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Beyond School Management: Teachers' Lived Experiences of Instructional Leadership Practices of School Principals at Divisoria High School

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ABSTRACT

The evolving demands of educational leadership have shifted the role of school principals from traditional administrative management to instructional leadership that directly influences teaching quality, teacher professional development, and learner achievement. Contemporary educational reforms emphasize that effective school leaders serve not only as managers of school operations but also as instructional leaders who inspire innovation, foster collaborative professional learning, and promote continuous school improvement. While numerous quantitative studies have established the relationship between instructional leadership and school effectiveness, limited qualitative investigations have explored how teachers personally experience the instructional leadership practices of school principals in their day-to-day professional lives. This study explored the lived experiences of teachers regarding the instructional leadership practices of school principals at Divisoria High School. Employing a transcendental phenomenological research design, twelve (12) purposively selected teachers participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's Seven-Step Phenomenological Method. The findings revealed that instructional leadership extends beyond school management by cultivating a culture of trust, collaboration, instructional excellence, and shared accountability that enhances teacher effectiveness and organizational performance. The study recommends strengthening instructional leadership capability-building programs, institutionalizing collaborative professional learning communities, enhancing teacher empowerment initiatives, and developing sustainable instructional leadership frameworks that support continuous school improvement.

Keywords: instructional leadership, school principals, school management, teachers' lived experiences, phenomenology, school improvement, educational leadership, professional development

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Background of the Study

The increasing complexity of contemporary education has transformed the responsibilities of school principals from traditional administrative management to comprehensive instructional leadership that directly influences teaching quality, professional learning, organizational effectiveness, and learner achievement. Modern educational systems require school leaders to function not merely as administrators responsible for operational efficiency but as instructional leaders who actively guide curriculum implementation, facilitate teacher development, promote evidence-based instructional practices, and cultivate collaborative learning organizations capable of responding to the changing demands of twenty-first-century education. Consequently, instructional leadership has emerged as one of the most influential dimensions of effective educational leadership because of its capacity to improve both instructional quality and overall school performance.

Instructional leadership emphasizes school leaders' active involvement in teaching and learning processes. Unlike conventional management approaches that focus primarily on administrative tasks, budgeting, personnel management, and school operations, instructional leadership prioritizes classroom instruction, curriculum development, teacher professional growth, learner-centered pedagogies, assessment practices, and continuous instructional improvement. Hallinger (2022) argued that instructional leadership remains one of the strongest school-based influences on educational effectiveness because it directly shapes teaching quality, teacher collaboration, and learner success. Through instructional leadership, school principals establish shared educational visions, provide instructional guidance, monitor curriculum implementation, facilitate professional learning, and create positive school climates where teachers continuously improve their instructional practices.

Globally, instructional leadership has gained significant attention as educational systems strive to improve learner outcomes while adapting to rapidly changing technological, social, and educational landscapes. Research consistently demonstrates that school principals who actively engage in instructional leadership positively influence teacher motivation, organizational commitment, instructional innovation, and student achievement (Robinson et al., 2020). Rather than relying solely on hierarchical authority, effective instructional leaders empower teachers through coaching, mentoring, reflective dialogue, collaborative decision-making, and professional learning communities that encourage continuous organizational learning. These leadership practices foster trust, shared responsibility, and collective efficacy, thereby creating educational environments where both teachers and learners thrive.

Robinson et al. (2020) argued that instructional leadership positively influences teacher performance because school leaders directly participate in activities related to teaching and learning. Their updated meta-analysis demonstrated that leadership practices involving teacher coaching, curriculum planning, professional learning, and instructional evaluation have stronger effects on student achievement than purely administrative functions. These findings suggest that instructional leadership creates meaningful opportunities for teachers to improve instructional competence while fostering collaborative school cultures committed to continuous learning.

Leithwood et al. (2020) further argued that successful school leadership integrates transformational leadership with instructional leadership by balancing organizational management with instructional improvement. School leaders who inspire teachers while simultaneously guiding curriculum



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implementation, instructional innovation, and professional learning contribute significantly to sustained school effectiveness. Teachers working under transformational instructional leaders often demonstrate greater motivation, stronger professional commitment, and higher instructional self-efficacy because leadership practices promote trust, collaboration, and shared responsibility.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) emphasized that effective professional development should be sustained, collaborative, classroom-focused, and directly connected to teachers' instructional responsibilities. Professional learning supported by instructional leadership enhances teacher confidence, pedagogical competence, instructional innovation, and learner engagement. Consequently, instructional leadership contributes significantly to developing highly competent teaching professionals capable of delivering quality education.

