
**NAVIGATING CHALLENGES AND LEVERAGING
INTERVENTIONS:
A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF TRANSFORMATIONAL
LEADERSHIP AND TEACHERS' PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES**

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Article Received: 27 March 2026

Article Revised: 17 April 2026

Published on: 07 May 2026

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DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijrpa.9824>

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the challenges and issues encountered in implementing transformational leadership practices and identified intervention programs that school heads employ to strengthen teachers' pedagogical practices in public elementary schools under the Schools Division Office of Cotabato. Using phenomenological inquiry through semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD) with 15 purposively selected school heads, principals, and teachers-in-charge, the study employed thematic analysis to derive meaningful themes from participant narratives. Two overarching global themes emerged from the data: (1) Workload and Time Management—encompassing sub-themes of high administrative workload and insufficient access to instructional resources; and (2) Professional Development Programs—comprising structured training and in-service sessions, and instructional coaching and mentoring. Participants revealed that heavy administrative burdens significantly limited opportunities for pedagogical leadership and instructional supervision. Resource scarcity further constrained teachers' ability to implement innovative, learner-centered strategies. In response, school heads employed structured professional development and individualized mentoring as primary interventions. The study concludes with an intervention plan recommending structured training, instructional coaching, collaborative professional learning communities, and technology integration support to enhance teacher effectiveness and learner outcomes.

KEYWORDS: *Transformational leadership, challenges, professional development, instructional coaching, qualitative research, thematic analysis, pedagogical practices, school heads.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding how school heads navigate the realities of transformational leadership in practice requires more than statistical data. The qualitative dimensions of leadership—lived experiences, perceived barriers, relational dynamics, and contextual interventions—are equally critical in advancing educational leadership theory and practice. While quantitative investigations can reveal correlations and predictive patterns, they often cannot fully illuminate why certain relationships exist or how they are experienced by practitioners on the ground.

In the Philippine public elementary school context, school heads face a complex landscape of administrative demands, resource constraints, and diverse learner needs. Despite the widely documented benefits of transformational leadership, little qualitative inquiry has examined the specific challenges school heads encounter in translating leadership ideals into pedagogical impact, particularly in rural and semi-urban settings such as those found in the Schools Division Office (SDO) of Cotabato.

This study, which constitutes Phase 2 of a larger sequential mixed-methods investigation, addressed this gap through a phenomenological qualitative inquiry. It sought to understand the challenges and issues school heads face in practicing transformational leadership, and the interventions they employ to strengthen teachers' instructional and classroom practices. By giving voice to the lived experiences of school leaders, this research contributes situated knowledge that complements and deepens the quantitative findings of Phase 1.

1.1 Research Questions

- (1) What challenges and issues do school heads encounter in practicing transformational leadership in relation to teachers' pedagogical practices?
- (2) What interventions can school heads implement through professional development initiatives to strengthen teachers' instructional strategies and classroom practices?

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Challenges in Transformational Leadership Practice

Despite its well-documented benefits, transformational leadership in schools faces significant structural and contextual barriers. Chief among these is the tension between administrative

responsibilities and instructional leadership. Hallinger (2018) noted that school heads are often overwhelmed by compliance tasks, paperwork, and bureaucratic demands that erode time and energy that could otherwise be devoted to classroom support and teacher development. This administrative burden is particularly pronounced in Philippine public schools, where school heads are expected to fulfill simultaneous roles as instructional leaders, administrative managers, and community liaisons (DepEd, 2020).

Resource limitations also represent a persistent challenge. Ng (2019) highlighted that schools lacking adequate instructional materials, digital tools, and professional development funding are constrained in their ability to implement innovative pedagogical strategies. In resource-scarce contexts, teachers often default to traditional, lecture-based approaches—not by preference but by necessity. This underscores the importance of examining how school heads navigate resource constraints while sustaining transformational leadership.

2.2 Professional Development as Intervention

Research consistently identifies professional development as the primary mechanism through which school heads translate transformational leadership into pedagogical improvement. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) argued that effective professional development is collaborative, sustained, job-embedded, and aligned with teachers' actual classroom needs. Desimone and Garet (2015) similarly found that structured learning opportunities that include active learning, coherence, collective participation, and duration significantly improve teaching practices.

