



The Impact of ICFP Trained Graduate Teachers with Seven Years of Experience on Student Learning Accomplishment in Primary Schools in Baucau, Timor-Leste

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how teacher leadership influences student learning outcomes in primary schools located in Baucau, Timor-Leste. The study examined nine ICFP graduates who possess a minimum of seven years of teaching experience. This study employed a mixed-methods approach to gather data through questionnaires and open-ended interviews. The investigation delves into aspects such as leadership style, peer collaboration, professional conduct, and the perceived impact on student outcomes. The quantitative data used descriptive statistics and examined qualitative responses through thematic analysis. The results indicate that ICFP graduate educators play a crucial role in fostering collaborative practices and enhancing student engagement. The investigation underscores the necessity for organised leadership development and collaborative opportunities to improve teaching quality and learning outcomes in the primary education system in Timor-Leste

INTRODUCTION

The independence of Timor-Leste in 2002 exposed the nation to enormous difficulties, which resulted in robust challenges across all sectors but most prominently in education. Rebuilding and equipping every school, training native teachers, and developing educational leaders were necessary to provide excellent education to all children (Burns, 2017). The achievement of educational goals in Timor-Leste depends on having strong teacher-leaders who display confidence (Quinn and Buchanan, 2021).

The Australian Government-funded project Apoio Lideransa no Mentoria Aprendizagem (ALMA) provides mentorship that helps develop leadership and teaching quality among many teacher-leaders, according to Cassity and Chainey (2020). The underqualified teaching force and insufficient ongoing development of teachers are major challenges to the educational vitality of Timor-Leste. Research shows that numerous working teachers at primary schools and school heads possess solid educational experience, yet they often lack leadership qualifications and skills (Beck and Araujo, 2013).

ICFP functions as a tertiary Catholic institution establishment in Timor-Leste to provide staff training for the Ministry of Education's needs through preparing professionals for primary school positions (ICFP Handbook, 2021). ICFP graduates now make up more than 900 workforce members in Timor-Leste, while 65 percent of them implement their skills in educational institutions. Most teachers at primary-level schools are graduates, but only select individuals hold leadership roles at their schools (Gilchrist, Beck, Schulleri, and McManus, 2021). There is training provided at the ICFP for graduates to not only teach pedagogy and classroom learning but also to supply them with the leadership capabilities required for their roles in primary schools (Butcher, Bastian, Beck, D'Arbon, and Taouk, 2015, p. 65).

The research took place at three primary schools in Baucau, where the ICFP students have become teachers. The study included nine graduates who had seven or more years of teaching experience, together with some leadership responsibilities. As a lecturer at ICFP, the researcher guided nine graduates who are considered teacher leaders. Through this research, the researcher succeeded in expanding my typical mentoring methods, which include observation services, along with planning tasks, feedback provision, discussion facilitation, and expert advice delivery. The research uses standard methodologies to collect teacher feedback on their work activities, which then consolidates in an accurate document of interview results. The results from this research will serve to improve both my instructional delivery and professional mentor activities toward teachers. This research will increase my capabilities to supervise all duties related to undergraduate teaching practice, which the researcher recently gained as an additional responsibility. The researcher has protected all documents derived from this investigation under confidentiality rules, ensuring they do not reveal any personal identities or school names.

This study had three core research questions for collecting data regarding leadership activities among teachers and their effects. The primary goal of this research was to examine the impact of ICFP teacher leadership on students'

academic assessments. Since graduate students hold leadership roles in their educational institutions, this research aims to understand the impact of ICFP graduate teacher leadership on student academic achievement. What role do teachers play in enhancing the influence of school principal leadership on student achievement?

This research contains a review of relevant literature and a description of the methods used in collecting and analyzing data, followed by the findings and discussion, and ending with a conclusion and recommendations.