Ryan and Deci (2020), through Self-Determination Theory, argued that individuals become intrinsically motivated when their needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness are fulfilled. Within educational organizations, instructional leaders satisfy these needs by empowering teachers, recognizing professional accomplishments, encouraging collaborative decision-making, and providing opportunities for continuous professional growth.

Within the Philippine educational context, instructional leadership has become increasingly significant with the implementation of the Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP) 2030, the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), and the MATATAG Agenda. These educational reforms emphasize that school heads should serve as instructional leaders who promote curriculum excellence, strengthen teacher competencies, facilitate instructional supervision, encourage collaborative professional learning, and sustain school improvement initiatives. The Department of Education recognizes that instructional leadership is fundamental to achieving quality, equitable, and learner-centered education by ensuring that instructional decisions remain responsive to learners' diverse needs and educational aspirations.

Teachers occupy a central role in translating instructional leadership into classroom practice because they directly implement curricula, facilitate learner engagement, and assess educational outcomes. Consequently, understanding teachers' lived experiences regarding instructional leadership practices provides valuable insights into how school principals influence professional growth, instructional quality, organizational culture, and school improvement. Teachers' experiences offer authentic perspectives on the effectiveness of leadership behaviors, revealing how instructional leadership shapes motivation, confidence, collaboration, innovation, and commitment toward educational excellence. Such perspectives contribute to a deeper understanding of leadership processes beyond what quantitative organizational indicators alone can explain.

At Divisoria High School, school principals continuously implement instructional leadership practices through classroom observations, instructional coaching, mentoring, Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, curriculum planning, instructional supervision, teacher professional development, and collaborative school improvement initiatives. These leadership practices aim to strengthen instructional effectiveness, improve learner achievement, and cultivate a professional culture characterized by continuous learning and shared accountability. However, despite the implementation of these initiatives, limited empirical evidence exists regarding how teachers personally experience the instructional leadership practices of



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school principals and how these experiences contribute to professional growth and organizational improvement within the school's unique educational context.

Existing literature has predominantly examined instructional leadership using quantitative methodologies that investigate its relationship with teacher performance, organizational commitment, school effectiveness, or learner achievement. While these studies provide valuable statistical evidence, they often fail to capture the personal meanings, emotions, professional reflections, and lived experiences of teachers who directly interact with school leaders. Furthermore, phenomenological investigations exploring instructional leadership within Philippine public secondary schools remain relatively scarce, particularly in local school contexts where instructional leadership practices continue to evolve alongside national educational reforms.

The research gap lies in the limited phenomenological studies exploring teachers' lived experiences of the instructional leadership practices of school principals within Philippine public secondary schools. Most existing investigations emphasize measurable organizational outcomes while providing limited understanding of how teachers interpret, experience, and respond to instructional leadership in their daily professional practice. Additionally, there is a scarcity of contextual qualitative evidence situated at Divisoria High School, where instructional leadership serves as a key strategy for advancing educational quality and continuous school improvement. Addressing this gap, the present study explores teachers' lived experiences to generate deeper insights into instructional leadership practices that promote professional growth, instructional excellence, collaborative organizational culture, and sustainable school improvement.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored primarily on Transformational Leadership Theory developed by Bass and Avolio (1994). The theory posits that leaders inspire followers through a compelling vision, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and motivational influence. In educational settings, transformational school principals encourage teachers to pursue professional excellence, embrace instructional innovation, and actively participate in school improvement initiatives. This theory explains how instructional leadership motivates teachers to exceed routine responsibilities while contributing to organizational development.

The study is further supported by Hallinger's Instructional Leadership Model (2022), which identifies defining the school's mission, managing instructional programs, and promoting a positive school learning climate as the principal dimensions of effective instructional leadership. Hallinger emphasizes that school leaders directly influence teaching quality through curriculum supervision, instructional support, teacher development, and collaborative learning.

Additionally, Spillane's Distributed Leadership Theory (2006) provides a complementary perspective by asserting that leadership is shared among members of the school community. Teachers, department heads, and school administrators collaboratively contribute to instructional improvement, organizational learning, and sustainable school development through shared expertise and collective responsibility.

