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## **The Mediating Role of Teacher Collaboration in the Relationship between Instructional Leadership and Faculty Performance**

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### **Abstract**

Instructional leadership has emerged as a crucial factor in shaping teaching effectiveness and overall faculty performance in higher education institutions. However, the mechanism through which instructional leadership influences performance is still underexplored. This study investigates the mediating role of teacher collaboration in the relationship between instructional leadership and faculty performance at the undergraduate level. A quantitative research design was employed, utilizing a survey administered to faculty members across selected universities. Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling to assess direct and indirect relationships. Findings revealed that instructional leadership significantly enhances faculty performance, both directly and indirectly, through promoting teacher collaboration. The results suggest that when leaders encourage professional dialogue, teamwork, and shared decision-making, faculty members demonstrate improved teaching effectiveness, motivation, and student engagement. The study contributes to the growing literature on instructional leadership by highlighting collaboration as a vital mediating factor, offering implications for policy and practice in higher education leadership.

**Keywords:** Instructional Leadership, Teacher Collaboration, Faculty Performance, Higher Education, Mediation

### **Background of the Study**

In the contemporary landscape of higher education, instructional leadership has gained prominence as an essential approach to improving teaching quality, faculty performance, and ultimately student learning outcomes. Unlike traditional



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administrative leadership, instructional leadership emphasizes guiding, supporting, and monitoring teaching and learning processes (Hallinger, 2011). Research indicates that effective instructional leaders foster an environment of professional growth by setting clear academic goals, encouraging innovation, and providing constructive feedback (Shatzer et al., 2014). These practices have been shown to significantly enhance faculty motivation and teaching effectiveness, which are critical for the undergraduate level where foundational learning occurs. Despite the recognized importance of instructional leadership, the mechanisms through which it impacts faculty performance are still underexplored. One such mechanism is teacher collaboration, which refers to faculty members working collectively to share knowledge, solve problems, and improve instructional practices. Collaborative practices are strongly associated with higher levels of job satisfaction, innovation, and teaching effectiveness (Vangrieken et al., 2015). Instructional leaders play a pivotal role in cultivating collaborative cultures by promoting teamwork, shared vision, and professional dialogue (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Recent scholarship suggests that collaboration can act as a mediating variable, linking leadership behaviors to faculty outcomes (Sleegers et al., 2014). Leaders who foster professional collaboration enable faculty members to exchange ideas and develop reflective teaching practices, thereby enhancing their performance in the classroom (Thoonen et al., 2011). This relationship is particularly relevant in higher education, where faculty autonomy is traditionally valued, but collaborative practices are increasingly recognized as essential for quality assurance and continuous improvement (Liu & Hallinger, 2018).

Given this context, exploring the mediating role of teacher collaboration provides valuable insights into how instructional leadership translates into measurable improvements in faculty performance. Such an inquiry is not only theoretically significant but also practically relevant for higher education institutions striving to improve teaching quality, professional development, and student success at the undergraduate level.

### **Statement of the Problem**



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Instructional leadership has been widely recognized as a key factor in enhancing teaching quality and institutional effectiveness in higher education. However, while its direct impact on student achievement and faculty performance has been explored in previous studies, the underlying processes that explain this relationship remain less clear. One such process is teacher collaboration, which can serve as a bridge between leadership practices and improved faculty performance. Faculty collaboration fosters professional dialogue, reflective teaching, and innovation, all of which are critical at the undergraduate level. Despite this, higher education institutions often emphasize individual autonomy over collective engagement, which may hinder the potential benefits of collaboration. Therefore, there is a pressing need to investigate whether teacher collaboration mediates the relationship between instructional leadership and faculty performance, especially in the context of undergraduate education.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study holds both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of knowledge by identifying teacher collaboration as a mediating mechanism through which instructional leadership influences faculty performance. Practically, the study provides actionable insights for university leaders and policymakers by highlighting the importance of fostering collaborative cultures among faculty. Strengthening collaboration not only enhances teaching performance but also leads to improved student learning outcomes, professional development, and institutional effectiveness. Findings of this study will also guide higher education administrators in designing leadership strategies that balance individual autonomy with collective professional practices, thereby advancing quality education at the undergraduate level.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To examine the direct relationship between instructional leadership and faculty performance at the undergraduate level.
2. To analyze the extent to which teacher collaboration is influenced by instructional leadership practices in higher education.
3. To investigate the mediating role of teacher collaboration in the relationship



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between instructional leadership and faculty performance.

### Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between instructional leadership and faculty performance at the undergraduate level?
2. How does instructional leadership influence teacher collaboration among faculty members in higher education?
3. To what extent does teacher collaboration mediate the relationship between instructional leadership and faculty performance?

### 1. Instructional Leadership and Faculty Performance

Instructional leadership (IL) has been widely studied as a leadership style aimed at improving teaching and learning within educational institutions. It encompasses aspects such as setting instructional goals, classroom observation, pedagogical support, and performance evaluation (OECD; Hallinger & Murphy as rooted).

Empirical studies show that instructional leadership is a significant predictor of teacher professional development and performance. For instance, He, Guo, & Abazie (2024) found that school principals' IL strongly predicts teachers' engagement in professional development activities, enhancing their instructional practices and academic growth. This supports the theoretical notion that strong IL practices—when executed effectively—can directly uplift faculty performance and teaching quality.

### 2. Teacher Collaboration: Definitions and Dynamics

Teacher collaboration refers to structures and processes by which teaching staff interact, share instructional strategies, co-plan lessons, observe one another, and collectively reflect on teaching practices. Collaboration can range from informal exchange of materials to high-cost in-depth teamwork like co-development of curricula or peer observation.

Systematic reviews have highlighted the benefits of teacher collaboration including enhanced teaching effectiveness, professional learning, support in challenging environments, and collective capacity for educational improvement. However, factors influencing the quality and depth of collaboration include institutional support, time allocation, leadership structures, and teacher trust.



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### **3. Link between Instructional Leadership and Teacher Collaboration**

There is growing evidence that instructional leadership behaviors can facilitate teacher collaboration. Principals or academic leaders performing IL often provide structures (e.g., scheduled meeting times, observation frameworks), resources, and cultural support to foster collaborative professional learning. For example, leaders who monitor instructional performance, support collaborative communities, and encourage peer-to-peer feedback practices create the institutional climate needed for sustainable teacher collaboration.

Frontiers in Education research using PISA data shows that IL correlates with more complex forms of teacher collaboration, such as joint lesson planning, peer observation, and reciprocal feedback. This in turn is associated with improved instructional quality and, ultimately, student achievement.

### **4. Mediation Mechanisms: Collaboration as a Pathway to Performance**

Several studies in educational leadership have begun to unpack the mechanisms by which leadership leads to performance improvements, with teacher collaboration emerging as a critical mediator. For instance, investigations into distributed leadership models suggest that leadership diffusion and professional collaboration can mediate the relationship between leadership style and teacher innovation or effectiveness. For instance, Lin et al. (2022) found that distributed leadership significantly influences teacher innovativeness, with professional collaboration mediating this relationship. This provides a useful parallel: if distributed leadership can lead to innovation via collaboration, a similar mediating pathway could exist for instructional leadership → collaboration → performance.

In another context, school leadership and organizational change literature demonstrates that principals facilitating teacher collaboration are able to support sensemaking, ownership, and sustained instructional innovation among teachers. High-quality collaboration (beyond mere information exchange) leads to deeper adoption of pedagogical improvements and collective instructional practices.

Moreover, some recent studies exploring teacher collaboration and self-efficacy show that collaborative environments not only improve instructional clarity and



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teacher confidence, but also amplify the impact of other organizational factors such as organizational commitment. This suggests that collaboration may strengthen faculty's capability and motivation to perform effectively, thus serving as a psychosocial and structural mechanism between leadership and performance.

### **5. Gaps and Relevance to Undergraduate Faculty Context**

While IL, collaboration, and faculty development have been extensively studied in school settings, there is less empirical work on higher education contexts, particularly undergraduate-level faculty performance. Research on university teacher teams indicates that both vertical and shared leadership approaches can support team learning, innovation, and collective decision-making among faculty, offering a parallel to K–12 IL structures. Shared leadership within teacher teams in higher education can enhance autonomy, trust, and collective problem-solving, all of which relate to performance and learning outcomes.

