

## Leadership practices in enhancing teachers' growth and student success in the 21st century: a systematic review of literature

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**Abstract:**The role of instructional supervisors has become increasingly important in supporting teacher's growth and improving student success. It is essential to examine the dynamics of instructional supervisors' leadership practices and how they affect teachers' development and their students' academic performance. By analyzing 20 research articles from 2013 up to the present, this systematic literature review identified the various effective leadership practices applied by supervisors to support teacher growth and improve student outcomes. Results highlight essential practices, including transformational leadership, instructional leadership, collaborative leadership, distributed leadership, sustainable leadership, learning-centered leadership, and symbolic and servant leadership. Furthermore, the review highlights these leadership practices' impact on teachers and students. As revealed, these practices helped improve teachers' strategies, enhance their career advancement, and increase their motivation. For students, these practices primarily enhanced their academic performance.

Keywords: Instructional Supervision, Leadership Practices, Teacher's Growth, Systematic Review, 21st Century

Date Submitted: May 8, 2024

Date Accepted: June 4, 2024

Date Published: June 21, 2024

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### INTRODUCTION

In education, supervision provides support, guidance, and assessment to educators to enhance instructional practices, improve student achievement, and promote professional growth. Instructional supervisory practices involve the strategies and actions used by educational leaders to improve teaching and learning in schools (Sumapal&Haramain, 2023). These include observing and evaluating teachers, providing feedback and support, and promoting a positive school environment focused on continuous improvement. As Zepeda (2019) emphasizes, supervisors who support continuous professional development foster a culture of lifelong learning among teachers.

It is a form of educational supervision undertaken to achieve the following objectives: (1) to provide objective feedback to teachers; (2) to diagnose and solve teaching problems; (3) to help teachers develop their strategies and skills; (4) to evaluate teachers for promotions or appointments; and (5) to help teachers maintain a positive attitude (Jared, 2011). Instructional leadership involves setting clear goals, managing curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, and evaluating teachers regularly to enhance instruction and student achievement (Hallinger, 2003).

Today, educational institutions are expected to produce graduates with 21st-century skills, which refer to the core competencies in collaboration, critical thinking, digital

problem-solving, and literacy. The K–12 curriculum is designed to foster these competencies for academic success, thriving in the modern workforce, and contributing positively to society. Thus, this led the researcher to conduct a systematic review to identify effective leadership practices and strategies instructional supervisors use to promote 21st-century skills. Leadership encompasses more than just efficient administration; it also involves inspiring, guiding, and creating an environment where educators and learners can flourish. Instructional supervisors collaborate with teachers to set professional goals and plans for continuous improvement. They help teachers establish a roadmap for their career development, providing guidance and resources to meet their objectives. Through this collaborative effort, teachers and supervisors work together to create a culture of continuous growth(exquisiteeducation.com,2023).

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research design*

This study employed a systematic review methodology to synthesize existing literature on instructional supervisors' leadership practices aimed at enhancing teacher growth and student success in the 21st century. A systematic review is defined as a type of review that uses repeatable methods to find, select, and synthesize all available evidence, answering a formulated research question and explicitly stating the methods used to arrive at the answer. This method was chosen because it can reliably and accurately contribute to synthesizing existing academic literature .

### *Procedure*

The systematic review focused on journal articles or research publications that address the leadership practices of instructional supervisors in K-12 educational settings. The inclusion criteria ensured that the studies included were written in English and published between 2013 and 2024. The geographical scope of the studies was not explicitly stated, but the focus on K-12 educational settings implies a broad applicability across different regions where such settings are present .

The research involved several strategic steps to achieve its objectives. First, electronic searches were performed using databases such as ERIC and Google Scholar. These searches utilized primary terms related to "supervision in education leadership practices," and were further refined with additional terms like "teacher growth," "impact," "student success," and "21st-century education settings." Additional searches focused on instructional leadership titles and abstracts to identify potentially relevant studies. To ensure systematic data collection, a uniform data extraction form was developed. This form was used to gather comprehensive data from the included studies, capturing details such as study characteristics (author, publication year), research design, participant demographics, primary findings, and implications for instructional supervision methods. This structured approach facilitated the systematic review, ensuring that the relevant data were meticulously gathered and synthesized.