Finally, Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1997) and Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2020)



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explain how supportive instructional leadership enhances teachers' confidence, motivation, professional autonomy, and commitment, ultimately improving instructional performance and organizational effectiveness.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a transcendental phenomenological research design to explore and understand the lived experiences of teachers regarding the instructional leadership practices of school principals at Divisoria High School. Phenomenology is an appropriate qualitative methodology for investigating how individuals interpret and assign meaning to their shared experiences concerning a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Specifically, transcendental phenomenology, as developed by Moustakas (1994), seeks to describe the essence of participants' lived experiences by allowing their perspectives to emerge while minimizing researcher bias through the process of *epoché* or bracketing. This design was selected because the study sought to capture rich, in-depth descriptions of how teachers experience instructional leadership beyond routine administrative management and how these leadership practices influence their professional growth, instructional competence, motivation, collaboration, and commitment to school improvement. Rather than measuring leadership effectiveness through numerical indicators, the study focused on understanding the meanings teachers attach to their experiences with school principals' instructional leadership.

The study was conducted at Divisoria High School, a public secondary educational institution committed to providing quality, inclusive, and learner-centered education under the Department of Education. The school continuously implements instructional leadership initiatives designed to strengthen teaching quality, teacher professional development, curriculum implementation, and learner achievement. School principals actively engage in classroom observations, instructional coaching, mentoring, Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, curriculum supervision, classroom action research, faculty development, and collaborative school improvement initiatives. These leadership practices are aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), the Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP) 2030, and the MATATAG Agenda, all of which emphasize instructional leadership as a vital component of educational excellence. The school provided an appropriate setting for the study because teachers regularly interact with school principals in various instructional leadership activities, allowing them to provide rich and meaningful accounts of their experiences.

The participants of the study consisted of twelve (12) licensed professional teachers currently employed at Divisoria High School. They were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly employed in phenomenological studies to identify individuals who have directly experienced the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure that participants possessed adequate experience to provide meaningful insights, the inclusion criteria required them to be full-time permanent teachers with at least three years of teaching experience in the school, direct involvement in instructional supervision, coaching, mentoring, Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, curriculum implementation, or school improvement initiatives, and willingness to participate voluntarily in the study. Teachers representing different subject specializations and grade levels were included to



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ensure diversity of perspectives. Participant recruitment continued until data saturation was achieved, where no new themes or significant insights emerged from succeeding interviews (Saunders et al., 2018). The primary research instrument was a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide composed of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed descriptions of teachers' lived experiences regarding the instructional leadership practices of school principals. The interview guide was developed based on the objectives of the study, the reviewed literature, Hallinger's Instructional Leadership Model, and Bass and Avolio's Transformational Leadership Theory. The interview questions focused on teachers' experiences with instructional leadership, visionary leadership, instructional coaching and mentoring, classroom observations, professional development, collaborative decision-making, teacher recognition and motivation, instructional innovation, reflective practice, and school improvement initiatives. Before the conduct of the actual interviews, the interview guide underwent expert validation by specialists in educational leadership and qualitative research to establish content validity and ensure alignment with the research objectives. A pilot interview with teachers from another public secondary school was also conducted to refine the wording, sequencing, and clarity of the interview questions.

Upon securing approval from the appropriate educational authorities and the school principal, the researcher coordinated with the prospective participants regarding the objectives, procedures, and ethical considerations of the study. Teachers who met the inclusion criteria received an invitation letter explaining the purpose of the research, confidentiality measures, voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. After obtaining informed consent, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted individually in a quiet and private location within the school. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' permission to ensure accurate documentation of their responses. Field notes were likewise maintained to capture non-verbal behaviors, contextual observations, and reflective insights that complemented the interview transcripts. Following each interview, audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and copies of the transcripts were returned to the participants for member checking, allowing them to verify the accuracy of their responses and clarify statements whenever necessary.

The collected data were analyzed using Colaizzi's Seven-Step Phenomenological Method (Colaizzi, 1978). The analysis began with repeatedly reading all interview transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences. Significant statements directly related to instructional leadership practices were then extracted and interpreted to formulate meanings while preserving the participants' intended perspectives. Similar meanings were clustered into categories that eventually formed the major themes of the study. These themes were integrated into an exhaustive description of teachers' lived experiences, leading to the formulation of the fundamental structure that represented the essence of instructional leadership practices at Divisoria High School. Finally, the interpreted findings were returned to the participants for validation through member checking to ensure that the descriptions accurately reflected their lived experiences.

