# Master Teachers' Instructional Competencies, Leadership Practices, and Challenges in Achieving Professional Development: Input to Proposed Competency-Based Policy Brief

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**Abstract**

This study explored the instructional competencies, leadership practices, and challenges faced by Master Teachers in the Division of Tayabas City, Quezon, and Lucena City during the school year 2025–2026. It aimed to determine the level of instructional competencies and leadership practices and examine their relationship with professional development engagement. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed, using a survey questionnaire as the primary data-gathering instrument among selected Master Teachers. The findings revealed that Master Teachers demonstrated a highly competent level of instructional practices, particularly in classroom management, pedagogical knowledge, and assessment techniques. They also exhibited strong leadership practices in terms of collaboration, communication, and adaptability. However, they experienced significant challenges in terms of workload, indicating the need for institutional support to reduce task overload. Further results showed that instructional competencies and leadership practices were positively correlated, with leadership practices fully mediating the relationship between instructional competencies and professional development engagement. Overall, the study highlighted that strong leadership practices enhanced the impact of instructional competencies on professional growth, underscoring the importance of supportive leadership systems in promoting continuous teacher development and school improvement.

"Keywords: Master Teachers; instructional competencies; leadership practices; challenges; professional development"

## 1. Introduction

Quality education is essential for the nation's development as it enhances the individual's opportunities and contributes to the growth of the society as a whole, on both social and economic scales. Education provides individuals with opportunities to enhance the quality of life and gain access to other life chances, which will further expand their opportunities and development (UNESCO, 2015). It is in this line where the teacher, considered to be the facilitator of learning, should be a mentor or a leader of students through the effective and adaptable teaching practices of a teacher for the success of students' learning (Darling-Hammond, 2017).

In the Philippine educational context, the designation of Master Teacher as the highest point in instructional expertise requires teachers to be excellent in teaching, provide instructional supervision and coaching to other teachers, take a leadership role in professional development activities, and support the implementation of the curriculum. With the requirements of 21st-century education, a teacher who is assigned

as a Master Teacher will also take part in a significant role in instructional leadership and school improvement. (DepEd, 2019).

In spite of this crucial role, there are a number of obstacles faced by Master Teachers. Among these problems are high workload, limited materials/resources, insufficient institutional support, and varied student needs that influence Master Teachers' role in leadership and instructional tasks (Fullan, 2007; Guarino et al., 2006). Though policies like the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers were implemented to cater to their needs and facilitate the profession, differences between the implemented policies and actual practice in school could still be observed, particularly in action research, utilization of ICT, and group work.

Considering these issues, this study investigates the instructional competence, practices in leadership, and the obstacles encountered by Master Teachers of Divisions of Tayabas City, Quezon, and Lucena City in SY 2025-2026 to know how it influences their professional development and how it helps strengthen their instructional leadership and enhance the quality of education.

## 2. Methodology

### *2.1. Research Design*

The design for this This study utilized descriptive-correlational research approach to thoroughly investigate Master Teachers' instructional competencies, leadership practices, and challenges as a basis for enhancing professional development policies in the Division of Tayabas City, Quezon, and Lucena City for School Year 2025–2026. This approach allowed the researcher to collect data, analyze them, and the results to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Quantitative data addressed the levels and relationships between key variables.

### *2.2. Respondents of the Study*

The participants in the study were the Master Teachers I and II from public elementary and secondary schools from the three divisions. Purposive sampling was utilized in order to select the sample for this study. The Master Teachers used were all involved in the instructional supervision, mentoring, and curriculum improvement. There was a total of 106 Master Teachers from the three divisions. All Master Teachers must have at least one year of experience. For the ethical issues, participants have signed a consent form, confidentiality was ensured to all respondents, participation in the study was voluntary, and they have the right to withdraw at any time.

### *2.3. Research Instruments*

A validated researcher-made questionnaire was used to gather the data. The questionnaire was divided into four parts: instructional competencies, leadership practices, challenges encountered, and professional development. Responses were measured in a 5-point Likert Scale format. Reliability testing indicated a high consistency where Cronbach's Alpha values were between good and excellent; therefore, a valid and reliable tool to be utilized.

