



Systematic Review on the 21st Century School Leadership: A Strategic Model

DOI 10.5281/zenodo.13923052

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Abstract:

In a world of challenges on leadership models, augmented workforces of school heads, leveled educational organizations, and an ongoing shift to team-based work practices, organizations are challenging school leaders to step up and show the way forward. This study focuses on the process of data extraction and synthesis for qualitative systematic reviews regarding school leaders in the 21st century. The main purpose is to generate a strategic model using an inductive approach that would explain the phenomenon of leadership styles. The specific objective is to make an in-depth review of the nineteen published studies pertaining to school leadership in terms of aims, methodology, participants, instruments, and outcomes. This systematic review used meta-synthesis to focus on the relevance of leadership portrayed by principals in the basic education program from 2014 to 2022 included 19 studies. The studies were selected for systematic review using the Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP) checklist and structured using the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram. The thematic analysis results in nine themes and three meta-themes. Themes 1 to 3 were factors on the successes of the 21st-century school heads in total quality leadership, themes 4 to 6 were factors as encountered trials of the school heads in total quality leadership in the 21st century, and the remaining themes 7 to 9 were factors on empowering stakeholders toward total quality leadership among school heads in the 21st century. In conclusion, school leaders are faced with many challenges in running organizations. Over the several years, the definitions, descriptions, expectations, and styles of leadership have evolved and will continue to do so. What was true concerning leadership in the past may no longer hold today, and what is true today may not be so in the future. Thus, it is recommended that educational leaders establish a three-year comprehensive and strategic plan for school leaders for them to be in tune with their teams and be willing to adjust to the times.

Keywords: leadership models, school heads, strategic plan, 21st- century leadership

Introduction:

Academic leadership development has emerged as a significant area of research, reflecting the multifaceted roles of academic leaders in university management, particularly in promoting teaching, learning, research, and technology (Zulfqar et al., 2021). Effective leadership is directly correlated with enhanced management capabilities and organizational performance. When a leadership focus is applied, it integrates numerous aspects of human resource management, such as hiring and selection, training and development, performance management, public service ethics, and succession planning (OECD, 2001).

Historically, effective leadership has been associated with societal growth. To mitigate behavioral issues that may hinder achieving organizational and personal goals, it is advisable to emphasize individuals' strengths rather than their weaknesses. Leading a diverse organization requires understanding the unique attitudes, actions, personalities, and motivations of its members (Cabrera et al., 2016; Rahman, 2021).

In response to the challenges faced by educational leaders in the twenty-first century, leadership development programs have been initiated to emphasize the significance of leaders' professional and personal abilities. These programs equip leaders with the tools to translate their visions into reality (Gigliotti & Ruben, 2017; Ruben et al., 2018). However, scholars studying leadership often grapple with the complexities of the topic, akin to attempting to fit disparate puzzle pieces into a cohesive picture. Throughout much of the previous century, leadership scholars have struggled to provide a



comprehensive and theoretically sound understanding of leadership, often leading to disappointment among those attempting to navigate the field.

As Smith (2016) notes, leadership has been extensively studied in business and education, yet the vastness and multifaceted nature of the topic can make it daunting to synthesize leadership studies. In the evolving educational landscape, it is crucial for school leaders to cultivate an environment where students, teachers, parents, and the community feel their contributions are vital to fostering a positive school culture. To achieve this, school leaders must understand the characteristics of 21st-century leadership and how these can collaboratively form a comprehensive leadership model.

In recent decades, the volume of research literature on 21st-century leadership has surged globally. However, systematic reviews examining school head leadership in basic education based on robust empirical evidence remain scarce. This gap suggests that school leaders practice leadership diversely, moving away from traditional approaches influenced by personal, cultural, and identity factors.

Khan et al. (2015) argue that insights gained from decades of research on leadership traits support the transferability of these traits across different sectors and cultures. This assertion implies the potential for designing tailored programs that can be universally applicable despite regional variations. In the context of the Department of Education (DepEd) Division of Cebu City, a redefinition of school leadership is essential. The school head serves as the central figure around which various school elements revolve, responsible for both academic and administrative decisions that are crucial for effective governance and ongoing improvement.

