

Teacher Leadership Practices and Challenges of Master Teachers in Curriculum and Planning

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the teacher leadership practices and challenges of master teachers in curriculum and planning in the Schools Division of Panabo City, Davao Region. At the heart of the research were the questions: *What are the leadership practices of Master Teachers in shaping curriculum and guiding instructional planning, and what challenges do they face along the way?* Grounded in Transformational Leadership Theory and the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) Domain 4, the study drew insights from 15 master teachers through interviews and thematic analysis. The teacher leadership practices of master teachers in the schools Division of Panabo City in curriculum and planning highlights five major themes: structured curriculum leadership through planning, monitoring, and alignment; instructional leadership through coaching, mentoring, and developmental support; responsive leadership through learner-centered and contextualized curriculum adaptation; collaborative leadership through LAC, PLC, and professional learning communities; and innovative leadership through ICT integration and resourcefulness. While, the teacher leadership challenges of master teachers highlight five major themes: workload and structural constraints on teacher leadership; gaps in curriculum understanding, alignment, and standards interpretation; resistance to change, evaluator perceptions, and weak collaborative engagement; limited readiness for responsiveness, differentiation, and learner-centered teaching; and ICT, resource, and communication barriers. The findings painted a vivid picture of leadership in action. Master teachers were seen mentoring colleagues, aligning curriculum with standards, facilitating collaborative planning, and experimenting with ICT integration to enrich instruction. Yet, their leadership journey was not without obstacles. Heavy workloads, unclear role boundaries, limited authority in decision-making, and gaps in institutional support often made their leadership efforts difficult to sustain. Resource shortages and resistance to change further complicated their work, revealing the tension between expectations and realities in schools. Despite these challenges, the study highlighted the resilience and commitment of master teachers. Their practices showed that teacher leadership is not just about authority but about influence, collaboration, and the drive to improve learning experiences. The study concludes that for master teachers to thrive as curriculum leaders, schools must provide clearer structures, stronger support systems, and leadership-focused professional development. Policy recommendations call for reducing workload overlap, strengthening mentoring frameworks, and investing in ICT resources to empower master teachers in their dual role as educators and leaders.

Keywords: Master Teachers, Teacher Leadership, Curriculum, Planning, Mentoring, DepEd Policy, Panabo City Division

INTRODUCTION

Teacher leadership is the process by which teachers influence and support educational improvement beyond their classroom responsibilities through collaboration, mentoring, professional learning, curriculum

development, and participation in school decision-making (York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). It is recognized as an essential component of school improvement because teacher leaders contribute to building collaborative cultures, strengthening instructional practices, and promoting shared responsibility for student learning (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). In the context of curriculum and planning, teacher leadership involves guiding teachers in interpreting the curriculum, aligning lessons, implementing assessment practices, and using effective instructional strategies. Master teachers, as experienced educators and instructional leaders, play a significant role in supporting teachers' professional growth and ensuring that curriculum standards are translated into meaningful classroom experiences (Harris & Muijs, 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Across different countries, teacher leadership has become an important strategy in improving educational quality by empowering experienced teachers to take active roles in curriculum development, instructional improvement, mentoring, and professional collaboration. In the United States, teacher leadership initiatives have emphasized the role of teacher leaders in supporting instructional improvement, facilitating professional learning communities, and contributing to school decision-making processes (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Similarly, in Australia, teacher leadership has been promoted through collaborative professional practices where experienced teachers support colleagues, lead curriculum initiatives, and contribute to continuous school improvement (Harris & Muijs, 2005).

In Singapore, teacher leadership is embedded in the education system through structured career pathways that allow experienced teachers to become mentors, curriculum leaders, and instructional specialists who support teacher development and innovation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). In Finland, teachers are recognized as autonomous professionals who actively participate in curriculum planning, instructional decision-making, and school improvement processes, highlighting the importance of teacher expertise and shared leadership in education (Sahlberg, 2015). Meanwhile, in England, teacher leadership practices have been strengthened through distributed leadership, in which teachers assume leadership responsibilities in curriculum implementation, coaching, and professional learning (Harris, 2013).

Despite these advancements, international studies also identify challenges experienced by teacher leaders across contexts, including increased workload, limited time, unclear leadership expectations, insufficient resources, and difficulties in sustaining collaboration among teachers (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). These challenges indicate that effective teacher leadership requires supportive structures, continuous professional development, and strong collaboration among educators.

In the Philippine education system, teacher leadership has gained increasing recognition as an essential element in improving curriculum implementation, instructional quality, and school improvement initiatives. Under the Department of Education (DepEd) leadership framework, teachers, particularly master teachers, are expected to perform roles beyond classroom instruction by serving as mentors, instruction coaches, and curriculum leaders who provide technical assistance to fellow teachers. The Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) emphasizes the importance of teachers' engagement in professional collaboration, reflective practice, and continuous improvement to enhance teaching effectiveness (Department of Education, 2017).

Master teachers in the Philippines serve as key instructional leaders who support curriculum planning, lesson preparation, assessment practices, and teachers' professional development. Their roles include guiding teachers in understanding curriculum standards, aligning learning competencies, implementing appropriate teaching strategies, and monitoring instructional practices. Studies on teacher leadership in the Philippine context highlight that experienced teachers contribute significantly to strengthening school-based professional learning communities, promoting collaboration, and improving teaching practices (Magsino, 2020; Llego, 2021).

However, despite their leadership responsibilities, Master teachers also face challenges that affect their effectiveness. These include heavy workloads, multiple administrative and instructional responsibilities, limited time for mentoring, variations in teachers' understanding of the curriculum, resistance to change, limited resources, and challenges with technology integration. These concerns reflect the need for stronger

support systems, continuous professional development, and collaborative structures that enable master teachers to effectively lead curriculum and instructional improvement.

Studies conducted in the Davao Region highlight the emerging importance of teacher leadership and instructional leadership practices in strengthening school effectiveness and teacher development. In the Division of Davao City, Merable (2024) explored the instructional leadership experiences of master teachers and found that their roles include instructional supervision, professional development support, collaboration with colleagues, and the management of occupational challenges. The study emphasized that master teachers serve as key instructional leaders who help improve teaching practices while also experiencing pressures associated with their expanded responsibilities. Similarly, Belbestre and Chieng (2024) examined the instructional leadership experiences of master teachers in the Division of Davao de Oro. Their findings showed that master teachers contribute to curriculum implementation, facilitate pedagogical development, provide professional support, and encounter challenges in balancing instructional leadership demands. The study highlighted the importance of developing leadership skills and providing institutional support to sustain Master Teachers' roles as educational leaders. Further, Limosnero (2025) explored the instructional leadership practices of master teachers in Magsaysay North District, Davao del Sur. The study revealed that master teachers demonstrate leadership through mentoring, professional collaboration, and instructional support, while also facing challenges related to their responsibilities and the need for continuous professional growth.

The study is necessary due to the increasing demand for effective instructional leadership in schools, particularly in implementing curriculum reforms and standards-based education. Although existing studies in the Davao Region (e.g., Merable, 2024; Belbestre & Chieng, 2024; Limosnero, 2025) have highlighted the leadership roles of master teachers, there remains a need to further examine how these roles are specifically enacted in curriculum and planning and what contextual challenges influence their effectiveness at the division level.

