

Influence of Instructional Leadership Practices on Teachers Performance: A Case Study of Secondary Schools in Lower Dir, Pakistan

Iftekhar Ahmad ¹ Abdul Ghaffar ² Samreen Mehmood ²

¹ M.Phil. Scholar, Department of Education, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

✉ iftikharahmadbtk@gmail.com

² Associate Professor, Department of Education, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

✉ abdulghafar@awkum.edu.pk

³ Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

✉ samreen@awkum.edu.pk

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Abstract: This qualitative study explores how principals' instructional leadership practices influence the professional performance of teaching faculty at the secondary school level in Lower Dir, Pakistan. This study explores teachers' experiences and perceptions of principals' leadership behaviors in rural and under-resourced Pakistan, aiming to fill the gap in global research on instructional leadership's impact on teacher development. Guided by the research question—How is teaching faculty influenced by principals' instructional leadership practices? This study employed a qualitative case study approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of 5 secondary school principals and teachers. Thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns and categories across participant responses. The findings reveal that principals who engage in instructional leadership—through classroom observations, teacher mentoring, professional development planning, and maintaining a focus on teaching and learning—positively impact teacher motivation, instructional quality, and collaboration (Zepeda, 2015). Teachers reported increased accountability, professional support, and empowerment from principals who provided consistent feedback, modeled effective teaching practices, and involved them in decision-making. The study concludes that instructional leadership is a key enabler of teacher performance, especially when it is characterized by collaboration, feedback, trust, and strategic support. These findings underscore the need for principal training programs, a redefinition of leadership roles in policy, and systemic frameworks that promote sustained instructional leadership in secondary schools. The paper contributes to the national discourse on leadership effectiveness and offers actionable insights for educational policymakers and school administrators in Pakistan.

Keywords: Instructional Leadership, Teacher Performance, Principal Practices, Qualitative Case Study, School Effectiveness, Leadership Influence

Corresponding Author:

Iftekhar Ahmad

M.Phil. Scholar, Department of Education, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

✉ iftikharahmadbtk@gmail.com

Introduction

Today's educational landscape is rapidly changing, with leadership within the school as one of the most important voices in teaching, achievement outcomes, and overall institutional progress. In this regard, instructional leadership is one of the famous models due to its impact on the central role of schools: teaching and learning. Unlike the traditional bureaucratic or administrative leadership styles, instructional leadership includes the principal's active participation in determining the standard of teaching provided, giving appropriate academic and pedagogic aid, and creating a school culture that celebrates achievement (Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2004).

Instructional leadership is viewed across the world as an essential part of effective school systems — especially those of high-performing education countries like Finland, Singapore, and South Korea, where the principals take a

lead role in actually conducting instruction, training the teachers, and developing the courses (Day et al., 2016). This is also true within the context of Pakistan as a developing country. It is in one way that the paradigm is novel; however, on the other, it does have the potential to transform how school leadership is conducted. It remains, however, poorly developed. School leaders in Pakistan, especially in rural and public sector schools, are known to work within more administrative or autocratic frameworks that value obedience and control over instructional guidance.

The case of the Lower Dir district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan, is particularly interesting for examining the impact of instructional leadership. This area has relatively low levels of infrastructure and conservatism, which greatly impacts the motivation of educators and the equity of women in positions of authority in schools. As with other regions, secondary school principals in these areas are supposed to supervise school management and also induce the teachers to perform their duties effectively. Usually, they have inadequate supervision training and, in most cases, no training or assistance.

It is well established that when principals employ some form of instructional leadership— class visits for their enactment, coaching of the teachers, joint lesson preparations, and use of instructional data— there emerges a culture of professional development and academic accountability in the institution (Robinson et al., 2008; Bush 2013). The performed instructional leadership tends to improve employees' attitudes toward work, their teaching practices, and the degree to which they identify with the school. Despite the global interest in this model of leadership, there is insufficient qualitative research in Pakistan, especially regarding the experiences of educators in relation to principal leadership.