### *2.4. Research Procedure*

The data was collected after acquiring the permission from the Schools Division Superintendents and school heads. The researcher personally administered the questionnaire by sending it through Google Forms.

The responses of the participants were collated and properly recorded for analysis. All ethical standards for data handling and usage of information were guaranteed for academic purposes only.

### *2.5. Data Analysis*

The data gathered were treated with descriptive and inferential statistical tools. Mean and standard deviation were used in describing the variables. Correlation and regression analyses were used in identifying and testing the relationship and predictive effect of variables. Mediation analysis was done to identify leadership practices that mediated instructional competency, while moderation was done to determine the effect of challenges in this relationship. All the results are interpreted at the respective alpha levels.

## 3. Results and Discussions

### *3.1. Master Teachers Instructional Competencies*

Table 1. Perceived Instructional Competencies

| Parameters | Mean | SD | Verbal Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pedagogical Knowledge | 3.65 | 0.55 | Highly Competent |
| Instructional Strategies | 3.62 | 0.58 | Highly Competent |
| Classroom Management | 3.71 | 0.54 | Highly Competent |
| Assessment Techniques | 3.65 | 0.57 | Highly Competent |
| **Overall** | **3.66** | **0.56** | **Highly Competent** |

The results on master teachers indicated a high level of professional competence among the master teachers, with an overall mean of 3.66. This indicated the high command of the core teaching domains and preparedness to guide instructional enhancement. Classroom management attained the highest mean among all the indicators. It revealed their ability to establish a well-managed, positive, and appropriate classroom environment for learning. Both Pedagogical Knowledge and Assessment Techniques have strong competency, which clearly illustrates their solid foundations in teaching and assessment. Instructional strategies, although they attained the lowest score, still show a strong level of competence, suggesting the continued use of well-chosen, varied instructional techniques. In summary, the results revealed a mastery of instructional competencies that influence positive instructional practices and learner outcomes among the master teachers.

### *3.2. Master Teachers Leadership Practices*

Table 2. Perceived Leadership Practice

| Parameters | Mean | SD | Verbal Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Decision-Making | 3.53 | 0.54 | Very High Extent |
| Collaboration | 3.64 | 0.50 | Very High Extent |
| Communication Style | 3.62 | 0.54 | Very High Extent |
| Resistance to Change | 3.63 | 0.50 | Very High Extent |
| Overall | 3.61 | 0.40 | Very High Extent |

As seen in Table 2, Leadership practices are put into practice to a Very High Extent, with an overall mean of 3.61, which indicates the adaptability and robustness of the leaders when adapting to change in a dynamic environment. As indicated by Munda (2021), collaboration holds the highest mean (3.64), emphasizing teamwork, shared work, and collective working among leaders towards a common goal in an organization. Resistance to change (3.63) and Communication style (3.62) are also indicated as in a very High extent, confirming the robustness and clarity of leadership adaptability as reported by Boss (2015), Donato (2021), and Belbestre et al. (2024), which are linked to innovation and transparency with an efficient way of leading and conducting. Nevertheless, Decision-Making had the lowest mean of 3.53, which implies there is

some constraint in reconciling the interests of stakeholders under new requirements (as described by Hare, 2024). The findings conclude that leadership practices are in very high extent of how flexible and responsive leaders can change strategies in response to organizational challenges.

### *3.3 Challenges Faced by Master Teachers*

Table 3. Perceived Challenges Faced

| Parameters | Mean | SD | Verbal Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Institutional Support | 2.31 | 0.91 | Slightly |
| Workload | 2.59 | 0.97 | Much |
| Resources Availability | 2.41 | 0.89 | Slightly |
| Student Diversity | 2.30 | 0.86 | Slightly |
| Overall | 2.40 | 0.71 | Slightly |