To establish the trustworthiness of the study, the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were observed throughout the research process. Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with participants, member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation of interview transcripts and field notes. Transferability was achieved by



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providing rich and detailed descriptions of the research setting, participants, and research procedures to enable readers to determine the applicability of the findings in similar educational contexts. Dependability was ensured by maintaining a comprehensive audit trail documenting all research procedures, coding decisions, thematic analyses, and methodological reflections. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive journaling, bracketing, and the inclusion of verbatim participant quotations, ensuring that the findings emerged from the participants' experiences rather than the researcher's personal assumptions. Ethical principles were strictly observed in accordance with the National Ethical Guidelines for Health and Health-Related Research (2022) issued by the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Schools Division Office and the school principal of Divisoria High School before data collection commenced. Participants were fully informed of the objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the study before voluntarily signing informed consent forms. They were likewise informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning pseudonyms such as *Participant 1* and *Participant 2* instead of using actual names. All interview recordings, transcripts, and research documents were securely stored in password-protected digital files accessible only to the researcher. Throughout the conduct of the study, the researcher upheld the ethical principles of respect, beneficence, justice, and non-maleficence by conducting interviews respectfully, protecting participants from harm, safeguarding confidential information, and ensuring that the findings were presented honestly and accurately. Collectively, these methodological procedures ensured the rigor, credibility, and ethical integrity of the study while providing an authentic understanding of teachers' lived experiences regarding the instructional leadership practices of school principals at Divisoria High School.

Results and Discussion

The phenomenological analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that teachers at Divisoria High School perceive instructional leadership as a transformative approach that extends beyond traditional school management and administrative supervision. Participants consistently described their school principals as instructional leaders who actively support teacher development, foster collaborative learning environments, strengthen instructional practices, and inspire a shared commitment toward school improvement. Rather than viewing school leadership as merely managing resources, enforcing policies, or ensuring compliance with institutional requirements, teachers emphasized that effective principals directly influence classroom instruction, professional growth, organizational culture, and learner success through meaningful engagement with teachers.

Teachers narrated that instructional leadership practices created opportunities for continuous learning, reflective teaching, collaborative problem-solving, and instructional innovation. The school principals were described as mentors, coaches, facilitators, and educational leaders who encouraged teachers to pursue excellence while providing the necessary guidance and support to improve instructional delivery. Participants further emphasized that instructional leadership nurtured trust, open communication, and professional empowerment, allowing teachers to become active partners in achieving the school's vision and educational goals. These experiences demonstrate that instructional leadership is not limited to



administrative authority but is fundamentally a collaborative process that strengthens both teacher competence and organizational effectiveness.

Theme 1. Inspiring Professional Growth through Visionary Leadership

The participants consistently described visionary leadership as one of the defining characteristics of effective instructional leadership. Teachers shared that their school principals continuously communicated a clear educational vision that inspired them to improve their instructional competencies and align their professional goals with the school's mission of delivering quality education. Participants explained that the school principal regularly encouraged faculty members to attend seminars, graduate studies, webinars, Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, and other professional development activities that enhanced their knowledge and teaching skills. This consistent encouragement fostered a culture of lifelong learning and professional excellence within the school community.

One participant shared, *"Our principal constantly reminds us that every training and seminar we attend should improve the way we teach our students. We are always encouraged to keep learning because education continuously changes."* (Participant 3). Another participant stated, *"The vision of our principal is very clear. We understand that our individual growth contributes to the success of the entire school."* (Participant 8). A third participant explained, *"She motivates us to pursue graduate studies and continuously improve ourselves because she believes that good teachers create better learners."* (Participant 11).

These findings indicate that visionary instructional leadership motivates teachers to pursue continuous professional growth by creating a shared sense of purpose and organizational commitment. Teachers become more willing to embrace educational reforms and instructional innovations when school leaders consistently communicate meaningful goals and provide opportunities for professional learning. These findings support the Transformational Leadership Theory of Bass and Avolio (1994), which posits that leaders inspire followers by articulating a compelling vision and encouraging them to achieve organizational goals beyond personal interests. Likewise, Hallinger (2022) emphasized that establishing a clear instructional vision significantly strengthens teacher commitment, instructional effectiveness, and school improvement.