This study draws on transformational and instructional leadership theories that suggest effective school leaders impact teachers not through compliance but by cultivating, guiding, and supporting their professional development (Hallinger, 2011). This research aims to understand how some teachers in secondary schools of Lower Dir perceive and experience the instructional leadership approaches of their principals and how these approaches affect the teachers' professional performance, self-efficacy, and engagement (Bendikson et al., 2012).

In pursuing this objective, the study intends to contribute contextually appropriate lessons that will aid in developing leadership capacity, revising policies, and advancing the overall educational quality framework in Pakistan. More specifically, this paper seeks to answer the following question:

What are the impacts of principals' instructional leadership practices on teaching faculty?

Literature Review and Gap Analysis

Instructional leadership is recognized as one of the most important factors impacting the quality of teaching and school effectiveness. Unlike administrative leadership, which deals largely with the functional activities of the school, instructional leadership is focused on learning all aspects of leadership action (Hallinger, 2005). It includes setting appropriate academic expectations, supporting teaching practices, and developing a professional environment that is positive and conducive to high achievement and self-improvement (Robinson et al., 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

In a broader context, the researchers emphasized the impact of effective instructional leadership on the motivation of teachers, collaborative practices, and the quality of teaching (Day et al., 2016; Van der Berg et al., 2011). More specifically, principals who actively participate in the evaluation of instruction by providing formal feedback through professional development sessions foster a more positive attitude toward teaching (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018; Jenkins, 2009). The Transformational leadership theory further supports the idea by stressing the importance of the leader engaging with the staff in an inspirational and intellectual way, showing that teaching that is supported by vision and guidance profoundly shapes the educational experience within a school.

In these developing countries, however, there is a lack of adequate training, which is compounded by inflexible structures and an overwhelming amount of administrative work that limits the scope of these leadership functions.

Bhengu and Mkhize (2013), along with Harris (2004), noted that the headmasters or principals of state-owned schools in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa face challenges trying to manage their teaching responsibilities alongside coping with the ever-increasing bureaucratization of schooling. In Pakistan, the predominant focus of



educational leaders has been on meeting bureaucratic requirements, and pedagogical leadership has been neglected at both policy and practice levels.

The impact of instructional leadership on urban school teachers has begun to garner attention (Ahmad et al., 2020; Ahmad et al., 2021), but these studies are lacking when it comes to rural counterparts. Teacher experiences and qualitative perspectives elucidating the principal-teacher relationship and the underlying dynamics of sustainability are still scarce due to the dominant reliance on surveys and performance assessments.

This is the gap the study intends to fill by investigating the perception Secondary school teachers in Lower Dir District, Pakistan, hold regarding the instructional leadership of their principals and how these perceptions affect their professional conduct, performance, and motivation (Glickman, 2014).

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative case study design to investigate the influence of principals' instructional leadership practices on the performance of teachers at secondary schools (Silverman, 2001). A case study approach was selected because it captures the intricacies and details of social phenomena—in this case, the leadership interactions within one particular school (Yin, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Rule & John, 2011). The qualitative approach was prioritized in this study as it centers the focus on the experiences and perceptions of the teachers, who are the most affected by the actions of the leaders, with regard to the leadership paradigms (Cohen et al., 2022).

Research Setting and Participants

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) region of Pakistan, particularly Lower Dir District, exhibits rural school domains with conservative societal frameworks and minimal access to ongoing professional development opportunities. The research specifically examines male secondary schools with the aim of capturing their perspectives.

