Instructional Leadership, Grade Assignment, Teaching Practices, and Competence Among Elementary Teachers: A Descriptive-Correlational Study

Zoraida Batua Pangansayan

Faculty of the Graduate School Holy Cross Of Davao College the Degree Doctor of Philosophy major in Educational Management

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.101100186

Received: 27 October 2026; Accepted: 03 November 2026; Published: 23 November 2026

ABSTRACT

This study examined perceived instructional leadership, teaching practices, and teacher competence among elementary teachers at Palimbang Central School, Palimbang I District, Sultan Kudarat. It also examined whether teachers' grade assignment—Kindergarten, Grades I–III, or Grades IV–VI—was significantly related to their teaching practices and competence. The study used a quantitative descriptive-correlational design and total enumeration of 30 eligible teachers. Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire covering perceived instructional leadership, teaching practices, and teacher competence, together with respondents' demographic and grade-assignment information. Frequency counts and percentages were used to describe the respondents' profiles, while weighted means summarized the three measured domains. The manuscript's reported correlation results showed a moderate negative relationship between grade assignment and teaching practices ($r = -0.509$, $p = .004072$), which was statistically significant at the .05 level. The relationship between grade assignment and teacher competence was very weak and not statistically significant ($r = 0.0373$, $p = .844855$). The findings suggest that teaching practices may vary across the grade-assignment categories, whereas measured teacher competence did not show a statistically significant association with grade assignment. Because grade assignment is an ordered categorical variable, the numerical coding and the appropriateness of the reported Pearson correlation should be verified against the raw data before final submission. The findings may inform differentiated professional development, instructional support, and collaborative learning opportunities.

Keywords: Instructional Leadership, Teaching Practices, Teacher Competence, Grade Assignment, Descriptive-Correlational Study

INTRODUCTION

The Problem and Its Setting

Improving teaching practices and teacher competence remains an important concern in the pursuit of quality education. Teachers are expected to demonstrate effective instructional planning, appropriate teaching strategies, classroom management, and assessment practices. Differences in professional learning opportunities, teaching resources, curriculum demands, and learner needs may shape how these responsibilities are carried out. Educational leadership is also important because school leaders establish academic expectations, provide instructional support, and create conditions that enable teachers to improve their practice.

International education systems continue to address challenges related to teacher workload, recruitment, professional support, and the quality of classroom instruction. Reports from the National Center for Education Statistics (2024), the Department for Education (2024), and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2023) point to the continuing importance of strengthening teacher support and professional learning. These concerns reinforce the need to examine the conditions associated with effective teaching and teacher competence.

In the Philippines, the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST), established through DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2017, provides a framework for teachers' professional growth and instructional performance. DepEd Order No. 5, s. 2024 also addresses the rationalization of teachers' workloads in public schools. Teachers assigned to Kindergarten, primary grades, and intermediate grades may encounter different curriculum expectations, developmental needs, instructional demands, and assessment requirements. These differences make grade assignment a relevant variable when examining teaching practices and competence.

At Palimbang Central School in Palimbang I District, Sultan Kudarat, teachers serve learners across Kindergarten, Grades I–III, and Grades IV–VI. Examining teaching practices and teacher competence across these grade-assignment categories may provide useful information for planning professional development and instructional support. The study therefore describes teachers' perceived instructional leadership environment, teaching practices, and competence, and examines the bivariate relationships between grade assignment and teaching practices and between grade assignment and teacher competence. Grade assignment is treated as the teacher's assigned grade grouping; it is not used as another term for instructional leadership.

Significance of the Study

The study may benefit teachers by identifying areas of strength and opportunities for improvement in instructional planning, teaching strategies, classroom management, assessment, and professional collaboration. The findings may help teachers reflect on the demands associated with their grade assignments and identify relevant professional learning needs.

School heads and instructional supervisors may use the findings as a basis for planning differentiated coaching, mentoring, and professional development. Understanding whether teaching practices and competence vary in association with grade assignment may help school leaders provide support responsive to the curriculum and developmental needs of learners.

