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RESEARCH PAPER

Effect of School Heads' Instructional Leadership Practices on Teachers' Functional Competencies: The Mediation of Teachers' Attitude toward Teaching

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ABSTRACT

This study intends to investigate the instructional leadership practices of secondary school heads and how these practices affect two important aspects such as teachers' functional competencies and teachers' attitude toward teaching. A sample of 300 teachers from 20 secondary schools in District Sargodha was selected to collect data using three questionnaires i.e. Instructional Leadership Standardized Scale, Functional Competencies Scale, and Attitude Towards Teaching Scale. The collected data from 281 respondents underwent analysis using Mean, Standard Deviation, t-test, ANOVA, and Linear Regression through SPSS. The findings suggest a positive and significant relationship between study variables. In essence, effective instructional leadership behaviors exhibited by school heads in promoting quality teaching and learning appear to positively influence teachers' abilities and skills and their viewpoint toward the teaching profession. The study recommended that educational institutions should prioritize the adoption of instructional leadership strategies to enhance teacher competence and improve their attitude.

| **KEYWORDS** | Instructional Leadership, Functional Competencies, Attitude toward Teaching |

Introduction

In today's educational landscape, the practices of principals and school leaders wield significant influence over students' learning experiences and teachers' work competence and attitude. This shift has profound implications for the teaching and learning processes. However, limited research has delved into the relationship between instructional leadership practices by school leaders and teachers' functional competencies and their attitude towards teaching. It is imperative to address how school leaders employ instructional leadership to bolster teachers' beliefs, competency, and ultimately, classroom instruction. Therefore, the present study seeks to investigate the effect of instructional leadership practices exhibited by school heads on the attitude of teachers towards teaching and their functional competencies within secondary schools in the Sargodha district.

Instructional Leadership: Leadership within educational institutions is an essential catalyst for elevating the quality of education. School teachers require guidance from motivated, competent, skillful, and empathetic leaders. According to Borland (2016), effective school leadership demands a multifaceted approach that draws from various leadership models. One such model is instructional leadership, which provides teachers and students with a clear vision and educational objectives. School leaders who exhibit instructional leadership not only mentor and coach teachers for professional development but also foster their functionality and competence (Robinson et al., 2008). Consequently,

school leaders proficient in instructional leadership significantly contribute to outstanding school performance (Ahmad et al., 2021).

Ismail et al. (2018) emphasize that the instructional leadership framework enhances teachers' professional skills, ultimately benefiting students' learning experiences. Leaders with instructional leadership qualities possess the ability to chart a clear path for their institution and effectively communicate this vision to their staff, thus enhancing student achievement. They further assist educators through coaching, counseling, and facilitating both formal and informal professional development opportunities (Borland, 2016). Instructional leaders act as valuable resources, aiding teachers in refining their teaching methods and, in turn, enriching the educational journey for students.

Teachers are the frontline ambassadors of educational institutions, continually engaging with students. Instructional leadership necessitates that school leaders support teachers in areas such as classroom management, professional growth, and resource allocation (Hansen & Làrudsóttir, 2015; Duplessis, 2013; Salo et al., 2014). A school leader should be both a resource and an ally in the realm of teaching. School leaders motivate and support teachers, encouraging them to innovate and participate in professional development opportunities, which positively impact student learning outcomes (Duplessis, 2013). Leaders proficient in instructional leadership empower and guide teachers to enhance their instructional skills, leading to improved student achievement.

Instructional leaders not only coach teachers but also increase the likelihood of teachers implementing new skills in the classroom through collaboration (Carraway & Young, 2014) and working together to enhance teaching skills (Kaparou & Bush, 2015). To fulfill their roles effectively, educators require access to various resources and materials. Instructional leaders ensure that teachers have the necessary resources to provide students with the best possible education. They recognize that expertise often resides in multiple individuals, making it their responsibility to connect teachers with the resources they need (Graczewski, Knudson & Holtzman, 2009). School leaders proficient in instructional leadership provide teachers with the essential material and resources. These leaders act as a wellspring of guidance, staying updated on effective teaching and evaluation methods, and directing and assisting teachers to enhance their instructional abilities (Duplessis, 2013).