Instructional coaching and mentoring have garnered particular attention as high-impact interventions. Glickman et al. (2018) emphasized that personalized coaching—characterized by classroom observation, reflective feedback, and goal-setting dialogues—builds teacher confidence and instructional competence. DuFour and Fullan (2013) further argued that professional learning communities (PLCs) foster collective inquiry and shared accountability, creating sustainable cultures of improvement that extend beyond individual mentoring relationships.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences of school heads in implementing transformational leadership. Phenomenology is well-suited to research questions that seek to understand the essence and meaning of lived

experiences as perceived by participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design enabled the researcher to capture the richness, complexity, and contextual nuances of leadership challenges and interventions as experienced in practice.

3.2 Participants

Fifteen (15) participants were purposively selected from school heads, principals, and teachers-in-charge in the Matalam South District, SDO Cotabato. Purposive sampling ensured that participants possessed direct experience with transformational leadership implementation and pedagogical supervision. Participants were identified as IDI 1 through IDI 15 to protect anonymity and confidentiality.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD). IDIs were conducted with each participant individually to elicit personal narratives and reflections. FGDs facilitated collaborative meaning-making and discussion of shared experiences. All sessions were audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and reviewed for accuracy before analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2018) was employed. The analytical process involved six phases: familiarization with the data through repeated reading; generation of initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the final report. To ensure rigor, the researcher applied member checking, peer debriefing, and audit trail documentation. Themes were organized into global, organizing, and basic theme levels to capture multi-layered meaning.

4. FINDINGS AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

4.1 Global Theme 1: Workload and Time Management

The first global theme, Workload and Time Management, encompassed two organizing themes: (a) high administrative workload and (b) insufficient access to instructional resources. These sub-themes captured the structural and material barriers that school heads identified as the most significant impediments to effective pedagogical leadership.

4.1.1 High Administrative Workload

Participants consistently described excessive administrative demands as a primary constraint on their capacity to exercise instructional leadership. The volume of paperwork, compliance reports, meetings, and financial documentation left minimal time for classroom observations, mentoring, and monitoring of teaching practices. Several participants drew explicit connections between administrative overload and the diminished quality of instructional supervision.

"As a school head, I often struggle to balance administrative tasks with instructional supervision. Most of the time, paperwork and reporting take precedence over classroom observations." — IDI 5

"As a principal, I find that attending meetings, submitting reports, and handling correspondence consume most of my working hours. This limits my ability to provide meaningful guidance to teachers on their pedagogical practices." — IDI 10

"As a teacher-in-charge, I experience difficulty allocating time for mentoring teachers because of the extensive administrative workload. Important instructional leadership activities are often delayed or postponed." — IDI 15

These accounts resonate with Hallinger (2018), who identified administrative overload as one of the most persistent structural barriers to instructional leadership in schools. The findings suggest that the tension between administrative and pedagogical roles is not merely individual but systemic, requiring policy-level attention to role clarification and workload distribution among school leadership teams.

The implications of this finding are significant. When school heads are unable to conduct regular classroom observations or provide timely feedback, teachers miss critical opportunities for professional growth. The cascading effect on student learning outcomes underscores the urgency of addressing administrative burden through streamlined compliance systems and the strategic delegation of non-instructional tasks.

4.1.2 Insufficient Access to Instructional Resources

Participants also identified resource scarcity as a formidable challenge. Limited access to updated textbooks, digital devices, and instructional technology materials constrained teachers' ability to implement innovative, learner-centered pedagogical approaches. Budget limitations were frequently cited as the root cause, with participants noting that financial constraints reduced opportunities for resource acquisition and technology integration.