LITERATURE RIVIEW

The ALMA project, designed and funded by the Australian Government, aims to support school leaders and teachers in their efforts to improve teaching quality and student learning in Timor Leste (Cassity and Chainey, 2020). The writers of the report about the ALMA project assumed that there is consensus about the important links between teaching quality, student engagement and learning outcomes. The participants displayed a strong belief that student engagement functions as a “robust predictor” for achievement and well-being (p. 15). Through interviews with 58 ALMA-participating staff members, researchers determined the program's positive impact on its implementation objectives. Their participation in the program enhanced their ability to successfully fulfil their responsibilities as instructional leaders. According to Cassity and Chainey (2020), these leaders activate numerous methods to stimulate teacher performance improvement. The staff members collaborate to establish a supportive environment that receives assistance from leadership. The general staff benefit from observing others perform their tasks, and they also benefit from the exchange of constructive feedback. Tablets, along with *Konversa* and *Eskola* applications, provide staff with better access to educational materials, which has boosted communication systems and redesigned teaching procedures. Through their leadership role, teachers became better equipped to provide their students with different, exciting learning tasks.

The fundamental aspects of teacher leadership and collaboration appear in the Model Standards for Teachers, according to Çoban, Özdemir, & Bellibaş (2023). Research by Shen et al. (2020) backs up the Consortium’s core principle for promoting collective work environments among teacher leaders. Cosenza (2015) researched the leadership style of 22 Californian teachers who were enhancing their leadership skills through collaborative work. The majority of subjects involved in this research study chose not to discuss their administrative or managerial positions. The participants emphasised the fundamental requirement of creating and living in a collaborative work community, which would allow them to exchange their best practices while talking about role models. The teachers' leadership passed from individual work to collective actions that established social capital together with improved relational skills (McCallum and O'Connell, 2009).

The study conducted by Calderone, Kent, and Green (2018) in Alabama, USA, based their definition of teacher leadership on York-Barr and Duke (2004), which describes teachers enabling their peers to create superior teaching approaches. The study aimed to collect data on teachable students who had their classroom instructors identified as teacher leaders by their school principals. Their results were inconclusive. They strongly advocated for teacher leaders to advance their abilities while seizing additional chances to manifest leadership in their teaching careers. The study conducted by Sugg (2013) produced inconclusive findings regarding the research question. Through their observations, this researcher learnt that teachers' participation in leadership initiatives and membership in an interactive professional environment (Sugg, 2013) produced academic improvement among students.

Educational leaders from the USA participated in two national surveys conducted during 2005 and 2008 to investigate learning and teaching responsiveness to leadership effects (Louis, Dretzke and Wahlstrom, 2010). Each survey received more than 4000 responses during these examinations. The researchers discovered that student learning improves when leadership incorporates shared responsibilities along with staff trust establishment and instructor skill enhancement as three components that reinforce each other. The professional community of teachers emerged as a crucial element that led to both improved student achievement and superior instructional quality, according to results in Louis et al., (2010)

Berry, Daughtrey, and Wieder (2010) established that professional community improvements led to better student outcomes, along with community members' collective expertise, self-confidence, and professional efficacy. Teaching professionals who exhibited strong leadership capabilities recognised the benefits of fostering effective relationships among community members, which included both students and their colleagues. By adopting dual responsibilities as teachers and leaders, teachers can effectively eliminate obstacles that hinder progress and use their expertise to shape educational decisions between their teaching and leadership functions, according to Berry (2019). All those who work in educational leadership must show creativity and innovation while they adapt to progressing student realities and life situations, according to Osman and Kamis (2019). Leadership strengthening consists of three core elements that affect cognition, behaviour, and emotions, based on Salicru (2017).

METHODOLOGY

Method and Procedures

Ten ICFP graduate teachers from Baucau's three primary schools served as research participants through purposive sampling, according to Robinson (2024). A teacher dropped out before the study started, thus reducing the participant numbers to nine. As mentoring teachers, ICFP graduates were selected based on their seven years of teaching experience, proven ability to lead peers, and capacity to maintain productive relationships with fellow teachers and school principals.

This research applied a mixed methodology approach, according to Creswell (2014) and Terrell (2012). The research combines questionnaires and interviews to provide better answers for research questions through a mixed methodology (Dawadi, Shrestha, & Giri, 2021). According to Creswell (2014), the data collection and analytic process happened in sequential order through explanatory design. The research proceeded through two staged data analysis phases dealing with quantitative and qualitative information.

