



Collaborative Leadership for Effective Literacy and Numeracy Reform

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Renith S. Guanzon, LPT, PhD (EdM), PhD (ScEd-Math)

SGS PhD Program Head, STI West Negros University, Bacolod City, Philippines

Osias Kit T. Kilag

Vice-President for Academic Affairs, PAU Excellencia Global Academy Foundation, Inc., Toledo City, Cebu, Philippines

Gamaliel A. Longa, PhD

Library Automation Technologist, King Abdulaziz Medical City, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Romel D. Maculada, PhD

Teacher III, San Enrique National High School, San Enrique, Negros Occidental

Janith S. Fuentesbella, LPT, MAEd

Teacher III, Inocencio V. Ferrer Memorial School of Fisheries, Talisay City, Negros Occidental

Ma. Marne J. Dumdum

Current Position: Assistant Prof VI, STI West Negros University, Burgos St., Bacolod City, Philippines

Abstract

This paper explores the critical role of strategic leadership in large-scale literacy and numeracy reform, focusing on the intersection of instructional improvement and collaborative leadership. By analyzing literature and case studies from countries that have successfully implemented reform initiatives, the study identifies key leadership practices that significantly impact educational outcomes. The findings emphasize the necessity of clear goal-setting, active stakeholder engagement, and the delicate balance between maintaining instructional quality and meeting external accountability demands. Effective leaders foster collaboration among educators, parents, and policymakers to create a supportive environment that drives reform efforts. This paper outlines the challenges that educational leaders face in enacting sustainable reform, such as resistance to change and the pressures of accountability measures. To address these challenges, the paper offers practical recommendations for educational leaders, including the need for ongoing professional development, adaptive leadership strategies, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. By implementing these strategies, educational leaders can enhance literacy and numeracy outcomes and contribute to the overall success of their reform initiatives.

Keywords: Strategic Leadership, Literacy and Numeracy Reform, Instructional Improvement, Collaborative Leadership

Introduction

The education sector continually grapples with the challenge of improving literacy and numeracy levels, recognizing their significance in fostering lifelong learning and active social participation. Leaders in education play a pivotal role in driving large-scale reforms, ensuring students achieve these essential skills.

Effective strategic leadership is necessary to align school practices with national or local policies, enabling education systems to address persistent challenges and improve student outcomes (Abendan et al., 2023). Without such alignment, efforts to enhance literacy and numeracy remain fragmented and ineffective.

Literacy and numeracy serve as foundational skills for academic success, supporting students in mastering various subjects across the curriculum (Ondog & Kilag, 2023). However, despite their importance, many reform initiatives encounter difficulties due to inconsistent implementation, resistance from stakeholders, and an overemphasis on performance metrics rather than holistic educational goals (Leithwood et al., 2004). Addressing these issues requires a leadership approach that goes beyond administrative functions to cultivate a shared sense of ownership and a focus on instructional improvements.

Strategic leadership, with its emphasis on fostering collaboration and aligning educational activities with reform objectives, has become a critical factor in the successful implementation of literacy and numeracy programs (Reyes, 2023).

Leaders must carefully manage change, leveraging innovative practices that promote student engagement while building teacher capacity through professional development (Kilag & Sasan, 2023). These efforts contribute to creating a sustainable culture of improvement within educational institutions.

This paper explores the theoretical underpinnings of strategic leadership and examines its practical applications in literacy and numeracy reform. Drawing on frameworks such as Fullan's (2007) change theory, the study highlights



the importance of continuous improvement processes that empower educators and encourage stakeholder involvement. By analyzing case studies of successful reforms, the paper identifies key leadership strategies that can help overcome common obstacles in implementing change.

Among the recurring challenges in educational reform are the need for clear communication, the alignment of policies with classroom practices, and the capacity to sustain improvements over time (Hargreaves & Fink, 2012). Leaders must be prepared to address these challenges proactively, developing long-term plans that ensure reforms are adaptable to shifting educational needs (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978). Strategic leadership plays a vital role in monitoring progress, evaluating outcomes, and maintaining stakeholder commitment throughout the reform process.