"As a school head, I often face challenges because our classrooms lack updated textbooks and teaching aids. This limits teachers' ability to deliver lessons effectively." — IDI 2

"As a principal, I notice that the shortage of digital devices prevents learners from engaging in interactive learning activities. Teachers struggle to integrate technology due to this limitation." — IDI 3

"As a school head, budget constraints often prevent us from purchasing necessary teaching resources or software. This reduces the opportunities for teachers to innovate in their pedagogy." — IDI 14

These experiences reflect the broader resource equity challenges in Philippine public education, where significant variation exists in school funding, infrastructure, and technology access across districts. As Ng (2019) observed, resource-constrained environments force teachers into conservative pedagogical choices even when they are aware of more effective alternatives. The absence of adequate materials not only limits instructional quality but also dampens teacher motivation and professional confidence.

Table 1. Themes on Challenges and Issues in Transformational Leadership Towards Pedagogical Practices.

Global Theme	Organizing Theme	Basic Themes
Workload and Time Management	High Administrative Workload	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School heads are burdened with administrative tasks, limiting time for pedagogical leadership. • Limited engagement with teachers reduces opportunities to improve classroom performance. • School heads provide minimal instructional supervision and feedback to teachers.
	Insufficient Access to Instructional Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited teaching materials and digital tools hinder effective lesson delivery. • Financial limitations affect the ability to implement innovative programs or technology integration. • Teachers feel undervalued due to lack of acknowledgment of their efforts and achievements.

4.2 Global Theme 2: Professional Development Programs

The second global theme, Professional Development Programs, encompasses the intervention strategies that school heads employ to strengthen teachers' instructional and classroom practices. Two organizing themes were identified: (a) structured training sessions or in-service training and (b) instructional coaching and mentoring.

4.2.1 Structured Training Sessions and In-Service Training

School heads underscored structured professional development as the foundational intervention for pedagogical improvement. Organized workshops, seminars, and in-service training programs provided teachers with updated knowledge of instructional methodologies, assessment strategies, technology integration, and learner-centered approaches. Participants noted that well-designed professional development fostered confidence, innovation, and collaborative learning.

"As a school head, I ensure that our teachers attend structured training sessions focused on lesson planning and instructional strategies. These sessions help teachers apply best practices in their classrooms." — IDI 12

"As a principal, I organize in-service training programs to update teachers on the latest teaching methodologies and technology integration. Most teachers report increased confidence in delivering lessons after attending these trainings." — IDI 6

"As a school head, I schedule regular professional development days to strengthen teachers' skills in interactive and learner-centered instruction. Most participants noted that these trainings improve classroom engagement." — IDI 13

These findings align with Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) and Desimone and Garet (2015), who identified structured, sustained, and job-embedded professional learning as the most effective approach to teacher development. Participants' accounts suggest that even within resource-constrained settings, school heads are actively creating spaces for professional growth, reflecting the core transformational leadership competency of inspiring and developing followers.

4.2.2 Instructional Coaching and Mentoring

Instructional coaching and mentoring emerged as the most personalized and impactful intervention described by participants. Through individualized classroom observations, constructive feedback, and peer mentoring programs, school heads supported teachers in identifying growth areas and refining their pedagogical approaches. Group mentoring and reflective discussions further promoted collaborative professional learning.

"I provide regular classroom observations followed by personalized feedback to guide teachers in improving their instructional practices. This helps them apply strategies effectively and address classroom challenges." — IDI 2

"As a principal, I pair experienced teachers with less experienced ones for mentoring sessions. Most teachers report that peer mentoring strengthens their teaching skills and builds confidence." — IDI 13

"As a school head, I ensure follow-up after each coaching session to monitor progress and support teachers in implementing recommended strategies. This continuous guidance enhances teaching effectiveness." — IDI 15

These accounts illustrate the transformational leader's commitment to individualized consideration—attending to the unique developmental needs of each teacher. Glickman et al. (2018) affirmed that instructional coaching built on trust, dialogue, and reflective practice is among the most effective tools for sustainable instructional improvement. The emphasis on follow-up and continuity also reflects the longitudinal commitment required for genuine professional transformation.

Table 2. Themes on Interventions to Strengthen Teachers' Instructional Strategies and Classroom Practices.