The research team at ICFP approved the study's ethical requirements, which allowed me to distribute translated Tetun permission letters to the three school heads. These school principals showed appreciation by agreeing to participate in the research activities. Before making personal visits to their respective school locations, the researchers conducted initial phone calls. The research participants expressed their willingness to review and document their consent after understanding all research-related procedures. The participants freely joined this study with complete permission to withdraw anytime without negative consequences (Wester, 2011). Throughout the research period, the participants experienced comprehensive protection of their privacy and confidential information (Australian Research Council (ARC) and Universities Australia (UA), 2018). ARC and UA (2018) say that participants knew the data would not be online or in print. I saved the research data in secure laptop files using my private passwords.

Quantitative Phase

Within this quantitative segment, the study investigated ICFP graduate teachers' leadership practices in educational operations as well as their power to enhance the influence of school administration leadership on student success. The questionnaire served to understand ICFP graduate teachers' emotional responses toward teacher leadership together with their school-based collaborative practices.

Ten brief statements within the questionnaires follow a Likert-based rating scale (Creswell, 2014) that divides into five distinct categories for participant selection. The research data is segmented into five areas: the working collaborative environment, the relationship to leading and encouraging, peer learning and teaching, understanding leadership, and research that produces data on teaching and learning.

Method and Procedures

School participants received the translated questionnaire statements from English to Tetun, which is Timor-Leste's official and working language, directly in three educational institutions. The participants carefully examined each statement before choosing their response from four options: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The participants already knew how to finish questionnaire forms through this method.

The collected questionnaires led to preparing data summary sheets through Excel operations on my laptop before moving towards analysis. The researcher conducted a descriptive statistical analysis to explain how graduates

approached classroom leadership and teacher-peer and teacher-school principal relationships (Creswell, 2014).

Qualitative Phase

The statistical data analysis yielded essential information about those taking part in the study. The established framework included aspects from this information which guided the process for obtaining qualitative interview data. These interviews focused on understanding both ICFP graduate teachers' student academic reaching impact and their peer and principal relationship effects on school betterment.

Method and Procedures

The researcher used one-to-one semi-structured interviews following data analysis through questionnaires so as to obtain additional details on findings identified through quantitative data (Creswell, 2014). All interview questions were administered in Tetun to the participants. The interview focused on three areas: their leadership history and their impacts on student academic outcomes and the way they interact with both school staff members and school executives. The interview duration should have been 30 minutes yet participants expanded their responses because they felt great appreciation for the opportunity to elaborate on their leadership activities. All our interaction through ICFP and mentoring roles enabled interviewees to share their thoughts without hesitation. For participants these interviews delivered value beyond typical research practices since they allowed them to advance their professional development.

The interview procedure for classroom teachers contained unique questions compared to those interviewing formal educational leaders at school coordinator level. The researcher took Tubuan Tetun notes instead of using recording and transcription methods for the interviews. Throughout the interviews researcher repeatedly checked for confirmation of opinions from interview subjects. The researcher conducted English translations of these notes for later use in data analysis.

The researcher employed thematic analysis to analyse interview data, as described in Creswell (2014). The research team used digital spreadsheets to verify each interview transcript before identifying common patterns, codes, themes, words, and expressions. The research team emphasised specific ideas in the interview data because they addressed the research questions. The data analysis technique confirmed both the credibility and reliability of the gathered data.

The study's main restriction consisted of enrolling nine ICFP graduates who were willing to approve it. Seven-year experienced teachers serving in three Baucau primary schools made up the entire participant pool for this study. The researcher did not implement classroom observation of graduates' teaching activities to examine both their performance and that of students.

