





Instructional leadership and implementation of inclusive education practices of school heads

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ABSTRACT

This study determined the relationship between instructional leadership practices and implementation of inclusive education practices of public elementary and secondary school heads in the Division of Camarines Norte. The study employed descriptive-correlational research design with survey questionnaire checklist as the data-gathering instrument. Total enumeration was employed in this study which involved one hundred two teachers, 21 public elementary school heads, and 15 secondary school heads in the locale of the study. Based on the findings, it is concluded that the public elementary and secondary school heads very satisfactorily implemented their instructional leadership practices along school-based review, contextualization and implementation of learning standards, teaching standards and pedagogies, teacher performance feedback, learner achievement and other performance indicators, learning assessment, learning environment and career awareness and opportunities except learners' discipline wherein they were rated outstanding. Moreover, they almost fully implemented the inclusive education practices along identification, assessment, and placement, developing individual education plan, providing assistance and reporting. There is a weak positive correlation between learning environment and identification, assessment and placement practices, while assistance has a significant correlation along learning environment, and reporting is significantly correlated along teacher's performance and feedback and career awareness and opportunities. The identified issues and concerns affected how they cater to learners with special needs. A guidebook is therefore proposed to address the instructional leadership practices and inclusive education practices of the school heads in public elementary and secondary schools in the Division of Camarines Norte.

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INTRODUCTION

The Department of Education (DepEd) prioritizes empowering school principals by strengthening their leadership abilities and overall effectiveness. To achieve this goal, DepEd has implemented the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads (PPSSH). This framework serves as a public commitment to professional responsibility and provides a guide for school leaders to self-assess and improve their practices as they continuously develop their careers (DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2020).

School principals, holding a vital leadership role, are key to creating an environment that fosters effective teaching and learning. Their strong leadership and management practices are instrumental in DepEd's mission of developing high-quality educators and nurturing well-rounded

students. These students, as envisioned by DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017, will be grounded in values, equipped with 21st-century skills, and empowered to drive the country's progress. This aligns perfectly with DepEd's broader vision, outlined in DepEd Order No. 36, s. 2013, of fostering Filipinos who possess a deep love for their nation and whose values and capabilities enable them to reach their full potential and meaningfully contribute to nation-building.

Within a school, the school principal, teachers, parents and other school stakeholders are involved in ensuring that the child can access their education and achieve their goals. The school principals play a crucial role in setting the priorities for learning in the school, with their values, commitment, knowledge and skill, they can make a difference. Effective leadership by the principal is especially important if schools are to be truly inclusive and meet the

educational needs of an increasingly diverse student population (DepEd Order No. 24. s. 2020). Recent educational reforms, including the K to 12 program and the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers, alongside global trends like ASEAN integration and the evolving needs of 21st-century learners, have created a pressing need for school heads to enhance their professional skills and pursue career advancement opportunities.

The Philippines' Enhanced Basic Education program, established by Section 8 of Republic Act 10533, promotes inclusivity. This means offering a variety of programs that cater to the diverse needs of learners. These programs address learners' physical, intellectual, psychosocial, and cultural backgrounds. Examples include programs for gifted students, learners with disabilities, and those from indigenous communities. Special Education is one such program mandated by this Act, ensuring all learners have access to appropriate support.

In the Division of Camarines Norte, for school year 2022-2023 only 25 or 35.71 % out of 70 secondary schools and 33 or 12.94% out of 255 elementary schools has identified learners with special needs mainstreamed in their regular classroom. They have 349 learners for secondary schools and 271 learners for elementary officially enrolled and tagged in the Learners Information System (LIS) as learners with special needs. Additionally, learners from regular classes of these schools also received failed grades from their teachers and one of the identified reasons is that most of the learners has learning difficulties which is considered as one the special needs.