Master teachers are expected to serve as instructional leaders, guiding teachers in lesson planning, curriculum alignment, assessment practices, and instructional improvement. However, literature shows that they often face challenges such as heavy workload, role conflict, limited time for mentoring, and varying levels of teacher readiness (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; Harris & Muijs, 2005). In the Philippine context, these challenges are further intensified by multiple assignments, administrative tasks, and the diverse needs of teachers in public schools, which may affect the quality of curriculum implementation and instructional support.

Moreover, while studies in nearby divisions within Region XI have explored instructional leadership in general, there remains limited localized evidence on teacher leadership practices in curriculum and planning among Master Teachers in the Schools Division of Panabo City. This gap highlights the need for context-specific data to inform school leaders and policymakers in designing targeted interventions, professional development programs, and support mechanisms to strengthen master teachers' leadership capacity.

Therefore, conducting this study is important as it provides empirical evidence on how master teachers perform their leadership roles in curriculum and planning, identify the challenges they encounter, and offer insights for improving instructional leadership systems. Ultimately, the findings may contribute to enhancing teacher collaboration, strengthening curriculum implementation, and improving the overall quality of education in the Schools Division of Panabo City.

Research Questions

1. What are the teacher leadership practices of master teachers in curriculum and planning?
2. What are the challenges faced by master teachers in curriculum and planning?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design for this study is a qualitative case study aimed at understanding the complexities of master teachers' leadership practices and the challenges they face in curriculum and planning. A qualitative approach is appropriate when the purpose of the study is to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and meanings regarding a particular phenomenon within its real-life context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design allows researchers to conduct an in-depth investigation of a bounded system by examining experiences, practices, strategies, and challenges through multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2018). A case study is a qualitative research design that involves an in-depth, comprehensive investigation of a particular phenomenon, group, organization, or situation in its real-life context. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a case study focuses on understanding a bounded system by collecting detailed information from participants and analyzing the meaning they attach to their experiences. In this study, the qualitative case study approach enabled an in-depth exploration of how master teachers perform their leadership roles, support curriculum implementation, and respond to challenges encountered in planning and instructional processes. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to share their experiences and perspectives while providing flexibility for deeper probing of emerging themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study employed purposive sampling to select master teachers and relevant educational stakeholders who had direct experience and knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation. According to Patton (2015), purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to identify information-rich participants who can provide meaningful insights related to the research topic.

Participants

The participants consisted of 15 master teachers from the Schools Division of Panabo City. To qualify for inclusion in the study, participants were required to: (1) hold the position of Master Teacher I, II, or III; (2) be actively involved in curriculum planning, instructional supervision, coaching, mentoring, or professional development activities within their schools; and (3) have a minimum of five years of teaching experience. These criteria ensured that participants possessed sufficient professional experience and direct engagement in teacher leadership practices related to curriculum and planning. The distribution of participants across districts was based on the availability of qualified master teachers and their willingness to participate in the study. Four participants were selected from Panabo Central District, four from Panabo North District, four from Panabo South District 1, and three from Panabo South District 2. Although the number of participants varied slightly across districts, the selection process prioritized the richness and relevance of participants' experiences rather than proportional representation. The inclusion of participants from multiple districts enabled the study to capture diverse perspectives and experiences of teacher leadership in curriculum and planning across different school contexts. The sample size of 15 participants was considered adequate for a case study inquiry, as data saturation was achieved. As interviews progressed, recurring patterns, common experiences, and shared meanings emerged across participant narratives, indicating that sufficient information had been collected to address the research questions.

Data Sources

The research centers on semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection tool, offering a flexible yet systematic approach to explore Master Teachers' experiences, leadership practices, strategies, challenges, and coping mechanisms in curriculum and planning. Semi-structured interviews are appropriate in qualitative research because they allow researchers to use prepared guiding questions while maintaining flexibility to ask follow-up questions that deepen understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The use of semi-structured interviews enabled participants to share their narratives, insights, and personal experiences in a meaningful and detailed manner. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), interviews are valuable qualitative data collection methods because they allow researchers to understand how individuals interpret and make meaning of their lived experiences. Furthermore, Kallio et al. (2016)

emphasized that semi-structured interviews strike a balance between consistency and openness, enabling researchers to gather comparable information while exploring participants' emerging ideas

Data Collection

The research instrument for this study primarily consisted of semi-structured interviews. This approach was selected because it offers flexibility for exploring participants' experiences, perceptions, and reflections while allowing the researcher to ask follow-up questions and probe deeper into significant responses that emerge during the interview. Semi-structured interviews combine predetermined questions with openness to unexpected insights, making them appropriate for qualitative studies that seek to understand participants' lived experiences and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), interviews are valuable qualitative research tools because they enable researchers to capture the meanings individuals attach to their experiences and provide detailed descriptions of a phenomenon within its context. The semi-structured format ensured that essential topics were consistently explored among participants while allowing room for rich, contextual, and meaningful responses. The interview guide was developed using a set of open-ended questions designed to examine the practices and challenges of master teachers in teacher leadership, particularly in relation to curriculum implementation and instructional planning. Open-ended questions are effective in qualitative research because they encourage participants to provide detailed explanations, personal insights, and reflections regarding their experiences (Patton, 2015). To ensure the validity of the interview questions, the instrument underwent expert validation. According to Heckert (2019), validation is essential to ensure that the instrument accurately measures what it is intended to measure. Without proper validation, measurement errors can occur, affecting the reliability of the findings and leading to inaccurate conclusions. Similarly, Yount (2019) emphasized that validating research instruments enhances the comparability of results across different contexts and strengthens the overall credibility of the study. In this study, the interview guide was reviewed by the research adviser and panel members to assess its clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study's objectives. Their feedback was used to refine the questions, ensuring that the instrument effectively captures the practices and issues of master teachers in teacher leadership in curriculum and planning.

Data Analysis

The study followed a systematic qualitative data analysis process to examine the leadership practices and challenges of master teachers in curriculum and planning. Qualitative data analysis involves organizing, interpreting, and making meaning from collected information through identifying patterns, categories, and themes that emerge from participants' responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the analysis process ensured that participants' voices and experiences were accurately represented through a rigorous, systematic approach. The following procedures were observed: identifying narratives; coding; supplementary and corroborative counting; and validity and quality of the study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical consideration must be essential in qualitative research (Resnick, 2015) to support moral and social values, such as the principle of not harming others. The value of collaborative work for mutual respect and fairness is essential in scientific research. This principle held researchers to be accountable for public trust. In this study, ethical considerations were adhered to ensure the integrity of the research and the welfare of the participants. Central to the approach is obtaining informed consent; all participants were provided with a detailed explanation of the study's purpose, methods, potential risks, and benefits. The consent was informed and voluntary, with an emphasis on the participant's right to withdraw at any time without any adverse consequences. The confidentiality and privacy of the participants' backgrounds were considered and maintained. Identifiable information was omitted or altered in the study report to prevent the identification of individual participants. Additionally, data were securely stored and accessible only to the research team, ensuring participants' privacy. Furthermore, this study ensured that participants were not subjected to psychological or emotional distress because of their involvement. The research design and instruments were