Functional Competencies: Competency, as defined by Nijveldt et al. (2005), encompasses knowledge, skills, and attitude, representing the fusion of these elements that allow an individual to execute a task with precision and that collectively define an individual's capability. Competence is characterized as the amalgamation of knowledge, skills, and attributes required for the proficient execution of specific tasks or roles (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Employees possess some generic competencies like communication skills and problem-solving and some personal skills like adaptability and emotional intelligence. These elements collectively influence an individual's capability to excel in their chosen profession or role, and employers often seek candidates who possess a balanced blend of these competencies to obtain success in the workplace (Ismail et al., 2018.

According to Klassen and Chiu (2010), teachers' competency encompasses various aspects, including teaching, research, managing the learning process, and adapting to the community. A quality teacher can diversify teaching methodologies, create effective AV aids, assess students' abilities, motivate students, manage behavior, group students effectively, and provide continuous assessment (Murphy et al., 2007). When teachers possess strong teaching competency, they can effectively engage students in the learning process. Therefore, within a school, a leader proficient in instructional leadership plays a

pivotal role in making teachers functionally competent, which, in turn, contributes to improved student performance.

McCoy (2001) stated that proficient teachers should possess subject mastery by demonstrating a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter they are teaching, along with the ability to effectively convey this knowledge to students. An effective teacher should be well-versed in pedagogical techniques to engage students and facilitate effective learning. The teacher should be adept at selecting appropriate learning materials and resources that align with the curriculum and enhance the learning experience. Recognizing the diversity of students' intelligence levels and learning styles, a skilled teacher should use differentiated instruction techniques. These components, as described by McCoy (2001), collectively form the foundation of a teacher's functional competency, enabling them to create a dynamic and effective learning environment.

Attitude towards teaching: Attitude is emphasized as a critical factor in the teaching profession because it can substantially shape how teachers apply their knowledge and skills in the classroom. Instructional leaders not only improve teaching and learning but they may also change the behavior of teachers positively. If teachers' attitude is positive towards teaching it may motivate teacher to develop their competencies. Even if educators possess a high level of expertise, a negative attitude can impede their ability to convey this effectively. Teachers with a positive attitude towards their profession are more likely to inspire intrinsic motivation in their students (Andronache, et al., 2014). This implies that a teacher's attitude can play a role in cultivating students' interest and enthusiasm for learning (Celikoz & Cetin, 2004). Educators with a positive attitude may be more inclined to tailor and personalize the learning experience to cater to individual student needs and preferences.

The beliefs and attitudes of teachers significantly affect their emotional experiences in the profession. This suggests that one's attitude toward teaching can impact motivation, job satisfaction, and overall well-being as a teacher. Several studies indicate that a teacher's attitude towards the teaching profession is closely linked to their efficiency and performance in the classroom (Bhargava, 2014). A teacher's attitude towards teaching can leave an impression on motivation and competence (Cornelius, 2000). Positive attitudes not only enhance learning but also create a conducive classroom environment that fosters effective learning. Hoy & Tarter, (2011) research has indicated that instructional school leaders influence teachers' efficacy.

Previous studies (Premavathy, 2010; Brolund, 2016; Ismail et al., 2018; Ahmad et al., 2021), investigating instructional leadership and teachers' competencies, have consistently demonstrated a significant relationship between instructional leadership and teachers' functional competencies and teachers' attitudes. These studies, conducted in diverse contexts, underscore the need to explore this relationship further in other settings to search for the impact from a causal-comparative perspective. Consequently, this research aims to investigate the impact of instructional leadership practices on teachers' functional competencies and their attitude toward teaching in secondary schools within the Sargodha district of Punjab province. Moreover, this study also intends to measure the mediating effect of teachers' attitudes toward teaching on the relationship between heads' instructional leadership styles and teachers' functional competency.

Material and Methods

Population and Sample

The study's population was public sector secondary school teachers within the Sargodha district. To conduct the research, a sample of 300 teachers, representing both genders, was randomly selected from this population. However, data from 281 responses were ultimately used for drawing inferences.