The researcher has experienced how challenging and difficult it is to cater these learners, thus, this study aimed to determine the relationship between instructional leadership practices and implementation of inclusive education practices of public elementary and secondary school heads in the Division of Camarines Norte was proposed. Specifically, it answered the following sub-problems: 1) What is the extent of instructional leadership practices of public elementary and secondary school heads as assessed by the receiving teachers and school heads themselves along a) school-based review, contextualization and implementation of learning standards, b) teaching standards and pedagogies, c) teacher performance feedback, d) learner achievement, e) learning assessment, f) learning environment, g) career awareness and opportunities, and h) learner discipline; 2) What is the extent of implementation of inclusive education practices of public elementary and secondary school heads as assessed by the receiving teachers and school heads

themselves along a) identification, assessment and placements, b) developing individualized educational plan, c) assistance, and d) reporting;

Moreover, 3) Is there significant relationship between the instructional leadership practices and implementation of inclusive education practices of public elementary and secondary school heads; 4) What are the issues and concerns encountered by the receiving teachers and school heads in terms of instructional leadership practices and implementation of inclusive education practices; and 5) What recommendations may be proposed to address the instructional leadership practices and implementation of inclusive education practices of public elementary and secondary school heads in the Division of Camarines Norte?

■ METHODOLOGY

This study employed descriptive-correlational method of research. The descriptive method was relevant in describing the extent of instructional leadership practices and the extent of implementation of inclusive education practices of public elementary and secondary school heads in the Division of Camarines Norte. Meanwhile, the correlation design was used to determine the relationship between the instructional leadership practices and implementation of inclusive education practices of public elementary and secondary school heads in the locale of the study.

The study involved one 102 teachers, 21 public elementary school heads, and 15 secondary school heads in the Division of Camarines Norte, with a total of 138 respondents. Total enumeration was utilized for the study. The sources of data were the answers of the respondents in the survey questionnaire checklist.

The data on the instructional leadership practices and implementation of inclusive education practices of public elementary and secondary school heads in the Division of Camarines Norte were analyzed using weighted mean and Pearson product moment correlation. Weighted mean determined the extent of instructional leadership practices and inclusive education practices as well as the challenges encountered by public elementary and secondary school heads as assessed by the receiving teachers and school heads themselves. Meanwhile, Pearson product moment correlation determined the significant correlation between the instructional leadership and implementation of inclusive education practices of public elementary and secondary school heads.

■ RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

This part presents the results of the data analysis in response to the problems covered by this study.

Extent of instructional leadership practices of public elementary and secondary school heads

Based on Table 1, the extent of instructional leadership practices of the school heads as assessed by the group of receiving teachers, group of school heads and both groups of respondents got a grand

mean of 4.29, 4.33 and 4.31 interpreted as "outstanding". Specifically, the school heads instructional leadership practices along school-based review, contextualization and implementation of learning standards, teacher performance feedback, learner achievement and other performance indicators, learning assessment, and career awareness and opportunities and learner discipline were rated "outstanding" except on the indicators along teaching standards and pedagogies and learning environment which were rated as "very satisfactory."

Table 1. Summary of the extent of instructional leadership of school heads as assessed by the receiving teachers and school heads

Indicators	School heads (36)		Receiving teachers (102)		Overall Mean	Int.
	WM	Int.	WM	Int.		
School-based review, contextualization and implementation of learning standards	4.30	O	4.14	VS	4.22	O
Teaching standards and pedagogies	4.35	O	3.77	VS	4.06	VS
Teacher performance feedback	4.48	O	4.37	O	4.43	O
Learner achievement and other performance indicators	4.30	O	4.41	O	4.36	O
Learning assessment	4.24	O	4.34	O	4.29	O
Learning Environment	3.78	O	4.36	O	4.07	VS
Career awareness and opportunities	4.26	O	4.25	O	4.26	O
Learner Discipline	4.91	O	4.68	O	4.80	O
Grand Mean	4.33	O	4.29	O	4.31	O

Rating scale	Adjectival rating	
4.20 – 5.00	Outstanding	(O)
3.40 – 4.19	Very satisfactory	(VS)
2.60 – 3.39	Satisfactory	(S)
1.80 – 2.59	Unsatisfactory	(U)
1.00 – 1.79	Poor	(P)

