

Instructional leadership beliefs of Filipino pre-service teachers

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ABSTRACT

In the teacher education context, there has been a call to pay attention to the preparation of pre-service teachers for instructional leadership roles necessary in today's various school reforms. Nonetheless, because the integration of instructional leadership is relatively new in the Philippine teacher education curriculum, there is a dearth of research along with this aspect. With the increasing need for more research on instructional leadership, particularly on Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs), this exploratory study was undertaken. Using an in-depth interview, it examined the instructional leadership beliefs of Filipino pre-service teachers. Twelve (12) graduating pre-service teachers from a public university in Cagayan Province, Philippines became the study participants whose views, insights, and narratives were thematically analyzed. Interestingly, the results of the study revealed that pre-service teachers believe that instructional leadership is shared, learning-focused, a conversation, service-driven, and a pursuit of equity. These deepen the assertion that understanding the instructional leadership beliefs of pre-service teachers would promote instructional interventions that can empower them and advocate a viable instructional leadership framework not only in the Philippine context but in the ASEAN region as well.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of instructional leadership has become crucial because of its various influences on educational praxis [1, 2]. Initially defined, instructional leadership is a critical point of focus among leaders who look into teachers' direct involvement in the academic growth of students and the management of school setting [3]. Traditionally viewed, it has been centered on authority; however, with the positive developments in the educational milieu, innovative concepts on instructional leadership have come to fruition as the 21st-century classroom demands proactive, learner-centered and effective instructional leadership [4]. Hence, this perspective has created an avenue where individuals' collaborative minds and activities stem from the fundamental conviction of providing a transparent platform to realize the institutional targets and shared goals [5, 6] as there has been emphasis on team reflexivity and performance [7] for sustained betterment of the school climate [8] and the attainment of quality learning [9-11].

In the teacher education context, there has been a call to pay attention to the preparation of pre-service teachers for instructional leadership roles [12] necessary in today's various school reforms. As Xu and Patmor [13] claim, formal training is identified as a significant approach in shaping instructional leadership skills. Tailored to the preceding premise, just recently in the Philippines, one major innovation in the teacher education curriculum is the offering of a professional education course that covers instructional

leadership [14]. This curricular action is seen as pivotal in mapping out the need for training and enhancement vis-a-vis instructional leadership capabilities and potential of the pre-service teachers.

Nonetheless, because the integration of instructional leadership is relatively new in the Philippine teacher education curriculum, there is a dearth of research along this area particularly on the aspect of instructional leadership beliefs, which according to Marcketti and Kadolph [15], may serve as a firm foundation of individual behavior and attitudes. Relative to this, Shertzer and Schuh [16] claim that how pre-service teachers regard instructional leadership might stand as the key to their perceptions of themselves as prospective leaders, which may further lead to the unraveling of their innermost beliefs that either constrain or loosen their participation, involvement and experiences in the academe. Thus, along this vein, pre-service teachers must have well-defined instructional leadership beliefs to achieve quality performance and potent functioning once they get employed as full-fledged teachers and promoted as school administrators. As Hiller [17] fittingly shares, individuals' personal view of leadership is a significant benchmark of subsequent thoughts and actions that ultimately define who they are as potential leaders.

With the active call for more studies on instructional leadership that intend to improve organizational norms, arrangements, and systems [18], research undertakings along this aspect is indispensable. Since Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) serve as the platform for the holistic development of pre-service teachers, it is just proper that research on instructional beliefs must start from them. According to Kulinna, Brusseau, Ferry, and Cothran [19], heeding to pre-service teachers' voices to address their belief systems is essential because it creates opportunities to understand better and appreciate them, and in this respect, TEIs stand as the nurturing avenues to facilitate the shaping of instructional leadership beliefs [13] [20]. Subsequently, exploring this dimension becomes significant input in determining appropriate mechanisms and strategies in integrating the concepts of instructional leadership to instruction and other academic-related activities to prepare pre-service teachers in their future leadership roles in the teaching profession. To date, little is known about Filipino pre-service teachers' instructional leadership beliefs; thus, an exploratory study is deemed necessary to fill in the knowledge gap for sound programmatic interventions and framework development. Specifically, the present study aimed to address the following question: What do Filipino pre-service teachers believe about instructional leadership?