Addressing the challenges within basic education requires embracing the new MATATAG agenda, which includes: (1) updating the curriculum to develop competent, job-ready, responsible citizens; (2) accelerating the delivery of basic education facilities and services; (3) ensuring inclusive education, learner well-being, and a positive learning environment; and (4) supporting teachers in their professional development. Moreover, the study advocates for distributed leadership structures, organizational resilience, and adaptive leadership to optimize institutional responses.

As instructional supervision adapts to the new normal, there is an urgent need for empirical research on learning modalities. School leaders require field evidence to inform the theoretical frameworks dominating the post-pandemic educational landscape. Capacity-building programs for school heads should focus on equipping them with instructional leadership models, empowering them to implement changes that enhance learning outcomes for all students.

The findings of this study may elucidate how educational leaders develop a professional identity that encourages them to embrace leadership roles. A considerable body of research highlights the diverse behavioral modalities of transformative leaders. To steer their organizations toward shared objectives and a well-defined vision in the evolving educational context, educational leaders must integrate various leadership styles and skills. This pressing issue has prompted the researcher to conduct an extensive literature review on 21st-century leadership among basic education school leaders at the international level.

Research Design

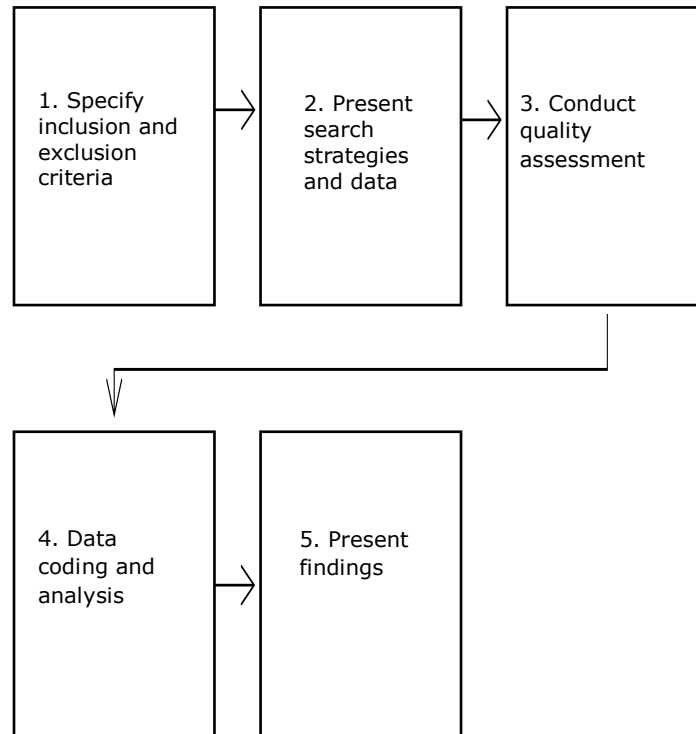
This study employed a meta-synthesis research design that strives to interpretatively consolidate results from different inter-connected studies (Walsh & Downe cited in Quinco et al., 2022). In March 2023, a thorough search was conducted across many databases, utilizing the search terms "leadership" and "instructional supervision," or "educational management." Only publications published between 2012 and 2023 were included in the systematic search to guarantee that the most recent findings are included in the review.

Before conducting the review, the criteria should be made explicit in a clearly defined procedure or strategy that the systematic review would adhere to. It is a thorough, transparent search that is repeatable by other scholars across a few databases and grey literature sources. It entails organizing a carefully considered search strategy with a clear emphasis or solution to a predetermined query. The review specifies the kinds of data that are looked for, evaluated, and reported on within predetermined

deadlines. The review must contain the search keywords, search tactics (such as database names, platforms, and search dates), and restrictions.

Figure 1

Research Design for Systematic Literature Review Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria



Additionally, the previous study documented a persistent issue in education, revealed a weakness in its design, sample, or interpretation, and suggested reading about the effects of a novel intervention to try to improve study methods during the COVID-19 pandemic (Moral, 2021). The research design of this review study is shown in Figure 1.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Every article, abstract, research aims statement, problem statement, methodology, and findings were thoroughly reviewed to ensure that they satisfied the inclusion criteria and were appropriate for inclusion in the study to meet the study's objectives. The articles selected were screened using the following criteria for inclusion and exclusion. The studies should involve leadership implementation practices or adoption constructs/variables and factors. Another criterion is that the study should employ a model, framework or theory for investigation related to school leadership. Further, the study should be written in English and published between 2014 to 2022. Finally, the study should involve school leadership in relation to basic education students, lecturers, teachers and administrators.