Theme 2. Empowering Teachers through Instructional Coaching and Mentoring

Another major theme that emerged from the participants' narratives was the empowering role of instructional coaching and mentoring. Teachers consistently emphasized that classroom observations were conducted not as fault-finding exercises but as opportunities for professional learning and instructional improvement. Participants appreciated that school principals provided constructive feedback, individualized coaching, and collaborative reflection after every classroom observation, allowing them to strengthen their teaching strategies and classroom management practices.

One participant remarked, *"After every observation, our principal discusses both our strengths and areas for improvement. Instead of feeling criticized, I feel encouraged to become a better teacher."* (Participant 5). Another participant stated, *"The mentoring sessions helped me improve learner engagement and classroom management. I became more confident because my principal guided me every step of the way."* (Participant 9). Similarly, another teacher



shared, *"Coaching is not about pointing out mistakes. It is about helping us discover better ways of teaching our students."* (Participant 2).

Participants further explained that coaching and mentoring encouraged them to experiment with innovative instructional strategies, integrate technology into classroom instruction, and reflect critically on their teaching practices. These supportive leadership practices reduced anxiety associated with classroom observations and fostered an atmosphere where teachers openly discussed instructional challenges and collaboratively developed solutions. These findings affirm Knight's (2018) Instructional Coaching Model, which highlights coaching as a collaborative partnership that enhances instructional effectiveness through dialogue, reflection, and continuous professional learning. Robinson et al. (2020) similarly emphasized that instructional coaching significantly improves teacher performance and learner outcomes by strengthening teachers' instructional competencies.

Theme 3. Promoting Collaborative School Culture through Shared Leadership

Teachers consistently described instructional leadership as fostering a collaborative organizational culture where leadership responsibilities were shared among school administrators, department heads, master teachers, and classroom teachers. Participants explained that school principals regularly involved teachers in curriculum planning, school improvement initiatives, Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, committee work, and organizational decision-making. Such collaborative leadership strengthened teachers' sense of ownership, accountability, and commitment toward achieving the school's educational objectives.

One participant explained, *"During meetings, our ideas are always considered. We feel that our opinions matter because our principal listens to every teacher."* (Participant 1). Another participant shared, *"School improvement is everyone's responsibility. We work together because our principal believes that leadership should be shared."* (Participant 6). Another teacher remarked, *"Our Learning Action Cell sessions allow us to exchange ideas, solve classroom problems together, and learn from each other's experiences."* (Participant 10).

Teachers emphasized that collaborative leadership strengthened interpersonal relationships, improved communication, and promoted teamwork throughout the school. Rather than relying solely on top-down leadership, the principal encouraged participatory governance, enabling teachers to contribute actively to school development initiatives. These findings support Spillane's (2006) Distributed Leadership Theory, which argues that leadership becomes more effective when responsibilities are distributed across organizational members according to expertise. Similarly, DuFour and Fullan (2018) emphasized that Professional Learning Communities enhance instructional quality by promoting collaborative inquiry, shared accountability, and continuous professional learning.

Theme 4. Strengthening Teacher Motivation through Recognition and Professional Support

The participants identified recognition, encouragement, and emotional support as powerful instructional leadership practices that strengthened teacher motivation and professional commitment. Teachers expressed appreciation for school principals who acknowledged both individual accomplishments and collective achievements through verbal recognition, commendations, and positive feedback. Participants believed that feeling appreciated significantly enhanced their morale, confidence, and willingness to perform beyond their routine responsibilities.



One participant stated, *"A simple appreciation from our principal motivates us to continue giving our best because we know our efforts are recognized."* (Participant 4). Another participant shared, *"Whenever we accomplish something successfully, our principal celebrates it with us. It inspires us to continue improving."* (Participant 12). Another teacher explained, *"Our principal understands our struggles and provides emotional support whenever we encounter challenges. That kind of leadership encourages us not to give up."* (Participant 7).

Teachers further emphasized that supportive instructional leadership promoted a positive school climate characterized by trust, empathy, and mutual respect. Recognition extended beyond formal awards and included meaningful conversations, encouragement, and professional guidance that helped teachers maintain enthusiasm despite increasing workloads and educational reforms. These findings align with Ryan and Deci's (2020) Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes that competence, autonomy, and positive relationships enhance intrinsic motivation. Likewise, Bandura's (1997) Self-Efficacy Theory suggests that positive feedback and supportive leadership strengthen teachers' confidence, resilience, and instructional effectiveness.