Participants were male secondary school principals and teachers for whom the purposive sampling strategy was initially utilized. Each teacher had at least three years of professional service. The selection process was based on willingness to participate and included a broad range of perspectives. The stratum ensured varying experiences working with different school principals and urban and rural teachers within the district. Efforts were made to include teachers from both urban and rural areas within the district.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in Urdu and later translated into English for analysis. Each interview lasted between 25 and 40 minutes, allowing participants the space to express nuanced reflections while maintaining focus on the research question. The interview protocol included open-ended questions designed to elicit the following:

- ▶ Teachers' perceptions of principals' instructional leadership practices
- ▶ The influence of these practices on their teaching performance, motivation, and collaboration
- ▶ Barriers and enablers related to leadership at the school level

All interviews were conducted face-to-face in secure and comfortable environments to encourage openness and authenticity.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis approach was employed, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. The analysis was conducted manually using a constant comparative method to ensure consistency across participant responses. Themes were derived inductively from the data, meaning they emerged from the teachers' narratives rather than being pre-defined.

Credibility was ensured through member checking—where selected participants reviewed summaries of their interviews—and peer debriefing with educational colleagues familiar with leadership studies.



Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant university research committee. All participants were informed of the study's purpose, assured of voluntary participation, and guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. Written consent was secured prior to each interview. No personal identifiers have been included in the final report, and all data were securely stored.

Results

Analyzing interviews conducted with five secondary school principals and teachers uncovered a number of interrelated themes regarding the influence of principals' instructional leadership practices on teacher performance. These themes detail the influences, in terms of professional behaviors, motivation, and instructional practices, that faculty members as teachers endure in diverse leadership styles within the Lower Dir region of Pakistan.

Theme 1: Principals as Instructional Guides

Numerous educators reported their principals as having a pivotal role in aiding teachers with instructional direction and academic focus. According to the teachers, alignment with institutional objectives was greater when principals actively observed classrooms, oversaw lesson planning, and engaged in discussions regarding pedagogical methods.

"Our principal regularly checks lesson plans and sometimes even discusses teaching methods with us. It keeps us on track and aware of what's expected academically." (Teachers of Secondary School A and B)

These practices were regarded as instructional leadership and reportedly strengthened the focus of teaching, lesson chronologic order, and curriculum alignment across the school.

Theme 2: Influence on Teacher Motivation and Accountability

An ongoing pattern from the interviews was the motivational enhancement and positive performance accountability stemming from good leadership. Respondents indicated that school heads who offered constructive communication provided adequate recognition, maintained open dialogue, and gave purposeful feedback fostered responsibility and ownership.

"The encouragement from our principal goes a long way. That type of leadership motivates you to perform at your best." (Teachers of A, B, and C Secondary School).

Those teachers reported enhanced punctuality, more detailed planning, and greater involvement with the students under such leadership. They indicated that there was improvement because their efforts were noticed.

Theme 3: Collegial Collaboration and Professional Development

Teachers reported increased opportunities for peer collaboration and professional growth when principals facilitated subject-wise meetings, group discussions, and informal mentoring. In schools where leadership promoted teamwork, there was greater innovation in teaching strategies.

"We hold subject-wise meetings regularly. Our principal joins and gives suggestions. We also learn a lot from each other." (Teachers of B, C and E Secondary School)

This reflects an emerging culture of instructional synergy, where leadership fosters shared responsibility for teaching and learning improvement.

Theme 4: Leadership Gaps and Barriers

While several participants spoke positively about their principals' engagement, others reported experiences with detached, bureaucratic, or authoritarian leadership styles. In such cases, principals were perceived as more focused on administrative duties than academic leadership.

"Our principal is usually busy with reports and inspections. We hardly get academic guidance. Everything is left to us." (Teachers of A, B, C and E Secondary School)



Some teachers expressed that a lack of formal training in instructional leadership often left principals ill-equipped to support teachers pedagogically, especially in managing diverse classrooms or promoting inclusive practices.

Theme 5: Cultural and Structural Constraints

A few teachers emphasized that the local cultural norms and systemic limitations restricted principals' ability to engage deeply in instructional leadership. For example, in rural schools, community expectations, traditional hierarchies, and lack of time or resources often hindered principals from prioritizing instructional support.

"In our area, principals are mostly busy managing community issues or admin tasks. Instructional work becomes secondary." (Teachers of A, B, C, and E Secondary School)

These barriers point to a broader need for policy and structural reform to enable principals to fulfill their instructional leadership roles more effectively.