The success of literacy and numeracy reforms depends on the ability of educational leaders to balance innovation with accountability, ensuring that students receive the support needed to develop essential skills (Schleicher, 2012).

This paper provides recommendations for leaders on how to navigate the complexities of reform while fostering sustainable improvements in teaching and learning. Through strategic leadership, education systems can create meaningful changes that enhance student performance and prepare learners for the demands of the future.

Literature Review

The integration of literacy and numeracy reform in educational settings is critical in fostering student achievement and long-term development. Educational leadership, instructional strategies, and innovation have been widely explored as key elements that contribute to successful reforms. This literature review synthesizes studies that examine the role of strategic leadership, innovative educational practices, and effective implementation of literacy and numeracy interventions.

Leadership is a cornerstone of educational reforms. Leithwood et al. (2004) highlight the significance of strategic leadership, focusing on the alignment of school-level practices with large-scale reform efforts, as demonstrated by England's national literacy and numeracy strategy. According to Fullan (2007), change theory plays a crucial role in guiding school improvement by fostering stakeholder engagement and encouraging adaptability. Similarly, Robinson, Hohepa, and Lloyd (2007, 2009) emphasize that leadership impacts student outcomes by promoting instructional improvements and creating coherent learning environments.

Strategic leadership ensures sustained improvement by distributing responsibilities and building commitment among educators. Hargreaves and Fink (2012) underscore the importance of sustainable leadership that balances short-term gains with long-term growth.

Leaders must navigate challenges such as resistance to change and inconsistent policy implementation, as Berman and McLaughlin (1978) suggest. Their work outlines how innovations often fail when leadership neglects the complexities of the reform process, underscoring the need for continuous support and stakeholder collaboration. Abendan et al. (2023) explore the intersection of education and digital innovation, highlighting the transformative impact of technology on student learning. Digital tools such as multisensory structured language techniques bridge gaps in literacy interventions (Lumando et al., 2023). Similarly, the introduction of problem-based learning fosters deeper engagement in social science subjects (Groenewald et al., 2023). These innovative approaches emphasize the importance of student-centered practices that align with broader reform goals.

Furthermore, Kilag, Jimenez, et al. (2023) demonstrate how creative pedagogies such as concrete poetry enhance language proficiency among young learners, particularly in multilingual contexts. Leong (2013) also investigates the use of Geometer's Sketchpad in mathematics education, showing that technology-enabled instruction leads to improved student achievement in graph functions. These findings indicate that integrating innovative methods is essential to literacy and numeracy reform efforts.

Instructional Leadership and Teacher Development

Instructional leadership has been identified as a critical factor in improving teaching quality and promoting literacy and numeracy. Kilag and Sasan (2023) emphasize the role of instructional leaders in facilitating teacher professional development, ensuring alignment with reform objectives. Professional learning communities and mentorship programs are key to fostering continuous teacher growth and improving instructional practices.

The work of Valle et al. (2023) underscores the importance of phonological awareness and rapid automatized naming in developing early numeracy skills. This research highlights how instructional leaders can guide teachers in implementing research-based interventions to enhance student performance. Additionally, Reyes (2023) points out that leadership, partnerships, and innovation are the most crucial factors in educational reform, reinforcing the value of collaborative leadership in achieving sustainable change.



Implementing large-scale reforms often presents challenges related to policy coherence and stakeholder engagement. As Darling-Hammond (2004) discusses, educational reforms must address persistent inequalities to achieve meaningful progress. Reform efforts that focus narrowly on performance metrics risk neglecting the broader goals of student development. Ondog and Kilag (2023) advocate for a constructivist approach to early numeracy, grounded in Piaget's cognitive development theory, to ensure that reforms are developmentally appropriate and student-centered.

Kilag, Tiongzon, et al. (2023) examine high-commitment work systems and distributive leadership as strategies for enhancing employee performance, suggesting that these leadership models can mitigate challenges in reform implementation. Sustainable reforms require coordinated efforts across different levels of the education system, ensuring that policies translate effectively into classroom practices (Schleicher, 2012).