For the exclusion criteria, the researcher will eliminate studies that do not present leadership implementation practice or adoption of construct variables, studies that do not use context other than school leadership, studies that are not written in English and studies not published between 2014 and 2022. Before 2014 and after 2022, and studies that do not involve students, lecturers, teacher administrators and administrators.as shown on Table 2.



Table 2

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion	Exclusion
Should involve leadership implementation practices or adoption constructs/variables and factors	Studies that do not present leadership implementation practice or adoption constructs/variables and factors
Should employ a model, framework, or theory for an investigation related to school leadership.	Models, frameworks, or theories used in contexts other than school leadership.
Should be written in English and published in 2014 and 2022	Studies that use languages other than English
Studies that involved school leadership in relation to basic education students, teachers, and administrators	Leadership studies that do not involve students, lecturers, and administrators

Quality Assessment Criteria

The selected articles were further tested to ensure quality of the studies, which must have relevant sources of data and ideas that will contribute scientifically to the validity of the study supported by proven theories and principles. The review will be subjected to a quality review, and its criteria will be satisfactorily met to ensure that the new theoretical model of leadership is grounded on the sound premises and data using systematic tools in research work. The quality assessment criteria include 10 questions that will serve as the points of reference as shown in

Table 3.

Table 3

Quality Assessment Criteria

Questions
1. Are research goals clearly stated?
2. Does the research consider any leadership practices?
3. Does the study consider constructs and factors?
4. Is the study's context well specified?
5. Does the paper provide a model/framework or rely on current theory?
6. Are the data collecting procedures sufficiently detailed?
7. Does the paper clarify the reliability and validity of the variables?
8. Are statistical methods used to assess the data?
9. Are the outcomes clearly discussed?
10. Are the study's implications clearly presented?

According to Moral (2021), the use at many points in the systematic review process including scoping the review, guiding the searching and identification stages, and interpretation of the results. A thorough selection of studies and an understanding of the study method and conclusion are necessary to uncover the assumptions and processes inside the educational research practices that are the subject of this study in the new normal. The procedure consists of the following seven steps: 1) organizing a search strategy for both published and unpublished studies and keeping it transparent, systematic, and replicable; 2) documenting studies involving secondary or tertiary participants as long as they are all about 21st-century leadership involvement, whether through quantitative, qualitative, or mixed designs; 3) including standards on the year of publication from 2014 onwards; 4) specifying that the journals are indexed to establish their quality or coming from any databases such as Scopus, Crossref, Google Scholar, Elsevier, Francis & Taylor, etc.; 5). Reviewing a variety of documents to determine which ones should be coded and retrieved for more research; 6) abstracting data to complete the details; and 7) evaluating the quality of the work using the Critical Appraisal Skills Program (2018) checklist. The predetermined inclusion criteria were used to screen the selected papers.



Data Analysis

To determine the emergent themes, the thematic analysis procedure (Braun and Clarke, 2003) was employed. This technique for analyzing qualitative data involves examining a set of data and identifying meaningful patterns. The six steps of the thematic analysis process are as follows: (1) familiarizing oneself with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report. The following will be carried out in a theme synthesis manner, as depicted in Figure 3, which lists numerous procedures for carrying it out and uses a comprehensive analysis of 21st-century leadership to explain the procedure and result of this method.

Research Paradigm

The study will have to undergo three stages of synthesizing the themes, namely, input, process and the output. The research paradigm must be followed thoroughly not only to accomplish the aims and objectives of the study but to ensure the reliability and validity of the results as shown in Figure 3. It is satisfied by IPO model as explained in Figure 3.

