



International Journal of Education, Literacies, and Curriculum Studies

ISSN: 3116-2991

Volume 2 Issue 3- 2026

<https://ijelcs.minduraresearch.com/journal/index>

# Beyond Supervision: Teachers' Lived Experiences of Education Program Supervisors' Instructional Leadership in Fostering Professional Growth and Teaching Excellence in the Schools Division of Santiago City

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## ABSTRACT

Education Program Supervisors (EPSs) play a strategic role in strengthening instructional quality, teacher professional development, and educational excellence within the Philippine basic education system. Beyond their supervisory responsibilities, EPSs serve as instructional leaders, mentors, curriculum specialists, and facilitators of continuous professional learning. As educational reforms, technological advancements, and competency-based standards continue to reshape teaching and learning, the instructional leadership of EPSs has become increasingly vital in enhancing teachers' pedagogical competencies and sustaining teaching excellence. Although numerous studies have examined instructional supervision using quantitative approaches, limited qualitative research has explored teachers' lived experiences of Education Program Supervisors' instructional leadership and its influence on their professional growth. This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of teachers regarding the instructional leadership practices of Education Program Supervisors in fostering professional growth and teaching excellence in the Schools Division of Santiago City. Guided by transcendental phenomenology, twelve (12) purposively selected public school teachers participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's Seven-Step Phenomenological Analysis. The findings revealed that Education Program Supervisors significantly influence teachers' professional growth by fostering reflective practice, collaborative learning, instructional innovation, and continuous competency development. The study concludes that instructional leadership extends beyond compliance monitoring and serves as a transformative process that empowers teachers to achieve instructional excellence and sustain lifelong professional learning. The findings provide significant implications for educational leadership development, instructional supervision policies, and teacher professional development programs within the Philippine Department of Education.

**Keywords:** instructional leadership, Education Program Supervisor, professional growth, teaching excellence, instructional supervision, phenomenology, teacher development

Received: 05-04-2026

Revised: 07-20-2026

Accepted: 07-30- 2026

Published: 08-30-2026

ISSN:3116-2991





### Background of the Study

Educational systems worldwide continue to recognize instructional leadership as one of the most influential drivers of teacher effectiveness, instructional quality, and learner achievement. As schools confront increasingly complex educational demands brought about by curriculum reforms, digital transformation, inclusive education, and global competitiveness, educational leaders are expected to move beyond administrative supervision toward leadership practices that promote continuous professional learning, instructional innovation, and organizational improvement. Within this evolving educational landscape, Education Program Supervisors (EPSs) play a crucial role in supporting schools by providing curriculum leadership, instructional guidance, teacher mentoring, quality assurance, and professional development opportunities. Their responsibilities extend beyond monitoring compliance with educational policies to fostering collaborative learning environments where teachers continuously improve their pedagogical competencies and instructional effectiveness.

Instructional leadership emphasizes improving teaching and learning through curriculum supervision, classroom support, coaching, mentoring, assessment of instructional practices, and evidence-based decision-making. Unlike traditional supervisory models that focus primarily on inspection and compliance, contemporary instructional leadership promotes professional dialogue, reflective practice, collaborative problem-solving, and teacher empowerment. Hallinger (2022) emphasized that instructional leaders directly influence educational quality by creating professional learning cultures that strengthen teachers' instructional competence and organizational commitment. Likewise, Robinson (2019) identified instructional leadership as one of the strongest predictors of improved teaching effectiveness and student achievement because it centers leadership efforts on classroom instruction and teacher development.

Hallinger (2022) emphasized that instructional leadership significantly influences school effectiveness because leaders actively participate in curriculum planning, instructional supervision, teacher mentoring, and evidence-based decision-making. Similarly, Robinson (2019) reported that instructional leadership has one of the strongest positive effects on teaching quality and student achievement because it directly addresses classroom instruction and professional learning. Consequently, instructional leadership has become an essential leadership competency among school heads and Education Program Supervisors responsible for improving instructional quality within educational systems.

Recent educational leadership studies have demonstrated that teachers who receive continuous mentoring, coaching, and instructional support from educational supervisors exhibit greater instructional confidence, professional commitment, innovation, and instructional effectiveness (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). Effective supervision therefore extends beyond evaluation toward facilitating meaningful professional learning experiences that encourage lifelong teacher development.