Summary of Findings

- ▶ Effective instructional leadership enhances teacher motivation, collaboration, and instructional quality.
- ▶ Principals influence teacher performance most when they provide direct feedback, pedagogical guidance, and professional recognition.
- ▶ Leadership gaps, particularly in training and time management, weaken the potential of principals to lead instructionally.
- ▶ Structural and cultural limitations often restrict the implementation of leadership best practices, especially in rural contexts.

Discussion

This study set out to examine how instructional leadership practices of secondary school principals influence the performance of teaching faculty in Lower Dir, Pakistan. The qualitative findings revealed that while teachers generally recognize and appreciate effective instructional leadership, there remains a considerable variation in leadership practices and a noticeable gap between ideal leadership behavior and actual experience (Ismail et al., [2018](#)).

Principals as Instructional Leaders: A Positive Influence

Teachers who reported that their principals engaged in classroom observation, lesson planning discussions, and academic feedback shared improved motivation, structured pedagogy, and stronger alignment with school goals. These findings are consistent with the literature that positions principals as key instructional leaders who influence teaching and learning through pedagogical guidance, vision-setting, and feedback loops (Hallinger, [2011](#); Robinson et al., [2008](#)).

As per Hollinger's instructional leadership model, effective principals perform three core functions:

1. Defining the school mission
2. Managing the instructional program
3. Promoting a positive school learning climate

Your participants' responses clearly reflect these elements. Teachers indicated that such leadership increased their sense of professional accountability, a factor also highlighted in Bush (2013) and Day et al. ([2016](#)), who argue that leadership rooted in pedagogy drives sustainable school improvement.

Motivational and Collaborative Benefits

The research also discovered reasons which included recognition, praise, and collaborative scheduling, which motivated a teacher's performance. This is in tandem with the transformational leadership theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994) which highlights the need to motivate and intellectually engage followers. Teachers are more likely to demonstrate innovation and commitment in environments fostered by collegial principals.



This was supported by the findings of Day and Sammons (2016), who reported that successful schools were marked by principals who cultivated trust-based professional communities. In your research, subject meetings, participatory decision-making, and unofficial mentorships were pointed out as notable leadership actions that enhanced professional development and sustained improvement.

Leadership Gaps and Barriers

Regardless, some educators reported disengaged or authoritarian forms of leadership which indicate a lack of interest among some principals. These leaders appeared primarily focused on implementing administrative responsibilities, reporting to the government, or maintaining discipline—sparing little time for the support needed for instruction. In similar studies conducted in Pakistan. In these studies, leadership is usually portrayed within a bureaucratic rather than a development-focused perspective.

Not having an assigned formal training for leadership was mentioned as one of the major shortcomings in the program. Most rural district principals are appointed based on age or length of service instead of having proven instructional leadership skills. This diminishes their ability to provide robust instructional guidance, which risks creating an environment perceived as professionally isolating for many educators.

Cultural and Structural Challenges

Within the discussions, some participants pointed out that cultural patterns and systemic inefficiencies also restrict leadership effectiveness. In rural schools, the principal's instructional role is hindered by community involvement, gender expectations, time constraints, and limited professional development opportunities. These findings corroborate Shah's (2006) research as well as UNESCO's (2020) studies, which emphasize the sociocultural factors in the context of developing countries as dominant constraints for the leadership phenomena.

In such contexts, policy-level reforms are necessary, including:

- ▶ Defining instructional leadership roles more explicitly
- ▶ Reducing the administrative load on principals
- ▶ Introducing regular training and support mechanisms

Implications for Practice and Policy

The evidence suggests that instructional leadership can significantly enhance teacher performance, but only when it is supported by:

- ▶ Training and mentoring structures
- ▶ Time allocation for instructional tasks
- ▶ A leadership model grounded in collaboration rather than control

The findings urge the Ministry of Education and local education authorities to adopt leadership development frameworks modeled on instructional leadership and transformational principles.