From Table 3, respondents indicated that they were to a certain extent (slightly challenged) doing their jobs, with a mean score of 2.40. Of all the indicators, Workload has the greatest concern (2.59, Much challenged), showing that the number of duties involved in carrying out their jobs contributes a great deal to the extent to which they are doing their work as well as the sense of well-being they derive from doing so. Workload has been found in studies to lower work performance and job satisfaction. Resource availability (2.41) also indicates that the respondents have encountered some moderate challenges, particularly in the use of instructional technologies and the completion of a full teaching load, but have limited existing institutional support (2.31), demonstrating a persistent need for more opportunities for continued professional development. Student diversity had the lowest mean (2.30) and indicates that there are further efforts in adapting to diversity. Generally, though respondents found themselves doing their jobs well enough, they have encountered workload as a significant area that requires a robust institutional support system.

### *3.4 Professional Development*

Table 4. Perceived Professional Development

| Parameters | Mean | SD | Verbal Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Training Programs | 3.36 | 0.67 | High Extent |
| Mentoring Initiatives | 3.60 | 0.55 | Very High Extent |
| Leadership Strategies | 3.52 | 0.55 | Very High Extent |
| Curriculum Improvement | 3.30 | 0.64 | High Extent |
| Overall | 3.45 | 0.60 | High Extent |

Based on Table 4, on average, professional development is done to a High Extent, where the overall mean is 3.45. The highest rated domains are Mentoring Initiatives (3.60) and Leadership Strategies (3.52), both considered to be implemented to a Very High Extent, meaning that the most prominent aspect of professional development among the Master Teachers is having support from personal mentors and effective instructional leadership. This is consistent with the new responsibility of a Master Teacher, that of an instructional leader, who coaches peers and mentors them in classroom practice, promotes collaborative planning and problem-solving, and serves as a model of exemplary instruction. Similar to what was stated in NEAP (n.d.) and previous research, it is these domains of mentoring and leadership that significantly contribute to the enhancement of teacher practice, the growth of teacher professional well-being, and the participation of teachers in collaborative decision-making of schools. While Training programs and curriculum improvement, although rated with a High Extent also, these are the lowest rated domains, and suggest that certain constraints such as limited access to high-quality training, heavy teacher workload, and inadequate time for continuing curriculum work in schools seem to be present.

*3.5 Test of Correlations Between Variables*

Table 5. Test of the Relationship between Instructional Competencies and Leadership Practices

| Instructional Competencies | Leadership Practices | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Decision-Making | Collaboration | Communication Style | Resistance to Change |
| Pedagogical Knowledge | 0.550*** | 0.544*** | 0.527*** | 0.550*** |
| Instructional Strategies | 0.577*** | 0.554*** | 0.565*** | 0.554*** |
| Classroom Management | 0.521*** | 0.545*** | 0.531*** | 0.483*** |
| Assessment Techniques | 0.570*** | 0.582*** | 0.513*** | 0.540*** |

*Note.* * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

As indicated in Table 21, there were moderate to strong, significant relationships between instructional competencies and leadership practices for the Master Teachers (r=.483 to .582, p < .001), suggesting that instructional competence is a contributor to leadership practices. Mastery in instructional areas such as assessment practices, instructional strategies, pedagogical knowledge, and classroom management, therefore, contributes significantly to the emergence of leadership behaviors in the areas of collaboration, decision-making, and communication. Assessment techniques provided the strongest coefficients, especially with collaboration (r=.582) and decision-making (r=.570), demonstrating that using data to inform instruction could have a significant impact on collegiality and decision-making. Instructional strategies and pedagogical knowledge were also highly correlated with dimensions of leadership, further supporting the belief that the art of teaching can play a role in the development of leadership qualities such as professional impact and instructional leadership. Classroom management provided the lowest of the significant correlation coefficients, specifically in regard to resistance to change (r=.483), suggesting that mastery of effective classroom management practices does not necessarily contribute to adaptability. Nevertheless, instructional competencies were important in supporting leadership practices for the Master Teachers.