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Research design

The study used qualitative design employing in-depth interview. Guest, Namey, and Mitchell [21] underscore that an in-depth interview is appropriate in examining a particular phenomenon deeply to generate elucidation and understanding. It assists the participants to express their ideas and experiences as it is "designed to elicit depth on a topic of interest" [22]. Since the study is exploratory, the in-depth interview was used to provide a context [23], a detailed picture of how the pre-service teachers view instructional leadership.

2.2. Research participants

Twelve (12) graduating pre-service teachers from the College of Teacher Education of a public university in Cagayan Province, Philippines became the study participants. Seventy percent (75%) of the participants were female, while 25% were male. The mean age was 19.83. In terms of the curricular program, 58.33% were Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) students, 16.67% were Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEEd) students, and 25% were Bachelor of Technical Teacher Education (BTTE) students. The participants represented each of the specializations offered in the College. Moreover, the number of participants was established upon reaching the data saturation. In qualitative studies, data saturation is usually achieved when common themes have already been identified in a homogenous group of participants [24]. Table 1 presents the participants' demographic profile.

Through purposive sampling, the participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (a) must have been a team leader during the off-campus student teaching, and (b) must have attended at least a leadership training or seminar. These criteria were set to make sure that the participants could provide the necessary views on instructional leadership since they had at least a direct experience of leading their peers and relevant exposure to leadership concepts.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the study participants

Participant	Sex	Age	Curricular Program	Specialization
PT1	Male	19	BEEd	Generalist
PT2	Female	20	BEEd	Pre-school
PT3	Male	21	BSEd	Mathematics
PT4	Female	19	BSEd	English Language
PT5	Female	20	BSEd	Social Studies
PT6	Female	20	BSEd	Biological Science
PT7	Female	19	BSEd	Physical Science
PT8	Female	20	BSEd	Filipino Language
PT9	Female	20	BSEd	Technology and Livelihood Education
PT10	Female	20	BTTE	Foods Service Management
PT11	Male	20	BTTE	Electronics
PT12	Female	20	BTTE	Garments Fashion Design

2.3. Research instrument

The researcher prepared a semi-structured interview guide used in facilitating the interview sessions. Initially, five (5) questions were drafted based on the research objective. However, the number of questions was increased to six (6) after two (2) senior faculty-researchers reviewed the interview guide for its consistency, relevance, and soundness. The question “If you were an instructional leader, how would you view power or authority?” was included. After which, the tool was pre-tested to three (3) pre-service teachers who were not participants of the study to ensure comprehensibility of the questions and to determine the reasonable time allotment for the interview session.

2.4. Research procedures

The researcher approached the College Dean to obtain approval for the conduct of the study. After which, the individual profile of graduating pre-service teachers was perused based on the given criteria to identify the eligible participants. The identified pre-service teachers were personally met by the researcher to solicit their participation in the study. They were oriented on the purpose and direction of the research. They also signed the Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) as a manifestation that they clearly understood the study objectives and that they were not compelled to be part of the research. Moreover, they were informed that the data obtained from them would be handled with the utmost confidentiality, and their identities would be kept in anonymity.

In conducting the individual interview, the time and venue were arranged by the researcher with due consideration of the availability and convenience of the participants. Furthermore, the participants were advised to speak in a language they were comfortable with since they could communicate both in English and Filipino languages. The researcher ensured that the interview atmosphere was free from any disturbances and that the participants spontaneously expressed their views and insights. A mobile phone recorded the responses of the participants, and this was supplemented by taking down notes of the essential words or phrases. The average interview duration lasted for about 20 minutes.

2.5. Data analysis

Thematic analysis was employed in analyzing the interview data. According to Maguire and Delahunt [25], thematic analysis is used to ascertain patterns in the data that are notable and use these for proper interpretation to address the purpose of the research. It aims to underscore the most relevant amalgamation of meanings found in a particular dataset [26].

