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SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AND INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION IN RURAL PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

School leadership and instructional supervision play a crucial role in shaping teaching quality and learner outcomes, particularly in rural public elementary schools where contextual constraints influence school operations. This study examined the leadership practices of school heads and the nature of instructional supervision at Ahin Elementary School, Tinoc. Using a qualitative case study design, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with the school head and teachers, classroom observations, and document analysis of supervisory plans and instructional records. Thematic analysis revealed two major domains: leadership practices in managing a rural elementary school and instructional supervision practices supporting teaching and learning. Findings indicate that instructional leadership, collaborative decision-making, and supportive supervision practices contribute to improved teacher motivation and instructional consistency despite challenges related to limited resources, multi-grade teaching, and workload demands. The study underscores the importance of context-responsive leadership and developmental supervision in strengthening instructional quality in rural public elementary schools. Implications for school leadership development, instructional supervision, and policy support are discussed.

Keywords: school leadership, instructional supervision, rural education, public elementary schools, Philippines

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I. INTRODUCTION

Effective school leadership is widely recognized as a key factor influencing instructional quality and learner achievement. School heads play a central role in setting instructional direction, supporting teachers, and ensuring that teaching and learning processes align with curriculum standards. In public elementary schools, particularly those located in rural and geographically isolated areas, leadership practices are shaped by contextual realities such as limited resources, teacher shortages, and multi-grade classrooms.

Instructional supervision is an essential function of school leadership, focusing on improving teaching practices through monitoring, feedback, and professional support. Rather than functioning solely as an evaluative mechanism, contemporary supervision emphasizes developmental and supportive approaches that foster teacher growth and instructional improvement. Studies suggest that instructional leadership and effective supervision practices positively influence teacher performance and learner outcomes (Hallinger, 2011; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2018).

In the Philippine basic education system, school heads are expected to perform instructional leadership roles guided by national frameworks such as the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH). However, rural public elementary schools face unique challenges that affect the implementation of leadership and supervision practices, including heavy administrative workloads, limited access to professional development, and contextual constraints related to community and geography.

Despite the importance of school leadership in rural settings, empirical studies examining leadership

practices and instructional supervision in small rural elementary schools remain limited. This study addresses this gap by examining leadership practices and instructional supervision at Ahin Elementary School, Tinoc, providing context-based insights into how school heads support instruction and teacher development in a rural public elementary school.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to:

1. Examine the leadership practices of the school head at Ahin Elementary School.
2. Describe instructional supervision practices employed to support teachers' instructional performance.
3. Identify challenges encountered in school leadership and instructional supervision in a rural public elementary school.
4. Explore how leadership and supervision practices influence teaching and learning processes.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative case study design to provide an in-depth understanding of school leadership and instructional supervision within a specific rural elementary school context. This approach allowed for detailed exploration of leadership practices and teacher experiences.

Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted at Ahin Elementary School, a rural public elementary school in Tinoc. Participants included the school head and eight elementary teachers.



Purposive sampling was used to select participants based on their direct involvement in instructional activities and school leadership processes.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Interviews explored leadership roles, supervision practices, and perceived challenges. Classroom observations focused on instructional delivery and supervisory feedback processes. Documents such as School Improvement Plans, instructional supervision plans, and lesson logs were analyzed to triangulate data.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were coded and categorized into themes reflecting leadership and supervision practices. Triangulation across data sources enhanced credibility and trustworthiness.

Results and Findings

Analysis of the data yielded two major thematic domains: **school leadership practices in a rural context** and **instructional supervision practices supporting teaching and learning**.

Theme 1: School Leadership Practices in a Rural Public Elementary School

Instructional Leadership as a Core Role

The school head emphasized instructional leadership as a primary responsibility, placing strong focus on curriculum implementation, lesson planning, and the systematic monitoring of learner performance. Despite the demands of administrative and managerial tasks, the school head consistently underscored that improving teaching and learning remained the core function of school leadership. Teachers reported that regular discussions on curriculum standards, lesson objectives,

and learner outcomes helped ensure alignment between planned instruction and classroom practice. This instructional focus enabled teachers to maintain clarity in lesson delivery and reinforced shared expectations regarding teaching quality and learner achievement.

Such prioritization of instructional leadership is well supported in the literature, which identifies school heads' active involvement in curriculum oversight and instructional monitoring as a key factor in enhancing teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes (Hallinger, 2011; Robinson et al., 2008). By closely monitoring learner performance and providing guidance on lesson planning, the school head created a culture of accountability and continuous improvement. This approach is particularly critical in rural public elementary schools, where instructional support from external sources may be limited and the school head's leadership plays a central role in sustaining instructional quality.