RESULTS

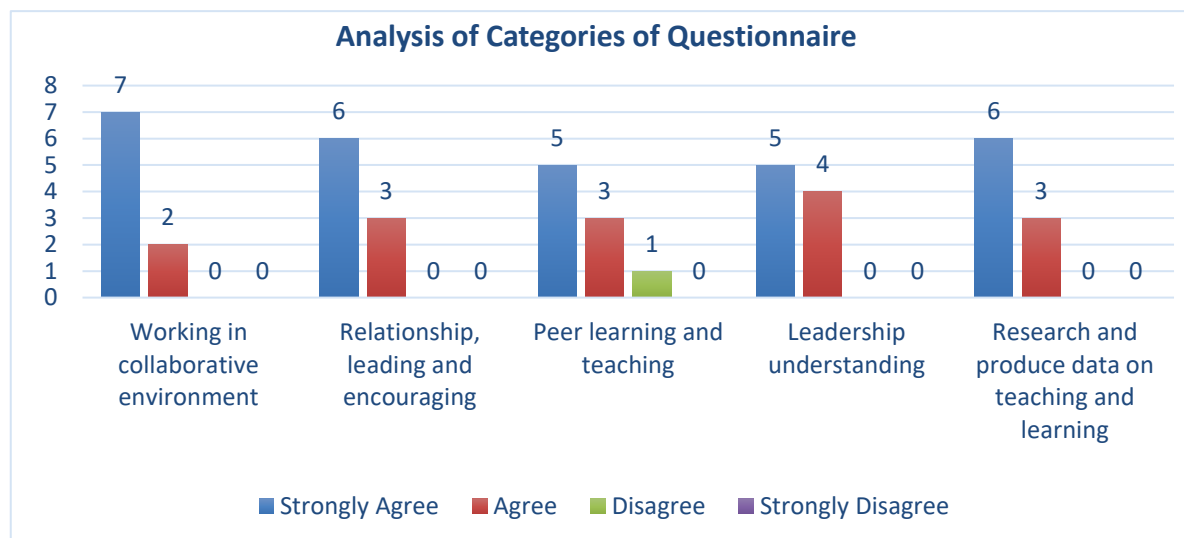
Findings

Graduate students demonstrated a strong agreement that fostering school collaboration between teachers and principals is a necessary condition for achieving desired academic outcomes in educational institutions. According to

these graduates' responses, effective school principal leadership and teacher leadership functions have a significant impact on student academic performance. The graphic below displays the nine ICFP graduates' replies to each of the ten statements from the questionnaire. The essential points derived from these statements formed the foundation for five distinct categories. These five categories assisted researchers in condensing the nine graduates' feedback through strongly agree-to-disagree scales.

The data presented in Graph 1 confirm that all nine ICFP graduate teachers demonstrate understanding about the exercise of teacher leadership throughout their instructional activities. All ICFP graduate teachers confirm collaboration as essential for their work according to this data. Every graduate teacher acknowledged that creating strong teacher relationships that extend to principal connections leads to improved educational goals in their schools.

Graduate teachers held varying opinions about how teacher leadership functions in combination with peer mentoring in their educational institutions. The participants generally recognised peer learning as crucial, but one new teacher reported coworkers who displayed behaviours that inhibited their willingness to learn from each other. Participants mainly expressed satisfaction about performing their teacher leadership function within their actual classroom environment. The graduates accepted that performing their leadership roles successfully requires them to perform their own systematic teaching and learning research, which generates data for assessing teaching effectiveness and student academic achievement.



Graph 1. The Results of the Questionnaire Given to 9 ICFP Graduate Teachers in Baucau Primary Schools

The graph's most popular theme was working in a collaborative environment. A collaborative work setting was the preferred choice among most ICFP graduates in the three Baucau primary schools since such environments enabled the growth of school improvement practices. Less than half of the

selected respondents strongly agreed with the third and fourth themes. The graduates showed requirements for enhanced knowledge about leadership alongside peer teaching and learning to become competent leaders and teachers.

The study found that all ICFP graduates understood their role as educational leaders. Through their professional roles, the graduates understood they could establish meaningful professional relationships and create productive teaching and learning settings in their schools.

The interview data analysis yielded four distinctive themes that included teachers collaborating with colleagues as well as their role in leadership development and their motivation to take leadership positions and peer teaching practices.

The majority of graduate respondents acknowledged that proper relationships require active idea-sharing among employees alongside mutual aid and cooperative environments.

The experience at ICFP alongside this school demonstrated how essential it is for leaders to develop strong relationships with colleagues. This promotes collective decision-making (Principle 1).

Our team jointly designs classroom rules while planning lessons together to perform student learning goals by incorporating all learning activities (according to Teacher 1).

At the same time, I collaborate with the parents and the principal to address the students' learning challenges and behavioural issues (Teacher 2). The graduates entering leadership positions understand they need to take charge of the complete educational development of their students. As per the graduates' consensus, a successful teacher-leader should guide educational operations, simultaneously making pertinent choices that boost student outcomes.

I hold a leadership duty within this educational institution. The principal has informed me that becoming successful in problem-solving and responsible leadership development is essential for creating successfully organised teaching and learning activities (Principal 1).