Theme 5. Advancing School Improvement through Reflective Practice and Instructional Innovation

The final theme demonstrated that instructional leadership promoted sustainable school improvement by encouraging teachers to engage in reflective practice and instructional innovation. Participants explained that school principals consistently encouraged them to evaluate their teaching practices, conduct classroom action research, integrate educational technologies, and develop creative instructional strategies responsive to learners' needs. Reflection became an integral component of professional practice through post-observation conferences, collaborative discussions, learner performance analysis, and curriculum review meetings.

One participant explained, *"Reflection has become part of our teaching because our principal always asks us to evaluate what worked and what needs improvement."* (Participant 2). Another teacher shared, *"We are encouraged to innovate and introduce new teaching strategies as long as they improve student learning."* (Participant 9). A third participant remarked, *"School improvement is continuous. Every school year we evaluate ourselves and find better ways to serve our learners."* (Participant 5).

Teachers perceived innovation as extending beyond technology integration to include improved assessment methods, differentiated instruction, curriculum enhancement, and classroom action research. Reflective instructional leadership encouraged teachers to make evidence-based instructional decisions while continuously improving their professional practice. These findings support Schön's (1983) Reflective Practice Theory, which emphasizes that professionals improve through continuous reflection on their experiences. Likewise, Hallinger (2022) maintained that instructional leaders sustain school improvement by cultivating organizational cultures that value innovation, collaboration, professional learning, and reflective practice.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that instructional leadership extends far beyond the traditional



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functions of school management. Teachers at Divisoria High School experienced instructional leadership as a multidimensional process characterized by visionary leadership, instructional coaching, collaborative decision-making, professional recognition, and reflective innovation. These leadership practices fostered teacher empowerment, instructional excellence, organizational commitment, and sustainable school improvement. The participants' lived experiences reveal that effective school principals influence educational quality not merely through administrative control but through meaningful professional relationships that inspire continuous learning, collaboration, and shared accountability. Collectively, the findings affirm the principles of Bass and Avolio's Transformational Leadership Theory, Hallinger's Instructional Leadership Model, Spillane's Distributed Leadership Theory, Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, and Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory, all of which recognize that effective educational leadership is achieved by empowering teachers, strengthening professional learning communities, fostering innovation, and cultivating collaborative organizational cultures that ultimately enhance learner success and sustainable school improvement.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of teachers regarding the instructional leadership practices of school principals at **Divisoria High School**. The findings revealed that instructional leadership extends beyond the traditional functions of school management and administrative supervision by directly influencing teachers' professional growth, instructional competence, collaborative engagement, motivation, and commitment to continuous school improvement. Teachers consistently described their school principals as instructional leaders who inspire educational excellence through visionary leadership, instructional coaching, collaborative decision-making, professional support, and reflective practice. Rather than perceiving leadership as merely maintaining school operations and implementing policies, participants experienced instructional leadership as a dynamic process that empowers teachers to become reflective practitioners, innovative educators, and active contributors to organizational development.

The first theme, Inspiring Professional Growth through Visionary Leadership, demonstrated that school principals significantly influence teachers' commitment to continuous learning by communicating a clear educational vision and encouraging participation in graduate studies, seminars, Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, instructional conferences, and other professional development activities. Teachers recognized that visionary leadership strengthened their instructional competencies, increased their confidence, and aligned their professional aspirations with the broader goals of the school. The findings suggest that when school leaders consistently articulate meaningful educational goals and invest in teacher development, educators become more motivated to pursue instructional excellence and lifelong learning.

The second theme, Empowering Teachers through Instructional Coaching and Mentoring, revealed that teachers viewed instructional supervision as a developmental process rather than an evaluative mechanism. Participants appreciated classroom observations followed by constructive feedback, reflective dialogue, individualized coaching, and mentoring that enhanced classroom management, learner engagement, assessment practices, and instructional innovation. These experiences strengthened teachers' confidence and willingness to adopt evidence-based teaching strategies while reducing anxiety associated with instructional evaluation. The findings indicate that instructional coaching creates supportive



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professional relationships that encourage continuous instructional improvement and reflective teaching practices.

