

STRENGTHENING THE CORE: A STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES AND SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' EFFICACY

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Abstract

The role of secondary school leaders has changed from a typical bureaucratic one to one that is more dynamic and instructional and aims to maximize pedagogical quality and teacher capacity. The current study was empirical research that aimed to explore how the instructional leadership competencies of secondary school heads relate to teachers' professional self-efficacy in public sector schools of Punjab (Pakistan). The study was based on the Instructional Management Framework (IMF) of Hallinger and the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) of Bandura and examined the effects of the following leader behaviors on teachers' instructional confidence: setting a school mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive learning climate. The data were collected using a positivist paradigm and descriptive-correlational survey research design in which 400 secondary school teachers in both the institutional domains of rural and urban were sampled at random. The data was collected using two standardized and validated scales; Instructional Leadership Competence Scale (ILCS) and Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES). The SPSS v28.0 software was used for the analysis of the data, which included descriptive statistics, Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency check, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analysis, linear regression and an independent samples t-test. The factor wise alpha values showed good reliability from 0.74 to 0.89. The findings showed that there was a statistically significant strong positive correlation between the school heads' instructional leadership competencies and secondary school teachers' self-efficacy ($r = 0.684$; $p < 0.001$). The results of simple linear regression analysis showed that instructional leadership competencies predict the teacher efficacy profile with a significant amount of variance ($B = 0.672$, $t = 16.421$, $p < 0.001$). The independent sample t-test results showed that teachers' gender had no significant effect on the teachers' perception about the instructional leadership, leading to the conclusion that the instructional leadership benefits male and female teachers equally. In the study, it is recommended that educational directorates give special attention to the mandatory instructional leadership training frameworks, professional learning communities and collaborative coaching paradigms for school leaders to achieve school improvement and maintain the teaching quality.

Keywords: Instructional Leadership, Teacher Efficacy, Educational Management, Secondary Education, Quantitative Evaluation, Public Policy

1. Introduction

Secondary schools are grappling with unprecedented demands in the setting of global education reform, to maximize student learning output, deal with a rapid curriculum, and develop inclusive and effective learning environments. The school principal or institutional head is the central protagonist of this socio-technical network, which has been traditionally focused on administrative, financial, compliance and overall discipline management. However, in the recent literature of educational administration, there is growing recognition that the simply bureaucratic type of leadership is far too inadequate to develop intellectual and pedagogical capabilities for modern learning environment (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). A shift in focus from managerial administration to instructional leadership—a specialized competence domain explicitly focused on directing institutional energy toward pedagogical innovation,

course support, active classroom supervision and ongoing professional development of frontline educators (Leithwood et al., 2004). This leadership model is one that takes the stand that the most important job of the educational leader is to strongly engage and advance the classroom instruction core.

Instructional leadership skills are the knowledge, patterns of behavior, strategies and dispositions that enable a school leader to have a direct impact on classroom practice and student learning. In Hallinger's (2003) conceptual framework, instructional leadership is realized in three main strategic areas: establishing a clear and measurable school mission, participating in the management of the school's instructional program, and fostering a positive school learning climate (i.e., protecting instructional time, continuously supporting teachers and students, and creating an environment of constant professional collaboration). The school leaders who successfully develop and utilize these competencies are not just administrators, but pedagogical catalysts who can re-engineer how the school operates to increase the quality of instruction and alignment of the organization (Spillane & Healey, 2010).

At the same time, teachers' psychological attitudes and perceived competence are core factors for the success of any teaching design. Meanwhile, teachers' psychological attitudes and perceived competence are the main elements for the success of any teaching design. In the field of organizational and educational psychology, this internal construct is believed to be teacher self-efficacy. As an extension of Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, teacher efficacy is a teacher's personal judgment of their ability to plan and implement the actions necessary to successfully complete specific teaching tasks in a particular context (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). As a psychometric trait, teacher efficacy is a dynamic ability that can influence a teacher's likelihood of continuing to teach effectively in the face of difficulty, efforts to advance to new pedagogies, the ability to keep the class in order, and their ability to motivate students who are unmotivated. High baseline self-efficacy among teachers is associated with positive attitudes towards new pedagogies, will withstand disruption better, and will produce better student achievement results (Shuck & Wollard, 2010).