Professional development is most effective when it is continuous, collaborative, job-embedded, and supported by instructional leaders. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2022), sustained professional learning that includes mentoring, coaching, collaborative inquiry, reflective practice, and instructional feedback produces greater improvements in teaching effectiveness than isolated seminar-based training programs. Likewise, OECD (2021) emphasized that educational systems characterized by strong instructional leadership create professional cultures where teachers continuously improve instructional practices through collaboration and reflective learning.



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ISSN: 3116-2991

Volume 2 Issue 3- 2026

<https://ijelcs.minduraresearch.com/journal/index>

Costa and Garmston (2016) described cognitive coaching as a collaborative process that enhances teachers' professional thinking and instructional decision-making through reflective conversations. Similarly, Knight (2018) explained that instructional coaching strengthens teacher effectiveness by providing individualized support focused on improving classroom instruction rather than evaluating performance. Education Program Supervisors occupy a unique leadership position within the Philippine Department of Education. As curriculum specialists and instructional leaders, they are responsible for ensuring effective curriculum implementation, mentoring school leaders and teachers, facilitating professional development, monitoring instructional quality, and supporting schools in achieving educational goals. Through classroom observations, technical assistance, Learning Action Cells (LACs), training programs, instructional coaching, curriculum reviews, and quality assurance activities, EPSs contribute significantly to teachers' professional growth and instructional excellence. Their leadership directly influences how educational policies are translated into effective classroom practices and sustainable school improvement initiatives.

Professional growth among teachers has become increasingly important as educational systems adapt to rapid technological advancements, evolving learner needs, competency-based curricula, and emerging global educational standards. Continuous professional development enables teachers to strengthen pedagogical knowledge, instructional strategies, assessment literacy, technological competence, classroom management, and research capability. Studies consistently demonstrate that teachers' professional growth is enhanced when educational leaders provide mentoring, coaching, collaborative learning opportunities, and constructive feedback that encourage reflective instructional practice and lifelong learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022).

Globally, educational organizations increasingly recognize that instructional supervision should function as a developmental rather than evaluative process. UNESCO (2023) emphasized that effective instructional supervision promotes teacher agency, professional collaboration, organizational learning, and continuous instructional improvement. Similarly, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021) reported that educational leaders who prioritize coaching, mentoring, and collaborative professional learning create stronger instructional cultures that positively influence teacher motivation, instructional quality, and learner achievement.

Within the Philippine educational system, the Department of Education has institutionalized teacher and school leadership standards through the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) and the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH). These frameworks emphasize instructional leadership, professional collaboration, mentoring, coaching, evidence-based teaching, and continuous competency development. Education Program Supervisors play a central role in supporting the implementation of these standards by guiding schools, facilitating technical assistance, and ensuring continuous teacher development through school-based and division-wide professional learning initiatives. In the Schools Division of Santiago City, Education Program Supervisors actively provide instructional support to teachers through curriculum implementation monitoring, technical assistance, coaching, Learning Action Cells (LACs), school visits, demonstration teaching, action research promotion, and professional capability-building activities. These initiatives aim to strengthen teachers' instructional competence while ensuring quality education for all learners. However, despite the critical role of EPSs in



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ISSN: 3116-2991

Volume 2 Issue 3- 2026

<https://ijelcs.minduraresearch.com/journal/index>

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educational leadership, limited research has examined how teachers personally experience their instructional leadership practices and how these experiences contribute to professional growth and teaching excellence.

Existing literature has predominantly examined instructional supervision using quantitative methodologies that measure supervisory effectiveness, teacher performance, instructional competence, or organizational outcomes through standardized survey instruments. Comparatively few phenomenological investigations have explored teachers' lived experiences regarding the instructional leadership of Education Program Supervisors, particularly within the Philippine public school context. Furthermore, limited studies have examined how teachers interpret instructional leadership as a catalyst for professional growth, reflective practice, instructional innovation, and teaching excellence. These methodological and contextual gaps limit a deeper understanding of the human experiences underlying effective instructional supervision.