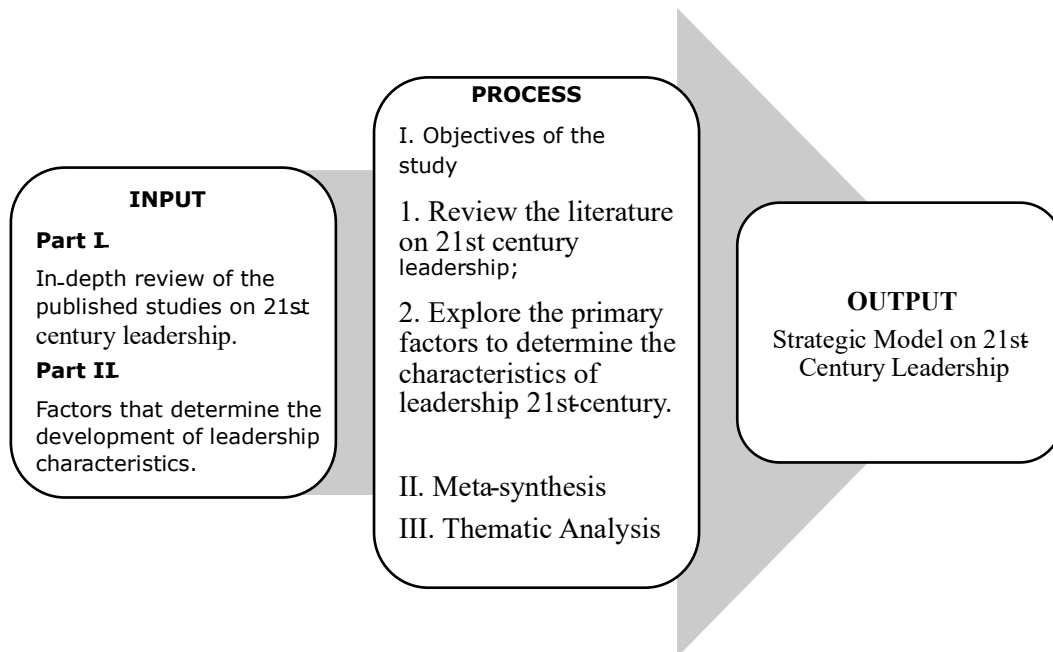
Input. The study will have an in-depth analysis of the published studies on 21st century leadership and examine the factors that determine the development of 21st century school leadership traits and characteristics.

Process. After the data compilation, the process of theme development will be conducted using the questions based on the objectives of the study, namely, 1. Review of Literature on the 21st century school leadership 2) Primary factors determining the characteristics of the 21st century leadership. Meta-synthesis and thematic analysis will then be conducted.

Output. The last stage is the development of the strategic model of the 21st century leadership which is grounded on the studies being selected.

