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Developing A Proposed Master's Training Program To Enhance The Instructional Leadership Of Master Teachers In Inclusive Elementary Education

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ABSTRACT: Recognizing the critical role of master teachers in fostering inclusive educational environments, this study examined the relationship between instructional leadership skills and professional growth in inclusive practice. It explored implementation challenges, including limited role-specific training, time constraints, and insufficient institutional support. Using a quantitative descriptive-correlational design, data were gathered via a census sample of 70 elementary master teachers in the South District, Cebu City, using a validated, researcher-modified Likert-scale questionnaire. This instrument measured professional growth and four instructional leadership domains: Instruction, Research, Coaching and Mentoring, and Observation and Supervision. Pearson's r and multiple regression revealed a moderate positive relationship between overall instructional leadership skills and professional growth. Instruction and observation/supervision demonstrated the strongest significant associations with inclusive practices, whereas research showed a small, non-significant negative effect and remained at a developing level. This study addresses a critical gap in regional research regarding Universal Design for Learning–aligned leadership in Philippine public schools. The findings informed a proposed Master's Training Program targeting research skills, coaching for inclusion, and structured observation, recommended for pilot testing within the district.

Keywords: Inclusive education, Instructional leaders, Master teacher, Training program, Philippines

I. INTRODUCTION

The strategic evolution of master teachers into frontline instructional leaders has become a vital requirement within the landscape of modern inclusive education. Beyond executing standard pedagogical responsibilities, master teachers are uniquely positioned to spearhead school-wide cultural shifts that foster welcoming, structurally inclusive environments for heterogeneous student populations. Sustaining these complex competencies necessitates continuous, contextualized institutional support systems. Collaborative school structures, notably professional learning communities (PLCs) and target-driven peer mentorship programs, serve as indispensable mechanisms for driving system-level instructional reforms. These supportive networks empower educators to adapt innovative pedagogical techniques and foster an institutional climate anchored in collaborative risk-taking and operational flexibility.

However, macro-level inclusion blueprints frequently fail to translate into classroom-level realities because they lack role-specific execution frameworks tailored to teacher leaders. The structural translation from abstract inclusion policy to field-level operational leadership remains an acute administrative bottleneck. This challenge is particularly visible among master teachers who
are culturally and legally tasked with modeling advanced inclusive practices without receiving targeted training. Consequently, bridging the gap between instructional supervision and inclusive teaching requires structured, empirical capacity-building programs that systematically refine leadership competencies to optimize learning outcomes for all students.

This operational vulnerability is highly evident in the Philippines, which ranks 89th out of 157 countries in the implementation of inclusive education initiatives according to the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report. Baseline administrative metrics from the Department of Education (DepEd) indicate a profound systemic exclusion, with only 391,089 learners with disabilities enrolled nationally, representing a low 20% total coverage rate. While cooperative professional frameworks are widely endorsed in literature, the local educational landscape exhibits a severe structural training deficit that blocks sustained collaboration and shared leadership. Statistically, only 20% of public-school educators possess verified specialized training in inclusive classroom methodologies, and the average teacher receives just 12.56 hours of cumulative training in diversity

management. This critical capability deficit directly correlates with a widening 15% academic performance gap observed between mainstream students and learners with special educational needs.

The crisis is further intensified by deeply rooted systemic pressures across public schools, including overcrowded classrooms, missing specialized resources, and a severe shortage of ongoing professional development paths. Historically, gender-biased decision-making frameworks within institutional hierarchies have further weakened instructional leadership pathways in inclusive configurations. Compounding these problems, the post-pandemic academic recovery has been weak; following the COVID-19 disruption, national enrollment metrics for students with documented disabilities collapsed by 65%, plunging from 360,879 in the 2019–2020 cycle down to 126,598 by the 2021–2022 period. Local public special education (SPED) frameworks continue to function under an unsustainable 31:1 pupil-to-teacher ratio, more than doubling the legally recommended 15:1 baseline. These systemic gaps mirror nationwide challenges observed across multiple administrative divisions, underscoring the deep structural barriers that hinder effective leadership execution.

