

PROGRAM HEADS' LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IN IMPLEMENTING INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION MODELS

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Abstract

Instructional supervision plays a critical role in enhancing teaching quality and improving student learning outcomes in higher education. In tertiary institutions, program heads serve as key instructional leaders responsible for mentoring, evaluating, and guiding faculty members.

This study explored the lived experiences of program heads in implementing instructional supervision models in private higher education institutions in Davao City. Using a qualitative phenomenological design anchored in Husserlian phenomenology, the research examined how program heads perceive and enact their supervisory leadership roles. Ten program heads with at least three years of supervisory experience were purposively selected. Data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews and analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step phenomenological method.

Findings revealed four major themes: guiding and supporting responsibility, instructional guidelines as strategic anchors, leadership as a strategic and transformational function, and standard leadership and accountability. Program heads described instructional supervision as a relational and developmental practice centered on mentoring, collaborative dialogue, and continuous improvement of teaching practices. However, they also reported challenges such as administrative workload, faculty resistance, policy constraints, and limited resources.

The study highlights that effective instructional supervision extends beyond compliance monitoring and is deeply shaped by leadership philosophy, institutional culture, and systemic conditions. Strengthening leadership development programs, mentoring frameworks, and institutional support mechanisms is recommended to enhance supervisory effectiveness and sustain instructional quality in higher education.

Keywords: instructional supervision, instructional leadership, program heads, phenomenology, higher education, teacher development

INTRODUCTION

Instructional supervision remains one of the most influential mechanisms for improving teaching quality and strengthening student learning outcomes in higher education institutions. In the Philippine tertiary context, program heads occupy a critical leadership position where they function not only as administrators but also as instructional leaders responsible for mentoring, evaluating, and guiding faculty members. Their lived experiences in implementing instructional supervision models shape the effectiveness of academic programs and ultimately influence institutional performance.

Globally, instructional leadership has shifted from a compliance-oriented monitoring system to a developmental and collaborative approach. Contemporary supervision models emphasize coaching, reflective dialogue, professional learning communities, and data-informed decision-making. However, in practice, program heads often navigate competing demands—administrative workload, faculty resistance, policy constraints, resource limitations, and institutional expectations.

Despite increasing scholarship on instructional supervision, limited empirical work explores how program heads themselves experience and interpret their leadership roles in implementing these models. Understanding their lived experiences is essential because leadership practice is not merely procedural—it is relational, contextual, and deeply shaped by personal beliefs and institutional culture.

This study investigates the lived experiences of program heads in tertiary private institutions in Davao City as they implement instructional supervision models. Anchored in the Integrated Theoretical Model on Instructional Supervision and Teacher Performance (Akpalu et al., 2025), the study explores how supervision practices, leadership functions, and systemic constraints intersect in real educational settings.

Specifically, this study seeks to answer:

1. How do program heads experience and perceive their leadership role in implementing instructional supervision models?
2. What leadership practices do they identify as central to instructional supervision?
3. How do they make decisions when supervising and supporting teachers?
4. What challenges do they encounter in fulfilling instructional leadership responsibilities?
5. How do they perceive their influence on teaching quality and teacher development?
6. What internal beliefs and external factors shape their supervisory approaches?

By foregrounding the voices of program heads, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of instructional supervision as lived leadership practice rather than a purely administrative function.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the essence of program heads' lived experiences in implementing instructional supervision models. Phenomenology was selected because it allows an in-depth examination of participants' subjective interpretations, meanings, and leadership realities.

The study followed Husserlian phenomenological principles, particularly the process of bracketing to minimize researcher bias. Colaizzi's method guided the systematic analysis of lived experiences.

Participants and Sampling

The participants consisted of ten (10) program heads from private higher education institutions in Davao City.

Inclusion criteria:

- Currently serving as program head, dean, or department chair
- Minimum of three (3) years in instructional supervisory role
- Direct involvement in mentoring, observing, or evaluating faculty
- Willingness to participate in an in-depth interview

Purposive sampling was used to ensure participants possessed rich, relevant supervisory experiences.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Each interview:

- Lasted approximately 45–60 minutes
- Was audio-recorded with consent
- Was transcribed verbatim

Field notes were maintained to document non-verbal cues and contextual observations.

Data Analysis

Colaizzi's seven-step phenomenological method was applied:

1. Familiarization with transcripts
2. Extraction of significant statements
3. Formulation of meanings
4. Clustering into themes
5. Exhaustive description development
6. Identification of fundamental structure
7. Member checking for validation

Trustworthiness

The study ensured rigor through:

- **Credibility:** Member checking and prolonged engagement
- **Dependability:** Audit trail documentation
- **Confirmability:** Reflexive journaling and bracketing
- **Transferability:** Thick description of context

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Institutional Research Ethics Board prior to the conduct of data collection. The research strictly adhered to established ethical standards for qualitative research involving human participants. All prospective participants were provided with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, potential benefits, and their rights as research participants.

