

Learning to Follow: Adaptation of Novice Teachers to Leadership Practices of School Heads

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Abstract: New teachers often face a range of difficulties as they adjust to the leadership practices and expectations in their schools. Their followership experiences significantly shape their transition, professional development, and long-term engagement. This study explored the lived experiences of new teachers in adapting to school leadership. This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach. Data were gathered from 10 newly hired teachers with no more than one year of teaching experience in their current school. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted using an interview guide. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and key themes from the participants' narratives. The findings revealed six major challenges experienced by new teachers: lack of clear communication, limited mentoring support, unfamiliarity with school policies, role ambiguity and confusion, pressure to conform to established norms, and inconsistent administrative feedback. In response to these, teachers employed six key coping mechanisms: seeking clarification through peer consultations, initiating self-directed learning and observation, reviewing documents and asking senior colleagues, clarifying responsibilities through regular follow-ups, adapting behavior while preserving personal teaching style, and requesting specific and timely input from supervisors. From these experiences, teachers derived six important insights: peer support helps clarify unclear communication, self-learning builds independence, consulting seniors prevents policy errors, clarifying tasks reduces confusion, balancing norms and style maintains authenticity, and clear feedback improves performance.

Keywords: *New Teachers, Followership, School Leadership, Qualitative Research, Adaptation*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Changing jobs is an important milestone in a teacher's career and often involves facing several challenges, such as adapting to the leadership approach of new school heads. Understanding how teachers adjust and learn to collaborate with their school leaders can contribute to fostering a more supportive and effective educational setting.

New teachers in various international contexts faced significant challenges adapting to school leadership due to cultural differences, varying educational practices, and often insufficient induction programs. The hierarchical nature of some educational systems created gaps between new teachers and school heads, affecting job satisfaction and professional growth. Rapid educational reforms further complicated their adjustment, requiring adaptable and supportive leadership. In the Philippines, centralized policies and rigid bureaucratic structures limited new teachers' autonomy and creativity, while a lack of effective mentorship left many feeling isolated. Economic constraints and resource disparities, especially between urban and rural areas like those in Davao City, further hindered support for new teachers.

Understanding the followership experiences of new teachers as they adapted to school leadership was crucial for creating a supportive and effective educational environment. The study highlighted the diverse challenges new teachers faced in international, national, and local contexts, emphasizing the need for inclusive and responsive leadership practices.

This study aimed to explore the followership experiences of new teachers adapting to school leadership, focusing on how they navigate expectations and support from school heads. Using a qualitative approach, it captured the lived experiences of new teachers across different settings, highlighting their challenges and successes. The study sought to provide insights for improving leadership practices to better support new teachers and enhance their professional development and job satisfaction.

To comprehensively explore the followership experiences of new teachers as they adapt to school leadership, this study aimed to address key areas that influence their professional journey. Understanding the challenges they face, the coping mechanisms they employ, and the insights they gain is crucial for developing supportive

educational environments. The following research questions guided this investigation:

- What are the experiences of novice teachers on adaptation to leadership practices of school heads?
- What are the coping mechanisms of novice teachers on adaptation to leadership practices of school heads?
- What insights of novice teachers on adaptation to leadership practices of school heads?

The literature review on new teachers adapting to leadership shows that effective leadership, clear communication, and supportive practices are essential for easing their transition. Structured mentoring and professional support help reduce isolation, while participative leadership fosters engagement and belonging. Adequate organizational resources and psychological support are crucial for managing challenges and stress. Continuous feedback also helps align new teachers with leadership expectations.

This study is based on Authentic Leadership Theory, which stresses genuine, transparent, and ethical leadership to build strong leader–follower relationships. Authentic leaders create trusting, open environments that help new teachers feel psychologically safe, reducing anxiety and easing their integration into school culture. The study also draws on Social Support Theory, which highlights the importance of emotional, informational, and instrumental support in helping new teachers cope with leadership transitions.

II. METHOD

This study used a qualitative phenomenological design to explore how new teachers experience and interpret their adaptation to new leadership. Phenomenology focuses on understanding the essence of lived experiences from the participants' perspectives, making it ideal for uncovering the meanings new teachers attach to their interactions with school leaders. This approach allowed the researcher to gather rich, detailed descriptions through in-depth interviews and reflective journaling, revealing the challenges, coping strategies, and insights of new teachers.