The literature emphasizes that effective leadership, innovative practices, and sustained professional development are essential to successful literacy and numeracy reform. Strategic leadership fosters coherence, while instructional leadership ensures continuous teacher growth and effective implementation.

Innovative teaching practices, particularly those integrating technology and student-centered approaches, play a crucial role in enhancing student outcomes. Despite the challenges of reform, collaborative leadership and sustained efforts offer opportunities for meaningful change. This review provides a comprehensive understanding of the elements required for advancing literacy and numeracy, serving as a foundation for further research and policy development.

Methodology

This study utilized a thematic literature review approach to analyze existing scholarship and case studies relevant to literacy and numeracy reform. Data sources included peer-reviewed articles, government reports, and educational policy documents. The research focused on identifying common themes and best practices in strategic leadership while also examining challenges encountered in real-world reforms.

A systematic search was conducted using keywords such as "strategic leadership," "educational reform," "literacy initiatives," and "numeracy programs." Studies and reports published between 2000 and 2023 were considered, ensuring a balance between seminal theories and recent innovations. Criteria for inclusion emphasized literature addressing leadership strategies in literacy and numeracy improvement and case studies highlighting both success and challenges.

A thematic analysis was employed to categorize findings into key areas: instructional leadership, stakeholder engagement, and the challenges of accountability. These themes formed the basis for the findings and discussion.

Findings and Discussion

Framework for Educational Reform

Strategic leadership plays a pivotal role in aligning educational practices with reform objectives, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Effective leaders create a shared vision that inspires educators, policymakers, and community stakeholders to work collaboratively toward common goals. This type of leadership ensures that reforms are not only planned but implemented coherently, providing clear direction and fostering collective responsibility. The success of literacy and numeracy reforms hinges on leaders' ability to guide systemic change while maintaining alignment between policies and classroom practices.

Effective educational leaders cultivate collaborative cultures that prioritize shared goals and continuous improvement. Fullan (2007) emphasizes that leadership extends beyond administrative tasks, requiring leaders to build partnerships that enhance professional collaboration among teachers. By promoting a sense of shared purpose, leaders foster an environment where educators work together to refine their teaching strategies and address challenges in implementing literacy and numeracy reforms. This collaborative approach encourages sustained efforts toward educational improvement, ensuring that initiatives gain long-term traction.

In addition to managing school operations, strategic leaders must prioritize instructional leadership. Robinson et al. (2009) argue that balancing managerial responsibilities with instructional improvement is essential for aligning teaching practices with broader educational objectives. Leaders who focus on instructional development create opportunities for teachers to improve their pedagogical skills, ultimately benefiting student outcomes. Literacy and numeracy reforms, in particular, require leaders to implement targeted interventions that strengthen students' foundational skills across all subjects.

One of the core responsibilities of strategic leaders is designing effective interventions that address gaps in literacy and numeracy. Strong leadership ensures that reform efforts are intentional and responsive to the specific needs of



students and teachers. This involves identifying best practices, such as data-driven instruction, and promoting evidence-based teaching strategies. Leaders also play a key role in monitoring the progress of reforms, ensuring that interventions remain relevant and adaptive to emerging challenges within the educational system.

Strategic leadership encourages the active participation of multiple stakeholders, including policymakers, teachers, parents, and the community. Leaders who build collective responsibility promote alignment between national reforms and school-level practices, ensuring that reforms are understood and supported by all involved. Fullan (2007) suggests that meaningful educational reform is only possible when leadership bridges the gap between vision and action, fostering trust and shared accountability among stakeholders. This collaborative effort strengthens the implementation of reforms and contributes to sustainable improvements in student outcomes.

Achieving coherence between policy goals and classroom practices is essential for the success of literacy and numeracy reforms. Leaders must navigate complex educational landscapes while fostering alignment across different levels of the system. Strategic leadership ensures that reforms remain focused and sustainable, even in the face of challenges such as resource limitations or resistance to change. Ultimately, literacy and numeracy reforms require leaders to adopt a long-term perspective, balancing immediate needs with the goal of creating lasting improvements in student achievement.