The third theme, Promoting Collaborative School Culture through Shared Leadership, highlighted the importance of collaborative decision-making in sustaining organizational effectiveness. Teachers described school principals who encouraged participation in curriculum planning, school improvement initiatives, committee work, and Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, thereby promoting shared ownership and collective accountability. Participants emphasized that collaborative leadership strengthened communication, teamwork, trust, and professional relationships among faculty members. These experiences demonstrate that effective instructional leadership fosters an inclusive organizational culture where teachers actively contribute to educational decision-making and school improvement.

The fourth theme, Strengthening Teacher Motivation through Recognition and Professional Support, underscored the significant influence of appreciation, encouragement, and emotional support on teachers' professional commitment and organizational engagement. Participants consistently expressed that school principals who acknowledged individual accomplishments, celebrated collective achievements, and provided emotional encouragement cultivated a positive school climate characterized by trust, respect, and mutual support. Such leadership practices enhanced teachers' motivation, resilience, job satisfaction, and willingness to participate in instructional innovation and school improvement activities despite increasing educational challenges.

The fifth theme, Advancing School Improvement through Reflective Practice and Instructional Innovation, demonstrated that school principals encouraged teachers to continuously evaluate and improve their instructional practices through reflection, classroom action research, technology integration, curriculum enhancement, and collaborative professional learning. Participants perceived school improvement as an ongoing process requiring continuous innovation, evidence-based decision-making, and reflective teaching. Reflective leadership enabled teachers to critically assess their instructional practices, respond effectively to learners' needs, and contribute to the long-term improvement of educational quality.

The study concludes that instructional leadership is a transformative leadership approach that significantly contributes to teacher empowerment, instructional excellence, organizational commitment, and sustainable school improvement. The findings affirm Bass and Avolio's Transformational Leadership Theory, Hallinger's Instructional Leadership Model, Spillane's Distributed Leadership Theory, Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, and Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory, all of which emphasize that effective educational leadership is achieved by empowering teachers, fostering collaboration, promoting continuous professional learning, and cultivating reflective organizational cultures. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that school principals who actively engage in instructional leadership create educational environments where teachers continuously develop professionally, collaborate meaningfully, innovate instructionally, and collectively contribute to achieving quality education.

Educational Implications

The findings of this study provide important implications for educational leadership, teacher professional development, school governance, and educational policy. First, school principals should prioritize instructional leadership by strengthening coaching, mentoring, curriculum supervision, reflective practice,



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and collaborative professional learning rather than focusing primarily on administrative management. Second, teachers should be empowered to participate actively in instructional decision-making, curriculum development, classroom action research, and professional learning communities to strengthen their sense of ownership and commitment to school improvement. Third, schools should institutionalize collaborative professional learning structures such as Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, peer mentoring, lesson study, and classroom action research to promote instructional excellence and organizational learning. Fourth, the Department of Education should continue enhancing leadership development programs aligned with the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH), Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), the Basic Education Development Plan (BEDP) 2030, and the MATATAG Agenda, ensuring that school principals possess the competencies necessary to function as effective instructional leaders. Finally, educational institutions should cultivate organizational cultures characterized by trust, innovation, collaboration, and continuous professional learning to sustain quality education and long-term school improvement.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. School principals should continuously strengthen instructional leadership practices by emphasizing coaching, mentoring, classroom supervision, collaborative leadership, instructional innovation, and teacher empowerment.
2. Teachers should actively participate in graduate education, seminars, webinars, Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions, classroom action research, peer mentoring, and other professional development activities to continuously improve instructional competence.
3. School administrators should institutionalize Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), collaborative lesson planning, peer observation, reflective teaching conferences, and evidence-based instructional improvement initiatives.
4. The Department of Education should strengthen leadership capability-building programs for school heads focusing on instructional leadership, transformational leadership, coaching, mentoring, distributed leadership, and organizational development aligned with the PPSSH, PPST, BEDP 2030, and the MATATAG Agenda.
5. Educational policymakers should provide sufficient resources, technical assistance, and professional development opportunities that support sustainable instructional leadership and continuous school improvement.
6. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct comparative studies involving public and private secondary schools, employ mixed-methods or longitudinal research designs, and examine the



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influence of instructional leadership on teacher effectiveness, learner achievement, organizational resilience, and educational innovation.

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