Instrumentation

To collect data, a standardized questionnaire on instructional leadership was adapted from the work of Hellinger and Murphy (1985). In addition to this, the research team designed a questionnaire to assess functional competencies and attitudes toward teaching. To ensure the quality of the research instrument, several steps were taken. The research instrument underwent a review process involving input from peers and experts. Changes were made based on their feedback to enhance clarity and relevance.

Pilot Testing

A pilot test was conducted with 40 prospective teachers selected through convenient sampling. The responses from this pilot group were excluded from the final data analysis, a common practice in refining questionnaires. Items that undermined the instrument's reliability were removed to ensure consistent and dependable results. Cronbach alpha reliability values are given in Table 1.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Mean, Std, Alpha values and correlation coefficient for Instructional leadership, Teachers' Functional Competencies, and their Attitude toward Teaching

SN	Factors	Mean	SD	α	IL	FC	AT
Instructional Leadership		**3.923**	**.695**	**.948**	1	.787**	.684**
1	Form the school objectives	3.846	.941		.683**	.499**	.455**
2	Communicate school objectives	3.926	.879		.767**	.585**	.521**
3	Coordinating the curriculum	3.997	.866		.816**	.669**	.612**
4	Monitoring students' progress	3.888	.881		.847**	.654**	.558**
5	Protecting instructional time	3.947	.842		.813**	.639**	.571**
6	Maintaining high visibility	3.925	.814		.799**	.625**	.523**
7	Providing incentives for teachers	3.975	.838		.818**	.715**	.604**
8	Provide incentives for learning	3.923	.876		.801**	.716**	.593**
Functional Competencies		**4.018**	**.778**	**.958**	.787**	1	.847**
1	Planning and supervising	3.977	.908		.611**	.778**	.576**
2	Multiple Learning methodologies	4.040	.919		.691**	.866**	.716**
3	Assessment	3.981	.985		.684**	.862**	.727**
4	Pedagogical knowledge	4.067	.842		.711**	.854**	.686**
5	Resilience	3.966	.957		.635**	.859**	.704**
6	Technology integration	4.064	1.02		.644**	.805**	.645**
7	Communication	3.968	1.05		.650**	.842**	.641**
8	Curriculum implementation	4.098	.916		.616**	.824**	.632**
Attitude toward teaching		**4.201**	**.894**	**.799**	.684**	.847**	1

Table 1 displays the level of instructional leadership (Mean=3.92), functional competencies (Mean= 4.02), and attitude toward teaching (Mean= 4.20) as high. The Cronbach alpha for all three variables was .948, .958, and .799 respectively, which was in the acceptable range.

The table reveals the relationship between the instructional leadership practices of heads and teacher's functional competency. The result shows (r=.787) a positive and statistically significant and strong relationship between the instructional leadership practices of heads and the functional competency of teachers. The results also reveal (r=.684) a positively strong and statistically significant relationship between instructional leadership practices of heads and teachers' attitude towards teaching.

Table 2
Effect of Instructional Leadership Practices on Teacher's Functional Competencies and their Attitude towards Teaching

DVs	Model	B	SE	Beta	t	P	R^2
Functional Competencies	Constant	.559	.165		3.397	.001	
	Instructional Leadership	.882	.041	.787	21.338	.000	.620
	F=(1, 279)455.325, Sig=.000						
Attitude towards Teaching	Constant	.569	.224		2.545	.011	
	Instructional Leadership	.879	.056	.684	15.668	.000	.468
	F=(1, 279)245.490, Sig=.000						

Table 2 indicates the impact of instructional leadership on teachers' functional competency as the coefficient R^2 was .620 which shows 62% variation in results due to the instructional leadership style of the heads. The outcome shows that F (1,279) 245.49, p=.000 was significant. The findings show that instructional leadership has a significant effect on teacher functional competencies (*B*=.787, p=.000)