Instructional Leadership and the Reformation

Instructional leadership is at the core of successful reform efforts in education, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Effective leaders recognize that the quality of teaching directly influences student performance, and as such, they must provide teachers with the necessary resources, professional development opportunities, and ongoing support to implement effective literacy and numeracy strategies. Research by Leithwood et al. (2004) underscores the importance of leadership actions focused on improving teaching quality, demonstrating a clear correlation between these efforts and enhanced student outcomes. Instructional leaders play a critical role in creating an environment that encourages educators to develop their skills and adopt evidence-based practices in the classroom.

An exemplary case of effective instructional leadership can be observed in Ontario, Canada, where a comprehensive professional development program was established to enhance literacy instruction. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2014) emphasized targeted literacy training as a fundamental aspect of this initiative.

School principals and district leaders actively facilitated collaboration among teachers, enabling them to share best practices and implement evidence-based reading strategies. As a result, significant improvements were documented in student literacy levels across participating schools. This program highlights how hands-on leadership practices—such as classroom observations, coaching, and constructive feedback—are essential for fostering effective reform.

Furthermore, the concept of sustainable leadership is critical in supporting literacy and numeracy reforms. Hargreaves and Fink (2012) assert that sustainable leadership is characterized by a long-term vision that prioritizes not just immediate improvements, but also the ongoing development of teaching and learning practices. By focusing on sustainability, instructional leaders can ensure that changes in literacy and numeracy instruction are not merely superficial or temporary, but instead become embedded within the school culture. This requires a commitment to continuous professional development and the establishment of collaborative learning communities where teachers can engage in ongoing dialogue about effective instructional strategies.

Professional development is a key component of instructional leadership that directly impacts literacy and numeracy education. Kilag and Sasan (2023) highlight the necessity of tailored professional development programs that address the specific needs of teachers. Instructional leaders must assess the strengths and weaknesses of their staff, providing targeted training that empowers teachers to refine their instructional practices.

This personalized approach fosters a culture of growth and improvement, where educators feel supported and motivated to enhance their skills. Moreover, ongoing professional development ensures that teachers remain abreast of the latest research and innovative strategies in literacy and numeracy education.

To effectively implement literacy and numeracy strategies, instructional leaders must also embrace a data-driven approach to decision-making. Robinson et al. (2009) argue that successful school leadership involves systematically collecting and analyzing data related to student performance and instructional practices. By using data to inform their decisions, instructional leaders can identify areas for improvement, track progress over time, and make informed adjustments to their strategies. This data-centric approach not only enhances accountability but also encourages a culture of reflection and continuous improvement among educators.



Additionally, the collaboration between leaders and teachers is essential for the successful implementation of literacy and numeracy reforms. Berman and McLaughlin (1978) emphasize the importance of fostering partnerships among educators, as collaboration enhances the sharing of knowledge and resources.

Instructional leaders must create opportunities for teachers to work together, whether through professional learning communities, workshops, or collaborative planning sessions. This collaborative framework not only supports the implementation of evidence-based practices but also builds a sense of collective responsibility for student outcomes, reinforcing the notion that every educator plays a vital role in fostering literacy and numeracy skills among students.

Instructional leadership is a fundamental element of effective reform efforts in literacy and numeracy education. By providing teachers with the necessary resources, professional development opportunities, and collaborative support, instructional leaders can create an environment conducive to successful implementation of evidence-based practices. The case of Ontario's targeted literacy training program exemplifies how strategic leadership practices can lead to significant improvements in student performance. Moreover, focusing on sustainable leadership, data-driven decision-making, and fostering collaboration among educators further enhances the effectiveness of literacy and numeracy reforms. As educational systems continue to evolve, the role of instructional leadership remains vital in ensuring that all students achieve foundational literacy and numeracy skills essential for their academic success.

Educational Leader and the Stakeholders

Engaging stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and policymakers, is a fundamental aspect of strategic leadership in educational reform. Effective reform efforts often necessitate the establishment of partnerships that span various levels of the education system. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) emphasize that collaboration among stakeholders not only builds trust but also ensures that reform initiatives are responsive to the unique needs of local communities. By fostering a sense of shared responsibility and ownership among all parties involved, leaders can create a more inclusive and effective reform process.