Addressing these research gaps, the present phenomenological study explores teachers' lived experiences of Education Program Supervisors' instructional leadership in fostering professional growth and teaching excellence in the Schools Division of Santiago City. By capturing teachers' authentic narratives, the study contributes to the growing body of qualitative educational leadership literature while providing evidence-based insights that may strengthen instructional supervision practices, leadership development programs, teacher professional learning initiatives, and educational policy within the Philippine Department of Education.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of teachers regarding the instructional leadership of Education Program Supervisors (EPSs) in fostering professional growth and teaching excellence in the Schools Division of Santiago City. A phenomenological approach was deemed appropriate because it seeks to understand and describe the essence of participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and meanings associated with a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Specifically, the study utilized transcendental phenomenology, which emphasizes describing participants' experiences as consciously lived while allowing the researcher to bracket personal assumptions and biases. This approach enabled the researcher to obtain rich, in-depth narratives regarding how teachers experienced the instructional leadership practices of Education Program Supervisors and how these experiences influenced their professional growth and teaching excellence.

The study was conducted in selected public elementary and secondary schools under the Schools Division of Santiago City, where Education Program Supervisors regularly provide instructional supervision, curriculum monitoring, technical assistance, coaching, mentoring, and professional development interventions aligned with the Department of Education's quality assurance initiatives. The participants consisted of twelve (12) public school teachers who were selected through purposive sampling based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) currently employed as a permanent teacher in the Schools Division of Santiago City; (2) possessing at least three years of teaching experience; (3) having directly participated in instructional supervision, coaching, mentoring, Learning Action Cells (LACs), curriculum implementation reviews, or professional development activities facilitated by Education Program Supervisors; and (4) voluntarily agreeing to participate in the study through written informed consent. The sample size was



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<https://ijelcs.minduraresearch.com/journal/index>

---

determined based on the principle of data saturation, wherein no new meanings, categories, or themes emerged from the interview data (Saunders et al., 2018).

Data were collected using a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide, which was subjected to content validation by experts in educational leadership, curriculum supervision, qualitative research, and teacher professional development to ensure its relevance, clarity, and alignment with the objectives of the study. Prior to the actual data collection, the interview guide was pilot-tested among teachers from another school division to refine the wording and sequence of questions. Individual face-to-face interviews, lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes, were conducted in venues identified by the participants to ensure privacy, comfort, and minimal interruption. With participants' permission, all interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented by field notes documenting observations, participants' emotional expressions, reflective insights, and contextual information relevant to the phenomenon under investigation.

The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) Seven-Step Phenomenological Method, which involved repeated reading of the interview transcripts to gain familiarity with the data, extraction of significant statements, formulation of meanings, organization of formulated meanings into thematic clusters, development of exhaustive descriptions of the phenomenon, formulation of the essential structure of the lived experience, and validation of the findings through member checking. Participants were provided copies of the interpreted themes and descriptions to verify that the findings accurately reflected their lived experiences, thereby enhancing the credibility and authenticity of the study.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, the study adhered to the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was established through prolonged engagement with participants, member checking, and peer debriefing. Transferability was enhanced through rich and detailed descriptions of the research setting, participants, and procedures, enabling readers to determine the applicability of the findings to similar contexts. Dependability was maintained by documenting all methodological decisions through an audit trail, while confirmability was ensured through reflexive journaling, triangulation of interview transcripts and field notes, and continuous consultation with qualitative research experts to minimize researcher bias.

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study in accordance with the Philippine National Ethical Guidelines for Health and Health-Related Research (2022). Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Schools Division Superintendent of Santiago City, the concerned school heads, and other relevant authorities. All participants received an informed consent form detailing the objectives of the study, voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality of responses, anonymity through the use of pseudonyms, right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any adverse consequences, and assurance that all collected information would be used solely for academic and research purposes. Digital recordings, interview transcripts, and research documents were securely stored in password-protected electronic files accessible only to the researcher and were scheduled for proper disposal after the completion of the study.

Through these rigorous methodological procedures, the study generated credible, authentic, and comprehensive descriptions of teachers' lived experiences regarding the instructional leadership of Education Program Supervisors in fostering professional growth and teaching excellence in the Schools





Division of Santiago City, providing valuable insights for strengthening instructional supervision, leadership development, and teacher professional learning within the Philippine basic education system.