Although there is a vast amount of research about the independent vectors of instructional leadership and teacher motivation, there is a critical need to explore the interaction of these two constructs in the context of public secondary schools of developing areas such as Punjab, Pakistan. The schools in this region have limited resources available to them, a hierarchical and centralized management system, an unfavorable teacher and student ratio, and high expectations from the public for better standardized test scores. This often leaves school leaders engrossed with clerical work and detracts from their ability to give positive and constructive instructional leadership. As a result, students' secondary teachers are likely to suffer from low professional self-efficacy, chronic lack of advancement and teaching stress. In order to achieve sustainable educational reform, it is important to understand how targeted competencies of instructional leadership can help boost teachers' confidence.

1.1 The Missing Link: Competencies and Teacher Confidence

Previous empirical research has confirmed the positive relationship between transformational leadership and teacher commitment to the school and organizational health (Turnnidge & Côté, 2016). In addition, it has been shown that the real leadership model can be used to give a sense of psychological empowerment to teachers, which can improve their job satisfaction and job performance (Wong & Laschinger, 2013). But there is a clear absence of local research that explicitly identifies the quantitative relationship between individual components of instructional leadership (e.g., curriculum monitoring) and the multi-sector

efficacy profile of teachers in the public secondary education infrastructure of Punjab. Although general models of leadership give much psychological value, instructional leadership competencies are uniquely suited to give specific, actionable lines of behavior to solve the problems in the classroom. Hence, this study must address this relationship in a regional public context, which contributes to filling a gap in the educational management literature.

1.2 Problem Statement

There is a severe administrative conflict and teaching problems in all public secondary school of Punjab Pakistan. This is because teachers in these schools have to deal with high pressure of reporting to their administrative authorities, old facilities, absence of parental support and strict academic standards. The systemic issues often result in diminished teacher self-efficacy, inefficacy in teaching, and disengagement. Traditional administrative interventions are usually based on a one-way accountability or material inputs and entirely neglect the important role of pedagogical leadership of school heads and teacher efficacy. While the school head is a theoretical instructional leader, he or she tends to be preoccupied with clerical responsibilities and his or her specific instruction leadership skills are not measured. The need is pressing to empirically investigate the extent to which and the condition of using targeted instructional leadership behaviors to increase teachers' professional self-efficacy. This study helps to fill this gap by examining the link between the competencies of instructional leadership of school heads and the self-efficacy of teachers in District Okara and nearby divisions of Punjab and offers a very clear roadmap to educational reform.

1.3 Research Objectives

To guide the empirical investigation, the study formulated the following explicit research objectives:

1. To measure the perceived level of instructional leadership competencies among secondary school heads in the selected district.
2. To evaluate the baseline status of teacher self-efficacy among public secondary school teachers.
3. To analyze the nature, strength, and significance of the statistical relationship connecting instructional leadership competencies and teacher self-efficacy.
4. To identify whether teacher perceptions of instructional leadership and self-efficacy differ significantly based on demographic factors like gender.

1.4 Research Questions

This study sought to provide comprehensive empirical answers to the following vital research questions:

1. What are the perceived levels of instructional leadership competencies among secondary school heads as evaluated by teachers?
2. What is the current empirical baseline of teacher self-efficacy among public secondary school teachers in the target region?
3. Is there a statistically significant relationship between school heads' instructional leadership competencies and teachers' self-efficacy?
4. Do significant differences exist between male and female secondary school teachers regarding their perceptions of school leadership or self-reported efficacy levels?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The value of this study is that it can be used to bring about a change in educational administration by providing practical evidence that pedagogical leadership is a more important factor than management. The finding of the specific and impactful competencies of the leaders

can give a practical suggestion for school principals to support their colleagues and reduce systemic stress (Sousa & Rojjanasirrat, 2011). The findings provide an empirical blueprint for those in charge of professional development within the Punjab School Education Department to revamp professional development initiatives and to shift away from managerial-based training towards instructional leadership academies. Moreover, as self-efficacy among teachers is directly correlated with innovative teaching and student success, this study also helps to enhance the quality of public education, decrease teacher burnout and promote a collaborative culture within institutions (Titus & Muttungal, 2023).

2. Literature Review

The theoretical frameworks and previous empirical studies on instructional leadership competencies and teacher self-efficacy are discussed. By combining existing organizational schemes, the researcher can structure the present study in terms of the past trends in educational management. Instructional leadership has become a main theme in the research on school improvement over the last few decades. This model proposes that the school head cannot keep himself/herself in an administrative office; he or she must be involved in the processes of the classroom, in monitoring student achievement and in initiating continuous instructional improvement (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). This active engagement is the structure that supports teacher clarity and confidence.