Figure 3

Research Paradigm Utilizing PRISMA



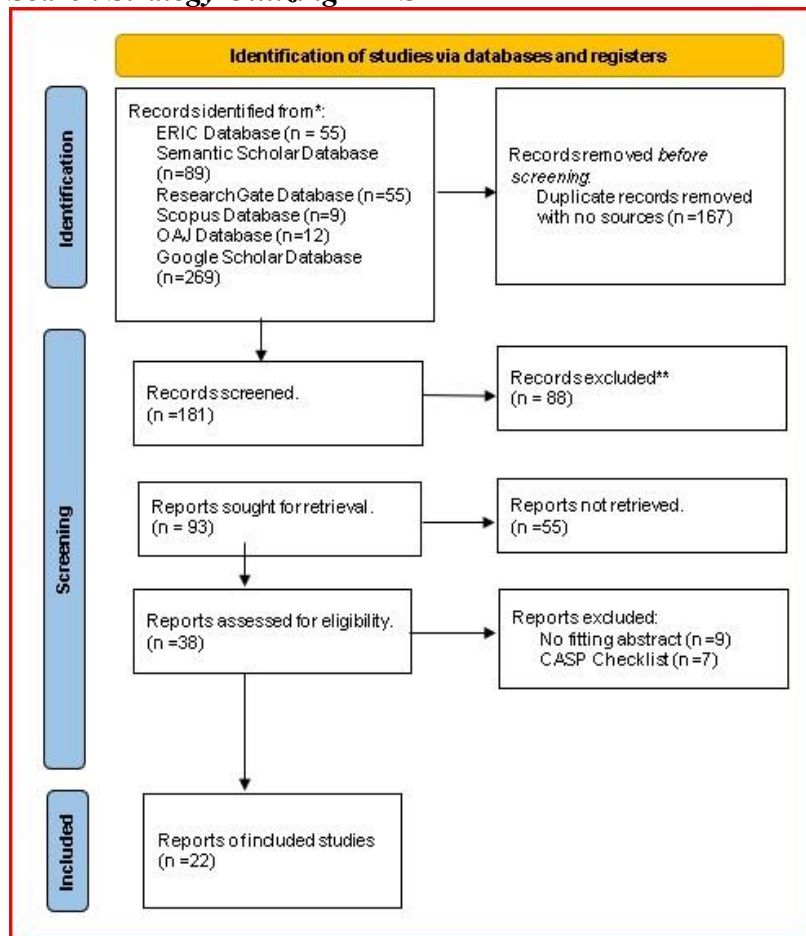
Identification, Screening and Inclusion

The PRISMA is an acronym which stands for Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Flow Diagram by Page et al. (2021). It involved three levels: identification, screening, and inclusions of articles. Figure 4 shows the search in identifying the studies included in the meta-synthesis.

There were three main stages in the systematic review process in selecting relevant articles for the present study. The first stage is the identification of keywords for the search process, second stage is the screening of articles based on several inclusion and exclusion criteria determined by the researcher and adviser, and the final stage is the identification of articles based its eligibility and inclusion. Using different databased resources, the researcher selected the following articles: Semantic Scholar Data Base, ERIC (with 89 articles included), Research Gate Database(with 55 articles included), Scopus Databased(with 9 cases included), OAJ Databased(with 12 cases included) and Google Scholar(with 269 cases were included). A total of 187 articles were removed before screening due to duplications and no records found.

In the second stage, 181 articles were screened based on several inclusion and exclusion criteria determined by the researchers. The inclusion criteria to identify the published articles for this review study are as follows: (1) the literature focus is only on published articles as they are primary sources that offers empirical data. Therefore, publications in the form of books, book chapters, conference proceedings, meta-analyses were excluded. systematic reviews, literature reviews, and meta-syntheses. Additionally, publications had to meet four requirements: (1) be published in English; (2) be published between 2014 and 2022; and (3) focus on school leadership in the twenty-first century and its influencing factors. From the initial 181 articles that were screened, a total of 88 articles were later removed based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria listed in Table 2.

Figure 4
Search Strategy Utilizing PRISMA





The final stage was the inclusion of articles for the study. The researcher gathered only 93 articles with retrieval reports; 88 articles were not included for they could no longer be retrieved from the databased sources. Out of 93 articles, only 38 were considered eligible for the study. For the final inclusion list, there were only 22 articles were considered final; the other articles were excluded because they did not have suitable abstracts, as per the CASP Checklist.

Findings and Discussion:

Primary Factors that Determine the Development of 21st-Century School Leadership Characteristics

In the rapidly evolving landscape of the 21st century, the characteristics of effective leadership play a pivotal role in guiding organizations and communities toward success. Understanding the primary factors that shape these characteristics is essential for individuals and organizations striving to thrive in this dynamic environment. By exploring the key influences on 21st-century leadership, stakeholders can equip themselves with the skills, mindset, and strategies necessary to navigate challenges, foster innovation, and inspire collective achievement. An analysis of these factors provides valuable insights into how individuals can adapt and excel in a complex global context.

One significant factor influencing school leadership effectiveness is the head teacher's approach to democratic leadership. Research by Baptiste (2019) emphasizes that principals have a considerable impact on both student achievement and teacher satisfaction. A democratic leadership style, which involves teachers in decision-making processes related to school objectives, has been shown to enhance job satisfaction. For instance, a head teacher from a high-performing school noted, "I always involve my teachers in all school matters...I am always the final decision maker for all issues that do not contribute to our school's goals" (Study 1, p. 57). In contrast, principals from poorly performing schools often resort to authoritarian tactics, undermining teacher morale and satisfaction.

Innovation in school administration is also crucial in the 21st century. Mwinzi (2016) highlights the importance of a shift from traditional management approaches to more collaborative and democratic practices that foster teamwork and academic excellence. Respondents emphasized the benefits of inclusive decision-making, with one stating, "We were encouraged to embrace teamwork in our operations...such decisions are successful for they are inclusive and mutually owned" (Study 2, p. 90). This adaptability to new management styles is essential for driving school improvement and fostering a positive educational environment.