### *Data analyses procedure*

The data analysis procedure involved systematic collection and synthesis of data from the included studies. A uniform data extraction form was used to gather data on study characteristics (e.g., author, publication year), research design, participant demographics, primary findings, and implications for instructional supervision methods. The selection criteria for the studies were determined before the database search and applied during the screening of titles, abstracts, and full texts. The extracted data were then synthesized to

identify effective leadership practices and strategies used by instructional supervisors to promote 21st-century skills .

## DISCUSSION

### *Identification of Effective Leadership Practices*

Effective leadership practices are critical to enhancing instruction and student achievement. Studies have indicated that school leadership significantly impacts teaching quality and student outcomes.

#### *Transformational leadership*

This type of leadership is most often associated with vision, which is setting directions, motivation, and a call to action to enable others to bring about positive change. According to Beach (2020), Transformational approaches to leadership emphasize emotions and values and share the fundamental aim of fostering capacity development and higher levels of personal commitment to organizational goals. Organizational members acknowledge authority to whoever can inspire their commitments to collective aspirations. Transformational leaders motivate followers by raising their consciousness about the importance of organizational goals and inspiring them to transcend their self-interest for the sake of the organization (Day et al., 2020). Communicating a positive vision of the future motivates and encourages their followers to keep pushing forward (Baker, 2015). Baker enumerated five (5) Ways to be a Transformational Leader: (1) Create a Positive Vision and Mission, (2) Inspire and Motivate Change, (3) Practice Servant Leadership, (4) Set an Example, (5) Think of Solutions.

#### *Instructional leadership*

This is the type of skill that influential educational leaders possess to inspire action and optimism. By treating people fairly and making an impression with their honesty and integrity, these leaders set an example for others. (Ng, 2019) describes how school principals who exude enthusiasm and a positive outlook can energize their staff, leading to a more vibrant and productive school culture. Some specific skills related to instructional leadership include communication skills, effective planning, trustworthiness, and competence. As instructional leaders, principals need to support and guide their teachers to improve their teaching and facilitating in the classroom generally or any of their teaching and facilitating activities (Saada & Sankaran, 2021).

#### *Collaborative leadership*

This leadership redefines the role of educators as one where establishing and maintaining democratic spaces is paramount. Collaborative leadership enables educators, students, and families to collaborate to define and co-create learning environments that allow everyone to learn, grow, and thrive. It helps educators, students, and families to collaborate to create learning environments that enable everyone to learn, grow, and thrive. (Ng, 2019) emphasizes that principals who actively engage with all stakeholders and build strong, trusting relationships create a sense of community and shared purpose within the school. Ongoing feedback regarding the teachers' performance needs to be communicated to ensure that the teachers are aligned with the need for continuous improvement in-class teaching practices (Saada & Sankaran, 2021).

#### *Distributed leadership*

This is the outcome of considering organizational management's awareness that leadership positions and roles should be shared. That is to say, distributed leadership addresses human resources in organizations, especially the academic staff in educational organizations as leaders (Göksoy, 2015). Distributed leadership has a positive and indirect effect on students' academic achievement, and the role of the principal is indispensable (Jambo & Hongde, 2020). It allows policymakers to think radically and creatively about school leadership practice. It provides an opportunity to reconsider unanswered questions regarding school leadership. The consensus among school leaders and teachers is that there is a need to develop the staff and nurture talent throughout the organization through more widely distributed leadership practices.

#### *Sustainable leadership*

It is simple to suggest, challenging to execute, and challenging to sustain growth, which requires effective leadership, but creating and sustaining leadership is also challenging. Sustainability is essential in education, as it is in business, society, and the natural environment, and many large corporations often abuse it. Businesses that operate sustainably have more consistent records of profitability than those that do not. Nevertheless, a great deal of corporate leadership still behaves unethically; too many companies not only put profit before purpose but make profit their only purpose; the only thing that matters is the bottom line (Beach, 2020).

