Research Article

Exploring the strategies of education leaders in managing under-achieving faculty

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ABSTRACT

Managing under-achieving faculty remains a major challenge in Philippine higher education, where tenure protections, cultural norms, and institutional diversity complicate accountability. This study explored the strategies of 18 academic leaders, from state universities in Lanao del Sur, Zamboanga Peninsula, Iloilo, and Palawan, through semi-structured interviews analyzed with reflexive thematic analysis. Findings show that leaders employ a stepwise approach: starting with coaching, mentoring, and reflective conversations, and escalating to improvement plans or disciplinary measures when necessary. Faculty responsiveness, institutional culture, and collaboration with stakeholders shaped outcomes. Leaders balanced empathy with accountability while facing structural barriers such as ambiguous policies, tenure protections, and cultural reluctance toward confrontation. Emotional and time-intensive demands further underscored the complexity of managing underperformance. The study highlights that effective management combines developmental support with accountability and must be adapted to institutional and cultural contexts. Limitations include reliance on leaders' self-reports, exclusion of faculty and student perspectives, and cultural specificity, which may restrict generalizability. Future research should employ comparative and mixed-methods designs to test these themes across contexts and examine their long-term impact.

Keywords: Faculty underperformance; educational leadership; accountability; mentorship; higher education

1. Introduction

Faculty performance is a cornerstone of quality education, directly influencing student learning, institutional reputation, and the achievement of academic goals [1,2]. While most institutions have systems in place for evaluating faculty performance, managing under-achieving faculty members remains a persistent and complex challenge for education leaders [3]. These leaders—including administrators, deans, and program chairs—are tasked with addressing performance issues while at the same time maintaining professional relationships, upholding academic standards, and fostering supportive environments [4,5].

Despite the significance of this responsibility, limited research has explored the specific strategies education leaders use to manage faculty underperformance, revealing a critical gap in the literature [6]. Much of the existing scholarship has focused on evaluation frameworks rather than the concrete leadership practices applied in real institutional settings [7]. Issues such as academic integrity, faculty motivation, and institutional discipline further complicate how leaders respond to underperformance [3,8,9].

The Philippine higher education context makes this issue particularly complex. Leaders must navigate tenure protections, cultural norms that often discourage direct confrontation, and institutional diversity spanning state colleges, universities, and private higher education institutions. These contextual factors influence how underperformance is defined, addressed, and resolved within academic units.

The key variables explored in this study include strategic interventions such as mentoring, performance evaluations, and formal accountability measures, alongside leadership perceptions of institutional and interpersonal challenges. Core concepts anchoring the research are educational leadership, faculty development, accountability, and organizational behavior [10,11]. Additionally, contextual influences such as health, economic instability, and equity issues during the pandemic are considered [12,13], as well as broader institutional compliance with gender-sensitive policies [14].

The expected outcome of this research is to generate practical insights and evidence-based recommendations that can inform leadership training, institutional policy, and strategic planning. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to the development of effective leadership practices that support faculty improvement and institutional success.

2. Literature review

Conceptualizing Faculty Underperformance in Higher Education

Under-achievement among faculty is typically identified through indicators such as low teaching effectiveness, limited research output, and insufficient engagement in institutional responsibilities. These outcomes, however, are strongly shaped by institutional culture, workload, and the availability of professional support [15,16]. Performance evaluation systems are often the first tool for identifying such underperformance, providing constructive feedback that can motivate faculty to improve. Research shows that improvement is most likely when feedback is immediate, when faculty have the willingness to change, and when they are provided with clear strategies for growth [17-19].

Yet, evaluation systems are not without controversy. While some frameworks guide faculty in identifying strengths and weaknesses, others highlight their limitations. For example, annual evaluation processes may help administrators align expectations and track faculty growth, but faculty themselves have expressed concerns that student evaluations are biased and unreliable measures of teaching effectiveness

[20,21]. This tension illustrates the need to balance quantitative metrics with qualitative insights to more accurately diagnose performance problems.

Beyond evaluation tools, studies have also identified broader dimensions of faculty performance. Factors such as managerial ability, scientific capability, discipline, teaching methods, and educational evaluation have been weighted as critical components, with talent development and retention emerging as essential for sustaining high levels of faculty performance [22,23]. In practice, however, higher education institutions often struggle to provide the structures necessary to develop these capabilities, especially when faculty members are stretched across multiple subject areas or administrative roles [24,25]. Furthermore, even issues that appear external to faculty—such as declining student grammar proficiency, reflect on the need for effective faculty oversight to maintain academic standards [26,27].