One of the competencies of the school heads as mandated by DepEd Order No. 24, s. 2020 focuses on instructional leadership with specific set of standards and practices to be employed in the schools with an end goal of attaining quality education. It promotes ongoing professional development and advancement throughout their careers, adhering to the principles of lifelong learning. The program recognizes that high-quality student learning depends on strong teachers who are empowered by effective school leaders. It establishes clear expectations for school heads at various defined career stages, from starting out to achieving exemplary practice. Additionally, it helps identify areas for improvement and facilitates a consistent performance evaluation process. To ensure school heads can effectively fulfill their roles and mandates, the researcher suggests the division office provide ongoing support. It should encompass areas

like teacher quality improvement, which ultimately leads to better student achievement. Additionally, the division office should conduct orientations on DepEd Order 24, s. 2020. These sessions will equip school heads with knowledge about the established continuum of professional practices in teaching, learning, and instructional leadership.

Extent of implementation of inclusive education practices

The extent of implementation of inclusive education practices of the elementary and secondary school heads along identification, assessment, and placement, developing individual education plan, providing assistance and reporting got an overall grand mean of 3.21 for the group of school heads interpreted as moderately implemented, 3.58 for the group of receiving teachers and 3.40 for both groups

of respondents interpreted as almost fully implemented. This led to the conclusion that the elementary and secondary school heads practices along identification, assessment, and placement, developing individual education plan, providing

assistance and reporting have been implemented with only few minor elements to be addressed or needing interventions or initiatives to make it fully implemented.

Table 2. Summary of the extent of implementation of inclusive education practices of school head

Indicators	School heads (36)		Receiving teachers (102)		Overall Mean	Int.
	WM	Int.	WM	Int.		
Identification, assessment, and placement	2.99	MI	3.80	AFI	3.40	AFI
Developing individual educational plan (IEP)	2.69	MI	2.88	MI	2.79	MI
Providing assistance	2.51	MI	3.26	MI	2.89	MI
Reporting	4.66	FI	4.38	FI	4.52	FI
Overall grand mean	3.21	MI	3.58	AFI	3.40	AFI
Rating scale	Adjectival rating					
4.20 – 5.00	Fully implemented (FI)					
3.40 – 4.19	Almost fully implemented (AFI)					
2.60 – 3.39	Moderately implemented (MI)					
1.80 – 2.59	Partially implemented (PI)					
1.00 – 1.79	Not implemented (NI)					

This implies that the school heads ensure that the entire school community caters to learning needs of diverse learners in order to improve or enhance their school performance and for higher learning outcomes. As affirmed in the study of Raguindin et al. (2021), this implication highlights a need to understand concepts of inclusive environment focusing on an engaging, affirming, and nurturing environment. With these, the researcher recommends that the school should ensure that the school programs, projects, activities, and school services are aligned to the needs of diverse learners and should conduct capacity enhancement programs not only for the receiving teachers but to the entire school community to make them responsive to the needs of diverse learners and to

attain the main goal of the department of providing quality education to all learners.

Relationship between the Instructional Leadership Practices and the Implementation of Inclusive Education Practices

Table 3 reveals the significant relationship between the instructional leadership practices and inclusive education practices of the school heads in the locale of the study. The table indicates a weak positive correlation and is significant at 0.01 level. While the correlation is weak it suggests a possible association between inclusive practices and the learning environment.

Table 3. Test for significant relationship between the instructional leadership practices and the implementation of inclusive education practices

Inclusive education practices \ Instructional leadership practices	Identification, assessment and placement		Developing educational plan		Assistance		Reporting	
	r	p-value	r	p-value	r	p-value	r	p-value
School-based review, contextualization, and implementation of learning standards	-.057	.507	-.162	.058	.002	.981	.093	.280
Teaching standards and pedagogies	-.108	.206	-.016	.854	-.090	.293	.099	.248
Teacher performance feedback	-.105	.220	-.013	.882	-.027	.750	.298**	.000
Learner achievement	.038	.655	-.060	.487	.157	.066	.108	.209
Learning assessment	.089	.297	-.090	.292	.083	.330	-.112	.192
Learning environment	.346**	.000	.044	.607	.202*	.017	-.074	.385
Career awareness and opportunities	-.067	.432	.104	.225	.138	.108	-.190*	.026
Learner discipline	-.056	.517	.007	.937	-.263**	.002	-.029	.737