#### *Learning-centered leadership*

The primary objective of this leadership practice is to establish an environment in which all organizational components, including curriculum creation, teacher preparation, and administrative policies, are designed to enhance student learning outcomes and experiences. Learning is about constructing meaning and understanding so students can understand the world. The emphasis should be less on putting information in and more on expanding existing knowledge (Beach, 2020). The foundation of learning-centered leadership is the conviction that all students can succeed and thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

#### *Symbolic and servant leadership*

When leaders' express symbolic aspects of leadership, they work beneath the surface of events, seeking to tap deeper meanings and values. Symbolic leaders can see the significance of what a group is doing or could be doing. He continues, "they have a feel for the dramatic possibilities inherent in most situations and can get people to go beyond their routines, to break out of the mold into something livelier and more vibrant". They speak in an understandable way and convey a sensation of novelty, excitement, and freshness. In contrast to other forms of leadership, servant leadership generates a distinct kind of conversation about the dynamic between leaders and followers. As Beach (2020) says, servant leadership is more concerned with followers' needs than one's own; these leaders sympathize with and support their followers.

#### *Impact of leadership practices used by instructional supervisors on teacher growth in the 21st century*

Effective leadership practices used by instructional supervisors can profoundly impact teacher growth, especially in light of the quickly changing educational landscape of the 21st century.

### *Improved instructional strategies*

These are one of the most significant impacts of instructional supervisors' leadership practices on the development of teachers in the twenty-first century. Teachers can evaluate their performance, pinpoint areas for growth, and make adjustments to increase their efficacy as teachers through in-depth feedback sessions.

### *Professional development*

Research by Smith A. H. et al. (2022) found that teachers who participated in supervisor-led workshops on differentiated instruction reported increased confidence and effectiveness in addressing diverse student needs. Through ongoing professional development sessions, teachers can acquire new skills, expand their knowledge base, and stay updated on the latest educational practices. These development opportunities may include workshops, conferences, online courses, and collaborative learning experiences. Teachers can enhance their instructional practices by investing in professional development and positively impacting student learning outcomes.

### *Mentoring and coaching*

Mentoring and coaching are two effective leadership techniques that directly affect the professional development of teachers. Instead of a directive approach, supervisors who take a coaching approach support teachers in creating self-efficacious and reflective practices. Teachers who received regular coaching sessions from instructional supervisors showed higher job satisfaction and commitment to professional growth. Emerson (2014) highlights that supervisors who engage in coaching can directly observe classroom instruction and offer immediate, practical feedback and modeling of effective practices. He notes that mentorship relationships help build trust, foster professional growth, and encourage a collaborative culture within the educational community.

### *Collaborative learning communities*

Collaboration between supervisors and teachers is a crucial strategy for adequate instructional supervision. By fostering a supportive learning community, we encourage open communication, shared goals, and a sense of collective responsibility. Through collaboration, supervisors and teachers can exchange ideas, share best practices, and collectively address instructional challenges. Through collaboration and problem-solving, educational developers may better serve the institution by working with campus colleagues to integrate external stakeholders, such as prospective employers, internship site coordinators, and local community leaders. (Smith A. H., et al., 2022).

### *Use of data for instructional improvement*

A research demonstrated that teachers who engaged in regular data analysis sessions with their instructional supervisors were better equipped to implement evidence-based instructional strategies. This practice ensures that teaching methods are grounded in data, which improves instructional effectiveness and student outcomes highlights that virtual observation tools allow supervisors to engage with teachers across different locations, providing consistent and high-quality support regardless of geographic constraints(exquisitiveeducation.com,2023). This approach enhances accessibility for teachers in remote or underserved areas, ensuring they receive the same level of support as their counterparts in more accessible regions.