reviewed thoroughly to avoid sensitive or potentially upsetting topics. If any participant felt discomfort during the study, immediate action was taken, including offering support and referring to appropriate counseling services. Finally, to maintain high ethical standards, the study underwent a thorough review by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) or an equivalent ethics committee. This review ensured that the research methods and objectives were ethically sound and in compliance with national and international research ethics guidelines. By adhering to these principles, the study also aimed to consider the rights and well-being of the participants.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Every research work must establish validity and reliability. In qualitative work, Lincoln and Guba (1985), as cited by Elo et al. (2014), developed criteria to evaluate content analysis for validity and reliability, which they term trustworthiness. For assessing trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba proposed five areas where it could be checked: credibility, transferability, dependability, conformability, and authenticity. To enhance credibility, informants' data were presented (see Table 1). The data gathered through interviews were transcribed and traced into an audit trail to establish dependability and consistency. Findings were drawn to highlight their transferability and authenticity. A validator, a connoisseur in data analysis, was employed through this process. According to Merriam-Webster, credibility is “the quality or power of inspiring belief,” an essential aspect of research that aims to accurately represent the phenomena studied (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed.). Transferability is the degree to which the findings of a qualitative study can be applied to other contexts or groups. While it is the reader’s responsibility to determine the applicability of the findings, transferability was enhanced by providing thick descriptions of the research context and participants, enabling readers to connect the study to their situations. Dependability in qualitative research is analogous to reliability in quantitative research, referring to the stability of data over time and under similar conditions. To ensure reliability, an audit trail was done documenting the research process, decisions, and changes throughout the study. This documentation enabled an external auditor to review and evaluate the research process. Conformability is the degree to which results can be corroborated by others, indicating that the findings are shaped by participants rather than by the researcher's bias, motivation, or interest. This was achieved by maintaining an audit trail that included raw data, analysis notes, and decisions, enabling external checks on how conclusions were drawn.

RESULTS

Teacher Leadership Practices of Master Teachers in Curriculum and Planning

The teacher leadership practices of master teachers in the schools Division of Panabo City in curriculum and planning highlights five major themes: structured curriculum leadership through planning, monitoring, and alignment; instructional leadership through coaching, mentoring, and developmental support; responsive leadership through learner-centered and contextualized curriculum adaptation; collaborative leadership through LAC, PLC, and professional learning communities; and innovative leadership through ICT integration and resourcefulness. These themes emphasize that teacher leadership among Master Teachers is both instructional and relational, grounded in daily practices that directly influence teaching and learning.

Structured Curriculum Leadership through Planning, Monitoring, and Alignment. This major theme refers to the practices of Master Teachers in ensuring that curriculum planning,

Table 1 Core Ideas and Major Themes of Teacher Leadership Practices of Master Teachers in Curriculum and Planning

Core Ideas	Major Themes
• Lesson plan review • MELC unpacking • Smart objectives • Backward design	Structured curriculum leadership through planning, monitoring, and alignment

• Competency alignment • Formative assessment • Synchronized planning • Regular checks	
• Mentoring • Coaching • Demonstration teaching • Post-conference mentoring • Hands-on workshop • Confidence-building • Guided feedback • Support for new teachers	Instructional leadership through coaching, mentoring, and developmental support
• Contextualization • Local culture • Current events • Learner interests • Student feedback • Differentiation • Life skills • Socio-emotional needs • Learner-centered methods	Responsive leadership through learner-centered and contextualized curriculum adaptation
• Lac sessions • Professional Learning Community • Collaborative planning • Peer coaching • Group reflection • Safe spaces • Active listening • Material sharing • Professional networks	Collaborative leadership through LAC, PLC, and professional learning communities
• ICT training • Multimedia • Educational apps • Digital quizzes • Online tools • Digital assessments • Low-cost ICT use • Improvised materials • Troubleshooting support	Innovative leadership through ICT integration and resourcefulness

Implementation and assessment processes are organized, aligned, and continuously improved based on learning standards and competencies. The core ideas under this theme reveal that master teachers actively support teachers in developing effective instructional plans through lesson plan review, MELC unpacking, formulation of SMART objectives, backward design, and competency alignment.

These practices demonstrate their role in ensuring that learning objectives, instructional strategies, and assessment methods are connected and directed toward the achievement of intended learning outcomes. Furthermore, the inclusion of formative assessment, synchronized planning, and regular checks highlights their commitment to monitoring instructional effectiveness and providing timely guidance to teachers. Through

these practices, master teachers ensure consistency, coherence, and quality in curriculum delivery across learning areas. The master teachers shared that:

"I guide my co-teachers in unpacking MELCs and aligning them with appropriate strategies." (R1)

"I help teachers look at how well their students are doing and change their lessons based on what they find." (R3)

"I help teachers write SMART learning goals that are based on MELCs." (R4)

"I make sure that learning outcomes are in line by keeping a close eye on lesson plans and tests." (R11)

"I practice reflective leadership by always looking at how well our curriculum is being used and making changes when needed." (R15)

This theme shows that master teachers serve as curriculum leaders, providing structure and direction in the teaching and learning process. Their leadership practices contribute to effective curriculum implementation by promoting systematic planning, continuous monitoring, and alignment of instruction with educational goals.

Instructional Leadership through Coaching, Mentoring, and Developmental Support. This major theme refers to the role of master teachers in enhancing teachers' professional competencies through continuous guidance, modeling, and capacity-building activities. The core ideas associated with this theme include mentoring, coaching, demonstration teaching, post-conference mentoring, hands-on workshops, confidence-building, guided feedback, and support for new teachers. These practices indicate that master teachers provide both technical and professional assistance to teachers by sharing expertise, demonstrating effective teaching strategies, and offering constructive feedback. Demonstration teaching allows teachers to observe best practices, while post-conference mentoring and guided feedback encourage reflection and improvement of instructional approaches. The presence of hands-on workshops and support for new teachers further reflects their commitment to developing teacher confidence, competence, and classroom effectiveness. The master teachers shared that:

"I once led a hands-on workshop. After that, they felt surer of themselves and started sending in lesson plans that were well-organized." (R1)

"I helped a coworker who was feeling overwhelmed with her work by helping her plan her week. She eventually got better at managing her classes." (R3)

"After a few sessions of mentoring, she felt surer of herself and was better at managing her class." (R5)

"I help teachers by demonstrating teaching and having post-conference meetings with them." (R7)

"I led a peer coaching activity in which teachers watched each other's classes." (R10)

This theme emphasizes the significant contribution of master teachers as instructional mentors and professional development facilitators. Their leadership strengthens teachers' abilities by creating opportunities for continuous learning, reflection, and improvement of teaching practices.

Responsive Leadership through Learner-Centered and Contextualized Curriculum Adaptation. This major theme concerns master teachers' ability to guide teachers in modifying curriculum practices to align with learners' needs, experiences, interests, and learning contexts. The core ideas under this theme include contextualization, integration of local culture, use of current events, consideration of learner interests, student feedback, differentiation, integration of life skills, attention to socio-emotional needs, and learner-centered methods. These practices demonstrate that master teachers encourage teachers to make learning experiences more meaningful and relevant by connecting lessons to real-life situations and learners' backgrounds.