**Correlation is significant at 0.01 level; *Correlation is significant at 0.05 level

Additionally, reporting is significantly correlated along teacher's performance and feedback ($r=.0298$) at 0.01 level and career awareness and opportunities ($r=-.190$) at 0.05 level. Meanwhile, a weak positive correlation exists between reporting and teacher performance and feedback, and a negative correlation between reporting and career awareness and opportunities. Generally, the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between the inclusive education practices and the instructional leadership practices will not be rejected, except for some variables, which was affirmed by Lambrecht et al. (2022). However, there is a need for the school head to give attention to the practices that needs to be improved and to be effectively implemented.

Issues and concerns encountered by the receiving teachers and schools' heads

For both groups of respondents, the issues and concerns identified were provisions of technical support and assistance to receiving teachers with an overall mean of 4.70, lack or limited school capacity and capability in terms of material, physical and human resources for the implementation of special education programs and activities with an overall mean of 4.67, competency of teachers specifically receiving teachers with an overall mean of 4.55, and absence of organized and functional team to handle learner's identification, screening, assessment and

evaluation and placement procedures and referral and coordination with other medical specialists, professionals and other line agencies with an overall mean of 4.55 interpreted as strongly agree respectively.

This led to the conclusion that the receiving teachers and school heads themselves strongly agree that they encountered issues and concerns along instructional leadership practices. This was affirmed in the study of Adaza et al. (2021) that teachers and school heads have common struggles and hardships in handling children with special needs in teaching in an inclusive education. With these, the researcher recommends the need to shape a professional development initiative for teachers and school heads in the promotion of children's wellness with several foci within school practice.

Meanwhile, Table 5 presented the issues and challenges in the implementation of inclusive education practices encountered by the receiving teachers and school heads. It included lack of training to cater different exceptionalities with an overall mean of 4.85, establishing ways of communication to parents with an overall mean of 4.67, identification of a child with special learning needs with an overall mean of 4.62 and behavioral issues of the child with an overall mean of 4.61 interpreted as strongly agree respectively.

Table 4. Issues and concerns along instructional leadership practices

Indicators	School heads (36)		Receiving teachers (102)		Overall mean	Int.
	WM	Int.	WM	Int.		
Limited or absence of program support fund	4.69	SA	3.98	A	4.34	SA
Competency of teachers specifically receiving teachers	4.72	SA	4.37	SA	4.55	SA
Time management given the multiple tasks of the school heads	4.14	A	3.78	A	3.96	A
Provisions of technical support and assistance to receiving teachers	4.83	SA	4.57	SA	4.70	SA
Absence of organized and functional team to handle learner's identification, screening, assessment and evaluation and placement procedures	4.56	SA	4.47	SA	4.52	SA
Lack or limited school capacity and capability in terms of material, physical and human resources for the implementation of special education programs and activities	4.72	SA	4.62	SA	4.67	SA
Referral and coordination with other medical specialists, professionals and other line agencies	4.56	SA	4.47	SA	4.52	SA
Accommodation of learners with special needs in upgraded regular classroom	3.97	A	4.32	SA	4.15	A
Provision of school learning facilities for inclusivity of diverse learners	4.17	A	3.69	A	3.93	A
Collaboration and partnership with parents of learners with special needs and community.	4.11	A	3.98	A	4.05	A
Overall grand mean	4.45	SA	4.23	SA	4.34	SA
Rating scale	Descriptive interpretation					
4.20 – 5.00	Strongly Agree (SA)					
3.40 – 4.19	Agree (A)					
2.60 – 3.39	Moderately Agree (MA)					
1.80 – 2.59	Disagree (D)					
1.00 – 1.79	Strongly Disagree (SD)					