While grassroots educators display remarkable personal resilience and a strong willingness to adapt to these resource-depleted environments, their professional growth remains limited by structural gaps in continuing professional education. This systemic weakness is critically concentrated in Region VII, specifically within the Cebu City South District. Central Visayas maintains an elementary student enrollment base of 1,076,523 learners operating under some of the country's most acute institutional infrastructure and classroom shortages. Within the Cebu City Division, the South District operates only six public SPED centers to manage a baseline enrollment of 444 specialized learners. These facilities have historically relied on rigid, self-contained special classes that restrict students with disabilities from entering standard inclusive rooms. Because public master teachers in this district are expected to lead inclusion without targeted support, this study addresses this urgent regional policy gap by analyzing master teachers' instructional competencies to develop a scalable, evidence-based Master's Training Program.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The conceptual framing of modern educational reform relies on the dual capacity of master teachers to execute advanced instructional interventions and model administrative leadership within inclusive classrooms. The institutional capacity of public elementary school master teachers to execute instructional leadership serves as a vital pillar for sustaining robust inclusive educational environments. By examining established frameworks across specialized research domains, this review synthesizes critical global and local baselines focused on classroom instruction, data-driven collaborative action research, peer coaching, and structured academic monitoring. Aligning these pedagogical pillars helps clarify the relationship between master teachers' target roles and the ongoing professional development of school personnel. Empirically, the baseline competencies of master teachers are structurally linked to professional growth, peer capacity development, and sustainable student achievement. Investigative baselines by Podador [1] demonstrate that master teachers maintain high professional performance across targeted technical sub-domains, including technical coaching, targeted curriculum adaptation, action research formulation, and structured capacity building. These interconnected skills provide an administrative anchor that supports classroom teachers as they transition away from exclusionary pedagogical practices toward unified inclusive configurations. Magnaye [2] notes that specialized competence in direct instruction, action-driven field research, and peer coaching shows a statistically significant, direct relationship with broad institutional success metrics. Despite these core capabilities, however, arbitrary systemic expansions of administrative duties frequently disrupt their primary leadership focus, leading to severe resource overextension and operational drift. Similarly, Laude et al. [3] state that regional master teachers exhibit high instructional competence and leadership capabilities, rendering them ideal agents for improving student performance metrics. When these core skills are systematically exercised, they foster a school culture built on accountability and standard performance tracking.

Furthermore, the broader institutional value of specialized instructional leadership tracks is visible across diverse classroom structures. Empirical data presented by Snoek and Volman [4] indicate that schools with high levels of distributed teacher leadership demonstrate more resilient professional environments and dynamic instructional flexibility. In addition, Liu and Hallinger [5] emphasize that practical instructional leadership competencies include directly setting academic goals, evaluating curriculum alignment, and mapping targeted instructional improvements. These integrated processes provide general education staff with the ongoing support required to manage diverse learners.

Implementing inclusive pedagogies within mainstream classrooms requires systematic adjustments to traditional instruction to eliminate learning barriers. Investigations by Karl and Venker [6] show that implementing individualized instructional practices and using targeted communication strategies directly enhances student engagement in diverse settings. To scale these specialized approaches across full school districts, master teachers must guide and model advanced differentiation strategies for general classroom

teachers. This supportive coaching mechanism ensures that students with varying learning needs receive equitable curriculum access without requiring complex retroactive accommodations.

However, establishing these inclusive teaching strategies requires continuous localized support and strong institutional backing. Martinez and Fabella [7] point out that local public primary systems face distinct operational demands that require master teachers to provide highly localized technical assistance. When teacher leaders establish predictable collaborative structures, it bridges the gap between official national inclusion frameworks and daily classroom execution. This focused process helps lower text-based and environment-based barriers for all students.

Engaging in structured action research serves as a vital mechanism for identifying operational bottlenecks and generating evidence-based solutions in inclusive schools. As explored by Mertler [8], action research provides a comprehensive, practical framework for grassroots educators to systematically study their own practices, analyze student performance data, and resolve local instructional problems. When master teachers lead these action research initiatives, it shifts a school's culture away from passive policy compliance toward active, data-driven professional reflection and problem solving.

This reflective practice is most effective when integrated directly into professional learning communities and continuous training frameworks. Desimone [9] highlights that effective professional development programs must feature collaborative learning, coherent content focus, and active teacher engagement over extended periods. Providing structured research workshops within these learning networks ensures that master teachers can systematically improve their data-analysis skills. This targeted approach helps convert complex research mandates into practical tools that refine daily inclusion strategies.

The final domain of effective instructional leadership relies on using non-punitive, formative supervision and active peer coaching to support teacher development. Grant and Cavanagh [10] explain that structuring professional interactions around clear feedback loops directly improves teachers' pedagogical confidence and resilience. Master teachers utilize classroom observations not as a compliance-heavy administrative tool, but as a supportive diagnostic path to identify specific teaching challenges and co-create practical instructional interventions with their peers.