Global Theme	Organizing Theme	Basic Themes
Professional Development Programs	Structured Training / In-Service Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School heads organize workshops and seminars to enhance pedagogical knowledge and skills. • Continuous learning updates teachers on modern strategies and technology integration. • Teachers are encouraged to collaborate and share best practices.
	Instructional Coaching and Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-on-one coaching, lesson observations, and constructive feedback improve teaching practices. • Peer mentoring pairs experienced and novice teachers for mutual professional growth. • Cross-grade collaboration and co-teaching strengthen teachers' instructional repertoire.

5. PROPOSED INTERVENTION PLAN

Drawing from the qualitative findings, a comprehensive intervention plan was developed to address the identified challenges and enhance teachers' pedagogical practices through transformational leadership. The plan targets four key areas: structured training and in-service programs; instructional coaching and mentoring; collaborative professional learning communities (PLCs); and technology integration support.

Table 3. Intervention Plan for Strengthening Teachers' Pedagogical Practices Through Transformational Leadership.

Key Area	Intervention Strategies	Expected Outcomes	Timeframe	Responsible Persons
Structured Training	Conduct workshops on modern strategies, classroom management, and technology. Schedule PD days for collaborative exercises.	Improved pedagogical knowledge. Teachers confident in learner-centered approaches.	Quarterly	School Head, Resource Speakers, Experienced Teachers
Coaching & Mentoring	Regular classroom observations with feedback. One-on-one coaching. Peer mentoring programs.	Improved classroom management. Adoption of learner-centered strategies. Enhanced teacher confidence.	Monthly cycles	School Head, Instructional Coaches, Teacher Mentors
PLCs	Establish PLCs for collaborative lesson planning. Cross-grade team teaching. Problem-solving sessions.	Improved teamwork and sharing of best practices. Enhanced learner outcomes.	Monthly	School Head, Grade-Level Coordinators, Teachers
Technology Support	Training on digital platforms and multimedia tools. Provide access to instructional software. Offer technical support.	Increased competence in technology integration. Enhanced learner engagement.	Ongoing	School Head, IT Coordinator, Teacher Mentors

6. DISCUSSION

The qualitative findings of this study reveal a compelling tension at the heart of transformational leadership in Philippine public elementary schools: the aspiration to be visionary, empowering, and instructionally engaged contrasts sharply with the structural realities of administrative overload and resource scarcity. School heads who are theoretically positioned to transform their schools through inspiration, intellectual challenge, and professional support often find themselves consumed by paperwork and constrained by inadequate resources.

Yet, the data also reveal resilience and innovation. Despite these systemic barriers, school heads in the study actively pursued professional development interventions—structured training, coaching, and mentoring—that reflect genuine commitment to transformational leadership ideals. These interventions embody the core principles of transformational leadership: individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation translated into practical support for teacher growth.

The intervention strategies identified in this study are consistent with global best practices in educational leadership. PLCs, coaching, and sustained professional development have been endorsed by researchers as the most effective mechanisms for building teacher capacity and improving student outcomes (DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). The proposed intervention plan thus offers a contextually grounded, evidence-based roadmap for school heads seeking to bridge the gap between transformational leadership ideals and pedagogical realities.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative study illuminated the human dimensions of transformational leadership in Philippine public elementary schools. The challenges of administrative overload and resource scarcity represent systemic barriers that must be addressed through policy reform, resource allocation, and structural support from higher levels of educational governance. Simultaneously, the interventions identified—structured professional development, instructional coaching, PLCs, and technology support—offer practical pathways for school heads to sustain their transformational leadership impact even within constrained environments.

The findings underscore the importance of providing school heads with both the conditions and the competencies to exercise genuine pedagogical leadership. Without addressing structural barriers, even the most committed transformational leaders will struggle to translate their vision into sustained improvements in teachers' pedagogical practices.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, this study recommends: (1) DepEd should streamline administrative requirements for school heads to free more time for instructional leadership; (2) Budget allocation for instructional resources and technology should be increased, particularly in underserved districts; (3) School heads should institutionalize PLCs and mentoring programs as sustained, system-wide practices rather than ad hoc interventions; (4) Future qualitative

research should extend inquiry to teachers' perspectives on leadership challenges and to private school contexts to enable comparative analysis.

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