

## Role Practices of School Middle Leaders in the Context of Curriculum Reform: A Qualitative Exploration in Taiwan

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The role of school middle leaders is increasingly recognized as crucial in educational leadership research, particularly as a significant driver for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning within schools. The institutional design of the school middle leader system varies from country to country. In Taiwan, schools typically maintain a hierarchical structure below the principal, including office directors, section heads, and department chairs, each overseeing different administrative areas such as academic affairs, student services, counseling, and general affairs. The role practices of various actors under the broad term 'middle leadership' are worthy of further inquiry. Given this context, the study adopted a qualitative design to explore the roles of middle leaders amidst curriculum reform in Taiwan. Data from interviews with 24 participants across seven schools were collected, and grounded theory was employed as the analytical approach. The findings reveal four primary themes: (1) The degree of alignment with and understanding of the curriculum significantly impacts middle leaders' motivation and the precision of their policy implementation. Leaders who are more aligned with the curriculum tend to be more proactive and display a nuanced approach to executing reforms. (2) Among middle leaders, directors stand out with distinct leadership qualities, such as the ability to steer strategic directions and integrate external resources. They are proactive in advancing policy initiatives and nurturing program development. (3) In contrast, section heads often undertake more operational roles, facilitating the seamless implementation of policies and programs. While they handle significant administrative tasks like payroll management and record-keeping, section heads may also exhibit initiative by actively writing proposals to get grants or enhancing operational procedures to advance curriculum development. (4) Ideally, department chairs should play a vital role in fostering professional and curriculum development within their subject or learning areas. However, in practice, these positions are typically rotated among teachers and primarily involve disseminating school policy information and managing administrative tasks related to exams and activities within their areas.

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