The study may contribute to the research and educational development initiatives of Holy Cross of Davao College by providing local evidence relevant to educational management and teacher development. It is also aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities, and may inform efforts to provide more equitable access to professional support.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to describe perceived instructional leadership, teaching practices, and teacher competence among elementary teachers at Palimbang Central School and to determine the relationships of teachers' grade assignment with teaching practices and teacher competence.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the teacher-respondents in terms of gender, age, educational attainment, teaching experience, and grade assignment?
2. What is the level of perceived instructional leadership practices of the school head as assessed by the teachers?
3. To what extent do teachers demonstrate effective teaching practices?
4. What is the level of teacher competence?
5. Is there a significant relationship between teachers' grade assignment (Kindergarten, Grades I–III, and Grades IV–VI) and their teaching practices?
6. Is there a significant relationship between teachers' grade assignment (Kindergarten, Grades I–III, and Grades IV–VI) and their teacher competence?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance:

$H_0$1: There is no significant relationship between teachers' grade assignment and their teaching practices.

$H_0$2: There is no significant relationship between teachers' grade assignment and their teacher competence.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in Shulman's (1987) theory of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), which explains the integration of subject-matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge required for effective teaching. PCK emphasizes that teachers must understand not only the content they teach but also how to represent, explain, and adapt that content to learners' varied abilities and needs. This perspective is relevant to teachers assigned to different grade groupings because instructional decisions must respond to the curriculum content and developmental characteristics of learners.

In this study, PCK provides a conceptual basis for understanding teaching practices and teacher competence. Perceived instructional leadership is examined descriptively as a contextual feature of the school environment. Grade assignment is treated as an ordinal grouping variable for the two relationship questions. The study does not test a mediating effect, and no mediation model or indirect effect is estimat

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study describes three measured domains: perceived instructional leadership practices of the school head, teachers' teaching practices, and teacher competence. Teachers' grade assignment (Kindergarten, Grades I–III, or Grades IV–VI) is used as the grouping/ordinal variable in examining its bivariate relationship with teaching practices and teacher competence. No mediation pathway is proposed.

Grade Assignment → Teaching Practices

Grade Assignment → Teacher Competence

Perceived instructional leadership is separately described through teachers' ratings and is not the variable used in the reported correlation tables.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive component summarized the respondents' profile and their ratings of perceived instructional leadership, teaching practices, and teacher competence. The correlational component examined the bivariate relationships between teachers' grade assignment and teaching practices and between grade assignment and teacher competence. The design does not establish causation and does not test mediation.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted at Palimbang Central School, located in Palimbang I District, Sultan Kudarat, Philippines. The school served as the setting for examining teachers' instructional practices and professional competence across Kindergarten, primary grades, and intermediate grades

Respondents and Sampling

The respondents were 30 eligible teachers at Palimbang Central School. Total enumeration was used. The respondents comprised three Kindergarten teachers, 13

teachers assigned to Primary Grades I–III, and 14 teachers assigned to Elementary Grades IV–VI.

TABLE 1

Grade-assignment category	Number of teachers

Kindergarten	3
Primary Grades (I–III)	13
Elementary Grades (IV–VI)	14
Total	30

Definition and Operationalization of Variables

Grade assignment. The grade grouping to which each teacher was assigned: Kindergarten, Grades I–III, or Grades IV–VI. This is the grouping/ordinal variable used in the two correlation questions.

Perceived instructional leadership. Teachers' ratings of school-head practices such as setting academic goals, monitoring teaching effectiveness, providing professional development, encouraging collaboration, giving feedback, and supporting instructional improvement. This variable is described using a weighted mean and is not called grade assignment.

Teaching practices. Teachers' self-reported use of student-centered strategies, differentiated instruction, technology, assessment and feedback, collaboration, data use, critical thinking, inclusive classroom practices, and varied instructional strategies.

Teacher competence. Teachers' ratings of professional competencies adapted from indicators associated with the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers and the Results-Based Performance Management System.

Research Instrument

Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire. The instrument contained items on perceived instructional leadership, teaching practices, and teacher competence, with respondents' demographic information and grade assignment recorded separately. Responses to the rating-scale items were summarized using a five-point scale. The manuscript should identify the source, validation process, and reliability coefficient of each scale if these are available in the research records; these details were not fully specified in the supplied draft.

