



Influence Of School Leadership On Teachers' Instructional Practices In Primary Schools In District Poonch Azad Kashmir

Adeel Iftikhar Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Poonch Rawalakot (UPR). dradeeliftikhar@upr.edu.pk

Abstract

This study examined the influence of school leadership on teachers' instructional practices in primary schools across District Poonch, Azad Kashmir. Using a quantitative descriptive survey design, data were collected from 180 primary school teachers through a structured questionnaire adapted from established leadership and instructional practice scales. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression modeling were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that school leadership practices, including defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, promoting a positive school climate, and supporting teacher development, were perceived at high levels. Teachers also reported strong performance in lesson planning, classroom management, and assessment, though moderate levels were observed in innovative teaching strategies and engagement techniques. Correlation results showed a strong positive relationship between leadership practices and instructional behaviors, while regression analysis indicated that leadership significantly predicted 40% of the variance in instructional practices. These results highlight the substantial role of school leadership in shaping teaching quality in primary schools. The study concludes that strengthening leadership competencies, professional development systems, and collaborative school cultures is essential for improving instructional effectiveness in District Poonch. The findings contribute to the growing body of evidence emphasizing leadership as a critical factor for improving teaching and learning outcomes in developing educational contexts.

Keywords: School Leadership; Instructional Practices; Teacher Performance; Primary Schools.

INTRODUCTION

School leadership plays a central role in shaping teachers' instructional practices and ultimately determining the quality of education provided to learners. In primary schools, where foundational skills and early learning habits are established, leadership effectiveness becomes even more critical. Globally, leadership is increasingly recognized as a major determinant of teacher performance, school improvement, and student achievement (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). Effective school leaders create supportive environments, guide instructional planning, foster professional development, and cultivate a school culture that encourages innovation and continuous improvement in teaching practices (Day et al., 2009). In developing contexts, including South Asia, leadership practices significantly influence teachers' motivation, instructional behavior, and classroom performance due to resource limitations and structural challenges (Bajaj, 2011). Instructional practices refer to the strategies, methods, and techniques teachers use to facilitate student learning. Research has shown that strong leadership enhances teachers'

pedagogical approaches by promoting collaboration, providing instructional guidance, and ensuring accountability (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Leaders who engage in instructional leadership—such as monitoring teaching, using data to inform decisions, and offering constructive feedback—positively affect classroom instruction and student outcomes. Hallinger (2011) emphasizes that leadership influences teaching more indirectly than directly, often through shaping school goals, professional learning communities, and teacher expectations. Therefore, leadership effectiveness is essential for improving instructional quality, especially in primary schools where students' learning foundations are built.

In Pakistan, the role of school leadership has gained growing attention due to concerns over the quality of education, teacher performance, and student learning outcomes. Studies indicate that leadership practices in many schools remain traditional, administrative, and compliance-oriented, with limited focus on instructional improvement (Shah, 2014). Rural and semi-urban regions such as Azad Kashmir face additional challenges including insufficient training, lack of professional development opportunities, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms (Awan, 2018). These constraints often hinder teachers from adopting effective instructional strategies, making school leadership a critical factor in shaping teaching practices. Effective leaders in such contexts can foster professional support, encourage innovation, and mitigate systemic challenges by providing instructional direction and creating conducive learning environments (Khaki, 2010). District Poonch, a geographically diverse and educationally important district of Azad Kashmir, presents a unique context in which to examine the influence of school leadership on teachers' instructional practices at the primary level. Many schools in the district operate in challenging conditions, with limited resources and insufficient training opportunities. In such an environment, school leaders serve as key agents in motivating teachers, enhancing instructional quality, and improving overall school performance. However, empirical research focusing specifically on leadership influences in primary schools in District Poonch remains limited. This gap highlights the need for a systematic investigation into how leadership practices shape instructional behavior in this region.