A compelling example of successful stakeholder engagement can be found in South Africa's literacy initiative, where district leaders actively collaborated with parents to promote home-based literacy activities. This initiative aimed to create a supportive environment for students, encouraging literacy development beyond the classroom. According to the Department of Basic Education (2017), engaging parents in their children's education helped to reinforce the value of literacy at home, leading to improved student outcomes. By involving families in the educational process, district leaders not only enhanced the support system for students but also cultivated a sense of community investment in the literacy reform.

Strategic leadership in this context involved empowering both educators and families to take ownership of the reform process. By providing teachers with the necessary resources and training, leaders enabled them to implement effective literacy strategies in their classrooms. Additionally, leaders organized workshops and informational sessions for parents, equipping them with tools and techniques to support their children's literacy development at home. This collaborative approach ensured that all stakeholders were not only informed but also actively involved in fostering a culture of literacy, ultimately contributing to sustained gains in student achievement.

Moreover, successful stakeholder engagement extends beyond immediate participants in the education system. Policymakers play a crucial role in shaping the broader framework for educational reform. Leaders must engage with policymakers to advocate for policies that support and sustain reform efforts. By presenting data and evidence of successful initiatives, educational leaders can influence policy decisions that align with the needs of schools and communities. This advocacy fosters a collaborative relationship between educational leaders and policymakers, ensuring that reform efforts are supported at all levels of government.

Effective communication is another essential component of stakeholder engagement. Leaders must be transparent in their intentions and goals, providing regular updates on the progress of reform initiatives. Open lines of communication foster trust and encourage stakeholders to share their perspectives and insights. By creating forums for dialogue, leaders can gather valuable feedback from teachers, parents, and community members, which can be used to refine and enhance reform strategies. This ongoing conversation ensures that reforms remain relevant and effective in addressing the needs of the community.

Additionally, the involvement of diverse stakeholders enriches the reform process by bringing a variety of perspectives and experiences to the table. Teachers provide insights into classroom dynamics and student needs, while parents can offer valuable information about the home environment and community expectations. Policymakers contribute a broader understanding of systemic challenges and opportunities. By harnessing this collective knowledge, educational leaders can develop more comprehensive and nuanced reform strategies that effectively address the multifaceted nature of educational challenges.



Stakeholder engagement is a critical element of strategic leadership in educational reform. By fostering collaboration among teachers, parents, and policymakers, leaders can build trust and ensure that reforms are responsive to the specific needs of local communities. The South African literacy initiative exemplifies how engaging stakeholders can create a supportive environment for students and lead to sustained improvements in literacy outcomes. Through effective communication and the inclusion of diverse perspectives, educational leaders can enhance the reform process and create a more inclusive educational system that ultimately benefits all students.

Literacy and Numeracy Challenges

Despite numerous successes, strategic leaders face significant challenges when implementing large-scale literacy and numeracy reforms. One of the most common obstacles is resistance to change. Educators and other stakeholders may exhibit reluctance towards new approaches, often stemming from uncertainty or fear of an increased workload. This resistance can manifest in various forms, from passive non-compliance to active opposition, making it essential for leaders to navigate these dynamics thoughtfully. As Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) suggest, leaders must strike a delicate balance between maintaining stability and promoting innovation. This balance is crucial in ensuring that educators feel supported while being encouraged to embrace new methods. Another major challenge involves the tension between accountability measures and holistic learning. While standardized testing can provide valuable data on student performance, an over-reliance on these assessments can narrow the focus to test preparation, often at the expense of deeper learning experiences (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Leaders must carefully manage these competing demands, fostering a culture of continuous improvement while ensuring compliance with accountability requirements. This challenge requires a nuanced understanding of how to leverage assessment data to inform instruction without allowing it to dominate the educational landscape.