I must learn how to lead and make all students responsible for their learning performance to become a good teacher leader in my classroom (Teacher 3 and 4).

I dedicate my efforts to enhancing the teaching effectiveness and learning quality within my classroom (Teacher 5).

The third identified factor concerned teachers showing interest and motivation toward leadership roles. The interviewees accepted their teacher leadership role for improving their abilities both in leadership development and student difference management.

Teacher leadership holds a particular interest in me. As a teacher, I have adopted the obligation of leading initiatives toward guiding children while persuading them to achieve academic success (Teacher 6). The collective support of my teaching colleagues motivates me to see them work closely together during every educational task (Principal 1 and Teacher 9).

The final theme discussed the effects that peer teaching and learning can generate. Graduates asserted that their close peer interactions helped them

exchange knowledge and skills from teaching and leadership responsibilities and classroom organisation practice for enhancing student achievement.

The skills of teaching and leadership became accessible through working with my peer teacher. My teacher training has strengthened my self-assurance in becoming an effective educator (Teacher 7).

The guidance from my peer teacher shaped my development toward being an active, creative instructor who helps students improve their academic performance (Teacher 8).

DISCUSSION

The research findings correspond to the previous studies that educational leaders need to work together with colleagues to deliver their roles properly (Shen et al., 2020). The data showed this to be accurate among nine ICFP graduates who work in three Baucau primary schools. The outcome of the survey questionnaires showed that leadership positions among teachers resulted in more student participation and better educational results. Students became more interested in class and participated actively when teachers employed their leadership roles as part of collaborative work systems, according to the graduates. From their perspective, professionals found that their workplace environment significantly supported their career growth and strengthened both their career dedication and their responsibility for student personal development. The graduates who took teacher leadership roles utilised opportunities to make decisions that enhanced their teaching quality, thereby promoting student success. Numerous previous studies indicated that teachers generate learning improvements for students through leadership responsibilities (Cosenza, 2015).

The data from interviews, together with the literature available, reveals that teaching staff in Timor-Leste work independently in classrooms without support from their colleagues or principals. The educational system in Timor-Leste does not follow the previous Indonesian educational model, which had been discontinued (Ministerio da Educação, 2014). Most principals do not engage themselves in the school curriculum or educational instructional aspects. Principal authorities view themselves as managers instead of taking the position of instructional leaders (Ribeiro, 2019). Catholic primary school principals who also function as parish priests maintain little experience in educational practices because pastoral obligations rank above their school responsibilities. The management of daily school operations rests with coordinators, however they lack the autonomy to bring about new initiatives such as leader-teachers and cooperative teaching. The ICFP graduates received positive support from their principals, who additionally consisted of an ICFP graduate among them.

The interviewed participants provided multiple reports on collaboration in their life cycle, starting from traditional events through ICFP education and onwards into teaching work and participation in after-school activities. The interviewees pointed out that educational institutions should encourage collaborative work practices instead of independent ones (Teacher 1 and 2)

among professionals. Their stated working practice conflicts with their knowledge of normal cultural and daily activities within Timor-Leste. Education stands out as the sole public sector within Timor-Leste that operates without any supervision or encounters transparent and accountable failures. The educators view their actions as countercultural. A strong collaborative atmosphere for working and learning depends on strong relationships among teachers, between teachers and principals, and between staff and parents. Everyone can help to establish a sense of trust and respect by learning to listen to one another. However, respondents emphasised the importance of teacher leaders engaging in ongoing professional growth and conducting their own research on teaching and learning.

Graduates shared duties with parents while dealing with attendance concerns and trying to boost their self-esteem. Despite their personal limitations, many parents were willing to engage with teachers and contribute to their children's learning. Parents wanted to do what's best for their kids and appreciated any help from schools. The graduates' desire to form an educational community with parents is consistent with the findings of a survey conducted by Louis et al. (2010), which found that establishing a professional community in schools significantly improved children's educational outcomes.

The ICFP graduate teachers and principal addressed some of the difficulties they encountered in their job. The majority of them were concerned about youngsters who had learning disabilities. They were particularly concerned about the influence of the Covid-19 epidemic on the teaching and learning process from 2020 to 2021. Although schools were closed for extended periods of time, they used various inventive teaching and learning methods to keep contact with their students. They frequently used their resources to produce and print distribution materials, as schools lack computers, printers, libraries, and large protected places where youngsters can meet. While they admit that their efforts to continue children's education during this time were only partially successful, they have certainly met some of the challenges posed by Osman and Kamis (2019), who believe that leaders must be creative individuals who can adapt to unforeseen events in ever-changing lives and situations.

