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Lawrence Jeron B. de la Cruz Alegre Elementary School, Alegre Sebaste, Antique, 5709, Philippines.

Reinforcement Practices of School Heads on the Instructional Competence of New Teachers in Selected Public Schools: Basis for Reinforcement Program for New Teachers' Competence

Lawrence Jeron B. de la Cruz

Abstract

This descriptive-correlational research focused on the positive reinforcement practices of school heads to the needs of the new teachers in the District of Sebaste in the Division of Antique. There were 111 respondents, consisting of three (3) principals, seven (7) Head Teachers/Teacher-in-Charge, eighty-seven (87) tenured teachers, and fourteen (14) new teachers from primary and elementary schools

In the study, a validated researcher-made questionnaire was used as the main instrument. Both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data.

Results showed that the teaching workforce is predominantly married females, with a significant portion having 11-20 years of service. Those with over 30 years of service represent the smallest group. Additionally, most respondents are tenured and hold a bachelor's degree with master's degree units. The results showed that the School Heads exhibited practices that collectively foster a supportive and motivating atmosphere for teachers. They exhibited a high level of sensory, natural, material, generalized, and social reinforcement practices. Moreover, the new teachers exhibit a very satisfactory level of instructional competence across various professional skills. They are particularly outstanding in integration and communication skills, notably in integrating technology and fostering a positive learning environment. Additionally, they demonstrate high competence in lesson planning, instructional strategies, and emergency handling. Results showed that there is a relationship between the level of positive reinforcement practices of the school heads and the instructional competence of newly hired teachers, indicating that supportive leadership practices, including positive reinforcement, are significantly associated with improved teacher effectiveness.

Keywords: reinforcement practices; instructional competence; reinforcement program.

1. Introduction

The educational landscape is experiencing a significant increase in the number of new teachers entering the profession. These novice educators bring fresh perspectives and enthusiasm but often face challenges adapting to the demands of the classroom. School heads, as instructional leaders, play a critical role in providing the necessary support and reinforcement to help new teachers develop their instructional competence. Reinforcement, in its simplest form, is any consequence that increases the probability of behavior. All reinforcers, whether positive or negative, augment the probability of a behavioral response. Surbhi (2018) [137] defines positive reinforcement as the process of encouraging an approved behavior by offering a reward as a stimulus. A positive response or reward following an action reinforces that action. Forshee (2018) [48], on the other hand, describes negative reinforcement as the removal of a stimulus after a behavior, also increasing the likelihood of that behavior recurring. Many organizations offer limited recognition of exemplary teacher contributions or lack reward systems altogether. Research indicates a beneficial relationship between extrinsic and intrinsic positive reinforcement and worker performance. Balliet et al. (2015) [11] found positive reinforcement highly effective in enhancing and strengthening behavior, while negative reinforcement strengthens the development of the target behavior.

Correspondence: Lawrence Jeron B. de la Cruz Alegre Elementary School, Alegre Sebaste, Antique, 5709, Philippines. Mavengere (2020) [104] notes that good behavior (hard work) is reinforced when a negative stimulus (overtime) is removed, leading to increased employee productivity and a stronger focus on organizational goals.

Effective teaching necessitates continuous learning and improvement. Reinforcement is crucial for fostering commitment, passion, and dedication to serving learners and the nation. In the District of Sebaste, effective teacher reinforcement could significantly impact stakeholders and the school. This study of school heads' reinforcement practices on the instructional competence of new teachers in selected public schools, and the subsequent development of a reinforcement program, is both academically valuable and ethically imperative. Adequate support and reinforcement for new teachers directly contribute to quality education and improved student outcomes, enhancing student well-being and behavior management, and fostering teacher competence and professional development.

Initial assessments of newly appointed educators reveal commendable enthusiasm for teaching responsibilities. However, they often lack experience in areas such as report writing, navigating the complexities of the educational environment, and practical teaching experience (Brennan & Johnson, 2015) ^[19]. This study advocates for equitable educational opportunities, ensuring all educators receive the necessary support to succeed. Reinforcement and support improve teacher well-being, reduce burnout, increase job satisfaction, and strengthen school-community relationships (Campbell, 2015) ^[23].

This research addresses a gap in literature: the limited exploration of positive reinforcement practices in improving the instructional competence of new teachers, particularly in the context of Sebaste District. Previous studies often focus on negative reinforcement or lack a thorough examination of positive reinforcement's influence (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) [10].

This study will use robust methodology, focusing on positive reinforcement while considering potential cross-cultural differences in the effectiveness of reinforcement strategies. The resulting Reinforcement Program will aim to improve teacher behavior, morale, and attitude. Measuring instructional competence will assess the quality of teaching input, contributing to a more effective educational environment.