Data-Gathering Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the appropriate school authorities. The purpose and procedures were explained to the teacher-respondents, and informed consent was secured before questionnaire administration. Respondents were instructed to answer honestly and were assured that their responses would be treated confidentially. Completed questionnaires were collected, checked, encoded, and submitted for statistical treatment

Statistical Treatment

Frequency counts and percentages were used to describe the respondents' demographic profile and grade assignment. Weighted means were used to summarize perceived instructional leadership, teaching practices, and teacher competence. The reported draft used Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient (Pearson's r) to examine the relationships between grade assignment and teaching practices and between grade assignment and teacher competence, with the .05 level of significance as the decision criterion.

Important statistical qualification: grade assignment consists of three ordered categories rather than a continuous measurement. Pearson's r is appropriate only if the categories were coded numerically in a defensible order and the assumptions for the analysis are reasonably met. For an ordinal predictor, Spearman's rank-order correlation or an appropriate group-comparison procedure may be more suitable. The reported coefficients and p-values in this revised draft are retained from the supplied manuscript and must be checked against the original encoded data and the statistician's output before final submission. The numerical coding scheme was not included in the supplied manuscript.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary. Respondents were informed about the purpose, procedures, and their right to decline or withdraw without penalty. Confidentiality was maintained by limiting access to the collected information and reporting results in aggregate form. Data were handled and stored securely, and the researcher committed to accurate and honest reporting without fabrication, falsification, or selective omission.

RESULTS

Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents according to grade assignment.

Grade assignment	Frequency	Percentage
Kindergarten	3	10%
Primary Grades (I–III)	13	43%
Elementary Grades (IV–VI)	14	47%
Total	30	100%

TABLE 2 The largest group consisted of teachers assigned to Grades IV–VI (14 or 47%), followed by teachers assigned to Grades I-III (13 or 14 %). Three respondents (10%) were assigned to K

Demographic Profile

Profile variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	5	17%
	Female	25	83%
Age	25–30	6	20%
	31–35	8	27%
	36–40	4	13%
	41–45	3	10%
	46–50	3	10%
	51–55	3	10%
	56–59	1	3%
	60 and above	2	7%
Educational attainment	Bachelor’s degree	11	37%
	Master’s degree	19	63%
	Doctorate’s degree	0	0%
Teaching experience	1–5 years	7	23%
	6–10 years	4	13%
	11–15 years	10	34%
	16 years and above	9	30%

Table 3

Most respondents were female (83%). The largest age group was 31–35 years (27%). Nineteen respondents (63%) held a master’s degree, while 11 (37%) held a bachelor’s degree. In terms of teaching experience, the largest group had 11–15 years of service (34%), followed by those with 16 years and above (30%).

Perceived Instructional Leadership Practices of the School Head

Indicator	Mean	Description
Sets clear academic goals and expectations	4.35	High
Regularly monitors and evaluates teaching effectiveness	4.10	High
Provides professional development opportunities	4.25	High
Encourages a collaborative learning culture	4.00	High

Provides feedback on teaching performance	3.95	High
Supports implementation of new instructional strategies	4.20	High
Ensures availability of instructional resources and materials	4.30	High
Promotes data-driven decision-making for instructional improvement	3.85	High
Fosters teacher empowerment in curriculum planning	3.75	High
Encourages innovative teaching and learning strategies	4.18	High
General weighted mean	4.09	High

TABLE 4

The perceived instructional leadership practices of the school head received a general weighted mean of 4.09, interpreted as High. The highest-rated indicator was setting clear academic goals and expectations (M = 4.35), while the lowest-rated indicator was fostering teacher empowerment in curriculum planning (M = 3.75). All indicators were within the High range.

Teaching Practices of Teachers

Indicator	Mean	Description
Incorporates student-centered teaching strategies	4.35	High
Adapts teaching methods to learning needs and feedback	4.10	High
Integrates technology into lessons	3.95	High
Assesses and provides constructive feedback	4.22	High
Collaborates with colleagues to develop strategies	3.88	High
Participates in professional learning communities	3.72	High
Uses assessment data to modify instruction	3.85	High
Encourages critical thinking and problem-solving	4.40	High
Creates a positive and inclusive learning environment	4.50	Very High
Uses varied strategies to accommodate diverse learners	4.15	High
General weighted mean	4.11	High

TABLE 5

Teachers' teaching practices obtained a general weighted mean of 4.11, interpreted as High. Creating a positive and inclusive learning environment received the highest mean (4.50, Very High). Participation in professional learning communities received the lowest mean (3.72), although it remained within the High range.