Differentiated instruction reflects recognition of learner diversity, while consideration of socio-emotional needs highlights the importance of addressing learners' holistic development. Through contextualized approaches and learner-centered strategies, Master teachers promote inclusive and engaging learning environments. The master teachers shared that:

"I make sure that our students' learning programs are connected to what they do in real life." (R1)

"I tell teachers to think about their students' backgrounds and the community when they plan lessons." (R2)

"I help teachers change learning programs to fit the needs and interests of each student." (R3)

"I encourage teachers to include local culture and problems in their lesson plans." (R4)

"I help teachers plan activities that are appropriate for all types of students." (R8)

This theme highlights the role of master teachers as advocates of meaningful and responsive education. Their leadership ensures that curriculum implementation is flexible, inclusive, and focused on addressing the diverse needs of learners.

Collaborative Leadership through LAC, PLC, and Professional Learning Communities. This major theme concerns the efforts of master teachers to foster teamwork, shared learning, and collective professional growth among teachers. The core ideas identified under this theme include LAC sessions, Professional Learning Community, collaborative planning, peer coaching, group reflection, safe spaces, active listening, material sharing, and professional networks. These practices reveal that master teachers create opportunities for teachers to collaborate, exchange ideas, and reflect on their instructional experiences. Through LAC and PLC activities, teachers engage in meaningful discussions, share effective strategies, and develop solutions to classroom challenges. The promotion of safe spaces, active listening, and professional networks further strengthens trust, cooperation, and continuous professional learning among educators. The master teachers shared that:

"I hold LAC meetings on a regular basis to talk about changes to the curriculum and share successful methods that work in our classrooms." (R2)

"I help teachers meet regularly to work together to solve problems with teaching and come up with better ways to help students learn." (R5)

"I make sure that teachers work together in professional learning communities where they can think about and improve their work on a regular basis." (R8)

"I set up group reflection sessions where teachers talk about what went well and what could be better." (R10)

"I encourage teachers to work together by making the classroom a safe place for them to share their thoughts and problems with planning lessons." (R12)

This theme demonstrates that master teachers function as facilitators of collaborative professional communities. Their leadership promotes shared responsibility and collective improvement, strengthening the culture of collaboration within the school environment.

Innovative Leadership through ICT Integration and Resourcefulness. This major theme refers to the practices of master teachers in promoting technology-based strategies and creative solutions to support effective curriculum implementation. The core ideas under this theme include ICT training, multimedia utilization, educational applications, digital quizzes, online tools, digital assessments, low-cost ICT strategies, improvised materials, and troubleshooting support. These practices show that Master Teachers encourage teachers to integrate technology into instruction to improve learner engagement and assessment practices. ICT

training and support help teachers build confidence in using digital resources, while the use of low-cost ICT strategies and improvised materials reflects their ability to make the most of the resources available to them. Troubleshooting support further demonstrates its role in helping teachers overcome technology-integration challenges. The master teachers shared that:

"I encourage the use of digital tools like PowerPoint, videos, and online quizzes in my practice to make lessons better and get students more involved." (R2)

"When ICT tools are limited, I help teachers make improvised teaching materials so that they can be resourceful." (R4)

"I include ICT in curriculum planning by pushing teachers to use digital tools like videos, presentations, and online platforms." (R6)

"I help teachers get used to technology by giving them ongoing help and training on how to use ICT tools with confidence." (R9)

"I help teachers make online quizzes and digital performance tasks so that ICT can be used in assessments." (R12)

This theme reveals that master teachers are innovators who promote adaptability, creativity, and resourcefulness in curriculum implementation. Their leadership supports teachers in embracing emerging educational practices and utilizing available tools to enhance teaching and learning.

The findings show that master teachers in the Schools Division of Panabo City demonstrate comprehensive teacher leadership practices in curriculum and planning. Their roles extend beyond instructional supervision as they provide curriculum guidance, professional support, collaborative opportunities, learner-responsive approaches, and innovative solutions that contribute to continuous improvement in education.

Teacher Leadership Challenges of Master Teachers in Curriculum and Planning

The analysis of the interview data revealed that while master teachers actively perform leadership functions in curriculum and planning, they encounter several organizational, instructional, and professional challenges that influence the effectiveness of their leadership roles. The teacher leadership challenges of master teachers highlight five major themes: workload and structural constraints on teacher leadership; gaps in curriculum understanding, alignment, and standards interpretation; resistance to change, evaluator perceptions, and weak collaborative engagement; limited readiness for responsiveness, differentiation, and learner-centered teaching; and ICT, resource, and communication barriers.

Table 2 Core Ideas and Major Themes of Teacher Leadership Challenges of Master Teachers in Curriculum and Planning

Core Ideas	Major Themes
- Heavy workload - Multiple roles and responsibilities - Time constraints affect effective collaboration - Limited training, skills among teachers	Workload and structural constraints on teacher leadership
- Differences in teachers' understanding of MELCs - Varied interpretations of curriculum standards - Gaps in understanding MELCs - Inconsistent lesson alignment - Limited shared understanding of curriculum	Gaps in curriculum understanding, alignment, and standards interpretation
Teachers' resistance to new practices	Resistance to change, evaluator perceptions, and

• Fear of evaluation • Limited participation in collaborative activities • Lack of engagement	weak collaborative engagement
• Limited teacher training • Gaps in teaching skills • Low confidence among teachers • Limited capacity in differentiated instruction • Challenges in applying learner-centered strategies	Limited readiness for responsiveness, differentiation, and learner-centered teaching
• Limited access to ICT • Varying digital skills • Communication gaps constrain instructional innovation and collaboration.	ICT resource, and communication barriers

Workload and Structural Constraints on Teacher Leadership. This major theme refers to the challenges master teachers face due to multiple responsibilities, competing demands, and limited time, which affect their capacity to perform leadership functions effectively. The core idea under this theme highlights that heavy workload and multiple roles create difficulties for master teachers in sustaining their mentoring activities, collaborative engagements, and curriculum monitoring responsibilities. As instructional leaders, master teachers are expected to provide technical assistance, support teachers, participate in administrative tasks, and monitor curriculum implementation. However, the increasing demands of these responsibilities limit the time and opportunities available for consistent coaching, professional support, and follow-through of instructional initiatives. The overlapping roles assigned to master teachers create challenges in balancing leadership responsibilities with their other school-related tasks. The master teachers shared that:

“I often have trouble fully supporting teachers in planning their lessons because I must do both teaching and administrative work at the same time.” (R1)

“A lot of schoolwork and other tasks take up a lot of time, making it hard to have meaningful planning sessions with others.” (R4)

“Finding a balance between administrative work and teaching makes it harder to plan lessons.” (R7)

“It’s hard to set up regular coaching and mentoring sessions because of school activities that get in the way and time limits.” (R13)

“Teachers have less time for collaborative activities because they have a lot of work to do and many responsibilities.” (R14)

This theme indicates that structural limitations influence the effectiveness of teacher leadership practices. While master teachers demonstrate commitment to supporting teachers and improving curriculum implementation, workload-related constraints affect the extent and consistency of their leadership engagement.