Table 6. Test of the Relationship between Leadership Practices and Professional Development

| Leadership Practices | Professional Development | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Training Programs | Mentoring Initiatives | Leadership Strategies | Curriculum Improvement |
| Decision-Making | 0.375*** | 0.470*** | 0.569*** | 0.337*** |
| Collaboration | 0.399*** | 0.509*** | 0.592*** | 0.396*** |
| Communication Style | 0.483*** | 0.519*** | 0.525*** | 0.274** |
| Resistance to Change | 0.378*** | 0.533*** | 0.554*** | 0.343*** |

*Note.* * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table 6 reports a significant positive and generally consistent relationship between leadership practices of Master Teachers and each of the dimensions of professional development; all the relationships are significant (p < .001). A high leadership practices score is related to successful outcomes in each dimension of professional development, providing evidence of the fundamental role of Master Teachers as facilitators of professional growth and school improvement. Collaboration is most strongly related to leadership strategies (r=0.592) and mentoring (r= 0.509). This is to say that more effective collaboration supports better instruction, leadership strategies, and a stronger mentoring system. Decision-making is also very strongly related; it provides a key indicator of instructional leadership and mentoring practices, aligning with previous research on data-driven decision-making and distributed leadership. Adaptation to change and resistance to change are also very strongly correlated to leadership strategies (r=0.554) and mentoring (r=0.533); adaptable leadership is critical to success in professional development as the system adjusts. Communication style has a consistent but not as strong positive relation, especially to the outcome variable Curriculum improvement (r=0.274); it may be supporting the other areas rather than being the key driver of the curricular change. The data strongly support the notion that Master Teacher leadership, especially collaboration, decision-making,

and adaptation/resistance to change, are critical factors to enhancing professional development system-wide and are directly aligned with the National policies that recognize Master Teachers as key players in instructional leadership and teacher professional development.

Table 7. Test of the Relationship between Instructional Competencies and Professional Development

| Instructional Competencies | Professional Development | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Training Programs | Mentoring Initiatives | Leadership Strategies | Curriculum Improvement |
| Pedagogical Knowledge | 0.236* | 0.387*** | 0.347*** | 0.184 |
| Instructional Strategies | 0.321*** | 0.377*** | 0.420*** | 0.228* |
| Classroom Management | 0.278** | 0.367*** | 0.405*** | 0.234* |
| Assessment Techniques | 0.258** | 0.382*** | 0.396*** | 0.238* |

*Note.* * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table 7 reveals a significant a strong positive relationship between Master Teacher's instructional competencies and their participation in professional development was found across all areas-Pedagogical Knowledge, Instructional Strategies, Classroom Management, and Assessment Techniques. In all areas, Leadership Strategies had the strongest correlation. The strongest relationships were found between Instructional Strategies (r = 0.420) and Classroom Management (r = 0.405). In the case of these two competencies, instructional leadership seems to be highly related to good teaching practice. Mentoring Initiatives showed consistently strong positive relationships with all instructional competencies (r = 0.367-0.387, p < .001). Master Teachers with a good pedagogical understanding and a good classroom management skill set seem to be well-positioned to support their colleagues. Training Programs showed significant positive relationships with all of the instructional competencies. This suggests that to be effective, professional development should be relevant and practical.

Curriculum Improvement showed relatively weak positive relationships and was not significantly related to Pedagogical Knowledge (r = 0.184). This means that despite strong pedagogical content knowledge and instructional skills, Master Teachers may not readily engage in curriculum development, and more support may be needed to promote collaboration in this area. In summary, the instructional competencies have a strong relationship with positive engagement in meaningful professional development, in particular, through leadership and mentoring opportunities.