To address these challenges effectively, strategic leaders must engage in active communication with stakeholders. Transparency is vital in building trust and alleviating fears associated with change. Regular updates about reform initiatives, clear explanations of the benefits of new practices, and opportunities for feedback can help to ease concerns among educators and other stakeholders.

Moreover, by actively involving teachers in the decision-making process and encouraging their input, leaders can foster a sense of ownership that mitigates resistance to change. When teachers feel that their voices are heard and valued, they are more likely to embrace new approaches and contribute positively to the reform efforts.

Professional development also plays a critical role in overcoming resistance and ensuring successful implementation of literacy and numeracy reforms. According to Berman and McLaughlin (1978), providing educators with targeted training that equips them with the skills and knowledge necessary for effective instruction is essential. This training should not only focus on content knowledge but also on pedagogical strategies that promote engagement and critical thinking among students. For instance, initiatives that incorporate problem-based learning, as discussed by Groenewald et al. (2023), can empower teachers to adopt innovative practices that foster deeper understanding and application of literacy and numeracy skills.

Furthermore, the need for collaboration among various stakeholders cannot be overstated. Engaging parents, community members, and policymakers is essential for creating a supportive environment for reform. For example, initiatives that involve parents in literacy activities, such as reading programs or workshops, have been shown to enhance student outcomes by reinforcing learning at home. Strategic leaders must prioritize building partnerships with these stakeholders to create a comprehensive support system that benefits students and educators alike.

Moreover, leaders must remain adaptable and responsive to feedback from the ground level. Continuous evaluation of reform efforts is crucial for identifying areas for improvement and making necessary adjustments. As educational contexts evolve, so too must the strategies employed to facilitate literacy and numeracy development.

Leaders should foster a culture of reflection and inquiry among educators, encouraging them to assess the effectiveness of their practices and share insights with their peers. This iterative approach to reform ensures that strategies remain relevant and effective in meeting the diverse needs of students.

While strategic leadership in literacy and numeracy reform is fraught with challenges, these obstacles can be addressed through a combination of effective communication, professional development, stakeholder engagement, and adaptability. By understanding the complexities of resistance to change and the interplay between accountability and holistic learning, leaders can navigate the reform landscape more effectively. Ultimately, fostering a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement will enhance the likelihood of successful outcomes, ensuring that all students receive the high-quality education they deserve. As the educational landscape continues to evolve, strategic leaders must remain committed to refining their approaches and addressing the challenges that arise, paving the way for meaningful and lasting change in literacy and numeracy education.



Conclusion

Strategic leadership plays a crucial role in the success of literacy and numeracy reforms. Leaders who actively engage stakeholders, prioritize instructional improvement, and maintain a balance between innovation and stability are more likely to achieve lasting educational change.

Effective leaders understand that involving teachers, parents, and community members fosters a collaborative environment where diverse perspectives can inform and enrich reform efforts. By building trust and transparency, leaders can mitigate resistance to change, ensuring that all stakeholders are invested in the process.

One of the significant challenges leaders face is the pressure of accountability measures, which can create a narrow focus on standardized testing at the expense of deeper learning experiences. However, effective leaders navigate these complexities by employing adaptive strategies that foster a culture of continuous improvement.

They understand the importance of professional development, providing educators with the tools and training necessary to enhance instructional practices. By encouraging innovative teaching methods and promoting problem-based learning, leaders can create engaging learning environments that strengthen foundational skills in literacy and numeracy.

Furthermore, strategic leaders recognize that reforms must be responsive to the unique needs of their educational contexts. By conducting regular evaluations and soliciting feedback from educators and students, leaders can make informed adjustments to reform initiatives, ensuring they remain relevant and effective. This iterative approach not only enhances student outcomes but also cultivates a sense of ownership among educators, empowering them to contribute actively to the reform process.

Strategic leadership in literacy and numeracy reform not only enhances individual learning but also promotes broader societal progress. By equipping students with essential skills for the future, effective leaders prepare them to navigate an increasingly complex world. As educational leaders and policymakers apply these insights, they can design more effective reforms that lay the foundation for improved student outcomes, fostering a generation of learners equipped for success.

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