Following the thematic approach espoused by Braun and Clarke [27], the researcher personally transcribed the interview data. The transcripts were read repeatedly for data familiarization. After which, initial codes were generated to extract the recurrent and meaningful insights from which the themes were deduced. The themes were then examined several times to verify if they worked well relative to the codes, data set, and study purpose. Subsequently, the extracted themes were named. To ensure the internal validity (credibility) of the data, the researcher used member checking as a technique wherein the participants were provided copies of the transcript for them to cross-check.

In the process of data analysis, the researcher observed self-reflexivity. In doing so, all responses were treated with equal value, and personal predispositions were set aside. Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas, and Caricativo [28] impart that self-reflexivity is a continuous exercise of introspection by researchers in recognizing how they can maintain confirmability or objectivity in their research practice.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With the use of an in-depth interview, the study explored the beliefs of the Filipino pre-service teachers on instructional leadership. Five

Themes were extracted from the interview data based on the narratives, views, and discussions of all the participants. These themes were presented starting from the highest frequency with which they were discussed.

3.1. Theme no. 1: Instructional leadership is shared

Interestingly, all participants viewed instructional leadership as a shared endeavor. They consider it as a process whereby authorities must involve all members of the school community. With this, they reject the idea that instructional leadership is only within the powers of one person. They believe that instructional leadership is seen as a property of the group and is understood to emerge as a result of collaborative interaction vis-à-vis collective accountability. This view is aligned with the idea of Northern and Bailey [1] that leaders of the 21st century must be oriented on teamwork and collective decision-making and the authority is no longer within the bounds of a single person but is spread among group members [29]. With this, instructional leadership becomes a viable platform for the creation of communities whose members can blend and connect to every aspect of their personal and professional roles as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Theme no. 1 Instructional leadership is shared

Participants	Responses
PT1	My view on instructional leadership is that it is a product of collaboration among stakeholders.
PT2	I believe that instructional leaders must share governance with all the members of the school community.
PT3	I believe that collective decision-making is the highlight of an effective instructional leadership.
PT4	Instructional leadership resides in the group, not in a single authority.
PT5	In my perspective, instructional leadership in schools is group accountability. Everyone must count in, especially in the decision-making and taking of responsibilities.
PT6	For me, leading is a shared responsibility. It is not only about one person directing everything.
PT7	I believe that authorities and subordinates must share school accountabilities.
PT8	Instructional leadership is a shared process of school improvement.
PT9	Thinking of it as an important organizational construct, I consider instructional leadership as a mutual undertaking. It is not only focused on one individual who wields the authority.
PT10	The true meaning of instructional leadership is that power and responsibility are shared to all individuals in the organization. To me, this is the real measure of its effectiveness.
PT11	Instructional leadership is a collective endeavor.
PT12	A respectable manifestation of instructional leadership is when a leader shares the authority to everyone wherein each member feels the sense of belongingness to all the school tasks and activities.

3.2. Theme no. 2: Instructional leadership is learning-focused

Most of the participants viewed instructional leadership as learning-focused see in Table 3. They firmly believed that the bottom-line of an effective instructional leader is seen through an excellent delivery of instruction that every student deserves.

Table 3. Theme no. 2 Instructional leadership is learning-focused

Participants	Responses
PT1	In my understanding, instructional leadership exists because of the need for quality learning.
PT3	I believe that the focus of instructional leadership is to create opportunities for students to grow and develop holistically.
PT5	For me, instructional leaders' actions must highlight the attainment of learning.
PT6	Based on my readings and with my personal view, instructional leadership should target quality learning and development.
PT7	In my experience as a team leader during off-campus student teaching, I was able to appreciate a principal whose primary concern is to see students' positive learning and achievements as real indicators of success.
PT9	I believe that an excellent instructional leader ought to have the heart for excellence in learning. Hence, I want to see school leaders who use their authority to improve the standards of teaching and learning.
PT10	My belief is that instructional leadership exists as a leadership concept because it must stress learning in all areas. When improvement happens in the quality of learning as seen in the high performance in the national assessment tests, then I can say that the principal is successful.
PT11	If I were a leader, I would be student-centered in all my approaches.
PT12	Learning is the prime factor for instructional leaders to keep their feet on track.