This study is grounded in a constructivist philosophical framework, viewing reality as subjective and shaped by social interactions (ontology) and knowledge as co-created between researcher and participants (epistemology). It acknowledges that values and biases influence the research process (axiology) and incorporates reflective strategies to address these influences. Employing a qualitative methodology, the study uses in-depth interviews and thematic analysis to explore the nuanced experiences of new teachers adapting to new leadership, aiming to capture their diverse perspectives and the meanings they derive from these experiences.

This study is based on the qualitative assumption that understanding human experiences requires detailed, context-sensitive exploration, aligning with a constructivist view that knowledge is shaped through social interactions and personal interpretations. The researcher recognizes that new teachers' experiences are subjective and influenced by their unique contexts and relationships with school leadership.

The study involved 10 newly hired teachers with up to one year of experience, selected through purposive sampling to explore their followership experiences adapting to new leadership. Participants were chosen based on their recent employment and relevance to the study's focus, ensuring similar stages in professional adaptation. Inclusion criteria required current teaching roles, employment within the institution for no more than a year, and voluntary participation with informed consent.

The researcher gathered data using two complementary methods: in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs), both guided by an Interview Guide. The IDIs involved one-on-one conversations with participants to gain a deep understanding of their personal experiences and perspectives through open-ended questions, allowing for rich and descriptive data. Interviews were scheduled at convenient times, conducted in private settings, and audio-recorded for accurate transcription and analysis. Following the IDIs, FGDs were conducted to explore shared experiences and collective insights among groups of participants.

The researcher systematically analyzed the data by first transcribing all audio-recorded interviews and focus group sessions to ensure accuracy. After becoming thoroughly familiar with the transcripts through repeated readings, the researcher coded significant data segments using both inductive and deductive approaches to identify patterns and align findings with theoretical concepts. These codes were then grouped into broader themes through thematic analysis, with careful review to ensure they accurately represented the participants' experiences. Finally, the researcher interpreted the themes in relation to the research questions and existing literature, drawing insights about the adaptation experiences of new teachers.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of the first section showed that new teachers encountered six key challenges when adjusting to school leadership practices. These challenges included unclear communication, insufficient mentoring support, limited knowledge of school policies, uncertainty about their roles, pressure to conform to existing norms, and irregular feedback from administrators.

The findings revealed six main strategies that new teachers employ to adjust to school leadership practices. These include consulting peers for clarification, engaging in self-directed learning and observation, reviewing relevant documents and consulting senior colleagues, regularly following up to clarify responsibilities, modifying their behavior while maintaining their own teaching style, and seeking specific, timely feedback from supervisors.

The findings revealed six main coping strategies new teachers use to adapt to school leadership: consulting peers for clarity, engaging in self-directed learning, reviewing documents with help from senior colleagues, regularly following up on responsibilities, adjusting behavior while

maintaining their teaching style, and seeking timely feedback from supervisors.

The study explored the followership experiences of new teachers and identified several challenges they faced in adapting to school leadership. These challenges included lack of clear communication, limited mentoring support, unfamiliarity with school policies, role ambiguity, pressure to conform to established norms, and inconsistent feedback from administrators.

To address these challenges, new teachers employed various coping mechanisms such as seeking clarification through peers, engaging in self-directed learning, consulting senior colleagues, regularly following up to clarify responsibilities, adapting their behavior while maintaining their personal teaching style, and requesting timely feedback from supervisors. From these experiences, they gained valuable insights, recognizing that peer support, self-learning, senior guidance, task clarification, balancing norms with authenticity, and clear feedback all contributed to improving their adaptation and performance.

The findings suggested that schools need to improve their orientation and communication processes for new teachers, addressing issues like unclear communication, limited mentoring, and unfamiliarity with policies. Role confusion and pressure to conform point to the importance of inclusive leadership that supports gradual adjustment and professional expression. School leaders should create a structured yet flexible environment where new teachers feel informed, supported, and valued from the beginning.

Additionally, the reliance of new teachers on personal initiative and informal support highlights a gap in formal institutional assistance. Schools should invest in structured mentoring, effective feedback systems, and accessible resources to ease the transition for new teachers. The insights gained by new teachers emphasize the potential for growth and professional development when supported by leadership that encourages dialogue, recognizes individual strengths, and fosters a culture of continuous learning for both teachers and students.

New teachers should proactively seek guidance, build peer support, and engage in self-directed learning to grow professionally. The Department of Education needs to implement structured induction and mentoring programs with clear guidelines and ongoing development. School heads must communicate clearly, give timely feedback, assign mentors, and foster an inclusive, supportive culture. Students can help by respecting and cooperating with new teachers. Future research could explore different school settings and track new teachers over time to better understand leadership's impact on their growth and retention.

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