Teacher Competence

Competence indicator	Mean	Description
Applies content knowledge within and across curriculum areas	4.35	Competent
Uses varied strategies to enhance literacy and numeracy achievement	4.42	Competent
Uses Mother Tongue, Filipino, and English to facilitate learning	4.20	Competent
Maintains safe and secure learning environments	4.15	Competent
Plans and implements developmentally sequenced teaching and learning	4.30	Competent
Participates in collegial discussions using teacher and learner feedback	4.18	Competent
Uses diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment strategies	4.25	Competent
Monitors learner progress using attainment data	4.10	Competent
Applies a learner-centered philosophy of teaching	4.40	Competent
Sets professional development goals based on the PPST	4.35	Competent
General weighted mean	4.27	Competent

TABLE 6

Teacher competence obtained a general weighted mean of 4.27, interpreted as Competent. The highest-rated indicator was the use of varied strategies to enhance literacy and numeracy achievement (M = 4.42). Monitoring learner progress using attainment data received the lowest mean (M = 4.10), while remaining within the Competent range.

Relationship Between Grade Assignment and Teaching Practices

Variables	Pearson's r	p-value	Decision at .05
Grade assignment and teaching practices	−0.509	.004072	Significant

TABLE 7

The reported correlation was moderate and negative (r = −0.509), with p = .004072. Since the p-value was below .05, the null hypothesis of no relationship was rejected on the basis of the reported analysis. The direction of the coefficient depends on how the grade-assignment categories were numerically coded. Therefore, the result should be interpreted as an association across the coded grade-assignment categories, not as evidence that moving to a higher grade level causes teaching practices to decline.

Relationship Between Grade Assignment and Teacher Competence

Variables	Pearson's r	p-value	Decision at .05
Grade assignment and teacher competence	0.0373	.844855	Not significant

TABLE 8

The reported correlation was very weak and positive (r = 0.0373), with p = .844855. Since the p-value was greater than .05, the null hypothesis was not rejected. The analysis did not establish a statistically significant relationship between grade assignment and teacher competence in this sample.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. The respondents were predominantly female; the largest age group was 31–35 years, most held a master's degree, and the largest teaching-experience group had 11–15 years of service. Most respondents were assigned to Grades IV–VI.
2. Perceived instructional leadership practices of the school head were rated High (GWM = 4.09).
3. Teachers' teaching practices were rated High (GWM = 4.11), with inclusive learning environments receiving the highest indicator mean.
4. Teacher competence was rated Competent (GWM = 4.27).
5. The reported analysis found a statistically significant moderate negative association between grade assignment and teaching practices (r = −0.509, p = .004072).
6. The reported analysis found no statistically significant association between grade assignment and teacher competence (r = 0.0373, p = .844855).

DISCUSSION

Perceived Instructional Leadership Practices

The High rating for perceived instructional leadership (GWM = 4.09) indicates that teachers generally viewed the school head as providing direction and support for teaching and learning. The comparatively strong ratings for goal setting, instructional resources, and professional development suggest that leadership support is visible in the establishment of expectations and provision of conditions that help teachers carry out their work. The lower rating for teacher empowerment in curriculum planning points to an opportunity to strengthen shared decision-making and teacher participation.

This pattern is consistent with instructional leadership perspectives that emphasize defining a school mission, managing the instructional program, and developing a positive learning climate (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Robinson et al. (2008) also identify leadership practices connected to teacher learning and instructional improvement as important dimensions of effective school leadership. These frameworks support the value of leadership that combines clear direction with meaningful teacher involvement.

Teaching Practices

The overall High rating for teaching practices (M = 4.11) suggests that teachers reported frequent use of effective instructional approaches. The highest rating for creating a positive and inclusive learning environment (M = 4.50) indicates particular strength in establishing supportive classroom conditions. The lower rating for participation in professional learning communities (M = 3.72), while still High, suggests that collaborative professional learning may be strengthened further.