As delineated by the participants, instructional leadership is a purpose-driven process measured by the improvement in the instructional practice and quality of student learning. This belief is regarded a

positive one because, in the report of Murphy, Elliot, Goldring, and Porter [30], it showed that those instructional leaders who are learning-centered are the ones dynamically involved in school improvement as manifested in their strong conviction as stewards of school's vision. They also possess a stable orientation for the optimization of learning and teaching [7].

3.3. Theme no. 3: Instructional leadership is a conversation

Several participants believed that instructional leadership is a form of conversation see in Table 4. As deduced from their insights and narratives, they consider instructional leadership as finding ways to use creative communication and critical dialogue in managing the flow of information that is intimate, interactive, and inclusive. They strongly agreed that an excellent instructional leader involves individuals who are actively engaging in the process of negotiated leadership, taking into account varied perspectives. This belief is congruent to the leadership model espoused by Groysberg and Slind [31] affirming that effective leaders in the schools and other settings stay connected with subordinates through frequent casual and personal dialogues and seldom giving of directives from on high.

Table 4. Theme no. 3 Instructional leadership is a conversation

Participants	Responses
PT2	In my experience as a team leader, I really loved speaking my mind. That is how an instructional leader should be.
PT4	I regard instructional leadership as a constant dialogue between authorities and subordinates.
PT5	Instructional leaders must consider multiple perspectives in dealing with people and issues.
PT6	Listening well to all the concerns of the pupils, colleagues, parents, and community makes up a quality instructional leader.
PT7	The vision of instructional leaders is cordially communicated to all school populace and community folks.
PT8	When I become a principal given a chance in the future, I will develop a healthy interaction between my teachers and me. I will be somewhat a negotiator or something like that.
PT10	Instructional leaders must establish an intimate exchange of ideas and best practices with others.
PT11	Instructional leadership must use productive dialogue to promote organizational interaction.

3.4. Theme no. 4: Instructional leadership is service-driven

Majority of the participants believed that instructional leadership is service-driven see in Table 5. This view emanated from their desire that the school authority must be the forefront of providing services that can make a positive change in the lives of the people. For them, this is possible if instructional leadership is focused on genuine and quality service for all the clientele and stakeholders and is characterized by love, care, and compassion in leading the subordinates. In the study of Chung [32], it was found out that leaders who are service-driven display high consideration of their work environment, accommodate their audience well, and prefer creating harmonious working lives.

Table 5. Theme no. 4 Instructional leadership is service-driven

Participants	Responses
PT3	It is my firm belief that an instructional leader must unconditionally serve the pupils, colleagues, parents, and community.
PT4	For me, instructional leadership is an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of other people.
PT7	If I were a school authority, I would live by my mantra - a great leader is a great servant.
PT8	An instructional leader must offer himself not to the lure of power but the call of service.
PT9	Instructional leadership is about effective service.
PT10	The heart of instructional leadership is love and care. This is what a leader must show to his subordinates. I can say this because I experienced this when I was in the off-campus student teaching. The school administrator was warm and compassionate to all of us.
PT11	I am quite idealistic in my view. The ultimate indicator of a successful instructional leader is his/her sincere attitude of serving the school.

3.5. Theme no. 5: Instructional leadership is a pursuit of equity

Sixty percent (60%) of the participants shared their belief that instructional leadership is a pursuit of equity as shown in Table 6. This emerging theme stemmed from their insights of what the crucial function of school leaders should be. For them, they regard the school authorities not as plain bearers of orders and directives but as agents of bridging gaps between the advantaged and deprived groups in the school. As adhered by them, instructional leadership is anchored on the elimination of achievement gaps. It serves as a lever of impartiality in all instructional actions and decisions.