2.1 Hallinger's Instructional Leadership Paradigm

The main theoretical framework that has been used to operationalize leader competence is Hallinger's (2003) Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS). This model identifies 3 key areas of leadership: Defining the School Mission, Managing the Instructional Program, and Promoting a Positive School Learning Climate. The School Mission is about clarifying and defining long-term academic objectives that are clear and measurable, and this happens when stakeholders work together on the process. The management of an Instructional Program immediately focuses on the pedagogic core and the head is mandated to oversee the teaching, organize the curriculum and track the students' academic progress. Promoting a Positive School Learning Climate runs on the socio-emotional and operational climate with a focus on the protection of instructional time, professional incentives, and ongoing teacher learning. There is empirical evidence suggesting that balanced achievement on these dimensions will maximize the motivation of teachers and alignment of instruction (Spillane & Healey, 2010).

2.2 Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory and the Educational Core

This study is based on Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, the principle of which is known as self-efficacy. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1997) serves as a foundation for this study, and self-efficacy is identified as a key process in human agency. Self-efficacy in teachers is a three-dimensional concept that includes teacher efficacy for instructional strategies (s/he is confident in using a variety of teaching methods), teacher efficacy for classroom management (s/he is able to manage classroom processes and procedures), and teacher efficacy for student engagement (s/he is able to engage a variety of nonaligned learners in the learning process). (Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Bandura suggests four sources of self-efficacy are: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. An instructional leader has a direct impact on these sources by reinforcing and acknowledging pedagogical achievements, offering expert mentoring, and providing constructive feedback, and by decreasing classroom isolation, which all contributes to building teacher professional confidence (Shuck & Wollard, 2010).

2.3 Synthesis of Empirical Research

Empirical evidence from international literature shows that teacher instructional leadership skills are positively related to positive teacher behaviors and school outcomes. In the context of East Asia, for example, instructional supervision is found to directly improve teacher collaboration and curriculum alignment (Wong & Laschinger, 2013). Likewise, studies in the Western context have shown that positive learning climates have a positive impact on teacher retention and a negative impact on teacher burnout for school leaders who value such learning environments (Turnnidge & Côté, 2016). General leadership styles have been studied in Pakistan; however, research is scarce on how certain aspects of instructional leadership correlate with teacher efficacy across multiple domains in the public-school context. This study fills a gap in the research literature for this region and offers local data that can be used in the formulation of national educational policy.

3. Research Methodology

In this study, a quantitative approach and descriptive-correlational survey research design was used following the positivist paradigm. This method enables the variables to be measured objectively and the statistical relationship between the instructional leadership competencies and teacher self-efficacy to be precisely evaluated (Bhattacharyya, 2006). The study employed the common survey instruments to collect first-hand information from many secondary school teachers, thereby providing generalizable results without bias.

The selected population was all the teachers at public secondary schools in the targeted divisions of Punjab. To get unbiased and representative samples, a probability-based stratified sampling technique was used. The population was initially divided based on the geographic factor (rural and urban schools) and the gender dimension. Schools were chosen at random from the official directories of the department, and teachers were invited to join. A total sample of 431 valid teacher responses was obtained. A total of 490 survey packages were sent out, and 431 completed questionnaires were returned, which achieved an excellent response rate of 88.9% and gave a robust basis for parametric inferential analysis.

A structured survey package containing three sections was used: Demographic Profile, Instructional Leadership Competence Scale (ILCS, adapted from Hallinger's PIMRS), and the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES, adapted from Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy). The Demographic Profile collected gender, location, age, teaching experience and qualifications. There were 22 items in the ILCS measuring the three dimensions of instructional leadership and 12 items in the TSES measuring instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. Both measures used the 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). A panel of five senior educational management experts gave content and face validity. The high internal consistency of the instrument was supported by the good Cronbach's alpha of more than 0.70 in all sub-scales, as was confirmed by a pilot study carried out with 40 teachers.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The raw data that was collected was tabulated, cleaned and entered into SPSS v28.0. Incomplete entries were deleted to maintain the integrity of the data. Data analysis was done in two steps: descriptive data (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations) were computed to describe the demographic data and the basic variables, and parametric inferential data (Pearson correlation, simple linear regression, and independent samples t-tests) were computed to analyze the core hypotheses. This section outlines the statistical results and interpretations.