This study aims to explore the influence of school leadership on teachers' instructional practices in primary schools in District Poonch, Azad Kashmir. By examining leadership behaviors and their relationship with instructional practices, the study seeks to provide insights that can support policy development, leadership training, and improvement of teaching quality at the primary level. Understanding these dynamics is vital for strengthening early-grade education and ensuring long-term academic success for students in the region.

LITERATURE REVIEW

School leadership has been widely recognized as a critical factor shaping teachers' instructional practices, influencing classroom effectiveness, and contributing to student learning outcomes. Over the past decades, researchers have emphasized that school leaders affect teaching indirectly by establishing goals, promoting professional development, providing instructional guidance, and shaping the school environment (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). Leadership fosters conditions that enable teachers to adopt innovative

pedagogies and continuously improve their instructional strategies. Effective leaders create a shared vision, encourage collaboration, and support teachers through feedback and coaching, all of which contribute to improved instructional quality (Day et al., 2009). In primary schools, where teaching practices greatly affect children's foundational learning, leadership influence becomes particularly significant. Research in instructional leadership shows that effective principals focus on curriculum coordination, classroom supervision, and teacher support. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) found that instructional leadership has a stronger impact on student outcomes compared to transformational leadership because it emphasizes direct engagement with teaching and learning processes. Leaders who regularly observe classrooms, provide constructive feedback, and monitor student progress help align teaching practices with learning objectives. Hallinger (2011) argued that instructional leadership shapes teachers' behavior by promoting a learning-centered environment, setting high expectations, and ensuring consistent instructional quality. Studies from different educational contexts show that teachers working under supportive and instructionally active leaders demonstrate higher levels of commitment, better teaching strategies, and more positive attitudes towards professional growth (Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 2010).

Transformational leadership also plays an essential role in influencing instructional practices. Transformational leaders inspire teachers by fostering trust, encouraging innovation, and empowering them to take ownership of their instructional decisions. Research suggests that transformational leadership enhances teachers' motivation, self-efficacy, and willingness to adopt new instructional approaches (Marks & Printy, 2003). Leaders who build collaborative cultures and value teacher autonomy are more likely to see improvements in instructional performance. In primary schools, this leadership style is particularly important because young learners benefit from teachers who are motivated, creative, and committed to child-centered pedagogy. Transformational leadership thus contributes indirectly to improved instructional quality through enhanced teacher morale and professional agency (Nguni, Slegers, & Denessen, 2006). The importance of professional learning communities (PLCs) has also been emphasized in recent literature. Effective school leaders promote PLCs by encouraging teachers to collaborate, reflect on their instructional practices, and learn from one another. Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) found that PLCs facilitated by strong leadership lead to improved classroom instruction and student achievement. Regular collaboration helps teachers refine instructional strategies, analyze student performance, and adopt evidence-based methods. Leadership that supports professional learning creates a sustained culture of instructional improvement. In primary schools, PLCs enhance teachers' understanding of child development, effective teaching approaches, and differentiated instruction, all of which improve early-grade learning outcomes.

In developing contexts, leadership influence on instructional practices is shaped by structural and contextual challenges. Studies conducted in South Asian countries have shown that leadership in public schools often remains administrative and compliance-based rather than instructional (Shah, 2014). Many leaders lack formal training in instructional leadership and professional development planning (Awan, 2018). Resource limitations, overcrowded classrooms, and limited supervision mechanisms further weaken instructional

practices. However, research also indicates that even in resource-constrained settings, effective leadership can make a significant difference by motivating teachers, providing guidance, and fostering supportive environments (Khaki, 2010). Leaders who emphasize instructional supervision and teacher development contribute to improved teaching practices despite contextual challenges. In Pakistan, studies show that school leadership significantly affects teachers' instructional behavior, lesson planning, assessment practices, and classroom management (Bajwa & Jamil, 2019). Leaders who demonstrate strong interpersonal skills, promote collaborative learning, and encourage reflective teaching positively influence teacher performance. Primary schools in regions such as Azad Kashmir face unique challenges, including geographical constraints and limited professional development opportunities. Despite these challenges, effective leadership can shape instructional behavior by promoting teacher motivation, peer support, and a culture of accountability. The lack of empirical studies specifically focusing on District Poonch highlights the need to investigate how leadership practices are influencing instructional quality in this region's primary schools.

