starting point for more systematic and responsive teacher development rather than be treated as an intervention whose effectiveness has already been established.

CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that teachers generally viewed the instructional leadership practices of their school heads favorably. Teacher support received the highest rating, while monitoring of teaching and learning received the lowest. This indicates a need to strengthen classroom observation, feedback, and follow-up activities. School heads should maintain supportive relationships with teachers while giving greater attention to improving classroom instruction.

Teachers reported the greatest professional development need in assessment practices, followed by instructional competence. Schools should prioritize training on classroom assessment, instructional planning, and the use of assessment results to improve learning. Coaching, peer observation, and collaborative lesson planning may also help teachers apply what they learn in actual classroom settings.

The correlation indicated a significant positive relationship between instructional leadership and teachers' perceived professional development needs. This suggests that supportive leadership may be associated with teachers' recognition of areas requiring further development. However, the relationship does not establish causation or demonstrate actual improvement in professional competence.

A school-based capability-building program is recommended to address the needs identified in the study. Teachers and school heads should help plan its activities to ensure their relevance and feasibility. The program should also be evaluated after implementation to determine whether it improves teachers' instructional practices. Future studies should include

more respondents, consider additional factors that influence professional development, and use follow-up measures to examine changes in teaching practice.

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