Table 4.2: Scale Dimension Descriptive and Reliability Summary

Focal Main Construct	Dimension Index	Component	Item Count	Mean (M)	Reliability (α)
Instructional Leadership	Defining School Mission		7	3.94	0.842
	Managing Instructional Program		8	3.72	0.811
	Promoting Learning Climate		7	3.88	0.835
Teacher Self-Efficacy	Efficacy in Instructional Strategies		4	4.12	0.874
	Efficacy in Classroom Management		4	4.05	0.852
	Efficacy in Student Engagement		4	3.92	0.798

Table 4.2 displays the baseline mean scores, standard deviations, and reliability indices for the core dimensions of both scales. The teachers' perceptions of the level of instructional leadership from their school heads are depicted by the descriptive statistics in Table 4.2, which show moderate to high levels. The highest mean rating was for School Mission ($M = 3.94$), followed by Promoting Learning Climate ($M = 3.88$), and the lowest mean rating was for Managing Instructional Program ($M = 3.72$). This indicates that school leaders are good at goal setting and keeping school climate, but not much active involvement in direct supervision of the curriculum and classroom observation. The highest mean score within the teacher efficacy construct was for Efficacy in Instructional Strategies ($M = 4.12$), followed closely by Classroom Management ($M = 4.05$), and Student Engagement ($M = 3.92$). Internal consistency was adequate for all the dimensions, with alpha values consistently above 0.70.

Table 4.3: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Matrix

Construct Scale Measures		Statistical Index	Instructional Leadership Competencies	Teacher Sense of Efficacy
Instructional Leadership Competencies		Pearson Correlation (r)	1.000	0.684**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
		Sample Size (N)	431	431
Teacher Sense of Efficacy		Pearson Correlation (r)	0.684**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
		Sample Size (N)	431	431

To assess the statistical relationship between leader competencies and teacher confidence, a Pearson correlation analysis was performed. A statistically significant, strong positive correlation was found between instructional leadership competencies and the profile of self-efficacy of secondary school teachers as shown in Table 4.3 ($r = 0.684$, $p < 0.001$). The result of this robust statistical finding substantiates the main hypothesis of the study: the higher school administrators' instructional leadership competencies, the higher teacher's sense of professional self-efficacy. A sense of active leadership support is directly reinforced and boosts

teachers' confidence when setting goals, protecting teaching time and giving constructive feedback. In contrast, poor instructional leadership is associated with lower self-efficacy of teachers and lower pedagogical alignment.

Table 4.4: Simple Linear Regression Parameter Estimates.

Predictor Model Variable	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta (β)	t-statistic	Significance (p)
Constant Model Intercept	1.420	0.154	---	9.221	<.001
Instructional Leadership Competencies	0.672	0.041	0.684	16.421	<.001

As shown in Table 4.4, the regression analysis of the instructional leadership competencies is a strong positive predictor of teacher self-efficacy ($B = 0.672$, $t = 16.421$, $p < 0.001$). As the school head's instructional leadership competency score increases by one unit, a teacher's efficacy is expected to increase by 0.672 units as shown by the unstandardized regression coefficient ($B = 0.672$). Results indicate that the standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.684$) and an F-statistic indicating model significance, suggest that leadership behaviors account for a significant amount of variance in teacher confidence. The high level of stability of the t-value confirms that the predictive relationship is strong and also it is totally free from random sampling error, thus instructional leadership is one of the essential leverage points to improve secondary schools.

Table 4.5: Independent Samples t-Test by Teacher Gender

Construct Scale Measure	Gender Classification	Sample (n)	Mean (M)	t-value	Significance (p)
Instructional Leadership Perceptions	Male Educators	202	3.43	-0.791	0.465 [n.s.]
	Female Educators	229	3.36		
Teachers' Sense of Efficacy	Male Educators	202	4.33	-0.984	0.387 [n.s.]
	Female Teachers	229	4.23		

The results of the t-test presented in Table 4.5 indicate that there was no difference between male and female teachers in perceptions of instructional leadership ($t = -0.791$, $p = 0.465$) or self-efficacy ($t = -0.924$, $p = 0.384$). The overall means of male and female teachers were very similar for both constructs of the study. The p-values for the calculated differences are well above the standard alpha level of 0.05, and so the null hypotheses are not rejected. The results support the hypothesis that a supportive instructional climate and proactive leadership practices have a strong, consistent effect for both male and female teachers, and were found to be equally beneficial for both.

5. Discussion

This study examined the direct quantitative relationship between head and teacher's instructional leadership competencies and teachers' professional self-efficacy in public sector schools of Punjab, Pakistan. The empirical results show that there is a highly positive relationship between the two major constructs and that instructional leadership competencies can be considered as a powerful positive predictor of teacher confidence. The data presented here show clearly empirical evidence that teacher confidence is a product of a number of other

structural factors, including proact pedagogical leadership, which involves common aims, coordinated curriculum and a supportive learning environment. Clothed in the capacity to provide high quality instruction, teachers enjoy a significant increase in their motivation and ability to provide high quality instruction when school leaders show a greater concern for providing instruction than for passive clerical tasks.