### *Impact of leadership practices by instructional supervisors on student success in the 21st century*

The data reveals the impact of leadership practices used by instructional supervisors on student success in the 21st-century research articles where these tools are typified. Of the twenty (20) research articles reviewed, eight (8) revealed the significant influence that effective leadership practices by instructional supervisors can have on student success in the 21st century.

#### *Improved academic performance*

Adequate instructional supervision positively impacts student achievement by ensuring teaching practices align with educational goals and standards. He highlights that instructional supervision enhances academic performance and enriches students' overall learning experience. When teachers are guided and supported, they can design engaging and interactive lessons, addressing students' diverse learning needs. Instructional supervisors advocate for evidence-based instructional strategies, integrating research-backed methods into lesson planning and delivery. This approach fosters active learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills among students, ultimately resulting in enhanced learning outcomes. To connect with students and impact their lives personally and professionally, teachers must be student-centered and demonstrate respect for their backgrounds, ideologies, beliefs, and learning styles (Paolini, 2015).

#### *Enhanced student engagement*

Involvement and engagement are the main components in student learning. Having students work in small groups on experiential tasks allows them to brainstorm, learn from one another, and collaboratively apply knowledge. The more instructors motivate and encourage their students to succeed, the more likely they will feel connected to the material, believe in themselves, and increase their learning outcomes (Paolini, 2015).

#### *Equitable learning opportunities*

Leadership practices emphasizing equity and data-driven decisions ensure that all students have access to high-quality education tailored to their needs. Instructional supervisors, recognizing the diverse needs and schedules of students, implement flexible learning opportunities to accommodate various learning styles and life circumstances. This strategy may permit students access educational content and complete assignments at their own pace and convenience, promoting increased engagement and academic success (Smith et al., 2022). Instructional supervision enhances academic performance and enriches students' overall learning experience. Instructional supervisors advocate for evidence-based instructional strategies, integrating research-backed methods into lesson planning and delivery. This approach fosters active learning, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills among students, ultimately resulting in enhanced learning outcomes (exquisitiveeducation.com,2023).

#### *Preparation for future readiness*

It involves equipping students with the skills, knowledge, and competencies necessary to thrive in an ever-changing world. This encompasses academic achievement and fundamental abilities like digital literacy, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and adaptability. Instructional supervisors leverage technology as a tool for future readiness.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

This systematic literature review offers insightful information about how instructional supervisors' practices might improve student success and teacher growth in the twenty-first century. Several vital themes and implications have developed due to synthesizing findings from various research articles. Transformational leadership inspires educators to reach their full potential, while instructional leadership ensures that evidence-based strategies drive student learning forward. Collaborative and distributed leadership models cultivate a sense of shared responsibility, foster collaboration among staff members, and promote collective efficacy. Leaders focus on being leaders' qualities needed to sustain the learning and teaching we need in the future rather than surviving in the present. Learning-centered leadership adapts to varied cultures, such as ideas, uses diverse teaching methods, and focuses on "how" students learn. The behaviors of symbolic leaders offer moral guidelines for educational institutions that increase relevance and purpose. Effective leadership practices that prioritize the professional growth and support of teachers have various effects, from improved professional development and instructional strategies to increased student achievement and motivation.

Several key recommendations emerge based on the comprehensive literature review surrounding instructional supervisors' leadership practices and their impact on teacher growth and student success. These recommendations are meant to educate educational stakeholders on effective strategies for enhancing supervision practices in 21st-century education. A fundamental suggestion is to encourage instructional supervisors to embrace transformational leadership strategies that motivate teachers to fulfill their most significant potential. Mentorship programs, leadership development courses, and creative teaching methods can help achieve this. Provide leadership workshops that give instructional supervisors the tools to deliver future-focused instruction. As educational demands change, these programs should emphasize technology integration, cultural competency, adaptation, and creativity. Develop initiatives that increase the motivation and job satisfaction of teachers. Focus on leadership practices that raise student achievement and are student-centered. By implementing these recommendations, educational leaders may create a conducive and effective learning environment that promotes teacher growth and student success in the 21st century.

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