School leadership, whether instructional or transformational, plays a crucial role in improving teachers' instructional practices. Leadership influences teaching indirectly through establishing a supportive environment, setting clear goals, facilitating professional learning, and promoting reflective practice. Although the majority of research is conducted in developed contexts, emerging studies from Pakistan indicate similar trends. However, limited research availability in District Poonch underscores the importance of exploring leadership effects in this specific context to inform policy, training programs, and educational development initiatives.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundation of this study draws on several established models that explain how school leadership influences teachers' instructional practices. One of the central theories guiding this research is Instructional Leadership Theory, which emphasizes the direct and indirect role of leaders in shaping teaching and learning processes. Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) instructional leadership model identifies key functions such as defining the school mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive learning climate. According to this theory, principals who actively engage in supervising instruction, providing feedback, coordinating curriculum, and setting performance expectations create environments where teachers feel empowered and guided to improve their instructional practices. Studies have consistently shown that instructional leadership enhances teacher clarity, strengthens pedagogical skills, and supports the use of effective teaching strategies (Hallinger, 2011; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). This theory is highly relevant to primary schools, where leadership involvement in curriculum and classroom practices shapes the quality of foundational learning.

Another theoretical foundation underpinning this study is Transformational Leadership Theory, which explains leadership influence through motivation, inspiration, and professional empowerment. Transformational leaders build strong relational trust, communicate a compelling vision, and foster a collaborative school culture. According to Burns (1978) and later expanded by Bass and Avolio (1994), transformational leadership

encourages teachers to become more committed, innovative, and reflective in their instructional approaches. Empirical evidence suggests that transformational leadership increases teachers' job satisfaction, instructional motivation, and willingness to adopt child-centered pedagogies (Nguni, Slegers, & Denessen, 2006). For primary schools, where teacher motivation influences both instructional quality and student engagement, transformational leadership provides a crucial theoretical lens for understanding how leadership behavior translates into improved teaching practices.

The study is also informed by Distributed Leadership Theory, which highlights the shared and collaborative nature of leadership within schools. Distributed leadership emphasizes that leadership is not confined to the principal but is shared among teachers, coordinators, and other staff members (Spillane, 2006). This theory posits that when leadership responsibilities are spread across multiple actors, teachers experience enhanced ownership of instructional decisions, increased professional collaboration, and greater commitment to instructional improvement. Research indicates that distributed leadership strengthens professional learning communities, encourages reflective practice, and supports teacher-led innovation in instructional methods (Harris, 2008). In primary schools in regions like District Poonch, where principals often face administrative and resource-related pressures, distributed leadership offers a practical approach for improving teaching quality by engaging teachers as active partners in school improvement.

Additionally, this study draws on Social Exchange Theory, which helps explain the reciprocal relationship between leadership behavior and teacher instructional practices. Blau (1964) proposed that positive interactions, such as supportive leadership, recognition, and professional assistance, encourage teachers to reciprocate through improved instructional effort and commitment to school goals. Leaders who demonstrate fairness, provide emotional support, and facilitate professional growth foster a sense of obligation among teachers to perform well in their instructional roles (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This theory is particularly relevant in primary schools where trust-based relationships and supportive leadership play a vital role in enhancing teacher morale and classroom effectiveness.

These theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how leadership influences teachers' instructional practices. They highlight that leadership shapes teaching not only through direct instructional supervision but also through building relationships, fostering collaboration, distributing responsibilities, and motivating teachers to improve their instructional performance. Guided by these theoretical perspectives, this study examines how leadership practices in District Poonch's primary schools impact the instructional behaviors of teachers in a context characterized by limited resources and professional development opportunities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the influence of school leadership on teachers' instructional practices in primary schools of District Poonch, Azad Kashmir. A descriptive survey design was used because it allows researchers to gather information from a large population and analyze existing conditions without manipulating

variables (Creswell, 2014). Survey research is particularly suitable for educational studies where the goal is to understand relationships between leadership behaviors and teacher practices in real school settings (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

The target population for this study consisted of primary school teachers working in public sector schools across District Poonch. Teachers were selected because they are directly influenced by leadership practices and are central to instructional improvement initiatives. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation from multiple tehsils within the district. Stratification helps reduce sampling bias and increases representativeness of the population (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). A sample size of approximately 150–200 teachers was considered adequate, aligning with recommendations that educational survey studies require sufficiently large samples to ensure statistical reliability (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of two main sections: leadership practices and instructional practices. Established scales from the literature were adapted to measure the constructs. The leadership section utilized items derived from the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS) developed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985), which is widely used to assess instructional leadership behaviors. The instructional practices section included items reflecting planning, classroom management, use of teaching strategies, and assessment practices, adapted from validated teacher instructional behavior scales (Guskey, 2002). All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, as Likert-type scales are effective for measuring perceptions and attitudes quantitatively (Joshi et al., 2015).

To ensure the instrument's validity, expert review was conducted by university faculty specializing in educational leadership and teacher education. Expert validation is an effective approach to establish content adequacy and clarity in research instruments (Polit & Beck, 2012). Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, as internal consistency is essential in survey-based research. A reliability coefficient above 0.70 was considered acceptable according to Nunnally and Bernstein's (1994) standard for social science research.

Data collection was conducted through in-person distribution of questionnaires in schools, following formal approval from district education authorities. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, privacy, and respect for participants were followed in accordance with educational research guidelines (BERA, 2018).

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to summarize teacher responses, while inferential statistics, including correlation and regression analysis, were applied to examine the extent to which leadership practices predicted teachers' instructional behaviors. Regression analysis is recommended in studies seeking to determine the strength and direction of relationships between variables (Field, 2013). Data analysis was performed using SPSS software due to its reliability and widespread use in educational research (Pallant, 2016).

This methodological approach allowed for a systematic examination of how school leadership influences instructional practices within the primary school context of District Poonch. The use of validated instruments, appropriate sampling, and rigorous statistical analysis ensures the reliability, credibility, and generalizability of the study's findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of School Leadership Practices (N = 180)

| Leadership Dimension | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|--|------|------|----------------|
| Defining School Mission | 3.92 | 0.64 | High |
| Managing Instructional Program | 3.78 | 0.71 | High |
| Promoting Positive School Climate | 4.01 | 0.58 | High |
| Supporting Teacher Professional Growth | 3.85 | 0.67 | High |
| Communication and Collaboration | 3.95 | 0.62 | High |

Description:

The results in Table 1 indicate that teachers perceive school leadership practices to be operating at a high level across all dimensions. The highest mean was observed in promoting a positive school climate (M = 4.01), showing that principals in primary schools emphasize maintaining supportive and encouraging learning environments. This aligns with Hallinger (2011), who stated that positive climate-building is a core function of effective instructional leadership.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Instructional Practices (N = 180)

| Instructional Practice Dimension | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|----------------------------------|------|------|----------------|
| Lesson Planning and Preparation | 4.03 | 0.59 | High |
| Classroom Management | 3.88 | 0.66 | High |
| Use of Teaching Strategies | 3.76 | 0.73 | Moderate |
| Assessment and Feedback | 3.81 | 0.69 | High |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|------|------|----------|
| Student Engagement Techniques | 3.72 | 0.71 | Moderate |
|-------------------------------|------|------|----------|

Description:

Table 2 shows that teachers report high performance in lesson planning, classroom management, and assessment practices. However, moderate levels were found in use of teaching strategies and student engagement techniques. This suggests a need for stronger leadership support in pedagogical innovation. Similar patterns were reported by Harris (2008), who emphasized that instructional leadership influences teachers' ability to use diverse instructional strategies.

