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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Learner-Centered Pedagogical Practices and Classroom Engagement in a Public School Context: Shared Leadership and Professional Development: Foundations for Student Success

Article Info

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Abstract

Student success in contemporary education systems is increasingly shaped by leadership models and professional development structures that emphasize collaboration, shared responsibility, and continuous learning. Traditional hierarchical leadership approaches have been found insufficient in addressing the complex instructional, organizational, and learner-centered demands of modern schools. This qualitative case study investigates how shared leadership and professional development practices contribute to student success in the City Schools Division of Santiago. Drawing on interviews with school leaders and teachers, focus group discussions, and document analysis, the study explores leadership distribution, professional learning mechanisms, and their perceived influence on instructional quality and student outcomes. Findings reveal that shared leadership strengthened collective accountability, instructional coherence, and teacher efficacy, while sustained professional development enhanced pedagogical competence and responsiveness to learner needs. However, challenges related to time constraints, uneven leadership participation, and resource limitations persisted. The study concludes that student success is best supported when shared leadership and professional development are strategically aligned, institutionally supported, and embedded in school culture.

Keywords: shared leadership; professional development; student success; school leadership; educational improvement

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INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

Student success has become a central concern in educational reform agendas worldwide, encompassing not only academic achievement but also learner engagement, well-being, and long-term preparedness for societal participation. Increasingly, research highlights that student outcomes are deeply influenced by school leadership and teacher professional capacity rather than by curriculum mandates alone. In this context, leadership models that promote collaboration, shared responsibility, and professional learning are gaining prominence.

Shared leadership also referred to as distributed or collaborative leadership—reconceptualizes leadership as a collective practice rather than a function of formal authority. It recognizes teachers and middle leaders as key contributors to instructional improvement and school decision-making. Parallel to this, professional development has shifted from episodic training sessions toward sustained, collaborative learning embedded in teachers' daily practice. Together, shared leadership and professional development form a synergistic foundation for improving teaching quality and, ultimately, student success.

In the Philippine education system, particularly within public school divisions, leadership and professional development play a crucial role in addressing persistent challenges such as resource constraints, diverse learner needs, and accountability pressures. The City Schools Division of Santiago has implemented initiatives emphasizing shared leadership structures and continuous professional development as part of its school improvement strategies. However, empirical research examining how these initiatives are experienced by educators and how they contribute to student success remains limited.

This study addresses this gap by examining shared leadership and professional development practices in the City Schools Division of Santiago and analyzing their contribution to student success from the perspectives of school leaders and teachers.

Research Questions

1. How is shared leadership enacted in schools within the City Schools Division of Santiago?
2. What forms of professional development are implemented, and how are they experienced by teachers?
3. How do shared leadership and professional development practices contribute to student success?

LITERATURE REVIEW

2. Review of Related Literature

Shared leadership is grounded in the idea that leadership is a social process distributed across individuals and contexts rather than concentrated in formal positions (Spillane, 2006). In schools, shared leadership enables teachers to participate in instructional decision-making, curriculum planning, and school improvement initiatives. Research indicates that shared leadership fosters collective responsibility, strengthens professional trust, and enhances instructional coherence (Harris, 2013).

Studies have shown that when teachers are empowered as leaders, schools demonstrate higher levels of innovation, teacher commitment, and instructional quality (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). However, effective shared leadership requires clear structures, role clarity, and a supportive organizational culture to avoid role confusion and uneven participation.

Professional development is a critical mechanism for improving teaching practice and student outcomes. Effective professional development is sustained, collaborative, content-focused, and connected to classroom practice (Desimone, 2009). Professional learning communities (PLCs), coaching, mentoring, and lesson study models exemplify approaches that promote reflective practice and collective learning.

Research consistently links high-quality professional development to improved teacher efficacy and student achievement, particularly when teachers engage in active learning and collaborative inquiry (Guskey, 2002). However, challenges such as limited time, fragmented initiatives, and misalignment with school goals often undermine its impact.

2.3 Student Success and Organizational Conditions

Student success is influenced by organizational conditions that support effective teaching and learning.

Leadership practices that prioritize instructional improvement, teacher collaboration, and continuous learning create environments conducive to student achievement and engagement (Hallinger, 2011). Shared leadership and professional development intersect in shaping these conditions by aligning leadership capacity with instructional expertise.