Empowering school principals is vital for enhancing school performance. Mestry (2017) asserts that many principals feel ill-prepared for their leadership roles, which can hinder their effectiveness. Professional development programs, such as the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE), equip principals with the skills needed to lead and manage schools effectively. One principal noted, "This program changed the whole school setup to become an enabling environment for effective teaching and learning" (Study 3, p. 5). Such empowerment not only improves administrative capabilities but also enhances student outcomes.

Adaptive leadership is another key practice for transforming schools. As outlined by Waheed et al. (2017), effective school leaders must demonstrate adaptive behaviors that respond to the unique challenges of their environments. For example, a principal shared her approach to fostering a collaborative school culture by asking, "What do you want to do to get this status and become a high-performing school?" (Study 4, n.p.). This highlights the importance of engaging staff in the transformation process.

Shared leadership practices also significantly influence school performance. Bahadur et al. (2017) reveal that principals who foster mutual respect and trust among teachers contribute to a positive school culture. As one principal noted, "I first tried to develop trust and confidence with the teachers so that they are comfortable sharing their problems with me" (Study 5, p. 34). This approach enhances collaboration and encourages teachers to take ownership of their roles.



Newly appointed principals face unique challenges as they strive to balance their personal and professional lives. Wieczorek and Manard (2018) highlight that without proper work-life balance, burnout can occur. For instance, one principal expressed, "I think that's the thing that I'm trying to stay on top of...maintaining my personal life outside of work" (Study 6, p. 9). Addressing these challenges is critical for sustaining effective leadership and fostering a positive school climate.

The development of 21st-century school leadership characteristics is influenced by various factors, including democratic leadership, innovation in administrative practices, empowerment of principals, adaptive leadership strategies, and the challenges faced by new leaders. Understanding these dynamics can help educational stakeholders create environments that foster effective leadership, ultimately leading to improved teacher satisfaction and student outcomes.

Instructional Leadership Development and the Experience of Neophyte School Leaders

The challenges faced by novice school leaders are increasingly significant in the context of heightened accountability for educational outcomes. Cabatac (2018) notes that these leaders often find themselves overwhelmed by their responsibilities, particularly regarding curriculum implementation. One school head expressed, "Regarding curriculum implementation, it's currently very complicated especially because it doesn't seem to align with the specialties, as to the expertise of the teachers. The lacking aspect is proper curriculum implementation" (Study 7, p. 8).

The adaptive leadership framework, as articulated by Heifetz (cited in Pak et al., 2017), offers insights into the complexities of curricular reform. Adaptive challenges highlight discrepancies between stated values and actual behaviors, showcase conflicting commitments, require addressing difficult topics, and confront issues of work avoidance.

Cabatac's study (2018) reveals critical elements of the lived experiences of neophyte school leaders in implementing the K to 12 curriculum. These include the necessity for balancing professional and private lives, community expectations for visibility and engagement, and the importance of thoughtful planning and reflection. Key themes emerged, such as the need for emerging instructional leadership, the desire for respect and dignity, and the complexities of emotional management.

To address practice-related issues and ensure alignment with standards, both technical and adaptive leadership approaches are essential. Building confidence and assertiveness is crucial for novice leaders, as assertiveness enables effective interpersonal communication and helps leaders navigate challenges in a polite yet firm manner (Sitota, 2018). One participant reflected, "I try to maintain a cool demeanor and approachable. I am not confrontational" (Study 7, p. 43).

Transformational leadership is also essential in driving school improvement. Godwin and Kabeta (2019) emphasize the role of school leaders in inspiring action and vision, while noting that many headteachers lack adequate administrative skills. They found that broken systems for overseeing teachers can lead to distractions and inefficiencies. Effective leadership styles significantly influence organizational transformation, where mutual appreciation among staff is key to fostering a productive work environment.

Recognition and professional autonomy are vital in maintaining teacher morale. Andrews (2011) highlights that teachers who receive recognition for their work are motivated to uphold high standards. Similarly, Mulford (2003) found that teachers who feel valued are more likely to stay in their positions, emphasizing the importance of a supportive school climate.

Despite some criticisms of transformational leadership for its transactional elements, many school leaders, as noted by Rehman et al. (2019), actively engage in classroom observations and implement assessment registers to monitor teacher performance. One leader stated, "I regularly take rounds and



observe teachers teaching in classrooms... I use electronic cameras through which I keep a close eye on the students' activities" (Study 9, p. 143).