Informed consent was obtained from each participant before the interviews were conducted. Participants voluntarily agreed to participate and were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative

consequences. Permission was also obtained for audio recording during the interviews to ensure accurate data capture and transcription.

To ensure confidentiality and protect participants' identities, pseudonyms and coded identifiers were used in all transcripts, analyses, and research reports. No personally identifiable information was disclosed in any part of the study. All collected data, including audio recordings and interview transcripts, were securely stored in password-protected digital files accessible only to the researcher. The data will be retained for research documentation purposes and will be securely disposed of following institutional guidelines.

Throughout the research process, the researcher-maintained respect for participants' dignity, perspectives, and professional experiences to ensure ethical integrity and trustworthiness of the study.

RESULTS

The analysis yielded four major thematic structures regarding program heads' lived experiences in implementing instructional supervision models.

Theme 1: Guiding and Supporting Responsibility

Participants consistently described instructional supervision as a relational responsibility centered on mentoring and professional growth.

Program heads perceived themselves as:

- Coaches rather than inspectors
- Facilitators of curriculum alignment
- Advocates for faculty development
- Builders of continuous improvement culture

They emphasized balancing administrative demands with interpersonal support. Supervision was described as both a professional duty and a personal mission.

A dominant insight was the need to institutionalize structured mentoring and evidence-based feedback to foster instructional growth.

Theme 2: Instructional Guidelines as Strategic Anchors

Participants viewed supervision as grounded in institutional standards, curriculum alignment, and learning outcomes.

They identified key practices:

- Classroom observation
- Constructive feedback cycles
- Collaborative planning
- Monitoring compliance with academic standards

Supervision extended beyond observation to reflective dialogue and collaborative refinement of teaching strategies.

Program heads emphasized alignment with national standards and outcome-based education frameworks.

Theme 3: Leadership as Strategic and Transformational Function

Leadership was described as both administrative and transformational.

Participants articulated three dimensions:

1. Administrative coordination
2. Instructional facilitation
3. Strategic influence on teaching quality

They highlighted:

- Balancing policy enforcement with empathy
- Contextualizing supervision based on teacher needs
- Acting as mentors and quality assurance officers

Leadership was not viewed as positional authority alone, but as strategic influence on academic culture.

Theme 4: Standard Leadership and Accountability

Participants identified accountability as integral to instructional supervision.

They described:

- Continuous dialogue
- Performance monitoring
- Structured professional development
- Cultivating reflective teaching culture

Some acknowledged time constraints and bureaucratic pressures as barriers to effective supervision.

Corollary Themes

Additional thematic clusters emerged:

- Decision-making guided by data, experience, and institutional policy
- Challenges including workload, faculty resistance, generational differences, and technology integration
- Perceived impact on teaching quality through coaching, mentoring, and professional development
- Internal beliefs emphasizing student-centeredness and teacher growth
- External influences including policy mandates, institutional culture, and accreditation standards.

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that instructional supervision, as experienced by program heads, is fundamentally relational, developmental, and context dependent.

First, supervision is understood not merely as compliance monitoring but as professional mentorship. This aligns with contemporary instructional leadership models emphasizing coaching over inspection.

Second, the duality of administrative and transformational leadership emerged strongly. Program heads navigate structural constraints while striving to foster innovation and collaboration.

Third, systemic barriers—time limitations, policy rigidity, and resource constraints—continue to shape supervisory effectiveness. This supports prior research indicating that instructional leadership is often constrained by institutional bureaucracy.

Fourth, internal belief systems significantly influence supervisory approaches. Program heads who view supervision as empowerment tend to adopt collaborative strategies, whereas compliance-driven environments may reinforce directive models.

Finally, the study underscores the importance of trust and relational capital in instructional supervision. Effective supervision thrives where professional dialogue, shared vision, and mutual respect are cultivated.

CONCLUSION

Program heads experience instructional supervision as a multifaceted leadership responsibility that integrates mentorship, accountability, strategic planning, and institutional alignment.

Their lived experiences reveal:

- A shift from inspection to developmental supervision
- The necessity of balancing administrative and instructional roles
- The critical role of relational leadership
- Persistent systemic constraints
- The influence of personal leadership philosophy

Instructional supervision, when implemented with strategic intent and relational depth, becomes a powerful mechanism for enhancing teaching quality and sustaining institutional excellence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop structured mentoring frameworks for program heads.
2. Institutionalize reflective supervision models.
3. Provide workload support to allow meaningful supervision.
4. Strengthen leadership development programs.
5. Conduct longitudinal studies linking supervision to student outcomes

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