METHODOLOGY

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine shared leadership and professional development practices within the City Schools Division of Santiago, an approach well suited to capturing the complexity of leadership structures and professional learning processes as they operate in a real-life organizational context. The study was conducted in selected public schools in the division, with participants purposively drawn to represent diverse leadership and instructional roles, including division supervisors, school heads, department heads, master teachers, and classroom teachers, thereby ensuring varied professional perspectives and experiences. Data were collected over one academic year using multiple qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews with school leaders to explore leadership arrangements, decision-making processes, and professional development initiatives; focus group discussions with teachers to examine experiences of shared leadership, professional learning, and perceived effects on teaching and student outcomes; and document analysis of school improvement plans, professional development programs, and performance reports to provide contextual and institutional grounding. All data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed through thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, with iterative coding and constant comparison across data sources to strengthen analytic rigor. Trustworthiness was enhanced through triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking, while ethical approval was secured prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4. Findings

The analysis yielded four interrelated themes that illustrate how shared leadership and professional development functioned as complementary mechanisms in strengthening student success within the City Schools Division of Santiago. Collectively, these themes demonstrate how leadership distribution and sustained professional learning shaped instructional practices, organizational culture, and accountability structures that ultimately supported improved learner outcomes.

Theme 1: Shared Leadership Strengthened Collective Accountability

Shared leadership emerged as a defining organizational feature across participating schools, reshaping traditional hierarchies and fostering a culture of collective accountability for instructional outcomes. Rather than centralizing authority in school heads alone, leadership responsibilities were intentionally distributed among department heads, master teachers, subject coordinators, and classroom teachers. Committees and subject-area teams were tasked with curriculum planning, instructional monitoring, learner assessment analysis, and school improvement initiatives. This distribution of leadership roles encouraged teachers to view student performance not as an individual classroom concern but as a shared institutional responsibility.

Classroom observations and interview data revealed that teachers were actively involved in decision-making processes related to instructional strategies and learner interventions. Regular meetings served as venues for collaborative reflection on learner progress, identification of challenges, and joint planning of remedial or enrichment activities. As a result, accountability became collective rather than punitive, emphasizing shared problem-solving over individual fault-finding.

Participant Responses.

One teacher remarked, "*Hindi lang punong-guro ang nagdedesisyon; sama-sama kaming responsable sa*

resulta ng mga bata. "Another teacher explained that shared leadership encouraged professional commitment, stating, *"Kapag may papel ka sa desisyon, mas seryoso ka sa pagpapatupad."* School heads echoed this perspective, emphasizing that leadership distribution fostered transparency and trust. One school head noted, *"Mas bukas ang usapan kapag alam ng guro na may boses sila sa pamamalakad ng paaralan."*

These findings align with research suggesting that distributed or shared leadership strengthens collective accountability, professional trust, and school effectiveness (Spillane, 2006; Harris, 2013). When leadership is shared, teachers are more likely to internalize responsibility for student success and engage in sustained instructional improvement. The findings further suggest that shared leadership in the division functioned not merely as delegation but as a relational practice that cultivated ownership, mutual accountability, and a shared moral purpose centered on learner success.

Theme 2: Professional Development Enhanced Instructional Competence

Professional development was identified as a critical mechanism for enhancing teachers' instructional competence and confidence. Across schools, professional development initiatives focused on learner-centered pedagogy, formative assessment, differentiated instruction, and curriculum alignment. Rather than isolated seminars, professional learning was increasingly embedded in teachers' daily practice through coaching, mentoring, lesson demonstrations, and collaborative reflection.

Teachers emphasized that professional development was most effective when it addressed real classroom challenges and was sustained over time. Learning sessions were often followed by classroom application, peer observation, and feedback, enabling teachers to refine strategies and adapt them to diverse learner needs. This cyclical process of learning, practice, and reflection contributed to improved instructional coherence and pedagogical confidence.

Participant Responses

One teacher stated, *"Mas nagiging handa kami sa klase kapag may tuloy-tuloy na learning at coaching."* Another shared, *"Hindi lang ito lecture; natutulungan kaming ayusin ang pagtuturo namin sa aktwal na klase."* Teachers also highlighted increased confidence in addressing learner diversity, with one noting, *"Mas kaya ko nang i-adjust ang lesson depende sa pangangailangan ng mga bata."*

These findings support evidence that sustained, practice-based professional development enhances instructional quality and teacher efficacy (Desimone, 2009; Guskey, 2002). The results suggest that professional development in the division functioned as a capacity-building process rather than a compliance activity. By emphasizing relevance, continuity, and collaborative learning, professional development strengthened teachers' ability to implement learner-centered strategies that directly contributed to improved student engagement and learning outcomes.

Theme 3: Leadership–Learning Alignment Supported Student Success

A salient theme emerging from the data was the alignment between shared leadership practices and professional development initiatives. Leadership teams and teachers collaboratively identified professional learning priorities based on learner performance data, classroom observations, and school improvement goals. This alignment ensured that professional development was purposeful, context-sensitive, and directly linked to student learning needs.

Shared leadership structures enabled teachers to participate in diagnosing instructional gaps and proposing professional development activities that addressed these gaps. As a result, professional learning was perceived as responsive rather than imposed, increasing teacher buy-in and commitment. Leaders also played a facilitative role, ensuring that professional development initiatives were integrated into broader instructional improvement plans.

Participant Responses.