Instructional and innovative leadership is emphasized in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013–2025, which stresses continuous training for school heads. Rahman et al. (2020) noted that principals who lack knowledge in instructional leadership may struggle to manage their responsibilities effectively. One senior principal observed, "If knowledge about instructional leadership was considered as least...then the principals had difficulties to manage school" (Study 10, p. 89).

Furthermore, a study by Francisco and Celon (2020) found notable differences in instructional techniques among high-value-added instructors compared to their lower-performing peers, reinforcing the significance of effective instructional practices. Some senior principals, however, expressed frustration with external pressures that hinder their capacity to lead instructional initiatives.

Ultimately, the interplay between instructional leadership practices and self-efficacy can lead to significant improvements in school performance. According to Bolman and Deal (in McBrayer et al., 2020), school leaders must engage in self-reflection to understand the impact of their leadership approaches. Leaders shape school dynamics through their beliefs, practices, and interactions.

The experiences and insights of school heads highlight the importance of passion and shared leadership in cultivating a positive working environment. Morales and Sapin (2020) discuss the various challenges faced by school principals, including administrative demands and the need for effective communication with staff. One leader articulated, "My main motivation to achieve my current position is my passion and advocacy that I can be a catalyst of change" (Study 11, p. 6299).

The role of neophyte school leaders is pivotal in driving educational change, with instructional leadership development playing a crucial role in their success. Through continuous learning and a commitment to fostering collaborative environments, school leaders can navigate the complexities of their roles and ultimately enhance the educational experience for students.

Collaboration, Communication, and Adaptability with Stakeholders as Requirements for 21st Century Leadership

Korumaz et al. (2020) emphasize the critical nature of collaboration, communication, and adaptability in 21st-century leadership. While managing change requires creativity and innovation, it often seems counterintuitive, as management traditionally focuses on maintaining the status quo. In their study, most participants described change in educational settings as a procedural process, often seen as positive. One participant noted, "Change is the process. It is the result of the process. The difference between the start point and the endpoint. Generally positive. It can happen physically and intellectually at the school. Change begins with the principals, with the guidance and collaboration of teachers" (Study 12, n.p.). This perspective highlights that effective change in schools depends significantly on collective leadership among teachers rather than on individual attributes alone. Berry et al. (2009) further assert that accomplished teachers recognize that teaching, especially in high-needs schools, is inherently collaborative and requires robust peer support.

However, managing change in educational institutions also entails confronting obstacles. Principals today must navigate complex human organizations in rapidly evolving educational and societal landscapes. As shown in Table 16, collaboration and communication with stakeholders are essential to overcoming these barriers. One principal highlighted the challenge posed by teachers' resistance to change, driven by a fear of increased workload and disruption. To address this, she organized meetings with class representatives to communicate the rationale behind changes, illustrating the need for open dialogue in mitigating resistance.



Moreover, Okogbaa (2017) underscores the role of educational institutions as socialization mechanisms that prepare learners for the 21st century, emphasizing the cultivation of literacies and survival skills essential for success in today's knowledge economy. To achieve this, teacher preparation programs must be reevaluated to better equip educators for their evolving roles. Instructional leadership, intrinsic motivation, and reward systems are vital for fostering high-performance schools. According to John and Mkulu (2020), effective school leadership significantly contributes to student success. Respondents in their study reported that their principals utilized democratic leadership styles, enhancing their job satisfaction and involvement in decision-making.

Additionally, the adaptability of school leadership has become increasingly crucial, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Beauchamp et al. (2021) documented how school leaders adapted their strategies, emphasizing shared leadership and emotional support for staff and students. As one headteacher noted, "I've learned to maybe trust my team more... I've learned to delegate more. Manage less, lead more" (Study 15, p.383). This adaptability not only addresses immediate challenges but also builds resilience within school communities.

Fostering a culture of collaboration, communication, and adaptability is essential for effective 21st-century school leadership. By promoting shared leadership, engaging stakeholders, and supporting teachers, school leaders can navigate the complexities of modern education and drive meaningful change for their students and communities.