"Kahit maraming administrative work, hindi puwedeng mawala ang focus sa instruction." (School Head)

Teachers reported that regular instructional discussions and systematic monitoring conducted by the school head played a significant role in maintaining and improving teaching standards at Ahin Elementary School. These discussions provided structured opportunities for teachers to reflect on lesson objectives, instructional strategies, and learner progress, allowing them to align classroom practices with curriculum standards and school goals. Through regular classroom visits, lesson plan reviews, and post-observation conferences, teachers received timely feedback that guided instructional adjustments and reinforced effective teaching practices. As one teacher noted, such consistent monitoring helped ensure that *"pare-pareho ang direksyon ng pagtuturo"* and encouraged accountability while remaining supportive rather than punitive.



This finding aligns with research emphasizing instructional leadership as a key driver of teaching quality and learner achievement. Hallinger (2011) underscores that school leaders who prioritize instructional goals, monitor classroom practices, and engage teachers in ongoing professional dialogue create conditions that support effective teaching and sustained school improvement. By maintaining a visible instructional presence and fostering continuous instructional conversations, school leaders help build a shared understanding of quality instruction, which ultimately contributes to improved learner outcomes, particularly in rural public school contexts where instructional support is critically needed.

Collaborative and Participatory Leadership

The school head practiced shared decision-making by actively involving teachers in instructional planning, problem-solving, and the implementation of school initiatives. Teachers reported that they were regularly consulted during the development of school plans, scheduling of activities, and identification of strategies to address instructional and operational challenges. This participatory approach created opportunities for teachers to share insights based on their classroom experiences, fostering a sense of ownership and collective responsibility for school improvement. As a result, teachers felt valued as partners in decision-making rather than merely implementers of directives.

Such collaborative leadership practices contributed to a more supportive and cohesive school culture, where teachers were more willing to take initiative and collaborate with colleagues. Research indicates that shared leadership enhances teacher commitment, professional trust, and the effectiveness of school improvement efforts, particularly in small and rural schools where collaboration is essential for addressing limited resources and multiple role demands (Leithwood et al., 2020). By promoting shared decision-making, the school head strengthened professional

relationships and supported sustained instructional improvement within the school.

“Kapag may desisyon, pinapakinggan muna ang teachers.” (Teacher 3)

Such collaboration fostered a strong sense of ownership and collective responsibility among teachers, as they became more invested in both instructional decisions and broader school initiatives. When teachers were given opportunities to contribute to planning and problem-solving, they viewed school goals as shared commitments rather than top-down mandates. This collective ownership encouraged mutual accountability and reinforced a culture of teamwork, where teachers supported one another in addressing instructional challenges and implementing agreed-upon strategies.

This finding is consistent with research on collaborative leadership, which emphasizes its role in strengthening professional relationships and sustaining school improvement efforts. Leithwood et al. (2020) argue that collaborative leadership is particularly effective in small school contexts, where close professional relationships and shared responsibility are essential for managing limited resources and multiple responsibilities. By fostering collaboration, school leaders create conditions that enhance trust, professional learning, and coordinated action toward improved teaching and learning outcomes.

Managing Contextual Challenges

Participants identified several challenges that significantly influenced school leadership and instructional supervision, including limited instructional resources, the demands of multi-grade teaching, and a heavy administrative workload. Teachers reported shortages of teaching materials and learning resources, which often required them to improvise instructional strategies or share limited materials across classes. In addition, multi-grade teaching arrangements placed added instructional demands on teachers, as they were



required to plan and deliver lessons that addressed the diverse learning needs and grade-level competencies of multiple groups of learners simultaneously. These instructional complexities were further intensified by the heavy administrative workload carried by both teachers and the school head, including extensive documentation and reporting requirements.

These challenges reflect the broader realities of rural public elementary schools, where human and material resources are often constrained. Existing studies note that rural school leaders frequently assume multiple roles and responsibilities, balancing instructional leadership with administrative and managerial tasks (Clarke & Stevens, 2009). Such conditions underscore the need for flexible leadership practices and systemic support to enable school leaders and teachers to sustain effective instruction despite contextual limitations.

“Marami kaming ginagawa, pero nagtutulungan para matuloy ang mga plano.” (Teacher 6)

Rural school leaders often manage multiple roles simultaneously, requiring a high level of flexibility and adaptability in their daily work (Clarke & Stevens, 2009). In small rural schools, school heads frequently serve not only as instructional leaders but also as administrative managers, classroom teachers, community liaisons, and coordinators of school programs. Balancing these overlapping responsibilities demands constant prioritization and the ability to adjust leadership practices according to emerging needs and contextual constraints. This multiplicity of roles shapes how leadership and instructional supervision are enacted, often requiring school heads to be pragmatic and resourceful in sustaining instructional quality while addressing operational demands.