Gaps in Curriculum Understanding, Alignment, and Standards Interpretation. This major theme concerns the challenges master teachers face in ensuring consistent curriculum implementation, given differences in teachers’ understanding of curriculum standards and competencies. The core idea identified under this theme focuses on the varying levels of teachers’ understanding of MELCs and curriculum standards, which contribute to inconsistencies in lesson planning, competency alignment, and classroom implementation. Differences in interpreting curriculum expectations may result in variations in instructional approaches, learning objectives, and assessment practices. These challenges require master teachers to provide continuous clarification, guidance, and technical assistance to help teachers deepen their understanding of curriculum

requirements and ensure that teaching practices remain aligned with prescribed standards. The master teachers shared that:

“Teachers have different levels of understanding, which makes it hard to align lessons.” (R2)

“Teachers don't all understand curriculum standards the same way.” (R6)

“Different people have different ideas about what competencies mean.” (R11)

“Teachers use old lesson plans that don't fully match the new MELCs.” (R12)

“Planning based on data is still hard because not all teachers use data on how well their students are doing to plan lessons.” (R10)

This theme reveals that differences in curriculum interpretation create challenges in achieving uniformity and coherence in curriculum implementation. Master teachers play an important role in bridging these gaps by strengthening teachers' curriculum knowledge and supporting alignment of instructional practices.

Resistance to Change, Evaluator Perceptions, and Weak Collaborative Engagement. This major theme concerns the challenges master teachers face in promoting professional development when teachers hesitate to adopt new practices and engage in collaborative activities. The core ideas under this theme include teachers' resistance to new practices, fear of evaluation, and limited participation in collaborative activities. These challenges affect the effectiveness of teacher leadership because some teachers may perceive coaching, monitoring, or feedback activities as forms of evaluation rather than opportunities for professional growth. Limited engagement in collaboration also reduces opportunities to share strategies, reflect on practices, and develop collective solutions to instructional concerns. As a result, master teachers struggle to build a culture of openness, trust, and continuous improvement. The master teachers shared that:

“Teachers don't want to be coached, especially when the feedback goes against what they've been doing for a long time.” (R3)

“It's hard to get teachers to try new ways of teaching when some of them are more comfortable with the old ways.” (R9)

“Teachers see Master Teachers as judges instead of partners.” (R5)

“Collaborative planning is sometimes seen as extra work instead of growth.” (R14)

“Teachers don't participate because they don't fully understand the value of professional learning communities.” (R8)

This theme highlights the importance of creating a supportive environment where teachers view leadership support as developmental rather than evaluative. Addressing these challenges can strengthen collaboration and encourage greater participation in professional learning activities.

Limited Readiness for Responsiveness, Differentiation, and Learner-Centered Teaching. This major theme refers to the challenges related to teachers' preparedness, skills, and confidence in implementing adaptive and inclusive instructional approaches. The core idea under this theme emphasizes that limited training, insufficient skills, and low confidence among some teachers hinder the effective application of differentiated instruction and learner-centered strategies. Although teachers are encouraged to respond to diverse learner needs, challenges arise when they lack adequate knowledge and experience in designing differentiated activities, addressing learner diversity, and creating flexible learning experiences. These limitations require master teachers to provide additional coaching, capacity-building activities, and instructional support to strengthen teachers' readiness. The master teachers shared that:

“Some teachers have a hard time including differentiated instruction in their plans.” (R8)

“Teachers have trouble helping students with special needs because they don't have the right materials or training.” (R10)

“Teachers are not all ready to make differentiated instruction.” (R12)

“Some teachers are more comfortable with traditional lesson plans.” (R13)

“Some teachers still use standardized materials even if they don't fit local needs.” (R12)

This theme demonstrates that effective learner-centered curriculum implementation requires continuous professional development and support. Master Teachers serve as key facilitators in helping teachers enhance their instructional competence and confidence in addressing diverse learner needs.

ICT, Resource, and Communication Barriers. This major theme refers to the challenges that limit the integration of technology, access to instructional resources, and effective communication among teachers in supporting curriculum innovation. The core ideas identified under this theme include limited access to ICT resources, varying digital skills among teachers, and communication gaps that affect instructional innovation and collaboration. Differences in teachers' technological competencies may affect their ability to make the most of digital tools and online platforms for teaching and learning. Limited resource availability also creates challenges in implementing technology-supported strategies, while communication gaps may affect coordination, information sharing, and collaborative planning among teachers. The master teachers shared that:

“Some schools have trouble because they don't have enough computers and projectors.” (R6)

“Some teachers don't have easy access to digital devices.” (R10)

“Teachers' digital skills vary.” (R12)

“Lack of training opportunities affects ICT integration.” (R5)

“Communication problems and different professional points of view make it hard to work together.” (R11)

“Communication gaps, especially when feedback isn't clear, affect collaboration.” (R15)

This theme highlights that resource availability, digital readiness, and effective communication are essential in strengthening teacher leadership and innovation. Addressing these barriers can provide master teachers and teachers with better opportunities to collaborate, integrate technology, and enhance curriculum implementation.

The findings reveal that Master Teachers in the Schools Division of Panabo City encounter various challenges that influence their teacher leadership practices in curriculum and planning. These challenges are shaped by workload demands, curriculum gaps, teacher readiness, collaboration issues, and resource limitations. Despite these constraints, master teachers continue to navigate these challenges by providing guidance, support, and leadership toward improving teaching practices and curriculum implementation

DISCUSSION

Teacher Leadership Practices of Master Teachers in Curriculum and Planning

The teacher leadership practices of master teachers in the schools Division of Panabo City in curriculum and planning highlights five major themes: structured curriculum leadership through planning, monitoring, and alignment; instructional leadership through coaching, mentoring, and developmental support; responsive

leadership through learner-centered and contextualized curriculum adaptation; collaborative leadership through LAC, PLC, and professional learning communities; and innovative leadership through ICT integration and resourcefulness. These themes emphasize that teacher leadership among master teachers is both instructional and relational, grounded in daily practices that directly influence teaching and learning.

The major theme of structured curriculum leadership through planning, monitoring, and alignment aligns with findings reported by Hare (2024), who found that master teachers contribute significantly to instructional quality by guiding teachers in curriculum alignment, lesson planning, and instructional practice improvement. Likewise, Palacio and Digo (2024) emphasized that coaching and instructional support provided by master teachers strengthen teachers' capacity to develop coherent, standard-aligned, and learner-responsive instructional plans.

These findings are also supported by Leithwood et al. (2020), who highlighted that instructional leadership practices, including curriculum monitoring, shared goal-setting, and professional support, play an essential role in improving teaching quality and school effectiveness. Similarly, Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) emphasized that effective teacher leadership is strengthened through continuous professional learning, collaboration, and structured support systems that enable teachers to align instruction with curriculum expectations. Furthermore, Hattie (2009) noted that clear learning intentions, effective instructional planning, and continuous monitoring of teaching practices are among the factors that contribute significantly to improved learner outcomes. These related studies reinforce the present finding that structured curriculum leadership through planning, monitoring, and alignment is a critical manifestation of teacher leadership in curriculum and planning, enabling master teachers to support instructional coherence, teacher development, and improved learning delivery.