Despite these clear benefits, master teachers frequently navigate deep structural and administrative challenges within the public school system. Investigations by Faizy and Ahmad [11] reveal that teacher leaders regularly experience severe implementation bottlenecks, including extensive administrative workloads, resource shortages, and limited role-specific leadership training tracks. On a broader scale, reports by UNESCO [12] emphasize that global inclusion initiatives often face execution gaps due to a lack of localized training programs tailored for field leaders. These complex structural pressures highlight the practical value of establishing custom-tailored, evidence-based development tracks, such as the proposed Master's Training Program, to systematically build inclusive teaching capacity across public education systems.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study assessed master teachers as instructional leaders in inclusive education in the elementary school department of the South District of Cebu City, Philippines, during the 2024–2025 academic cycle. Specifically, it evaluated their level of instructional leadership skills and competencies, the extent of their professional growth, the challenges and opportunities they encountered, and the strategies they employed. The empirical baselines established through this investigation directly informed the structural development of a scalable, evidence-based Master's Training Program designed to optimize inclusive education systems.

IV. MATERIALS AND METHODS

To ensure methodological rigor, this study utilized an empirical approach to evaluate the interaction between instructional leadership and professional growth variables. This section outlines the structural research architecture, participant selection parameters, data collection tools, and data analysis procedures used to design the proposed Master's Training Program.

4.1 Research Design

This investigation utilized a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design. This framework was selected to systematically measure, analyze, and describe the existing state of master teachers' instructional leadership competencies while simultaneously identifying the direction, strength, and predictive value of their relationship with professional growth within inclusive configurations. This methodology avoids experimental manipulation, ensuring that the documented field performance and institutional constraints reflect actual day-to-day operations in public schools.

4.2 Participants and Sampling Method

The target population for this study consisted of public elementary school master teachers assigned to the South District of the Department of Education (DepEd) Division of Cebu City, Philippines. Due to the specialized nature of the group and the specific inclusion leadership criteria, a total universe census sampling

approach was used. This approach eliminated sampling error by including all 70 active elementary master teachers across the district's public facilities. This ensured complete coverage of the administrative and pedagogical views within the district.

4.3 Research Instrument

Data collection was conducted using a content-validated, pilot-tested, researcher-modified Likert-scale questionnaire. The tool was divided into three main operational parts: a demographic component to profile participants (age, gender, educational attainment, and teaching tenure); an instructional leadership assessment scale split across four domains (Instruction, Research, Coaching and Mentoring, and Observation and Supervision); and a professional growth metric tailored for inclusive education environments. To guarantee field reliability, the modified tool was pre-tested outside the target district, demonstrating a strong internal consistency profile with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient exceeding the 0.70 threshold across all major subscales.

4.4 Ethical Considerations and Data Collection Procedures

Administrative clear paths were strictly followed, beginning with formal institutional permissions from the DepEd Division Superintendent and School Principals. Ethical standards were maintained by providing written informed consent documents to all 70 participants, ensuring voluntary participation and complete anonymity. To protect intellectual property and comply with privacy legislation, no identifying institutional or individual descriptors were extracted. Data gathering was conducted through structured, non-disruptive distribution methods during designated school professional blocks.

4.5 Data Analysis and Statistical Treatment

The collected data were organized, coded, and analyzed using standard statistical software. Demographic profiles were processed using frequency counts and percentage distributions. To measure self-assessed instructional leadership competencies and professional growth baselines, weighted means were calculated and mapped to standardized four-level rubrics (Highly competent, Competent, Developing, Beginning). The relationship between instructional leadership skills and professional growth was evaluated using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson's r). Finally, multiple linear regression analysis was applied to isolate individual domain predictive significance, providing the empirical foundation needed to structure the components of the proposed training program.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section displays the systematic empirical findings gathered from the complete census assessment of public elementary school master teachers across the South District of Cebu City (n=70). The data are organized into three separate statistical sections with independent tables, each immediately followed by detailed discussion and practical school implications.

5.1 Level of Instructional Leadership Skills and Competencies of Master Teachers

To measure operational capability thresholds and isolate core competency profiles across the district, Table 1 details the compressed composite summary metrics across the four key teacher leadership sub-domains.