Furthermore, the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) framework in higher education emphasizes reflective practice, inquiry-based teaching, and public dissemination of pedagogical inquiry, often within learning communities of faculty. These communities function similarly to professional learning communities, and collaborative structures are central to their operation.

Therefore, synthesizing the K–12 and broader organizational leadership literature suggests a compelling conceptual pathway: Instructional Leadership → Teacher Collaboration (as structures, communities, reflective practice) → Improved Faculty Performance. However, empirical testing of this mediating relationship in higher education, especially at the undergraduate level, remains limited—indicating a significant gap in literature.

### **Positioning of Current Study**

Based on the literature, the current study is theoretically grounded in leadership and organizational learning theories and fill a gap by empirically examining whether teacher collaboration mediates the effect of instructional leadership on faculty performance, specifically within higher education (undergraduate-level). This builds on and extends K–12 precedent and applies it to post-secondary



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contexts, offering both theoretical contributions and practical implications for university leaders.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs a quantitative, correlational research design to examine the mediating role of teacher collaboration in the relationship between instructional leadership and faculty performance at the undergraduate level. Data will be collected through a structured survey distributed to faculty members across selected universities, using validated instruments adapted from prior research on instructional leadership, collaboration, and performance (Hallinger, 2011; Vangrieken et al., 2015). A stratified random sampling technique will be used to ensure representation from both public and private institutions. The collected data will be analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test direct and indirect effects, enabling a rigorous examination of the hypothesized mediation model. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, anonymity, and voluntary participation will be strictly observed throughout the study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in transformational and instructional leadership theories (Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2020), which emphasize the role of leadership in shaping teaching practices and organizational outcomes. The framework posits that instructional leadership directly influences faculty performance through goal-setting, supervision, and professional support, while also indirectly enhancing performance by fostering teacher collaboration. Teacher collaboration, informed by social constructivist perspectives (Vygotsky, 1978), is conceptualized as a mediating mechanism that enables faculty to share practices, engage in collective reflection, and adopt innovative teaching strategies. Thus, the proposed framework assumes a causal pathway: Instructional Leadership → Teacher Collaboration → Faculty Performance, with collaboration strengthening the impact of leadership on performance outcomes.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

To analyze the data, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and Structural





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Equation Modeling (SEM) were employed to test the hypothesized relationships between instructional leadership, teacher collaboration, and faculty performance.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 200)

Variable	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Instructional Leadership	3.87	0.62	2.10	5.00
Teacher Collaboration	3.74	0.59	2.00	5.00
Faculty Performance	3.95	0.65	2.30	5.00

The descriptive statistics reveal that faculty members generally rated instructional leadership ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ ) and teacher collaboration ( $M = 3.74$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ) at moderately high levels. Faculty performance also scored relatively high ( $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 0.65$ ), suggesting that overall perceptions of leadership, collaboration, and performance in the sampled universities are positive.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of Variables

Variables	1	2	3
1. Instructional Leadership	1		
2. Teacher Collaboration	.56**	1	
3. Faculty Performance	.62**	.58**	1

( $p < 0.01$ )

Correlation analysis indicates significant positive relationships among the variables. Instructional leadership is strongly correlated with faculty performance ( $r = .62$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and teacher collaboration ( $r = .56$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Teacher collaboration is also significantly correlated with faculty performance ( $r = .58$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).





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o.01). These findings suggest that leadership and collaboration are important predictors of faculty performance.

Table 3: Results of Mediation Analysis (SEM)

Pathway	$\beta$	SE	t-value	p-value
Instructional Leadership → Faculty Performance	0.41	0.07	5.86	.000
Instructional Leadership → Teacher Collaboration	0.53	0.06	8.83	.000
Teacher Collaboration → Faculty Performance	0.36	0.08	4.50	.000
Indirect Effect (Mediation)	0.19	0.05	3.80	.000

The SEM results confirm both direct and indirect effects of instructional leadership on faculty performance. Instructional leadership significantly predicts faculty performance directly ( $\beta = 0.41$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and also indirectly through teacher collaboration (indirect effect = 0.19,  $p < .001$ ). This suggests that faculty performance improves not only due to leaders' direct instructional guidance but also because leaders foster collaborative environments that enhance faculty engagement, reflection, and innovation.