Summary

- ▶ Principals who lead with academic focus and support enhance teacher motivation and performance.
- ▶ Transformational traits, such as encouragement and collaboration, amplify instructional leadership.
- ▶ Leadership development and contextual flexibility are essential to make these practices sustainable.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study explored the influence of instructional leadership practices on the performance of teaching faculty in secondary schools located in Lower Dir, Pakistan. Grounded in a qualitative case study design, the research uncovered how principals' leadership behaviors—particularly those related to pedagogy, motivation, and collaboration—shape the instructional climate within schools.

Based on the findings, teachers tend to appreciate principals who engage in instructionally centered leadership activities, which include observing teaching, providing appropriate feedback, enabling collaboration among peers, and acknowledging the efforts of the teachers. Such leadership cultivates a professional climate that is purposeful, accountable, fosters growth, and improves performance—especially in terms of the instruction provided.



On the other hand, the research also revealed significant gaps in the specific practices of leadership. These gaps were traced mainly to a lack of framed training, burdensome work at the level of administration, and organizational constraints—the most prominent of which occur in rural areas. In some instances, principals appeared to be unable or unwilling to function as instructional leaders but rather approached their role from a compliance-driven or managerial perspective. In addition, some contextual factors, including cultural attitudes and scarcity of resources, equally constrained school leaders from employing effective instructional strategies.

The consensus is that while instructional leadership undoubtedly has a strong and direct impact on teacher performance, the boundaries to exercising this potential are systemic and contextual in nature. Transformational leadership is needed, but not in the traditional sense of holding authority. Effective leadership will require moving from just having a title to one that is deeply grounded in pedagogy, empowers teachers, and fosters their development in collaboration with one another.

Recommendations

For School Principals and Leaders

- ▶ **Maximize Instructional Engagement:** Move from an administrative to a leadership role by actively participating in classroom observation, teacher coaching, and curriculum alignment, enhancing academic leadership.
- ▶ **Promote Professional Dialogue:** Strengthen collaboration and shared responsibility through organized, structured, cross-grade feedback and lesson planning departments.
- ▶ **Implement Reflective Practices:** Promote reflection on leadership and teaching practice with portfolios, peer review, and professional learning communities.

For Education Departments and Policy Makers

- ▶ **Enhance Engagement with Instruction:** Elevate the role from functional to strategic by increasing participation in classroom activities, teacher coaching, and curriculum mapping to deepen academic leadership.
- ▶ **Foster Dialogue for Professional Growth:** Enhance professional collaboration and collective ownership with cohesive, structured, interdisciplinary planning and feedback sessions at the departmental level.
- ▶ **Reflect on Practices and Implement Changes:** Encourage self-evaluation of leadership and teaching with reflective portfolios, review by colleagues, and professional learning communities.

For Teacher Training Institutions

- ▶ **Cultivate Leadership Acumen Within Teacher Prep Programs:** Inculcate with prospective instructors different orientations of leadership and the contribution of instructional leadership to the growth of a school.
- ▶ **Improve the Intersection Between Theories of Leadership and Actual Teaching:** Prepare teachers through school-based practicum, mentoring, and contemporary case study instruction to function within/below different leadership structures.

For Future Researchers

- ▶ **Do Cross-Cultural Research:** Expand this study to investigate the public and private schooling systems in urban and rural areas or male and female leadership in institutions.
- ▶ **Assess Students' Points of View:** Examine the impact of instructional leadership on students' motivation, discipline, and academic achievement as an indirect effect.
- ▶ **Appraise Leadership Development Programs:** Determine the impacts of various instructional leadership programs on principals and associated teaching outcomes.

Final Reflection

Instructional leadership is not a luxury—it is a necessity for school transformation. When principals embrace their role as academic leaders and mentors, teachers are more empowered, and students are more likely to succeed. This study calls for a structural shift in how leadership is conceptualized, trained, and supported, particularly in under-resourced regions of Pakistan. Only then can the vision of equitable, high-quality education truly be realized.



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