Table 1. Composite Level of Instructional Leadership Skills and Competencies of Master Teachers (n=70)

Evaluated Instructional Leadership Competency Domain	Composite Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Descriptive Interpretation	District Rank
Domain 1: Direct Classroom Instruction	3.42	0.44	Very Satisfactory	2nd
Domain 2: Action and Field Research Development	2.15	0.61	Satisfactory	4th
Domain 3: Professional Coaching and Mentoring Support	2.88	0.52	Very Satisfactory	3rd
Domain 4: Observation and Structural Supervision Processes	3.51	0.39	Excellent	1st
Overall Core Leadership Competency Summary	2.99	0.49	Very Satisfactory	—

The statistical indicators compiled in Table 1 reveal an accomplished yet uneven capability profile among public school master teachers. The domain tracking Observation and Structural Supervision achieved the

highest score across the region (M = 3.51, SD = 0.39), indicating an 'Excellent' rating, which is followed closely by Classroom Instruction (M = 3.42, SD = 0.44). This distribution proves that master teachers maintain expert mastery over standard pedagogical layouts and official supervisory tools, easily executing evaluation instruments like the Results-Based Performance Management System (RPMS). In sharp contrast, Domain 2 (Action and Field Research) scored lowest with a 'Satisfactory' mean of 2.15. This low score identifies a critical capability bottleneck: while master teachers excel as standard class monitors and lesson models, they lack the data-analysis skills and technical training required to write formal research to solve immediate inclusive classroom problems.

This performance gap demonstrates that master teachers function primarily as institutional compliance monitors rather than data-driven instructional leaders. This dynamic restricts the development of flexible inclusive schools, which naturally require research-backed responses to manage diverse student populations. To correct this, the division office must simplify research expectations, moving away from complex requirements and instead funding practical research workshops focused on helping teachers analyze real-time classroom data to improve inclusion practices.

5.2 Extent of Professional Growth of the Master Teachers

To establish the baseline efficiency of teacher leaders navigating the unique demands of inclusive educational configurations, Table 2 details the compressed composite markers for professional development.

Table 2. Extent of Professional Growth Exhibited by Master Teachers in Inclusive Settings (n=70)

Evaluated Professional Growth Dimension Indicators	Composite Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Descriptive Interpretation	Dimension Status
Integration of Specialized Differentiated Instruction	3.28	0.41	Very Satisfactory	Highly Practiced Area
Application of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Guidelines	2.31	0.58	Satisfactory	Developing Track
Formulation of Contextualized Learning Accommodations	3.15	0.48	Very Satisfactory	Practiced Track
Active Collaboration in Professional Learning Networks	3.74	0.35	Excellent	Established Asset
Overall Extent of Professional Growth	3.12	0.46	Very Satisfactory	Proficient Baseline

The metrics in Table 2 demonstrate that the extent of professional growth among master teachers is strong but hindered by specific training deficits. Active Collaboration in Professional Learning Networks achieved the highest rating (M = 3.74, SD = 0.35), proving that master teachers are highly active participants in communal professional circles, cluster sessions, and standard peer dialogues. Similarly, the Integration of Differentiated Instruction is well-established at 3.28. However, the direct application of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines scored lowest with a mean of 2.31 ('Satisfactory'). This indicates that while master teachers are highly eager to collaborate and adapt, they lack formal, technical training in modern structural inclusion frameworks, limiting their ability to build proactively accessible curriculums.

This growth distribution shows that macro inclusion policies often fail to translate into specific classroom actions because they lack specialized training support. While master teachers display excellent personal willingness and strong peer collaboration, their growth remains restricted to basic, reactive accommodations. To maximize professional efficacy, district development plans must move away from generic lectures. Instead, funds should be allocated to provide verified certifications in proactive multi-tiered instruction and modern assistive technologies, ensuring that teachers' professional growth translates into successful classroom inclusion.

5.3 Significant Relationship Between Instructional Leadership Skills and Professional Growth

To test the primary operational hypothesis and identify the directional interaction between variables, Table 3 presents the bivariate correlation metrics linking leadership competencies to professional growth.

Table 3. Bivariate Correlation Matrix: Leadership Competencies vs. Professional Growth (n=70)

Correlated Operational Variable Sets	Pearson Correlation (r)	Coefficient (r^2)	p-Value	Statistical Significance Verdict
Instructional Leadership Skills × Professional Growth	0.54	0.291	< 0.01	Highly Significant Relationship / Reject Ho

The bivariate correlation parameters in Table 3 reveal a highly significant, moderate positive relationship between master teachers' overall instructional leadership skills and their subsequent professional growth ($r = 0.54$, $p < 0.01$). This statistical outcome justifies the formal rejection of the null hypothesis (H0). It proves that strategic improvements in teacher leadership capabilities directly match expansions in professional growth within inclusive schools. Looking at the individual components, master teachers' core strengths in classroom observation and direct instruction serve as the primary drivers of this relationship, while complex, compliance-heavy research requirements display a non-significant, weak negative association ($r = -0.12$). This confirms that abstract research tasks do not align with professional advancement under current public school conditions.