### *3.6 Mediation Analysis*

Table 8. Mediating Role of Leadership Practices between Instructional Competencies and Professional Development

| Effect | | | Estimate | SE | Z | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Indirect | | | 0.3136 | 0.0714 | 4.393 | <.001 |
| Direct | | | 0.0614 | 0.0971 | 0.632 | 0.527 |
| Total | | | 0.375 | 0.0859 | 4.365 | <.001 |
| **Path Estimates** | | | **Estimate** | **SE** | **Z** | **p** |
| Instructional Competencies | → | Leadership Practices | 0.5444 | 0.0677 | 8.043 | <.001 |
| Leadership Practices | → | Professional Development | 0.5759 | 0.1098 | 5.244 | <.001 |
| Instructional Competencies | → | Professional Development | 0.0614 | 0.0971 | 0.632 | 0.527 |

Table 8 clearly demonstrates that leadership practices serve as a full mediator in the relationship between instructional competencies and professional development among Master Teachers. The indirect effect is statistically significant (Estimate = .3136, p < .001) with instruction competencies promoting professional development through the implementation of leadership practices. As seen in the direct effect, it is not statistically significant (p=.527) that instruction competencies have a strong influence on professional development. Nonetheless, the total effect is significant (p<.001), and the entire effect is accounted for in the

mediation effect pathway. Further examined using path estimates, instruction competencies influence leadership practices, which are strong predictors of professional development. The current study identifies leadership practices as the necessary link to connect the impact of instructional competencies to professional development among Master Teachers.

### *3.7 Moderating Role of Challenges Faced*

Table 9. Moderating Role of Challenges Faced between Instructional Competencies and Professional Development

| Moderation Estimates | Estimate | SE | Z | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Instructional Competencies | 0.3588 | 0.0832 | 4.31 | <.001 |
| Challenges Faced | -0.078 | 0.0534 | -1.46 | 0.144 |
| Instructional Competencies ✻ Challenges Faced | 0.4196 | 0.1558 | 2.69 | 0.007 |
| **Simple Slope Estimates** | **Estimate** | **SE** | **Z** | **p** |
| Average | 0.3588 | 0.0881 | 4.072 | <.001 |
| Low (-1SD) | 0.0595 | 0.1467 | 0.406 | 0.685 |
| High (+1SD) | 0.6581 | 0.1398 | 4.707 | <.001 |

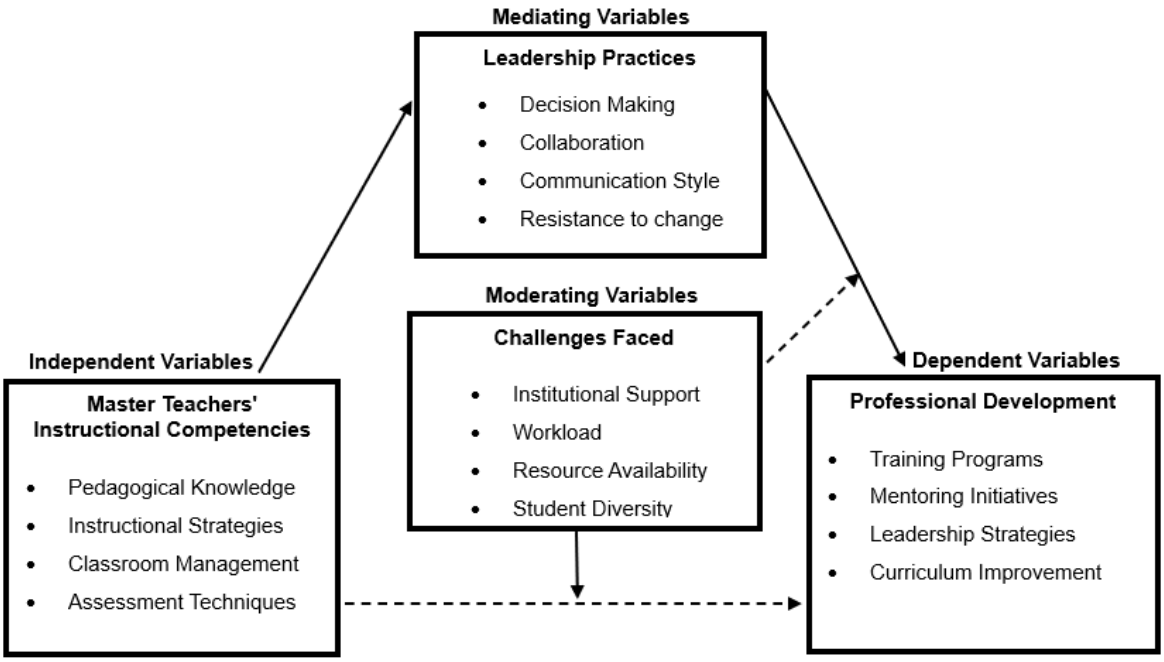
Table 9 highlights that challenges faced by Master Teachers significantly moderate the relationship between instructional competencies and professional development. Instructional competence has a strong positive main effect on professional development (p<.001), and challenges have a non-significant main effect (p=0.144). However, the significant interaction effect between instructional competence and challenges (p=.007) demonstrates that as challenges increase, instructional competence is a stronger predictor of professional development. Simple slopes reveal that instructional competence has the strongest positive effect on professional development at higher levels of challenges (p<.001), it has a positive effect at moderate levels of challenges (p<.001), but has no effect at lower levels of challenges (p=.685). The results seem to demonstrate that challenges actually increase the predictive power of instructional competence on professional development, therefore implying that challenges may act as a trigger, helping to promote Master Teachers' development of and utilization of their professional competence.