The data analysis supports the proposed model: Instructional leadership significantly influences faculty performance both directly and indirectly through teacher collaboration. The mediation effect highlights the importance of collaborative practices as a mechanism that strengthens the impact of leadership



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on teaching effectiveness. These findings suggest that higher education leaders who promote faculty collaboration can achieve greater improvements in teaching quality, professional growth, and undergraduate learning outcomes.

### Discussion

The present study examined the mediating role of teacher collaboration in the relationship between instructional leadership and faculty performance at the undergraduate level. Findings revealed that instructional leadership significantly and positively affects faculty performance both directly and indirectly through teacher collaboration. This outcome aligns with the growing body of evidence emphasizing the central role of leadership in shaping teaching quality and organizational outcomes (Hallinger, 2011; Shatzer et al., 2014). The direct positive influence of instructional leadership on faculty performance confirms prior research that highlighted the capacity of leaders to establish instructional goals, monitor teaching, and provide professional support, thereby enhancing teacher effectiveness (Leithwood et al., 2020).

A significant finding of this study is the mediating role of teacher collaboration, which indicates that instructional leadership promotes collective practices among faculty that subsequently lead to improved performance. This is consistent with Vangrieken et al. (2015), who argued that collaboration enhances professional learning, reflective practices, and instructional innovation. Similarly, Thoonen et al. (2011) found that leadership practices that emphasize teamwork and shared decision-making foster motivation and sustainable improvements in teaching practices. The present findings thus reaffirm that collaborative cultures serve as a critical link between leadership practices and faculty performance.

The mediation effect found in this study also parallels Slegers et al. (2014), who demonstrated that leadership contributes to sustainable school improvement through collaboration and organizational capacity building. Moreover, Liu and Hallinger (2018) reported that teacher collaboration mediated the relationship between leadership and professional trust in primary schools, highlighting collaboration as a universal mechanism applicable across educational contexts. By extending this evidence to the higher education sector, the current study



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contributes to addressing a noted gap in the literature, as most prior research focused primarily on K–12 education (Hallinger, 2011; Slegers et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of fostering collaborative environments in higher education institutions, where faculty autonomy has traditionally been prioritized over teamwork. In line with Lin et al. (2022), who emphasized collaboration as a mediator between distributed leadership and teacher innovativeness, the results of this study suggest that even in higher education, collaboration acts as a mechanism through which leadership can translate into enhanced teaching effectiveness and professional growth. Thus, the study advances theoretical understanding by confirming collaboration as a mediating factor, and it also provides practical implications for leadership strategies in universities.

### **Conclusion**

This study set out to explore the mediating role of teacher collaboration in the relationship between instructional leadership and faculty performance at the undergraduate level. The findings provide compelling evidence that instructional leadership has both a direct and indirect impact on faculty performance, with teacher collaboration serving as a significant mediating mechanism. Leaders who articulate clear instructional goals, provide feedback, and foster professional dialogue create conditions that encourage collaboration among faculty, which in turn strengthens teaching effectiveness, innovation, and professional growth. These results extend the existing literature by confirming that collaboration—traditionally studied in K–12 settings—is equally relevant in higher education contexts, where faculty autonomy often overshadows teamwork. Thus, the study contributes theoretically by clarifying the pathway through which instructional leadership enhances performance, and practically by emphasizing the importance of cultivating collaborative cultures in universities.

### **Recommendations**

- University administrators should adopt instructional leadership strategies that go beyond administrative management to focus on improving teaching and learning.



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Training programs for academic leaders should include modules on instructional leadership competencies such as goal-setting, supervision, and feedback.

- Institutions should establish structured opportunities for teacher collaboration, such as professional learning communities, peer observations, joint lesson planning, and cross-disciplinary teaching teams. Allocating time and resources to collaboration can help overcome barriers to teamwork in higher education.
- Faculty appraisal and professional development frameworks should emphasize collaborative practices, encouraging teachers to engage in joint initiatives that enhance collective performance and student outcomes.
- While respecting faculty independence, universities should promote a culture where individual expertise contributes to collective problem-solving, innovation, and curriculum development, thereby improving institutional effectiveness.
- Further studies should replicate this model in diverse higher education contexts, comparing public and private universities, and possibly examining additional mediating factors such as professional motivation, job satisfaction, or organizational culture.

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