Notably, this belief is attached to the primary tenets of social Reconstructionism as an educational worldview, which considers justice as the forefront of all structural actions and innovations [33]. It sees events, people, and even experiences as workable opportunities to critic all forms of discrimination, prejudices and widening gaps of people especially concerning how they are treated and what must they deserve [34]. Hence, this participants' belief on instructional leadership only implies that they would like to use power not to perpetuate dominance but to cultivate equity between and among members of the school community and leadership must contribute to the school development as a reflection of more significant societal change.

Table 6. Theme no. 5 Instructional leadership is a pursuit of equity

Participants	Responses
PT1	Ideally, giving more to the less privileged members of school populace is the essence of instructional leadership.
PT2	If I were a school leader, I would give more resources to groups that need them more.
PT5	Because of my learning in my field of specialization, I came to understand that leadership in school should help in reducing gaps between the dominant and the marginalized members of the school community.
PT6	When I would become a leader in the future, I would emphasize the decrease of disparity among pupils' performance and standing.
PT8	Based on what I learned in a leadership seminar which I attended a year ago, I realized that leaders must prioritize fairness in all educational undertakings.
PT11	Instructional leaders must always be impartial in everything they do.
PT12	For me, an ideal leader of the school is just.

3.6. Further discussion

Remarkably, the five themes extracted as the underlying instructional beliefs of the participants, namely: shared, learning-focused, conversation, service-driven, and pursuit of equity can be discussed further by looking at a theoretical model of 21st-century instructional leadership that is advocated by Baldanza [35]. In this framework, the instructional leadership serves as a catalyst for the betterment of teaching and learning and provision of productive services to all education stakeholders. In this case, potential leaders must possess desirable beliefs and qualities that foster the establishment of a professional culture that acknowledges individual purpose and goals and promotes respect to each of its collaborators. Undoubtedly, the beliefs of the participants fit this model because of their emphasis on shared responsibility, effective communication, quality learning and service, and desire for equity. These are favorable views of leadership that are necessary for the fast-changing landscape of the 21st-century educational milieu. As Adams, Kutty, and Mohd Zabidi [4] claim, educational systems now demand a new breed of instructional leaders who can adapt to the globalizing and technologically-driven society. Indeed, the significance of leadership education for today's pre-service teachers cannot be undervalued. In their future practice of the teaching profession, they will experience the volatility of today's work setting and so to succeed; they need to embrace perspectives of instructional leadership that are geared towards empowering others as they deliberately empower themselves [15].

Moreover, this study presents implications for research and practice in teacher education not only in the Philippines but also in the ASEAN landscape. Interestingly, the study may encourage the development of Filipino pre-service teachers' instructional leadership framework that can be utilized for programmatic actions to match the training of pre-service teachers with their belief system. Knowing the beliefs of the pre-service teachers makes it easy on the part of teacher education to identify appropriate strategies in integrating leadership concepts that are tailored to the context of the students. In doing so, it generates opportunities to understand better and appreciate them as potential instructional leaders of the future. Ultimately, the present study may also be considered as a preliminary effort to fill in literature gaps and to put forward the potential future of more research on instructional leadership in teacher education.

Since the study is exploratory, admittedly, it bears some limitations. Regarding scope, the data came only from 12 participants in the same geographical location and educational institution in the Philippines. Typical in a qualitative design, the samples may not sufficiently characterize all Filipino pre-service teachers. Hence, parallel studies on this area may take into account a mixed-method, broader geographical scope, and a higher number of samples with the inclusion of pre-service teachers from private TEIs as respondents.

4. CONCLUSION

This study explored the instructional leadership beliefs of Filipino pre-service teachers. Generally, the participants viewed instructional leadership as shared, learning-focused, conversation, service-driven, and a pursuit of equity. These beliefs are seen to be advantageous in the context of the 21st-century educational demands, challenges, and opportunities as confirmed by existing literature. Indeed, the pre-service teachers

possess well-defined beliefs that they can rely on to attain quality performance once they become professional teachers and instructional leaders in the future. Contributing to knowledge and practice, this research can be a guide to teacher education in identifying appropriate strategies of integrating instructional leadership to curriculum and instruction and may become the basis of constructing a viable pre-service teachers' instructional leadership framework not only in the Philippine context but also in the ASEAN region.

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