Table 2 demonstrates that instructional leadership explains 47 % of the variance in teachers' functional competency, as indicated by the R-square value. Furthermore, the beta value of .684 suggests that a unit increase in the independent variable (instructional leadership) results in a .68 unit increase in the dependent variable.
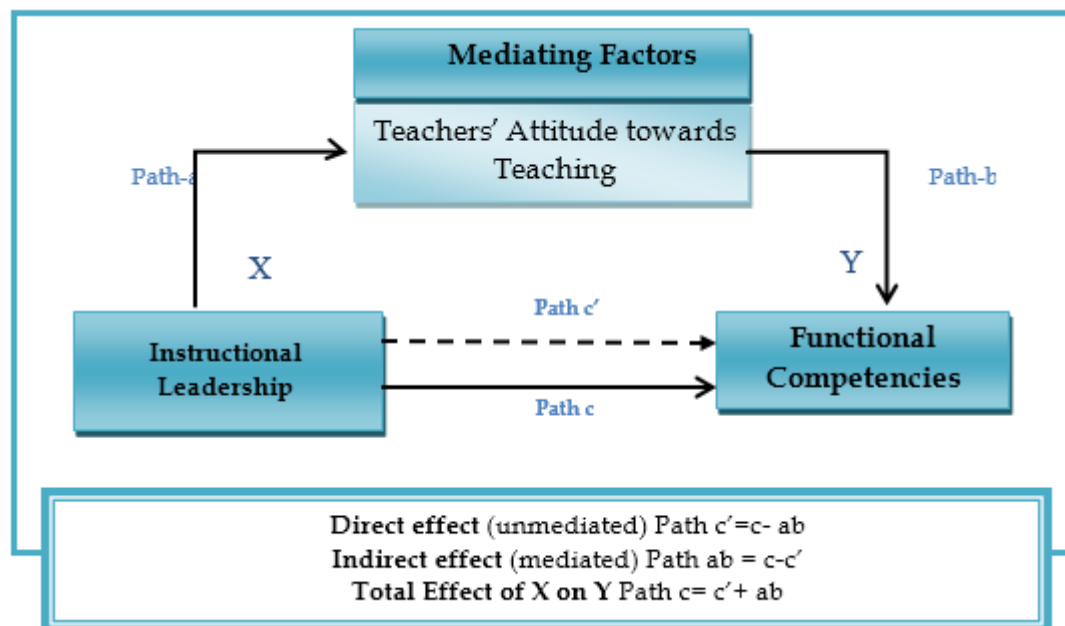

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of Hypothesized Mediation Model

Note: This figure demonstrates the conceptual framework of the effect of instructional leadership on functional competencies and the mediating effect of

instructional leadership on functional competencies through teachers' attitude towards teaching.

Table 3
Direct, Indirect, and Total effects of all variables of the study

Paths	B	SE	t	P	LLCI	ULCI
Direct Paths						
Instructional Leadership→ Functional Competencies	.438	.04	10.599	.000	.357	.519
Instructional Leadership→ Attitude towards Teaching	.879	.05	15.668	.000	.769	.989
Attitude towards Teaching→ Functional Competencies	.502	.03	15.661	.000	.441	.568
Indirect Path						
Instructional Leadership→ Attitude→ FuncComp	.443	.07		Sig	.313	.572
Total Effect						
InstLead→ Attitude + InstLead→ Attitude → FuncComp	.881	.041	21.34	.000	.801	.963

Note: InstLead = Instructional Leadership, FuncComp = Functional Competencies

Table 3 shows the standardized total effect of instructional leadership on functional competencies is significant *B* = .881, *t* =21.34, *p* .000. All values show a good model fit. The direct effect of IL on functional Competencies is significant (B= .438, *t* =10.599, *p*=.000). The direct effect of Instructional Leadership on attitude towards teaching is also significant (B= .879, *t* =15.67, *p* =.000). The direct effect of attitude towards teaching on functional competencies is again significant (B= .502, *t* =15.66, *p*= .000). The indirect effect of instructional leadership on functional competencies through the mediation of teachers' attitude towards teaching is significant, B=0.443 (LLCI=.313, ULCI=.572); 5000 bootstrap samples were selected to test the mediation. This indirect effect is significant as the confidence interval's lower and upper bounds differ from zero. Therefore, the mediation type suggested by the model is partial mediation.