2. Materials and methods

The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. According to Creswell (2014) [32], the descriptive-correlational approach represents a variant of non-experimental inquiry that seeks to elucidate the relationship between two or more variables without imposing any manipulations. This methodology enables researchers to observe variables in their natural context, thus facilitating a deeper understanding of their intrinsic dynamics. It yields insights into their associations without asserting causal connections. This study rigorously adheres to these principles, thereby contributing to the body of knowledge on variable interrelations while maintaining a robust academic integrity throughout the research process.

The descriptive-correlational research design involves collecting and analyzing the quantitative data. This study assessed the reinforcement practices of school heads on the instructional competence of new teachers in elementary and primary public schools in the District of Sebaste in the Division of Antique. Also, it identified the level of instructional competence of new teachers. It determined if there is any significant relationship between the level of positive reinforcement practices of the school heads and the level of instructional competence of new teachers. In this case, the said research design was applicable.

2.1. Participants

With latest update of the School Division of Antique, in the District of Sebaste, there were nine (9) complete elementary schools while one (1) primary school. A total of 87 tenured teachers while a total of 14 new teachers during School Year 2022-2023. It also had a total of three (3) Principal and (7) Head Teacher/Teacher-in-Charge.

A total of one hundred eleven (111) participants were considered which comprise of three (3) female principals, one (1) female Head Teacher, one (1) male and five (5) female Teacher-in-Charge, four (4) male and eight-three (83) female tenured teachers, and three (3) male and eleven (11) female new teachers. The school principals and the Head Teachers/Teacher-in-Charge were voluntarily involved in the study. Likewise, new teachers and tenured teachers were free to refuse to participate without facing any negative consequences. Hence, their participation is at will.

The selection of one hundred eleven (111) participants, encompassing newly appointed educators, tenured faculty, and school administrators, facilitates a thorough examination of diverse perspectives within the educational landscape. By incorporating representatives from various roles and experience levels, the study is poised to capture a broad spectrum of insights and experiences pertaining to pedagogy, learning, and school governance. Given the constraints of the population size, a comprehensive enumeration was employed as the statistical methodology for selecting the respondents, which included school heads, novice teachers, and seasoned educators.

2.2. Data Collection

In the process of data collection for this study, a formal letter of authorization to conduct the research was obtained from the Schools Division Office of Antique. Additionally, a letter of consent was acquired from the Office of the District Supervisor in the District of Sebaste. The questionnaires were administered in person and retrieved to ensure a complete return rate of 100 percent.

The questionnaire was answered by the selected school principals and the Head Teachers/Teacher-in-Charge, tenured teachers, and the new teachers. This is to establish both self-assessment, peer assessment, and superior assessment in the school.

The accomplished questionnaire was double-checked for its completeness. If there were items left unanswered, the respondents were requested to complete them. The data were then collected, gathered, and tallied. Confidentiality of the answer was likewise maintained.

The participants underwent a debrief after responding to the questionnaire.

3. Results & Discussion

3.1. Socio-Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The socio-demographic profile of 111 respondents showed that the majority (90.1%) were female, aged 26 years and above (100%), and held tenured positions (78.4%), primarily as tenured teachers (78.4%). Most (78.4%) were

married and had 6–10 years (12.6%) or 11–20 years (34.2%) of teaching experience. A small percentage (18.9%) held a college graduate degree. Regarding the highest educational attainment, most respondents (70.3%) were college graduates with master's units. A smaller percentage held master's degrees (6.3%), while a few had master's degrees with doctorate units (1.8%) or doctorate degrees (2.7%).

3.2. Level of Positive Reinforcement Practices of the School Heads on the Instructional Competence of New Teachers in terms of Sensory Reinforcement

School heads' sensory reinforcement practices, as measured by mean scores, ranged from average (soft music, motivational quotes) to high (soft lighting, plants) (Haake, 2011; Bringslimark et al., 2009)^{[61, 20].} Overall, sensory reinforcement practices were rated highly (M=3.44), although significant variability existed across specific practices (SD=0.95). The placement of plants received the highest rating and lowest variability, suggesting strong approval and consistent implementation (Bringslimark et al., 2009) ^[20].

3.3. Level of Positive Reinforcement Practices of the School Heads on the Instructional Competence of New Teachers in terms of Natural Reinforcement

School heads' natural reinforcement practices were rated highly (M=3.86, SD=0.78), demonstrating consistency across methods (Scheeler et al., 2004; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Scott & Landrum, 2020) [126, 75, 127]. The highest-rated practice was guiding tenured teachers (M=4.12, SD=0.83), highlighting the importance of mentorship (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Scott & Landrum, 2020) [75, 127]. Feedback from colleagues and students also received high ratings, although with more variability (Scheeler et al., 2004) [126].