The theme aligns with transformational leadership theory, particularly the dimensions of idealized influence and intellectual stimulation proposed by Bass (1985). By modeling effective curriculum planning, promoting reflective practice, and encouraging data-informed instructional decisions, master teachers influence colleagues toward higher levels of professional competence and instructional performance. This finding supports the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) Domain 4, particularly the strands on planning and managing teaching and learning processes and on aligning learning outcomes with learning competencies (Department of Education, 2017). The practices described by participants reflect the expected leadership role of master teachers in ensuring curriculum coherence and instructional effectiveness within schools.

Master teachers demonstrate teacher leadership in curriculum and planning through structured, systematic support for lesson preparation, alignment of learning outcomes, and continuous monitoring of instructional practices. This theme shows the consistent efforts of master teachers to ensure that teaching is guided by clear objectives, aligned competencies, and organized instructional processes. Their leadership is reflected in how they help teachers unpack MELCs, design coherent lesson plans, and maintain alignment between objectives, activities, and assessments to achieve intended learning outcomes.

The theme of instructional leadership through coaching, mentoring, and developmental support yields similar findings to those reported by Palacio and Digo (2024), who identified coaching and mentoring as critical functions of master teachers in strengthening instructional quality and professional growth. Lewis and DeSantis (2024) likewise found that individualized coaching promotes reflective practice and instructional improvement through sustained professional dialogue. Furthermore, Phumsaidorn and Julsuwan (2024) emphasized that coaching and mentoring models significantly enhance teachers' instructional competencies and capacity to implement active learning approaches. These studies reinforce the present finding that coaching, mentoring, and developmental support are essential manifestations of teacher leadership in curriculum and planning.

The findings support the Philippine Professional Standards for Teachers (PPST) Domain 4, particularly the strand on professional collaboration, which emphasizes supporting colleagues in improving instructional practices and curriculum implementation (Department of Education, 2017). The theme also reflects the principle of Individualized Consideration within Transformational Leadership Theory, wherein leaders attend

to the developmental needs of individuals through mentoring, guidance, and personalized support (Bass, 1985). By coaching teachers, providing feedback, and creating opportunities for professional learning, Master Teachers demonstrate transformational leadership that enhances both teacher competence and instructional effectiveness.

Master teachers serve as developmental leaders who foster professional growth through supportive, collaborative relationships. Rather than relying on evaluative or compliance-based approaches, they exercise teacher leadership by fostering learning opportunities that build colleagues' confidence, competence, and reflective practice. Their leadership is characterized by modeling effective instruction, facilitating professional dialogue, and providing constructive feedback that promotes continuous improvement. These practices indicate that teacher leadership in curriculum and planning is relational, grounded in trust, professional support, and shared learning experiences. Through coaching and mentoring, master teachers strengthen teachers' ability to design aligned instruction, implement curriculum effectively, and respond to learners' diverse needs. The findings further suggest that instructional leadership becomes more effective when professional development is embedded within daily teaching practice and supported by meaningful collegial relationships.

The theme of responsive leadership through learner-centered, contextually adapted curriculum has findings like those reported by Domínguez-Castillo et al. (2024), who identified adaptability, responsiveness, and contextual awareness as essential attributes of effective teacher leadership. Whitworth et al. (2021) likewise found that teacher leaders contribute to instructional improvement by encouraging practices that respond to learners' unique needs and classroom contexts. Furthermore, Indrawati et al. (2024) emphasized that differentiated instruction and responsive teaching require strong instructional leadership to support teachers in effectively addressing learner diversity. These studies reinforce the present finding that a responsive, learner-centered, and contextually adapted curriculum is a critical manifestation of teacher leadership in curriculum and planning. Supports PPST Domain 4, particularly the strands on the relevance and responsiveness of learning programs and the planning and management of teaching and learning, which emphasize adapting instruction to meet diverse learner needs and contextual realities (Department of Education, 2017). The theme also aligns with Bass's (1985) transformational leadership theory, particularly the intellectual stimulation dimension, which encourages innovative thinking, adaptability, and creative problem-solving in instructional practice. By guiding teachers to contextualize lessons, differentiate instruction, and respond to learner diversity, master teachers foster reflective, responsive decision-making that enhances curriculum implementation.

This shows that master teachers serve as adaptive instructional leaders who facilitate meaningful connections between curriculum requirements and learner realities. Their leadership is characterized by a commitment to keeping curriculum implementation responsive rather than rigid, allowing teachers to address students' varying needs, interests, and experiences. They suggest that master teachers view effective curriculum leadership as a dynamic process that requires continuous reflection, contextualization, and instructional adaptation. By encouraging teachers to consider learners' backgrounds, local contexts, and developmental needs, they promote educational practices that support inclusion, engagement, and equitable learning opportunities. This demonstrates that teacher leadership in curriculum and planning extends beyond technical curriculum alignment and encompasses the ability to guide teachers in making instructional decisions that are relevant, flexible, and responsive to changing learner needs. Such leadership positions as master teachers advocate meaningful learning experiences that connect curriculum content to students lived realities.

The theme of collaborative leadership through LAC, PLC, and professional learning communities aligns with the work of Hu and Endozo (2024), who emphasized that communities of practice serve as effective platforms for teacher learning, knowledge sharing, and professional development. Similarly, Altun and Yucel-Toy (2023) found that collaborative-reflective professional development models contribute significantly to teacher transformation and instructional improvement. Supovitz and Comstock (2023) further reported that formal teacher leadership initiatives that promote collaboration positively influence instructional quality and student outcomes. Moreover, Wiens et al. (2024) described teacher leadership as a collaborative process that extends influence beyond individual classrooms through professional interaction and shared learning. These studies

reinforce the present finding that collaborative leadership through LACs, PLCs, and professional learning communities is a critical dimension of teacher leadership in curriculum and planning.

The findings support PPST Domain 4, particularly the strand on professional collaboration, which highlights the importance of working with colleagues to improve teaching practices and learner outcomes (Department of Education, 2017). The theme also reflects the principles of Transformational Leadership Theory, particularly Inspirational Motivation and Individualized Consideration (Bass, 1985). By fostering collaborative environments and encouraging shared professional learning, Master Teachers inspire teachers to work toward collective goals while supporting their individual professional growth.

It proves that master teachers function as collaborative leaders who influence school improvement by fostering professional relationships and collective responsibility. Rather than positioning themselves as the sole source of expertise, they create opportunities for teachers to learn from one another, exchange ideas, and engage in shared reflection. This indicates that teacher leadership in curriculum and planning is not confined to individual instructional competence but extends to the capacity to mobilize professional communities toward common educational goals. Through LAC sessions, PLCs, collaborative planning, and reflective discussions, Master Teachers help establish a culture of trust, openness, and continuous learning. Their leadership promotes professional agency among teachers by encouraging participation, valuing diverse perspectives, and supporting collective problem-solving. These practices strengthen curriculum implementation by informing instructional decisions with shared experiences, collaborative reflection, and mutual support rather than isolated individual efforts. The findings further suggest that effective teacher leadership is relational, relying on collaboration to sustain instructional improvement and organizational learning.