Table 10. Moderating Role of Challenges Faced between Leadership Practices and Professional Development

| Moderation Estimates | Estimate | SE | Z | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Leadership Practices | 0.6011 | 0.0863 | 6.96 | <.001 |
| Challenges Faced | -0.049 | 0.0487 | -1.01 | 0.314 |
| Leadership Practices ✻ Challenges Faced | 0.1806 | 0.1262 | 1.43 | 0.152 |

Table 10 reveals that leadership practices have a significant and strong positive relationship with Master Teacher professional development (Estimate=0.6011, p<.001), meaning leadership practices such as decision making, communication, and cooperation positively influence a Master Teacher's participation in professional development. The challenges faced by Master Teachers, however, do not have a significant relationship with Master Teacher professional development (p=.314), meaning that Master Teacher professional development is not directly impeded by the presence of these challenges. Additionally, there is no interaction effect between leadership practices and challenges (p=.152), meaning the positive impact of leadership practices on professional development does not change based on the level of challenges Master Teachers encounter. Therefore, while leadership practices positively influence Master Teacher professional development, challenges do not directly or indirectly impact it.

Figure 1
*The Mediating and Moderating Effects of Leadership Practices and Challenges on the Instructional Competencies and Professional Development of Master Teachers*




As seen from the research paradigm, the competencies of the Master Teachers are the core of professional development. But their development is mediated through leadership behaviors, such as collaboration, communication, and decision-making. The context and working environment, workload, resources, and organizational commitment can promote or mediate their development. The overall professional development is the combination of competencies, leadership, and working environment.

## 4. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, it has been concluded that the instructional competencies, leadership practices, and professional development of the Master Teachers are closely interrelated and leadership practices are very important mediation in which the instructional competencies are transformed into effective and sustainable teacher professional development. It is found in the result that not only is the teacher's professional development significantly related to the leadership practice and instructional competency separately, but the mediated relation is significantly related to the teacher's professional development. Finally, it has also been concluded that the problems experienced by the Master Teachers significantly affect their relationship of instructional competencies, leadership practices, and professional development, which may be the result that context could strengthen or weaken the teacher professional development, while effective leadership practice is always an influencing variable that always encourages and sustains teacher professional development and organizational improvement.

## 5. Recommendations

Recommendations based on the above conclusion have been suggested that Master Teachers should continuously improve their instructional competencies through the use of ICT, higher-order thinking skills development, and learning processes like PLC and LAC in work-life balance and effective management of workload. School leaders and administrators should enhance supportive mechanisms through the removal of administrative load, provision of administrative support services, continued coaching, mentoring, and technical assistance, and programs that enhance the leadership practice and the teacher professional development of Master Teachers. Schools Division Offices may create development programs on leadership that could further improve skills in decision making, collaboration, and flexibility in response to Master Teachers' needs. Further research should consider other variables like emotional intelligence, stress management, and organizational support to gain more insight into teacher professional development and improve school practice.

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