Shulman's (1987) Pedagogical Content Knowledge framework provides a useful explanation for why effective teaching requires the integration of content knowledge with pedagogical approaches responsive to learners. Professional learning communities can provide opportunities for teachers to discuss instructional challenges, reflect on practice, and share approaches. The sources listed in the original manuscript, including Al-Yahmadi (2023) and Pan and Cheng (2023), similarly address the role and challenges of collaborative professional learning. The results support continued attention to protected collaboration time and purposeful professional dialogue.

Teacher Competence

The general weighted mean of 4.27 indicates that teachers rated themselves as Competent across the measured professional domains. Strengths were reported in using varied strategies for literacy and numeracy and applying a learner-centered teaching philosophy. The comparatively lower rating for monitoring learner progress through attainment data suggests an area where assessment literacy and the use of evidence to adjust instruction may be further developed.

PCK theory is relevant because teacher competence involves making content understandable through appropriate representations, instructional strategies, and assessment decisions. The PPST also provides a professional reference for planning and evaluating teacher growth. Professional development that links assessment evidence to instructional adjustment may help teachers build on their existing strengths.

Relationship Between Grade Assignment and Teaching Practices

The reported result showed a statistically significant moderate negative association between grade assignment and teaching practices ($r = -0.509$, $p = .004072$). This result suggests that teaching-practice ratings varied in association with the ordered grade-assignment code used in the analysis. However, the meaning of the negative direction depends on whether Kindergarten, Grades I–III, and Grades IV–VI were coded in ascending or descending order. The finding must therefore be described in relation to the actual coding scheme and should not be interpreted as a causal effect.

Different grade groupings involve different curriculum content, developmental characteristics, and instructional demands. PCK offers a theoretical basis for understanding why teachers may adapt representations, strategies, and assessment approaches to the learners and subject matter they teach (Shulman, 1987). Before making substantive claims about differences across grade groups, the researcher should verify the coding and consider an ordinal association test or a comparison of teaching-practice scores across the three groups using the raw data

Relationship Between Grade Assignment and Teacher Competence

The reported relationship between grade assignment and teacher competence was very weak and statistically non-significant ($r = 0.0373$, $p = .844855$). The analysis therefore did not provide evidence of an association

between the coded grade-assignment categories and the overall competence ratings in this sample. This does not prove that competence is identical across all grade groups; it indicates only that the reported analysis did not detect a statistically significant relationship.

The result may suggest that the competence indicators assessed in the questionnaire are shared professional expectations across grade groupings. Teachers at different levels are expected to demonstrate content knowledge, sound pedagogy, classroom management, assessment, and professional growth. The PPST provides common professional standards while allowing the application of these competencies to vary according to teaching context.

Overall Synthesis

The findings present a generally positive profile of perceived instructional leadership, teaching practices, and teacher competence at Palimbang Central School. Teachers rated the school head's instructional leadership practices High, their own teaching practices High, and their competence Competent. The correlation results showed a significant association between grade assignment and teaching practices but no statistically significant association between grade assignment and teacher competence. These results should be interpreted cautiously because the grade-assignment variable is categorical and the coding and statistical assumptions require verification. The study supports the practical value of differentiated instructional support while recognizing the importance of common professional standards for all teachers.

CONCLUSION

Teachers at Palimbang Central School reported High teaching practices and perceived instructional leadership and Competent professional performance; grade assignment was significantly associated with teaching practices but was not significantly associated with teacher competence in the reported analysis. The findings are consistent with the relevance of Shulman's Pedagogical Content Knowledge framework to teaching practice and competence, but they do not test or establish any mediating effect.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. School leaders should sustain instructional leadership practices while increasing teachers' participation in curriculum planning, collaborative decision-making, and the use of assessment data.
2. Professional development should respond to the instructional demands of Kindergarten, Grades I–III, and Grades IV–VI, while strengthening inclusive teaching, assessment literacy, and evidence-informed instruction.
3. The school should provide regular, structured professional learning community sessions in which teachers share strategies, examine learner progress, and plan appropriate instructional interventions.
4. The researcher should verify the numerical coding of grade assignment and consult the statistician on whether Spearman's rank correlation or a group-comparison test is more appropriate; if needed, the analysis should be recomputed from the raw data before finalizing the results.
5. Future researchers may examine other factors associated with teaching practices and teacher competence using a larger sample and a design suited to the research questions.

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