Although none of the participants had studied educational leadership at the postgraduate level, hearing them speak about the meaning of leadership based on their own experiences was eye-opening. They all had very mature and sophisticated thoughts about leadership. Nobody used phrases like being in control, having authority, or issuing instructions. Instead, they discussed collaboration (a recurring theme in this study), connection development, discussion facilitation, sharing ideas, tasks, and time with others, listening to people, being aware of their needs, and assisting in issue solving in a kind manner.

Another component of leadership that they all agreed upon was that leadership is not limited to the classroom or even the school. Leadership, like vocation or culture, becomes an integral aspect of one's identity. They demonstrate this aspect of their identity by applying their leadership skills beyond the school environment and within their communities. Although their

leadership in various fields outside of school was not the focus of this study, it is widely known that they all generously give their time and make valuable contributions to sporting clubs, music and cultural groups, community welfare organisations, and churches, in addition to their families. This is what leadership entails for them. Their leadership culture is the focal point of all three study questions.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study reveal that ICFP graduate teachers firmly believe that teacher leadership roles and collaborative work have a positive impact on student learning. The graduates responded that teacher leadership responsibilities allow them to make better judgements, work more productively as a team rather than alone, and know that they are constantly learning from their peers. They also discussed how their roles as teacher leaders offered them the freedom to allow their pupils to be more active and creative learners. They hypothesised that instructors taking on leadership roles and creating a professional community in a collaborative setting would contribute positively to students' academic progress or at least be a strong predictor of such achievement (Cassity and Chainey, 2020).

However, this research experiment did not collect data to determine whether teacher leaders' actions improved students' academic outcomes. If such data were obtained, the results could have been equivocal, as in the study projects of Calderone et al. (2018) and Sugg (2013). These researchers were pleased to find that the teachers' professional and participatory cultures were favourable and that pupils were exhibiting signs of improving their performances. They did not believe it was important to voice their unhappiness with the absence of evidence of better results.

The nine ICFP graduates interviewed agree that development is not solely determined by students' test scores. Their understanding of educational leadership appears to be more inclusive, with cooperation, relationships, involvement, social skills, and self-confidence recognised as essential indicators of human development for all educators.

In response to research question 1, these ICFP graduates display leadership by being kind and collaborative, participating in learning activities, inviting parents, generating and sharing resources, and assisting everybody in developing their skills.

In response to research question 2, their leadership helps students enjoy school more, provides them energy, motivates them to develop social skills, and offers them a sense of belonging at school. These may all be strong predictors of academic achievement.

In response to study question 3, their leadership strengthens the link between principal leadership and student achievement by incorporating the principal directly in children's learning. The teacher leader initiative becomes a feature of the school, drawing the attention of education officials, diocesan education representatives, teachers, parents, and researchers. School

communities welcome visitors who identify the principal as the primary person in charge of such programmes.

Recommendation 1: To improve the quality of teaching and learning, all schools in Timor-Leste should implement some kind of collaborative teaching or teacher leadership.

Recommendation 2: Staff members who want to gain leadership skills or have been identified as having leadership potential should join groups that participate in leadership development programmes like ALMA (Cassity and Chainey, 2020).

Recommendation 3: Continue to research the work of ALMA and other organisations involved in leadership development, and share the findings widely with the profession of teaching, staff at all levels of the department of education, diocesan education personnel, and all supporting institutions.

Additional Investigation

This study, like all investigations, has its limitations. The limited sample size, consisting of only nine participants from a single teacher training institute, may not adequately reflect the wider population of teacher leaders in Timor-Leste. Furthermore, data were gathered from a single municipality, which could restrict the applicability of the findings. Future studies ought to incorporate a broader and more varied sample from multiple regions and institutions. Longitudinal studies could yield a more profound understanding of the evolution of teacher leadership and its effects on educational outcomes over time. Furthermore, integrating student viewpoints and classroom observations would enhance the comprehension of the direct impact of teacher leadership on learning processes.

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