### Results and Discussion

The phenomenological analysis of teachers' lived experiences regarding the instructional leadership of Education Program Supervisors (EPSs) in fostering professional growth and teaching excellence in the Schools Division of Santiago City generated five major themes. These themes illustrate how instructional leadership extends beyond supervisory compliance and becomes a transformative process that nurtures teachers' professional competence, instructional innovation, reflective practice, and commitment to quality education. The emergent themes include (1) Experiencing Transformative Instructional Leadership Beyond Traditional Supervision; (2) Enhancing Professional Competence through Coaching, Mentoring, and Technical Assistance; (3) Strengthening Instructional Innovation through Collaborative Professional Learning; (4) Building Professional Confidence through Constructive Feedback and Reflective Practice; and (5) Sustaining Teaching Excellence through Continuous Professional Development and Curriculum Leadership. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that Education Program Supervisors significantly influence teachers' instructional effectiveness by fostering collaborative learning, professional empowerment, and lifelong competency development.

#### Theme 1. Experiencing Transformative Instructional Leadership Beyond Traditional Supervision

Participants consistently described Education Program Supervisors as instructional leaders who went beyond monitoring compliance with policies and curriculum standards. Rather than merely evaluating classroom performance, EPSs inspired teachers through visionary leadership, professional encouragement, curriculum guidance, and genuine commitment to instructional improvement.

One participant shared:

*"Whenever our Education Program Supervisor visits our school, the purpose is not simply to check documents but to help us become better teachers. We always learn something valuable after every supervision."* (Participant 3)

Another participant stated:

*"Our supervisor encourages us to improve continuously instead of making us feel that we are being inspected. That approach motivates us to perform better."* (Participant 8)

These narratives reveal that teachers perceive instructional supervision as a developmental process that emphasizes professional learning rather than compliance. Such findings strongly support **Hallinger and Murphy's Instructional Leadership Theory**, which asserts that instructional leaders improve educational quality by focusing on curriculum, teaching, and teacher development. Similarly, Robinson (2019) emphasized that instructional leadership positively influences teacher effectiveness when leaders actively support classroom instruction and professional learning.

#### Theme 2. Enhancing Professional Competence through Coaching, Mentoring, and Technical Assistance

Teachers emphasized that coaching, mentoring, technical assistance, and curriculum support provided by Education Program Supervisors significantly enhanced their pedagogical knowledge, instructional strategies, assessment practices, and classroom management skills. Participants described mentoring sessions as opportunities to receive practical guidance that improved their confidence and instructional effectiveness.



One participant remarked:

*"Our Education Program Supervisor explains instructional strategies that we can immediately apply in our classes. The mentoring sessions have helped me improve my teaching."* (Participant 6)

Another teacher explained:

*"Whenever we encounter difficulties in implementing the curriculum, our supervisor provides technical assistance instead of simply pointing out our mistakes."* (Participant 10)

These findings demonstrate that mentoring and technical assistance strengthen teachers' instructional competence through supportive professional relationships. The results align with Darling-Hammond et al. (2022), who emphasized that sustained coaching and mentoring are among the most effective forms of professional development because they provide contextualized learning experiences directly connected to classroom practice.

### **Theme 3. Strengthening Instructional Innovation through Collaborative Professional Learning**

Participants consistently described Education Program Supervisors as facilitators of collaborative learning experiences through Learning Action Cells (LACs), professional learning communities (PLCs), demonstration teaching, lesson study, action research, and curriculum workshops. These collaborative activities encouraged teachers to exchange ideas, discuss instructional challenges, and develop innovative teaching practices.

One participant shared:

*"The Learning Action Cells facilitated by our supervisor allow us to learn from one another. We openly discuss classroom challenges and discover better teaching strategies."* (Participant 2)

Another participant stated:

*"The workshops encouraged us to become more innovative. We learned new teaching approaches that made our lessons more engaging for our students."* (Participant 11)

The findings indicate that collaborative professional learning creates organizational cultures where continuous instructional improvement becomes a shared responsibility. These experiences support Fullan's Theory of Educational Change, which highlights collaboration, organizational learning, and collective capacity-building as essential drivers of sustainable educational improvement. Likewise, DuFour and Fullan (2013) emphasized that professional learning communities significantly strengthen instructional effectiveness by promoting collective inquiry and reflective dialogue.