The theme of innovative leadership through ICT integration and resourcefulness aligns with Lewis and DeSantis (2024), who found that instructional coaching significantly improves teachers' capacity to integrate technology through continuous guidance and support. Similarly, Indrayani et al. (2024) emphasized that digital instructional leadership strengthens teacher performance by fostering technology adoption and professional learning. Furthermore, Mishra et al. (2024) highlighted that successful educational innovation requires both technological competence and leadership support to sustain change within organizations. These studies reinforce the present finding that ICT integration, resourcefulness, and instructional innovation are important manifestations of teacher leadership in curriculum and planning.

The findings support PPST Domain 4, particularly the strand on the utilization of teaching and learning resources, including ICT, which emphasizes the effective selection, development, and use of instructional resources to improve learner outcomes (Department of Education, 2017). The theme also aligns with Bass's (1985) Transformational Leadership Theory, particularly the Intellectual Stimulation dimension, which encourages innovation, creativity, and the exploration of new approaches to teaching and learning. By promoting ICT integration, supporting experimentation with instructional technologies, and encouraging resourcefulness in addressing classroom challenges, Master Teachers stimulate teachers to adopt innovative practices that enhance instructional effectiveness.

Master teachers function as innovation leaders who facilitate instructional improvement through both technological advancement and adaptive problem-solving. Their leadership is evident in their efforts to build teachers' confidence in using ICT, encourage experimentation with digital tools, and provide continuous support for technology-enhanced instruction. More importantly, the findings suggest that innovation is not merely the adoption of advanced technologies but the creative use of available resources to improve teaching and learning. By guiding teachers in both ICT integration and resource development, Master Teachers help create learning environments that are engaging, flexible, and responsive to students' needs. This form of teacher leadership demonstrates adaptability, initiative, and forward-thinking practices that enable schools to respond effectively to changing educational demands. The findings further indicate that Master Teachers play a crucial role in reducing barriers to innovation by providing mentoring, technical assistance, and practical solutions that empower teachers to embrace instructional change.

Teacher Leadership Challenges of Master Teachers in the Schools Division of Panabo City in Curriculum and Planning

The teacher leadership challenges of master teachers in the schools Division of Panabo City, in curriculum and planning, highlight five major themes. These themes highlight the complex realities faced by master teachers: workload and structural constraints on teacher leadership; gaps in curriculum understanding, alignment, and standards interpretation; resistance to change, evaluator perceptions, and weak collaborative engagement; limited readiness for responsiveness, differentiation, and learner-centered teaching; and ICT, resource, and communication barriers. Together, these themes provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape and challenge the effectiveness of master teachers as curriculum leaders and agents of instructional improvement.

The theme of workload and structural constraints on teacher leadership is consistent with the literature, which shows that these factors hinder the sustainability of teacher leadership. Altun and Yucel-Toy (2023) found that collaborative curriculum planning improves instructional practice but is often difficult to sustain due to workload, time constraints, and coordination challenges. Hu and Endozo (2024) likewise emphasized that limited time and insufficient institutional support weaken collaboration and professional learning initiatives. Saad (2019) also identified workload pressure and time limitations as barriers to peer coaching and professional learning communities. Furthermore, Siregar (2024) noted that administrative workload and multiple responsibilities hinder school leaders' ability to focus on instructional improvement.

In relation to transformational leadership theory, these findings show that while master teachers may demonstrate inspirational motivation and individualized consideration through mentoring and support, structural constraints can limit their ability to consistently enact these leadership behaviors (Bass, 1985). The findings also align with PPST Domain 4, which requires planning, collaboration, and resource utilization, and implies the need for adequate institutional conditions to allow master teachers to perform these functions effectively (Department of Education, 2017).

Master teachers exercise teacher leadership within conditions that often limit their capacity to provide sustained support. Their leadership roles require them to guide curriculum planning, mentor teachers, facilitate collaboration, and monitor instructional practices; however, these responsibilities compete with their regular teaching load and administrative tasks. As a result, teacher leadership may become fragmented, irregular, or reactive instead of continuous and developmental. This suggests that effective teacher leadership does not depend solely on the commitment or competence of master teachers but also on the presence of enabling school structures. Without protected time, clear role expectations, and institutional support, master teachers may struggle to fully perform their leadership functions in curriculum and planning.

The theme of gaps in curriculum understanding, alignment, and standards interpretation aligns with the existing literature, which emphasizes curriculum knowledge as a critical component of teacher leadership. Indrawati et al. (2024) found that teachers often experience difficulties in curriculum implementation because of limited training, insufficient planning support, and challenges in understanding curriculum expectations, all of which affect instructional alignment. Similarly, Kamaruzaman et al. (2020) reported that teacher leaders frequently encounter difficulties in guiding curriculum-related practices when teachers lack a clear understanding of standards and expectations. Mishra et al. (2024) further argued that knowledge gaps and weak knowledge-sharing systems reduce the effectiveness of instructional leadership and professional collaboration. Altun and Yucel-Toy (2023) also emphasized that curriculum planning frameworks require substantial curriculum knowledge and ongoing support to be implemented effectively.

From the perspective of transformational leadership theory, these findings highlight the importance of intellectual stimulation, wherein master teachers encourage teachers to critically examine curriculum standards, rethink instructional practices, and improve alignment between competencies and classroom instruction (Bass, 1985). Likewise, the findings directly relate to PPST Domain 4, particularly the strands on planning and management of teaching and learning and alignment of learning outcomes with learning competencies, which

require teachers to demonstrate deep curriculum understanding and effective instructional planning (Department of Education, 2017).

Master teachers serve as curriculum mediators, bridging the gap between curriculum policy and classroom implementation. A significant portion of their leadership role involves clarifying standards, interpreting competencies, explaining curriculum changes, and guiding teachers toward aligned instructional practices. However, differences in curriculum understanding among teachers often require repeated coaching, mentoring, and monitoring efforts. These challenges suggest that curriculum leadership extends beyond ensuring compliance with standards; it also involves developing teachers' curriculum literacy and instructional decision-making skills. The findings further indicate that inconsistent interpretation of competencies and continued reliance on outdated instructional practices may weaken curriculum coherence across classrooms. As a result, Master Teachers must continuously provide guidance and support to ensure that curriculum implementation remains aligned, meaningful, and responsive to intended learning outcomes.

The themes of resistance to change, evaluator perceptions, and weak collaborative engagement are consistent with previous studies that highlight the relational challenges of teacher leadership. Ali et al. (2020) found that teachers often experience anxiety toward coaching initiatives because feedback is sometimes perceived as evaluation rather than professional support, leading to resistance and defensiveness. Kamaruzaman et al. (2020) similarly reported that teacher leaders frequently encounter resistance when colleagues misunderstand leadership roles or perceive leadership efforts as supervisory rather than collaborative. Hu and Endozo (2024) emphasized that active participation in communities of practice depends largely on trust, shared purpose, and teachers' recognition of collaboration's value. Likewise, Wiens et al. (2024) argued that teacher leadership is fundamentally relational and requires strong professional relationships to influence practice effectively. In line with Transformational Leadership Theory, these findings highlight the importance of Individualized Consideration and Inspirational Motivation, in which leaders build trust, support individual growth, and inspire colleagues to embrace change and professional learning (Bass, 1985). The findings also support PPST Domain 4, particularly the strand on professional collaboration, which emphasizes collegial engagement, shared learning, and collective responsibility for improving teaching and learning (Department of Education, 2017).