Such conditions highlight the importance of adaptive leadership in rural education settings. Clarke and Stevens (2009) emphasize that successful rural school leaders rely on relational skills, collaborative problem-

solving, and context-sensitive decision-making to manage competing responsibilities effectively. Flexibility and adaptability enable school leaders to respond to instructional needs while navigating limited resources and heavy workloads, reinforcing the critical role of leadership capacity in sustaining teaching and learning in rural public elementary schools.

Theme 2: Instructional Supervision Practices

Supportive and Developmental Supervision

Instructional supervision in the school focused on mentoring and professional growth rather than fault-finding or punitive evaluation. Classroom observations were conducted as part of a supportive supervision process, with the school head emphasizing constructive dialogue and reflection. Following each observation, feedback sessions were held to highlight teachers' strengths, acknowledge effective instructional practices, and identify specific areas for improvement. Teachers reported that this approach helped them feel supported and encouraged to reflect on their teaching without fear of criticism.

This mentoring-oriented supervision fostered a positive professional climate where teachers were more open to feedback and willing to experiment with new instructional strategies. Research on developmental supervision emphasizes that when supervision is framed as a collaborative and supportive process, it enhances teacher confidence, instructional improvement, and professional learning (Glickman et al., 2018). By focusing on guidance and growth rather than fault-finding, instructional supervision contributed to continuous improvement in teaching practices within the rural school context.

“Hindi kami pinapagalitan. Tinutulungan kami kung paano pa mag-improve.” (Teacher 1)

Developmental supervision promotes teacher growth and instructional improvement by emphasizing



professional support, reflective practice, and continuous learning rather than evaluative judgment (Glickman et al., 2018). Through collaborative dialogue, coaching, and formative feedback, developmental supervision helps teachers identify their instructional strengths and areas for improvement, encouraging them to refine their practices in a supportive environment. This approach recognizes teachers as professionals with varying developmental needs and tailors supervisory strategies accordingly, making it particularly effective in fostering sustained instructional improvement.

In rural school contexts, where teachers often work with limited resources and multiple instructional demands, developmental supervision provides a critical mechanism for ongoing professional growth. Glickman et al. (2018) highlight that when supervision is aligned with teachers' developmental stages and focused on improvement rather than compliance, it enhances teacher motivation, instructional competence, and overall teaching quality. As a result, developmental supervision serves as a vital leadership practice for strengthening instruction and promoting a culture of learning within schools.

Coaching and Professional Support

The school head provided instructional coaching through demonstration lessons, peer mentoring, and Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions to support teachers' professional growth. Demonstration lessons allowed teachers to observe effective instructional strategies in practice, particularly in areas such as classroom management, lesson pacing, and learner engagement. Peer mentoring further complemented this approach by pairing teachers to share expertise, reflect on classroom experiences, and collaboratively address instructional challenges. These activities created opportunities for teachers to learn from one another in a collegial and supportive environment.

LAC sessions served as structured platforms for collective learning, where teachers discussed teaching strategies, reviewed learner performance data, and planned instructional improvements. Teachers reported that these coaching-oriented activities helped them refine their instructional practices and feel more confident in implementing new strategies. Consistent with research on instructional coaching, such collaborative and practice-based professional learning approaches contribute to improved teaching quality and sustained instructional improvement, especially in rural public schools where access to external training opportunities may be limited.

"May coaching at sharing sa LAC, malaking tulong sa amin." (Teacher 5)

Instructional coaching is closely linked to improved teaching practices and enhanced teacher efficacy, as it provides sustained, job-embedded professional support focused on classroom practice (Knight, 2007). Through coaching activities such as demonstration lessons, peer mentoring, and collaborative reflection, teachers are able to observe effective strategies, receive individualized feedback, and refine their instructional approaches in response to learners' needs. This process supports teachers in translating professional learning into actual classroom practice, thereby strengthening instructional quality.

Knight (2007) emphasizes that instructional coaching is most effective when it is collaborative and non-evaluative, allowing teachers to engage in reflective dialogue and take ownership of their professional growth. In rural school contexts, where teachers may have limited access to external training and professional networks, coaching serves as a practical and sustainable mechanism for building instructional competence and confidence. By fostering continuous improvement and reinforcing teachers' sense of efficacy, instructional coaching contributes to more effective teaching and improved learning outcomes.



Monitoring and Feedback for Instructional Improvement

Regular classroom visits and systematic review of lesson plans enabled continuous monitoring of instructional quality and alignment with curriculum standards. Through frequent classroom observations, the school head was able to gain firsthand insight into teaching strategies, learner engagement, and classroom management practices. Reviewing lesson plans further allowed the school head to ensure that instructional objectives, learning activities, and assessment strategies were coherent and responsive to learners' needs. Teachers noted that this consistent monitoring helped them remain focused on instructional goals and encouraged thoughtful planning and preparation.