This relationship path provides a clear empirical blueprint for future professional development models. Since core instructional leadership skills share a highly significant bond with professional growth, investments in observation and coaching mechanisms yield immediate expansions in field efficiency. School administrators must maximize these existing capabilities by funding structured peer-mentoring networks. Concurrently, district leaders must reform action research tasks into practical, simplified problem-solving exercises, ensuring that research requirements support rather than complicate daily teacher operations.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The empirical evaluation of public elementary school master teachers in the South District of Cebu City provides a clear look at how instructional leadership and professional growth interact within inclusive educational settings. Based on the statistical findings, several major conclusions and actionable recommendations have been established to guide district policy and refine teaching standards.

6.1 Major Findings and Conclusions

This study demonstrates that public school master teachers possess highly developed, expert-level skills in classroom observation and structural supervision, alongside very satisfactory proficiency in direct classroom instruction. These established strengths serve as an invaluable institutional foundation, confirming that master teachers are capable of modeling core pedagogical techniques and leading formal evaluation processes. However, a significant operational bottleneck exists regarding action and field research, where performance scores remain at a developing level. This specific deficit is directly tied to heavy administrative workloads, high pupil-to-teacher ratios, and limited access to role-specific research training. Because multiple regression models reveal that research currently exerts a non-significant negative effect on professional growth, it acts as an institutional stressor that pulls teacher leaders away from active peer coaching duties.

Despite these systemic constraints, the study confirms a moderate positive correlation between overall instructional leadership competencies and the subsequent professional growth of master teachers within inclusive configurations. This relationship justifies the rejection of the null hypothesis and proves that systematic investments in teacher leadership skills will yield immediate expansions in professional efficacy. Instruction and observation skills remain the single strongest predictive indicators of successful inclusive practice. Consequently, maximizing inclusive learning environments across the region requires transitioning away from traditional, self-contained classrooms toward open, adaptive systems supported by targeted capacity-building frameworks.

6.2 Policy Recommendations and Institutional Actions

Based on these conclusions, the following structural recommendations are proposed for immediate implementation across the district's public school networks:

1. Establish Structured Research Partnerships: The DepEd Division of Cebu City should collaborate with local state universities and graduate research schools to deliver localized, practical action research seminars. These interventions must focus directly on addressing classroom inclusion bottlenecks rather than abstract theory, helping master teachers build practical research skills without increasing their administrative burden.
2. Optimize Administrative Workload Alignments: School principals and district supervisors must implement administrative adjustments to protect master teachers' primary schedules. This includes reducing secondary clerical tasks to ensure teacher leaders have sufficient time to conduct targeted peer mentoring, collaborative UDL lesson planning, and direct classroom coaching sessions.
3. Fund Specialized Inclusion Training: District offices should allocate professional development funds to provide verified, role-specific certifications in Universal Design for Learning (UDL), assistive technology integration, and modern diversity management practices for all active master teachers.

6.3 The Proposed Master's Training Program Framework

To translate these empirical findings into field-level practice, this study proposes the formal adoption and pilot testing of a customized Master's Training Program across the South District of Cebu City. This program is intentionally structured into three core operational tracks designed to bridge discovered performance gaps and maximize leadership efficacy:

Track I: The Action Research Incubator. This track focuses on improving low performance scores in the research domain by providing master teachers with hands-on skills in data-driven field inquiry, action research formulation, and basic statistical software applications. This training enables educators to systematically analyze inclusive classroom performance metrics and make evidence-based policy adjustments.

Track II: Peer Coaching for Inclusive Classrooms. This module leverages master teachers' existing strengths in classroom instruction to establish peer mentoring frameworks. It provides training in collaborative lesson design, differentiating instruction for heterogeneous student populations, and using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines to support learners with special educational needs in mainstream settings.

Track III: Data-Driven Observation and Supervision. This track refines existing observation skills by introducing specialized, non-punitive supervisory tools. It trains master teachers to conduct structured peer evaluations, analyze classroom inclusion barriers, and provide constructive, formative feedback to general education teachers, ensuring continuous improvement across the district.

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