Master teachers' effective teacher leadership depends not only on technical expertise but also on their ability to build trust, credibility, and positive professional relationships. Resistance to coaching and instructional change suggests that leadership influence is often mediated by teachers' perceptions of feedback and professional support. When master teachers are viewed as evaluators rather than mentors, opportunities for reflective practice and professional learning become limited. Likewise, weak engagement in collaborative activities reduces the effectiveness of shared decision-making, peer learning, and collective curriculum improvement efforts. These findings suggest that master teachers must continuously cultivate a culture of trust, openness, and psychological safety to encourage teachers to embrace feedback, participate in collaboration, and view leadership as a supportive rather than supervisory process. Therefore, teacher leadership involves not only guiding instructional practices but also transforming professional relationships and school culture to support continuous improvement.

The theme of limited readiness for responsiveness, differentiation, and learner-centered teaching is supported by studies that highlight the challenges of implementing these approaches. Indrawati et al. (2024) found that teachers frequently experience difficulties in implementing differentiated instruction due to limited training, inadequate support systems, and insufficient opportunities for professional development. Similarly, Indrayani et al. (2024) reported that innovation in teaching practices is often constrained by gaps in teacher competence and readiness, limiting the successful implementation of responsive instructional approaches. Altun and Yucel-Toy (2023) further emphasized that effective curriculum adaptation requires substantial instructional knowledge, reflective practice, and continuous professional support. These findings align with the present study by demonstrating that learner-centered instruction requires more than mere compliance with the curriculum; it demands instructional competence and sustained capacity-building. According to the principles of transformational leadership theory, the findings reflect the principle of individualized consideration, wherein leaders recognize individual developmental needs and provide support to help colleagues improve their

professional practice (Bass, 1985). Likewise, the findings relate directly to PPST Domain 4, particularly the strand on the relevance and responsiveness of learning programs, which emphasizes the need to design instruction that addresses learner diversity and contextual realities (Department of Education, 2017).

Master teachers face the challenge of building teachers' capacity to implement responsive and learner-centered instruction effectively. Their leadership responsibilities extend beyond curriculum alignment and instructional monitoring to include developing teachers' competence in differentiation, contextualization, and inclusive pedagogy. The responses suggest that many teachers still require substantial support in designing lessons that accommodate learner diversity and connect learning to students' experiences and contexts. The continued reliance on standardized, traditional instructional approaches suggests that the transition toward learner-centered teaching is still in its early stages. Consequently, master teachers serve as instructional facilitators, guiding teachers in translating curriculum expectations into classroom practices that are responsive, flexible, and inclusive. The findings further imply that effective teacher leadership involves strengthening teachers' instructional readiness, thereby making curriculum implementation more meaningful and relevant to learners.

The theme of ICT resources and communication barriers aligns with studies highlighting the influence of technological and organizational conditions on instructional leadership. (2024) found that limited technological resources and weak knowledge-sharing systems reduce the effectiveness of instructional innovation and professional collaboration. Similarly, Indrayani et al. (2024) reported that inadequate access to technology and varying levels of ICT competence hinder the successful implementation of digital instructional practices. Hu and Endozo (2024) further emphasized that effective professional learning and collaboration depend on strong communication structures and institutional support systems. In addition, Lewis and DeSantis (2024) noted that technology integration becomes more successful when teachers receive continuous support, coaching, and access to appropriate resources.

From a transformational leadership theory perspective, these findings highlight the importance of intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation, in which leaders encourage innovation, support technological adaptation, and inspire colleagues despite existing challenges (Bass, 1985). The findings also align with PPST Domain 4, particularly the strand on the utilization of teaching and learning resources, including ICT, which emphasizes the effective use of resources and technology to enhance teaching and learning outcomes (Department of Education, 2017).

Master teachers' effectiveness of teacher leadership is influenced not only by leadership competence but also by the availability of resources and the quality of communication systems within schools. Master Teachers may possess the knowledge and willingness to lead instructional innovation, but inadequate technological resources and uneven digital readiness can limit the implementation of their initiatives. Likewise, ineffective communication can weaken coordination, reduce understanding of leadership goals, and create barriers to collaborative problem-solving. These findings suggest that teacher leadership operates within organizational conditions that either support or constrain instructional improvement efforts. Consequently, master teachers must often compensate for resource shortages, provide additional guidance on technology use, and establish clear communication channels to ensure that curriculum and planning initiatives are successfully implemented. The findings further indicate that sustainable teacher leadership requires supportive systems that provide adequate resources, strengthen digital capacity, and promote effective professional communication.

Implications for Educational Practice

The findings highlight that master teachers may strengthen their teacher leadership practices through establishing quarterly coaching and mentoring cycles focused on curriculum alignment, contextualization, differentiated instruction, and ICT integration. Conduct regular classroom observations followed by post-conference discussions and follow-up coaching sessions. Develop curriculum alignment guides, lesson planning templates, and sample instructional materials to support teachers. Facilitate peer coaching and demonstration teaching activities to encourage professional learning. Create a supportive and non-evaluative mentoring environment to build trust and reduce resistance among teachers.

Teachers may improve their participation and professional growth through actively participating in monthly LAC sessions, curriculum planning meetings, and professional learning communities. Collaborate with colleagues in lesson planning, instructional material development, and assessment design. Engage in continuous professional learning related to curriculum alignment, learner-centered instruction, and differentiated teaching. Maintain reflective journals or learning logs to monitor instructional improvements. Enhance ICT competence by participating in school-based and division-sponsored digital literacy training.

School heads may provide stronger institutional support through allocating protected time for coaching, mentoring, curriculum planning, and collaborative learning activities. Reduce unnecessary administrative and non-instructional tasks assigned to Master Teachers. Strengthen school-based professional development programs focused on curriculum leadership. Promote a culture of shared leadership where master teachers are recognized as instructional partners rather than evaluators. Monitor the implementation and effectiveness of mentoring, coaching, and collaborative learning initiatives.

The Schools Division Office and DepEd may address systemic challenges through developing and implement a teacher leadership enhancement program for Master Teachers. Provide specialized training on curriculum alignment, instructional coaching, differentiated instruction, contextualization, and ICT integration. Institutionalize regular mentoring, coaching, and LAC schedules through division-level policy guidelines. Allocate resources for updated instructional materials, digital devices, and reliable internet connectivity. Establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of teacher leadership initiatives across schools. Develop a division policy framework that clearly defines and supports the instructional leadership functions of Master Teachers.

Implications for Future Research

Future researchers may extend the present study through the conducting of similar qualitative studies in other divisions and educational levels for comparative analysis. Employ mixed methods approaches to examine the relationship between teacher leadership and instructional effectiveness. Investigate the impact of master teachers' leadership practices on teacher performance and student achievement. Explore the effectiveness of coaching, mentoring, and professional learning communities as leadership interventions. Examine the long-term effects of ICT integration and collaborative leadership on curriculum implementation and school improvement.

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