Table 5. Issues and concerns along inclusive education practices

Indicators	School Heads (36)		Receiving Teachers (102)		Overall Mean	Int.
	WM	Int.	WM	Int.		
Time management	3.61	A	4.41	SA	4.01	A
Behavioral issues of the child	4.53	SA	4.69	SA	4.61	SA
Lack of adapted clothing and disability aids	3.22	MA	3.59	A	3.41	A
Awareness and acceptance of family members	4.03	A	4.31	SA	4.17	A
Establishing ways of communication to parents	4.83	SA	4.51	SA	4.67	SA
Lack of training to cater different exceptionalities	4.89	SA	4.80	SA	4.85	SA
Identification of a child with special learning needs	4.72	SA	4.51	SA	4.62	SA
Lack of access to learning resources to promote learning	2.67	MA	3.59	A	3.13	MA
Empathy and understanding from others and family members	3.17	MA	4.31	SA	3.74	SA
Management between typical learners and mainstreamed learners	4.17	A	4.12	A	4.15	A
Overall grand mean	3.98	A	4.28	SA	4.13	A

Rating scale	Descriptive interpretation	
4.20 – 5.00	Strongly Agree	(SA)
3.40 – 4.19	Agree	(A)
2.60 – 3.39	Moderately Agree	(MA)
1.80 – 2.59	Disagree	(D)
1.00 – 1.79	Strongly Disagree	(SD)

This led to the conclusion that the receiving teachers and school heads themselves encountered issues and concerns along instructional leadership practices and implementation of inclusive education practices. A study by Walsh (2018) found that many teachers reported a lack of training in effectively teaching students with special needs. Despite this, these students are often included in general education classrooms. While teachers may welcome having students with diverse needs in their classes, they might feel unprepared to fully support their specific learning requirements. This highlights the need for more opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to create inclusive learning environments that benefit all students.

Recommendations to address the instructional leadership practices and implementation of inclusive education practices

This study aims to develop recommendations for improving instructional leadership and inclusive education practices among public elementary and secondary school heads in Camarines Norte. Based on the research findings, a Guidebook will be created outlining these recommendations with specific goals of improving or enhancing competency of school heads along school-based review, contextualization,

and implementation of learning standards, teaching standards and pedagogies, teacher performance feedback, learner achievement and other performance indicators, learning assessment, learning environment and career awareness and opportunities.

The researcher recommends the conduct of capacity enhancement training for school heads with an end goal of improving the practices from very satisfactory to outstanding practices. The next goal is to conduct intensive child-finding activities, coordinate with school stakeholders, and incorporate programs and activities to School Improvement Plan and Work and Financial Plan for effective implementation of inclusive education.

Another goal is for the school to conduct capability enhancement program for school personnel and other school stakeholders to improve instructional leadership practices and implementation of inclusive education practices. Also, they may implement comprehensive ways of communication to ensure engagement of parents in school programs and activities related to inclusive education and tap or coordinate with the school stakeholders and experts in the field to provide the necessary programs and services for diverse learners.

The utilization of the output entitled "Guidebook for Effective Implementation of Instructional

Leadership and Inclusive Education Practices in the Division of Camarines Norte" may commence after this has undergone thorough evaluation of Schools Division Office. Some items may still be refined after a series of consultative conferences with school

managers and division officials. After which, the schools may adopt the proposed recommendations to address the implementation of instructional leadership and inclusive education practices in the Division of Camarines Norte.