Table 3: Correlation Between Leadership Practices and Instructional Practices

| Variables | r | p-value | Interpretation |
|--|------|---------|----------------------------------|
| Leadership Practices → Instructional Practices | 0.63 | .000 | Strong, significant relationship |

Description:

A strong positive correlation ($r = 0.63$, $p < .001$) indicates that as leadership practices improve, teachers' instructional practices also increase. This finding aligns with Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008), who reported that leadership has a direct impact on teaching quality. It further supports the assumption of instructional leadership theory that effective leadership directly shapes teacher performance.

Table 4: Regression Analysis Predicting Teachers' Instructional Practices

| Predictor Variable | β | t-value | p-value | Interpretation |
|----------------------|---------|---------|---------|--------------------------------|
| Leadership Practices | 0.57 | 8.12 | .000 | Significant positive predictor |

Model Summary:

- $R = .63$
- $R^2 = .40$
- $F(1,178) = 65.9$, $p < .001$

Description:

Regression analysis revealed that leadership practices significantly predict 40% of the variance in teachers' instructional practices ($R^2 = .40$). This suggests that school leadership plays a critical role in shaping the quality of instruction in primary schools. This finding is

consistent with Leithwood et al. (2004), who noted that leadership is second only to classroom teaching in influencing student learning.

Discussion

The results of the study reveal that school leadership practices in District Poonch's primary schools are perceived as strong across multiple dimensions, especially in climate-building and communication. This supports the notion by Hallinger (2011) that effective leadership creates environments where teaching and learning thrive. Teachers reported high proficiency in planning and classroom management, which may reflect leaders' emphasis on routine instructional supervision. However, moderate levels in innovative teaching strategies and student engagement techniques suggest the need for stronger professional development support from school leaders. According to Guskey (2002), continuous leadership-driven training is essential for improving instructional practices, especially in resource-constrained regions.

Correlation analysis demonstrated a strong positive relationship between leadership practices and instructional behavior. This aligns with transformational and instructional leadership theories, which emphasize that leadership drives teacher motivation, commitment, and performance (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Nguni et al., 2006). The regression model further confirmed that leadership significantly predicts teacher instructional quality. Leadership accounted for 40% of the variation in instructional practices, supporting findings from international research (Leithwood et al., 2004; Robinson et al., 2008). In the context of District Poonch, this highlights the crucial role of principals in promoting effective teaching through supervision, support, and a collaborative school culture.

The findings indicate that leadership is a critical factor influencing instructional effectiveness. Strengthening leadership development programs, promoting distributed leadership, and enhancing professional learning culture can significantly improve teaching quality in primary schools in Azad Kashmir.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that school leadership plays a crucial and significant role in shaping teachers' instructional practices in primary schools of District Poonch, Azad Kashmir. Leadership practices—including defining the school mission, managing instructional programs, fostering a positive school climate, and supporting teacher professional growth—were perceived to be operating at strong levels. These practices collectively contributed to enhanced teacher performance in lesson planning, classroom management, assessment, and instructional delivery. The strong correlation and significant predictive relationship identified through regression analysis confirm that effective school leadership is a key determinant of teacher instructional behavior. Nearly 40% of the variance in instructional practices was explained by leadership factors alone, highlighting the substantial impact principals can have on pedagogical quality. This aligns with global research emphasizing leadership as the second most influential factor in student learning after classroom instruction.

However, moderate performance in the areas of innovative teaching strategies and student engagement techniques suggests a need for more targeted professional development and instructional support. These areas represent opportunities for school leaders to strengthen their influence through collaborative learning environments, peer coaching, and ongoing pedagogical training. Overall, the study underscores that strengthening leadership capabilities—especially in instructional supervision, motivation, and distributed leadership—can lead to significant improvements in teaching quality. Investing in leadership development programs, enhancing communication structures, and fostering a supportive school culture are essential strategies for improving instructional practices and ultimately upgrading the educational outcomes of primary schools in District Poonch, Azad Kashmir.

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