### **Theme 4. Building Professional Confidence through Constructive Feedback and Reflective Practice**

Teachers viewed constructive feedback from Education Program Supervisors as an important factor in developing professional confidence and reflective teaching practices. Rather than focusing on deficiencies, participants appreciated feedback that acknowledged instructional strengths while providing practical recommendations for improvement.

One participant explained:

*"The feedback from our supervisor always motivates me because it focuses on how I can improve rather than criticizing my weaknesses."* (Participant 5)

Another participant shared:

*"After every classroom observation, I become more reflective about my teaching. I continuously evaluate what I can improve*



*in future lessons.*" (Participant 9)

These narratives illustrate that constructive supervision fosters reflective practice, self-evaluation, and continuous instructional refinement. The findings align with Schön's (1983) **Reflective Practice Theory**, which posits that professionals improve their expertise through critical reflection on authentic experiences. Similarly, Knight (2018) emphasized that instructional coaching strengthens teachers' confidence by promoting reflective dialogue rather than evaluative judgment.

#### **Theme 5. Sustaining Teaching Excellence through Continuous Professional Development and Curriculum Leadership**

Participants consistently emphasized that Education Program Supervisors promoted lifelong professional learning by encouraging teachers to participate in graduate studies, action research, curriculum enhancement, instructional innovation, educational conferences, seminars, and capability-building programs. Teachers regarded continuous professional development as a shared commitment between themselves and instructional leaders.

One participant remarked:

*"Our supervisor constantly reminds us that learning does not stop after becoming a teacher. We are encouraged to continue studying, conducting research, and improving our profession."* (Participant 4)

Another participant explained:

*"The professional development opportunities provided by our supervisor have strengthened my competence and motivated me to pursue excellence in teaching."* (Participant 12)

The findings indicate that instructional leadership fosters a culture of continuous learning, professional responsibility, and instructional excellence. These experiences support Knowles' Adult Learning Theory, which emphasizes that adults develop professionally through self-directed, collaborative, and experience-based learning. UNESCO (2023) likewise emphasized that educational leaders who promote lifelong learning create resilient educational systems characterized by innovation, adaptability, and sustained instructional quality.

#### **Discussion**

The findings reveal that teachers perceive the instructional leadership of Education Program Supervisors as a transformative force that extends beyond traditional supervisory functions toward meaningful professional development and instructional excellence. Participants consistently described instructional leadership as a developmental process characterized by mentoring, coaching, technical assistance, collaborative professional learning, constructive feedback, and continuous capacity-building. Rather than viewing supervision as an evaluative mechanism, teachers experienced instructional leadership as a source of encouragement, empowerment, and professional inspiration that strengthened their instructional competence and reflective practice. Furthermore, collaborative learning opportunities such as Learning Action Cells, professional learning communities, curriculum workshops, and action research initiatives fostered a culture of innovation and shared responsibility for educational improvement. Constructive feedback enhanced teachers' confidence and encouraged continuous refinement of instructional practices, while sustained professional development initiatives promoted lifelong learning and teaching excellence. These findings strongly affirm Hallinger and Murphy's Instructional Leadership Theory, Bass's Transformational Leadership Theory, Knowles' Adult Learning Theory, and Fullan's Theory of Educational





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ISSN: 3116-2991

Volume 2 Issue 3- 2026

<https://ijelcs.minduraresearch.com/journal/index>

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Change, demonstrating that effective instructional leadership is fundamentally collaborative, developmental, and transformative. By empowering teachers through professional support, reflective practice, and continuous learning, Education Program Supervisors play a critical role in strengthening instructional quality, fostering teaching excellence, and advancing sustainable educational improvement in the Schools Division of Santiago City.