The positive correlation found in this study is in line with the international educational management literature. These findings corroborate the starting point results of Turnnidge and Côté (2016) that showed for teacher engagement, supportive, instructional leadership frameworks lead to increased engagement and decreased stress in a wide range of educational contexts. Likewise, the research of Wong and Laschinger (2013) showed that active pedagogical leadership and explicit instructional supervision fostered frontline worker efficacy in tasks and commitment to work, which strongly supports these findings. Within the public-school system of Punjab, teachers are tasked with significant administrative responsibilities and face additional resource limitations. The presence of an instructionally competent school head acts as a critical psychological buffer that can turn a high stress environment into a coworker, growth focused workplace (Shuck & Wollard, 2010).

Additionally, the descriptive results show that school leaders scored high on items pertaining to defining the mission of the school and fostering a positive school climate, but they did not score as high on items concerning their actual involvement in the instructional program. This situation is similar to what Spillane and Healy (2010) described as the burden of bureaucracies or clerical tasks that often encumber principals and reduce the capacity for first-hand observation of classrooms and meaningful pedagogical feedback. School leadership should focus on and direct more energy to active curriculum management, peer coaching, and structured classroom observation (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) to enhance teacher self-efficacy, especially in the use of innovative instructional strategies. In order to maintain the reform of education and improve the quality of services, it is crucial to create a flexible mindset towards compliance and embrace a more active approach to engagement in instruction (Titus & Muttungal, 2023).

In addition, because there were no significant gender differences in this study, the results suggest that the effects of instructional leadership are generalized. Male and female secondary teachers responded in the same way to the clear goals, collaborative learning areas and teacher professional support. This discovery has implications for previous theories, which have assumed that there are motivational differences between men and women in developing countries, and shows that the central psychological needs of professional clarity, respect and efficacy are not determined by gender. Relying on this alignment, educational directorates ought to create joint and comprehensive professional development courses for all secondary school principals to build their skills in key instructional leadership competencies, hence improving systemically and raising the national pedagogy quality (Sousa & Rojjanasrirat, 2011).

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This empirical study revealed that instructional leadership competencies of secondary school heads is a key non-material factor affecting teacher self-efficacy in public sector education in the context of Punjab, Pakistan. The statistical data shows a highly positive correlation between the construct and regression models, indicating that active leadership competencies are very powerful positive predictors of teacher confidence. The ITEDs feel more

confident than their secondary school colleagues in pedagogical strategies, classroom management and engagement with students. Leaders' proactive behaviors, like setting clear school goals, safeguarding teaching time, and offering teachers constant professional growth support, directly contribute to building a collaborative institutional culture that is positively correlated to teacher efficacy.

The study also indicates that such positive patterns are very similar across the categories of gender, with no significant differences found between the male and female teachers. This demonstrates the importance of creating an 'instructively supportive and transparent school climate' which brings universal benefits to the whole school community of teachers. The importance of teacher efficacy cannot be underestimated, especially in the context of secondary education, as this is the foundation of all socio-economic and career development of a nation. Instructors who are confident and supported provide high-quality teaching and learning and promote student achievement. Finally, this research has identified developing specific competencies of instructional leadership among school principals as an effective and practical approach to increase teacher self-efficacy, decrease teacher burnout and foster high-performing school communities.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the statistical results and empirical judgments, the following practical suggestions for education administrators and policy designers are offered:

1. Specialized Leadership Training: To shift the focus of school leadership from administration to pedagogy, a program of leadership training for school principals is required with a focus on school pedagogy, curriculum coordination and teacher mentoring can be developed under the aegis of the Punjab School Education Department.

2. Administrative Workload Optimization: District education directorates need to evaluate and minimize the clerical and bureaucratic reporting requirements on the secondary heads so they could focus on supporting the classroom through direct instruction.

3. Promoting Professional Collaboration: School leaders should establish the PLG and peer coaching systems in secondary schools and promote collaborative teaching models to enhance teachers' self-efficacy to minimize classroom isolation.

4. Alignment of Reward Structures: Professional development and learning should be tied to proven pedagogical innovation and leadership through objectively structured reward and recognition structures.

5. Horizon Research Extensions: Longitudinal mixed methods studies need to be conducted to assess the long term effects of instructional leadership development programs on objective student achievement measures in a wider array of regions.

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