3.4. Level of Positive Reinforcement Practices of the School Heads on the Instructional Competence of New Teachers in terms of Material Reinforcement

The result showed that school heads' material reinforcement practices were rated highly overall (M=3.54, SD=0.96) (Scott & Landrum, 2020; Pushpasiri & Ratnayaka, 2020; Nelson, 2005) [127, 121, 113], although variability existed across methods. While monetary incentives were rated low (M=2.58, SD=1.48), nonmonetary rewards and certificates of appreciation received high ratings (M=3.25, SD=1.29; M=4.03, SD=1.03, respectively) (Scott & Landrum, 2020; Pushpasiri & Ratnayaka, 2020; Nelson, 2005) [127, 121, 113], suggesting formal recognition is highly valued. The high ratings for non-monetary rewards align with research indicating their positive impact on job satisfaction (Pushpasiri & Ratnayaka, 2020) [121].

3.5. Level of Positive Reinforcement Practices of the School Heads on the Instructional Competence of New Teachers in terms of Generalized Reinforcement

Generalized reinforcement practices were rated very highly overall (M=4.09, SD=0.75), indicating strong agreement among respondents (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Bayron & Lumapenet, 2024; Kusurkar et al., 2011) [64, 14, 93]. Practices such as maintaining a friendly work environment, providing feedback, and holding regular meetings to acknowledge achievements received the highest ratings (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Bayron & Lumapenet, 2024; Kusurkar et al., 2011) [64, 14, 93]. The emphasis on feedback aligns with research highlighting its importance for teacher professional development and instructional quality (Hattie

& Timperley, 2007) ^[64], while regular acknowledgment of achievements contributes to teacher motivation and morale (Kusurkar et al., 2011) ^[93].

3.6. Level of Positive Reinforcement Practices of the School Heads on the Instructional Competence of New Teachers in terms of Social Reinforcement

School heads' social reinforcement practices were rated highly overall (M=4.09, SD=0.89), showing strong agreement among respondents (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Iwal & Arenga, 2021)^[10, 76]. Verbal compliments and encouraging positive social interactions received the highest ratings (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Iwal & Arenga, 2021) ^[10, 76], highlighting the importance of creating a supportive and collaborative work environment. Team-building activities and soliciting new teachers' ideas also received high ratings, although with slightly more variability (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Iwal & Arenga, 2021) ^[10, 76].

3.7. Level of Instructional Competence of New Teachers New teachers demonstrated a very satisfactory overall level of instructional competence (M=4.14, SD=.62), exhibiting strengths in technology integration and creating positive learning environments (Koehler & Mishra, 2009; Encanto, 2022; Garcia & Wei, 2014; Nazareth, 2021; Noddings, 2005) ^[89, 44, 50, 112, 116]. Competencies in lesson planning, diverse teaching strategies, assessment techniques, and classroom management were also rated very satisfactorily. Outstanding ratings were achieved in technology integration and multilingual communication, highlighting key strengths (Koehler & Mishra, 2009; Garcia & Wei, 2014) ^[89, 50]. The low variability across ratings indicates consistent competence among new teachers.

3.8. Relationship between the Level of Positive Reinforcement Practices of the School Heads on the Instructional Competence of New Teachers and the Level of Instructional Competence of New Teachers

Results revealed significant positive correlations between school heads' positive reinforcement practices (sensory, natural, material, generalized, and social) and new teachers' instructional competence (all p < .001) (Boyd et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2012; Hoy & Miskel, 2008; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Schieltz et al., 2020) [18, 79, 69, 96, 128] Correlation coefficients ranged from r = .492 to r = .711, indicating a meaningful relationship, although not exceptionally strong. These findings support the rejection of the null hypothesis, confirming a statistically significant between positive reinforcement association instructional competence. The results align with research emphasizing the positive impact of supportive leadership on teacher performance and the creation of positive work environments (Boyd et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2012; Hoy & Miskel, 2008; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Schieltz et al., 2020) [18, 79, 69, 96, 128]

4. Conclusions

This study strongly suggests a positive relationship between supportive leadership, manifested through various positive reinforcement strategies, and the effectiveness of new teachers. The findings highlight the importance of creating a nurturing and encouraging environment to foster teacher growth and success. The consistently high ratings across different reinforcement types and the significant correlations observed underscore the impact of school leadership on teacher performance and overall educational

quality. It's encouraging to see the positive impact of these practices on both teacher well-being and student outcomes.

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