These monitoring practices also created opportunities for timely feedback and instructional adjustment. Rather than functioning as isolated evaluation activities, classroom visits and lesson plan reviews were integrated into an ongoing supervision process that emphasized improvement and support. Research suggests that continuous instructional monitoring, when paired with constructive feedback, plays a critical role in strengthening teaching quality and promoting reflective practice among teachers (Hallinger, 2011; Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

“Nakakatulong ang feedback kasi alam namin kung saan pa kami pwede mag-ayos.” (Teacher 7)

Effective feedback is essential in instructional supervision because it supports reflective teaching and promotes continuous improvement in classroom practice (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). When feedback is timely, specific, and focused on instructional goals, it helps teachers understand the impact of their teaching strategies on learner outcomes and identify concrete areas for refinement. Such feedback encourages teachers to engage in self-reflection, evaluate their

instructional decisions, and make informed adjustments to enhance learning.

Hattie and Timperley (2007) emphasize that feedback is most effective when it answers key questions for teachers: *Where am I going? How am I going? and What are the next steps?* In the context of instructional supervision, feedback that clearly communicates expectations, acknowledges effective practices, and provides guidance for improvement fosters a culture of professional learning rather than compliance. This approach strengthens teachers' instructional competence and contributes to sustained improvement in teaching quality, particularly in settings where ongoing support is critical for instructional growth.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that school leadership and instructional supervision in a rural public elementary school are profoundly shaped by contextual constraints and the capacity of school leaders to adapt their practices to local realities. In settings characterized by limited instructional resources, small teaching staff, multi-grade classes, and heavy administrative demands, leadership effectiveness depends less on rigid managerial control and more on flexible, context-responsive approaches. Consistent with studies on rural education, school heads are often required to perform multiple roles simultaneously, balancing instructional leadership with administrative, community, and managerial responsibilities (Clarke & Stevens, 2009; Preston & Barnes, 2017). These conditions necessitate adaptive leadership practices that prioritize instructional support while navigating structural limitations.

Within this context, instructional leadership, collaborative practices, and supportive supervision emerged as critical mechanisms for sustaining instructional quality. The school head's consistent focus on curriculum implementation, classroom practices, and learner progress reflects core principles of instructional



leadership, which research has repeatedly linked to improved teaching quality and student learning (Hallinger, 2011; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). By maintaining an instructional focus despite competing demands, school leaders help establish clear expectations for teaching and reinforce the centrality of learning within the school's mission. Supportive and developmental supervision further strengthens this process by framing supervision as professional guidance rather than evaluation, enabling teachers to reflect on practice and pursue continuous improvement (Glickman et al., 2018).

The study also highlights the importance of teacher-centered supervision and collaborative leadership in rural school improvement. Collaborative practices such as shared decision-making, peer mentoring, and collective planning foster professional trust and collective responsibility among teachers. Research indicates that such relational and participatory leadership approaches are particularly effective in small and rural schools, where close working relationships and interdependence among staff are unavoidable (Leithwood et al., 2020; Spillane, 2006). When teachers are actively involved in instructional decision-making, they are more likely to demonstrate commitment, initiative, and openness to change.

Moreover, the findings underscore the role of teacher agency and collegial support in strengthening instructional practices. Teacher agency the capacity of teachers to act purposefully and reflectively within their professional contexts has been identified as a key factor in instructional improvement, especially in resource-constrained environments (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015). Collegial support, manifested through collaboration, peer learning, and shared problem-solving, enables teachers to compensate for material shortages and instructional challenges by drawing on collective expertise. Together, these relational dimensions suggest that leadership effectiveness in rural

public elementary schools extends beyond formal authority structures. Instead, it is grounded in trust, shared commitment, and the cultivation of a professional community focused on teaching and learning. Such findings align with broader leadership literature emphasizing that sustainable school improvement is achieved through relational leadership that empowers teachers and builds collective capacity (Harris, 2013; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Conclusion

School leadership and instructional supervision at Ahin Elementary School play a vital role in supporting teaching and learning in a rural public elementary school context. Despite challenges related to resources and workload, instructional leadership, collaborative decision-making, and developmental supervision contribute positively to teacher motivation and instructional consistency. Strengthening leadership capacity and supervision practices can enhance instructional quality in rural public elementary schools.

Implications and Recommendations

Schools should strengthen leadership development programs focusing on instructional leadership and supportive supervision, particularly for rural school heads. Policies should provide adequate resources and administrative support to reduce workload and allow school leaders to focus on instructional improvement. Future research may employ mixed-methods or multi-site studies to examine leadership and supervision practices across rural public elementary schools.

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