### Conclusion

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of teachers regarding the instructional leadership of Education Program Supervisors (EPSs) in fostering professional growth and teaching excellence in the Schools Division of Santiago City. The findings revealed that teachers perceive Education Program Supervisors as transformational instructional leaders whose roles extend far beyond traditional supervisory and compliance-monitoring functions. Rather than merely evaluating teachers' performance, EPSs were viewed as mentors, instructional coaches, curriculum leaders, facilitators of professional learning, and advocates of continuous instructional improvement. Through coaching, technical assistance, collaborative learning activities, constructive feedback, and curriculum guidance, Education Program Supervisors significantly contributed to strengthening teachers' pedagogical knowledge, instructional competence, professional confidence, and reflective teaching practices. Participants also emphasized that instructional leadership created opportunities for collaboration, innovation, action research, and professional dialogue, which enhanced their commitment to lifelong learning and teaching excellence. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that teachers became more motivated to improve their instructional practices when supervision was characterized by trust, encouragement, and professional support rather than inspection and fault-finding. Ultimately, the findings affirm that instructional leadership is a transformative process that develops highly competent, reflective, and innovative educators capable of sustaining instructional excellence and organizational improvement. The study supports Hallinger and Murphy's Instructional Leadership Theory, Bass's Transformational Leadership Theory, Knowles' Adult Learning Theory, and Fullan's Theory of Educational Change, emphasizing that instructional leadership serves as a catalyst for professional growth, collaborative learning, and sustainable educational quality within the Philippine basic education system.

### Educational Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for instructional supervision, educational leadership, teacher professional development, and educational policy. First, Education Program Supervisors should continue strengthening instructional leadership by prioritizing mentoring, coaching, technical assistance, reflective supervision, and collaborative professional learning rather than focusing solely on compliance monitoring and administrative accountability. Second, the Schools Division Office should institutionalize structured coaching and mentoring systems that enable Education Program Supervisors to provide continuous instructional support tailored to teachers' developmental needs. Third, professional learning initiatives such as Learning Action Cells (LACs), Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), lesson study groups, curriculum workshops, and action research programs should be strengthened to promote collaborative knowledge sharing and instructional innovation among teachers. Fourth, instructional supervision should emphasize reflective practice, constructive feedback, and evidence-based



## International Journal of Education, Literacies, and Curriculum Studies

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Volume 2 Issue 3- 2026

<https://ijelcs.minduraresearch.com/journal/index>

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instructional improvement to cultivate teachers' professional confidence, instructional competence, and commitment to lifelong learning. Finally, educational policymakers should formulate policies that reinforce the instructional leadership role of Education Program Supervisors by providing sustained leadership development, sufficient resources, manageable supervisory workloads, and opportunities for continuous professional learning. These initiatives will strengthen the quality of instructional supervision and contribute to improved teacher performance, learner achievement, and sustainable educational excellence.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. **Education Program Supervisors** should continue strengthening their instructional leadership competencies by providing sustained coaching, mentoring, technical assistance, curriculum guidance, and reflective supervision that support teachers' continuous professional growth and instructional excellence.
2. **Teachers** should actively participate in professional development initiatives facilitated by Education Program Supervisors, including Learning Action Cells (LACs), Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), mentoring sessions, action research, curriculum enhancement activities, graduate studies, and instructional innovation programs to strengthen their pedagogical competence and professional expertise.
3. **The Schools Division Office of Santiago City** should develop comprehensive capability-building programs for Education Program Supervisors focusing on instructional leadership, curriculum leadership, coaching and mentoring, educational research, technology integration, change management, and evidence-based supervision to further enhance instructional support provided to schools.
4. **School administrators** should strengthen collaboration with Education Program Supervisors by integrating school-based instructional improvement initiatives with division-level professional development programs to ensure coherent and sustained teacher capacity-building.
5. **The Department of Education** should review and strengthen policies that institutionalize developmental instructional supervision by emphasizing mentoring, coaching, collaborative learning, and professional support while reducing unnecessary administrative demands that limit Education Program Supervisors' instructional leadership functions.
6. **Future researchers** are encouraged to conduct similar phenomenological studies in other school divisions, regions, and educational contexts to validate the findings. Comparative studies involving different learning areas, educational levels, and supervisory structures may further



## International Journal of Education, Literacies, and Curriculum Studies

ISSN: 3116-2991

Volume 2 Issue 3- 2026

<https://ijelcs.minduraresearch.com/journal/index>

enrich understanding of instructional leadership practices. Researchers may also employ mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to examine the long-term effects of Education Program Supervisors' instructional leadership on teacher effectiveness, instructional innovation, learner achievement, organizational commitment, and sustainable school improvement.

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International Journal of Education, Literacies, and Curriculum Studies

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Volume 2 Issue 3- 2026

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