A school head explained, *"Ang training namin ay nakaangkla sa pangangailangan ng mga mag-aaral."* A

teacher similarly noted, *"Mas ramdam namin ang epekto ng training kapag malinaw kung bakit ito ginagawa."* Participants emphasized that data-informed discussions helped focus professional learning on areas with the greatest impact on student success.

These findings align with research emphasizing the importance of aligning leadership practices with professional learning to improve student outcomes (Hallinger, 2011). When leadership and learning are coherently aligned, schools are better positioned to translate professional development into instructional improvement. The findings suggest that leadership-learning alignment served as a mediating mechanism through which shared leadership and professional development jointly contributed to student success.

Theme 4: Structural Constraints Moderated Impact

Despite the positive influence of shared leadership and professional development, participants identified structural constraints that moderated their impact. Time constraints emerged as a persistent challenge, with teachers balancing instructional responsibilities, administrative tasks, and professional learning activities. Heavy workloads and limited staffing reduced opportunities for sustained collaboration and reflection. Resource limitations also affected the scope and consistency of professional development initiatives. Some schools lacked access to instructional materials, technology, or external expertise, constraining the depth of implementation. While shared leadership helped mitigate some challenges through collaboration, participants emphasized that institutional support remained essential.

Participant Responses

Teachers noted, *"Minsan kulang ang oras para sa collaboration at training."* Another participant explained, *"Gusto naming mag-collaborate, pero maraming paper works."* School leaders acknowledged these constraints, highlighting the need for systemic support to sustain reforms.

These challenges echo findings that institutional conditions such as time allocation, workload management, and resource provision are critical for sustaining leadership and professional development reforms (Guskey, 2002). The findings suggest that while shared leadership and professional development create strong foundations for student success, their effectiveness depends on supportive organizational structures and policies that enable sustained collaboration and learning.

DISCUSSION

5. Discussion

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that shared leadership and professional development functioned as mutually reinforcing practices that strengthened student success in the City Schools Division of Santiago. Shared leadership cultivated collective accountability and trust, while professional development enhanced instructional competence. Their alignment ensured coherence between leadership decisions and instructional improvement efforts. However, structural constraints highlight the need for sustained institutional support to maximize impact. These findings underscore the importance of viewing leadership and professional development not as isolated initiatives but as integrated components of a comprehensive strategy for improving student outcomes. The findings demonstrate that shared leadership and professional development jointly strengthen student success by improving instructional coherence, teacher efficacy, and collective accountability. Shared leadership empowered teachers as instructional leaders, while professional development provided the knowledge and skills needed to respond to diverse learner needs. These results support international research highlighting leadership and teacher learning as central drivers of school improvement.

However, the study also underscores the importance of organizational conditions. Without adequate time, resources, and administrative support, the potential of shared leadership and professional development may be constrained. The findings suggest that student success is most effectively supported when leadership distribution and professional learning are intentionally aligned and embedded in school culture.

6. Conclusion and Implications

This study provides compelling evidence that shared leadership and sustained professional development function as foundational pillars of student success in the City Schools Division of Santiago. When leadership responsibilities are distributed among school heads, teachers, and instructional leaders, and when professional learning is continuous, collaborative, and practice-oriented, schools are better positioned to create coherent instructional environments that support both teacher effectiveness and positive student outcomes. Shared leadership cultivated collective accountability, strengthened professional trust, and encouraged collaborative problem-solving, while professional development enhanced teachers' pedagogical competence and responsiveness to learner needs. Together, these interrelated practices contributed to a school culture focused on continuous improvement, instructional coherence, and learner achievement, underscoring the importance of aligning leadership structures with professional learning initiatives.

Implications for Practice

At the school level, the findings suggest the need to institutionalize shared leadership structures such as instructional teams, professional learning communities, and teacher-led committees that promote collective decision-making and shared responsibility for student learning. Professional development programs should be intentionally designed to align with instructional priorities, student performance data, and identified learning gaps, ensuring that training activities translate into improved classroom practice. Embedding coaching, mentoring, and collaborative reflection within teachers' daily work can further strengthen the impact of professional learning on teaching quality.

Implications for Policy and Leadership

For division and school leaders, the results highlight the importance of creating enabling conditions for shared leadership and professional development. This includes allocating sufficient time within school schedules for collaboration, providing resources to support sustained learning initiatives, and recognizing teacher leadership as a critical component of school improvement. Policies should move beyond one-shot training models toward long-term, coherent professional development frameworks that are closely linked to instructional leadership and student learning goals.

Directions for Future Research

Future studies may employ mixed-methods or longitudinal research designs to examine the causal relationships among shared leadership practices, professional development initiatives, and student achievement outcomes across different school divisions. Comparative studies involving multiple contexts could also provide deeper insights into how variations in leadership structures and professional learning models influence instructional quality and student success, thereby contributing to a more robust evidence base for leadership and professional development reforms in basic education.

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