Table 6. Basis of the proposed guidebook

Findings	Goals	Recommendations
The instructional leadership practices of the school heads along school-based review, contextualization, and implementation of learning standards, teaching standards and pedagogies, teacher performance feedback, learner achievement and other performance indicators, learning assessment, learning environment and career awareness and opportunities were interpreted as "very satisfactory".	To improve or enhance competency of school heads along school-based review, contextualization, and implementation of learning standards, teaching standards and pedagogies, teacher performance feedback, learner achievement and other performance indicators, learning assessment, learning environment and career awareness and opportunities	Capacity Enhancement Training for School Heads
The implementation of inclusive education practices of the school heads along identification, assessment, and placement, developing individual educational plan (IEP) and providing assistance were rated as "moderately implemented".	To conduct intensive child-finding activities, coordinate with school stakeholders, incorporating programs and activities to School Improvement Plan and Work and Financial Plan for effective implementation of inclusive education	Conduct intensive child-finding and child-mapping activities, coordinate with DepEd and other line agencies and incorporate programs and activities to School Improvement Plan and Work and Financial Plan for effective implementation of inclusive education
Issues and concerns along instructional leadership in terms of provisions of technical support and assistance to teachers, lack or limited school capacity and capability in terms of material, physical and human resources for the implementation of special education programs and activities, competency of teachers, absence of organized and functional team to handle learner's identification, screening, assessment and evaluation and placement procedures and referral and coordination with other medical specialists, professionals and other line agencies.	To address or improve the identified issues and concerns in the implementation of instructional leadership practices and inclusive education practices. To attain 100% participation in capacity building activity for teachers and parents.	The school should conduct capability enhancement program for school personnel and other school stakeholders to improve instructional leadership practices and implementation of inclusive education practices. Implement comprehensive ways of communication to ensure engagement of parents in school programs and activities related to inclusive education. Tap or coordinate with the school stakeholders and experts in the field to provide the necessary programs and services for diverse learners.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the findings of the findings of the study, the following conclusions were arrived at: 1) the elementary and secondary school heads in the locale of the study were outstanding in terms of implementing their instructional leadership practices along school-based review, contextualization and implementation of learning standards, teaching standards and pedagogies, teacher performance feedback, learner achievement and other performance

indicators, learning assessment, learning environment and career awareness and opportunities except learners' discipline wherein school heads were rated outstanding, implying that they practiced established standards and exceeded expectations in all indicators, thus resulting to higher performance and learning outcomes of the schools; 2) they almost fully implemented the inclusive education practices along identification, assessment, and placement, developing individual education plan, providing assistance and reporting, implying that they ensure

that the entire school community caters to learning needs of diverse learners to improve or enhance their school performance and for higher learning outcomes.

Furthermore, 3) there is a weak positive correlation between learning environment and identification, assessment and placement practices, while assistance has a significant correlation along learning environment, and reporting is significantly correlated along teacher's performance and feedback and career awareness and opportunities; 4) the school heads themselves and receiving teachers encountered issues and concerns along instructional leadership practices and implementation of inclusive education practices such as provisions of technical support and assistance to receiving teachers and lack or limited school capacity and capability in terms of material, physical and human resources for the implementation of special education programs and activities affecting how they cater learners with special needs, thus, there is a need to shape a professional development initiative for teachers and school heads in the promotion of children's wellness with several foci within school practice; and 5) the proposed Guidebook will address the instructional leadership practices and inclusive education practices of the school heads in public elementary and secondary schools in the Division of Camarines Norte.

Recommendation

The following recommendations to the area of research and development are hereby given: 1) conduct capacity enhancement for school heads focusing on instructional leadership and inclusive education to improve and or enhance the competencies of the school heads along instructional leadership and inclusive education; 2) conduct capability building program or school activity that could improve the awareness not only of the receiving teachers but also the regular teachers in an inclusive classroom; 3) look into the issues and concerns encountered by the receiving teachers to strengthen the areas needing potential back-up, especially in terms of crafting capability building programs and various key actions with an end goal of enhancing not only the competencies of the receiving teachers, school heads and the entire school community; 4) link and collaborate with the internal and external stakeholders of the schools and other line agencies like experts in medical field and trained specialist from MSWDO, for proper identification, assessment, and placement of learners with special needs; and 5) utilize the proposed Guidebook to specifically help the school heads enhance their practices for effective

implementation of instructional leadership and implementation of inclusive education.

DECLARATIONS

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Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests in this research and publication.

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