Instructional Leaders: Impact on Teaching and Learning Processes

This case study examines the challenges faced by head teachers in their roles as instructional leaders, as outlined in Table 21. School leadership is described by Hillinger and Hosseingholizadeh in Shah et al. (2022) as the process of directing and guiding students' learning experiences while enhancing the capabilities of teachers and the community to achieve desired educational outcomes. The interviews in Study 17 revealed a lack of expertise among teachers in instructional leadership, emphasizing differing perceptions about the necessary experience and knowledge for effective leadership. One informant stated, "I faced problems in performing the role of principal because I was appointed directly as principal after completing my master's degree. So, I faced difficulties implementing policies and curriculum effectively" (Study 17, p. 34). This reflection illustrates how novice principals often learn through trial and error in their roles.

Table 21 highlights that school leaders must implement policies and plan curricula, attend training sessions, and make critical decisions to impact teaching and learning processes. Successful leadership relies on collaboration with staff, parental involvement, and the appropriate use of school resources. Jenkins (2009) notes that instructional leaders must understand classroom dynamics to address the challenges faced by educators and students effectively. Horng and Loeb (2010) further argue that school leaders influence classroom teaching and student learning by hiring effective teachers and fostering conducive teaching environments.

The complexities of school leadership have intensified due to the pandemic, as highlighted by Eslaban (2022) in Table 22. School heads must navigate new norms, such as following safety protocols and adapting to rapid changes in instruction. These leaders have focused on building relationships, providing technical assistance, and fostering professional development among staff, which ultimately improves student achievement. One teacher noted, "The mode of delivery of my instruction is a combination of face-to-face and virtual depending upon the situation since the number of teachers is just manageable" (Study 18, p. 61).

Furthermore, the role of instructional leaders is to draw lessons from both successes and failures to prepare for future challenges, as discussed by Brock et al. (2021). Faculty development programs, including seminars and workshops, are essential for improving teaching practices. One participant indicated plans for ongoing professional growth through training initiatives (Study 18, p. 71). This aligns with Hamilton et al. (2020), who found that teachers in urban areas reported receiving more training in



distance learning, highlighting the need for ongoing professional development, especially for those teaching vulnerable populations.

Nalla and Camaya (2023) explore the importance of collaboration with stakeholders to enhance school improvement. Their study emphasizes the need for novice school heads to seek mentorship and engage in personal and professional development. The findings resonate with Arrieta and Ancho (2020), who identified common challenges faced by novice leaders, such as managing paperwork and adhering to protocols.

Lastly, the importance of fostering strong relationships with parents and the community is critical for educational success. The theory of action presented in the study by Hannah et al. (2019) demonstrates how communication with parents builds trust and compliance. It is essential for schools to engage parents actively, as their involvement significantly impacts students' academic performance. Effective instructional leadership not only nurtures a culture of continuous learning but also addresses the diverse needs of the school community.

The insights gleaned from this case study underscore the multifaceted role of instructional leaders in shaping educational outcomes. These leaders must balance their responsibilities, engage stakeholders, and continuously seek professional development opportunities to foster a thriving learning environment.

Conclusion:

The development of 21st-century school leadership characteristics is fundamentally shaped by a multitude of interrelated factors, including democratic leadership styles, innovative administrative practices, and the empowerment of school principals. This study highlights the importance of adaptive leadership as school leaders face the complexities of modern educational environments, necessitating collaboration, effective communication, and a deep understanding of the unique challenges confronting both novice and experienced leaders.

The findings indicate that fostering a culture of shared leadership is paramount for driving school improvement, enhancing teacher satisfaction, and ultimately improving student outcomes. Leaders who prioritize inclusivity in decision-making processes cultivate a sense of ownership among their staff, thereby promoting a positive school climate. Moreover, the significance of ongoing professional development cannot be overstated, as it equips leaders with the necessary skills and confidence to navigate the demands of their roles effectively.

The experiences of head teachers underscore the necessity of balancing instructional leadership with emotional intelligence, as the ability to engage and inspire staff is crucial in fostering resilience during challenging times, such as those brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. As educational landscapes continue to evolve, school leaders must embrace adaptability and creativity in their approaches to leadership, ensuring that they remain responsive to the needs of their communities.

Ultimately, this study serves as a call to action for educational stakeholders to invest in the development of effective leadership practices, recognizing that strong, innovative, and collaborative leadership is vital for shaping the future of education. By cultivating the characteristics of effective 21st-century leaders, schools can better prepare students for success in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

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