Discussion

This study delves into the link between instructional leadership practices exhibited by secondary school principals and the functional competence of teachers at the secondary education level. Moreover, instructional leadership practices were also evaluated to see their role in improving teachers' attitude toward teaching. Here's a condensed summary of the main findings and insights from the research:

Principals were exhibiting strong instructional roles especially coordinating the curriculum, monitoring students' progress, and protecting instructional time. The teachers' scores were fairly high in competencies such as planning and supervision skills, use of various learning methods, pedagogical knowledge, technology integration, and curriculum implementation having a substantial impact on student achievement. Effective curriculum planning by school principals and its implementation through teachers were identified as pivotal elements in the student learning process. The study revealed that secondary school principals effectively communicated with teachers, students, parents, and the wider community as effective communication is indispensable for achieving educational goals (Ahmad et al., 2021). Current research emphasizes the pivotal role of technology integration and utilization in schools for student learning and organizational success. Earlier studies also reinforce the notion that organizations and students benefit from integrating technology into the educational process of curriculum (Hammond, 2000).

The study uncovered a noteworthy correlation between the instructional leadership practices exhibited by secondary school principals as perceived by the teachers and the functional competence of teachers. This discovery is in harmony with earlier work by Hellinger and Murphy (1985), and Hellinger (2011), which suggested a link between principal leadership and teacher competence. Robust instructional leadership was associated with improved outcomes in schools, in line with earlier research (Cansoy & Parlar, 2018). The research revealed a strong positive relationship between the different aspects of instructional leadership endowed by school principals and the various functional competencies of teachers. This aligns with findings from studies conducted by Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe (2008), and Hellinger and Murphy (1985). Most teachers surveyed in the study expressed accord with the instructional leadership practices in their schools. This supports the idea that there exists a favorable connection between instructional leadership and teachers' functional competence, as proposed by Hellinger (2011).

The findings make it clear that Instructional leadership had a positive and significant effect on functional competencies and the attitude of teachers toward teaching. The study suggests that instructional leadership practices upgrade teachers' functional competence, and better their attitude toward teaching for boosting students' academic achievements. This assertion is corroborated by prior research by Ross, Hogaboam-Grey, & Grey (2004), and Ebmeier (2003). The findings of Cansoy, and Parlar, (2018) also revealed that school leadership significantly and positively predicted collective teacher efficacy.

The mediation analysis revealed that the indirect effect of instructional leadership on functional competencies through the mediation of teachers' attitude towards teaching was significant. Therefore, there was a partial mediation effect of teachers' attitude towards teaching in the relationship between instructional leadership and functional competencies. A study by (Liu, & Hallinger, 2018) found a partial mediation for principal's time management and level of self-efficacy in the relationship between principal instructional leadership and teacher professional development. Similar findings were reported by Liu, Bellibas, and Gumus, (2021), who found out the mediating effects of a supportive school climate and teacher cooperation for instructional leadership and teacher job satisfaction.

Conclusion

It is concluded that a significant proportion of secondary school teachers support various aspects related to school objectives, communication of these objectives, curriculum coordination, student progress monitoring, protection of instructional time, maintaining a visible presence, offering incentives for teachers, and providing rewards for student achievements. Additionally, teachers also demonstrate consensus on topics including effective planning and supervision, the utilization of diverse teaching methodologies, assessment practices, teaching attitudes, pedagogical knowledge, resilience, and the integration of technology. Effective communication and successful curriculum implementation are also areas where teachers are largely united. In conclusion, the findings mentioned can serve as a valuable resource for educational policymakers, school districts, and institutions responsible for training school leaders. By investing in the development of secondary school principals and their instructional leadership skills, we can create a positive ripple effect that enhances the educational experience for students and contributes to long-term educational success.

This research underscores the pivotal role of instructional leadership within schools, highlighting its beneficial impact on both teacher competence and student outcomes. The study recommended that School leadership can put practices in place to

improve teachers' ability and competence. Moreover, educational institutions should prioritize the adoption of instructional leadership strategies to enhance teacher competence and improve their attitude for a better educational experience for students.

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