Accurate diagnosis of underperformance therefore requires a holistic approach that incorporates multiple perspectives. While tools such as student evaluations, peer observations, and publication records can be useful [28,29], performance management systems often fail to align with the actual job descriptions of academics. Such misalignments may open the door to bias, including gender-based inequities from supervisors. Addressing these gaps requires training evaluators to minimize subjectivity and fostering an academic culture that emphasizes collaboration and collective responsibility for performance improvement [30,31]. Cultural behaviors and professionalism, such as those observed in student conduct, can also indirectly reveal the broader disciplinary challenges institutions face in faculty management [32].

Leadership Strategies in Managing Faculty Underperformance

Education leaders employ a range of leadership styles to respond to underperformance, with transformational leadership inspiring shared vision, transactional leadership emphasizing clear expectations and accountability, and servant or distributed leadership promoting collaboration and professional growth. The choice of leadership approach often depends on both the institutional culture and the nature of the performance issue. In some cases, ineffective departmental leadership has been met with collective faculty strategies such as coalition-building, escalation to deans, or direct confrontation with leaders to demand accountability [33]. These strategies highlight that leadership in higher education is not only top-down but can also be shaped by faculty responses.

Formal interventions remain central to addressing underperformance. Mentoring, coaching, and structured professional development plans have been shown to promote faculty growth, especially when paired with goal-setting and accountability measures. Peer collaboration and reflective practice further encourage continuous improvement and foster a culture of shared responsibility. In underperforming institutions, however, leadership style can significantly influence whether such initiatives succeed. For example, while democratic leadership styles have been widely accepted as effective in schools struggling with performance, autocratic tendencies may still emerge depending on organizational culture and leader personality. Notably, democratic leadership has been linked to greater readiness for change and the adoption of innovative management practices [34].

Effective communication and emotional intelligence are also critical in sustaining these strategies. Empathetic feedback and trust-building behaviors reduce faculty resistance and increase receptivity to change. Likewise, interpersonal communication patterns, including apologies and reconciliation, can diffuse conflict and foster renewed engagement [35]. These relational skills allow leaders to balance accountability with compassion, making performance management less adversarial and more developmental.

Finally, institutional policies provide the formal framework within which leaders operate. Tenure protections, academic freedom, and due process rights ensure fairness in addressing underperformance [36].

At the same time, these protections often make it difficult to enact change, especially when faculty resistance is strong or when institutional culture discourages direct confrontation. This tension contributes to leadership fatigue and underscores the importance of clear institutional guidelines and consistent enforcement. While many leadership strategies show promise, empirical research on their long-term effectiveness remains limited, leaving room for further study into sustainable approaches for improving faculty performance.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study adopted an exploratory qualitative research design to investigate the strategies employed by education leaders in managing under-achieving faculty members. The exploratory nature of the study allowed for a deeper understanding of both the strategic actions and the perceptions of leaders as they navigated the complex challenges of faculty underperformance. The qualitative approach was chosen because it prioritizes depth over breadth, providing an opportunity to capture the nuanced experiences of education leaders in real institutional contexts. By focusing on meaning-making rather than numerical measurement, the design aligned with the study's intent to uncover both explicit strategies and underlying beliefs that shape leadership practices.

3.2. Population and sampling

A total of 18 participants were purposefully selected using purposive sampling to ensure rich, relevant data. Participants included educational administrators, deans, and program chairs from state universities in Lanao del Sur, Zamboanga Peninsula, Iloilo, and Palawan, Philippines, all of whom had direct experience managing faculty performance. Inclusion criteria required participants to have held a leadership role for at least two years and to have managed at least one case of faculty underperformance. This sampling approach was deemed appropriate because it intentionally targeted individuals with lived experience of the phenomenon under study, rather than attempting to generalize across all higher education leaders. By focusing on those directly involved in addressing faculty underperformance, the study captured specific, context-driven insights that may not be evident in broader surveys.

The diversity of the participants' roles also allowed for multiple perspectives within the same institutional framework. While deans often manage faculty performance at a strategic level, program chairs and administrators tend to handle more immediate, operational concerns. This range of responsibilities enriched the data by providing both macro-level and micro-level perspectives on faculty underachievement.

3.3. Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection was a semi-structured interview guide. This guide was developed in alignment with the study's key aim: to explore how education leaders manage under-achieving faculty by identifying the strategies they use and understanding their perceptions and responses to related challenges. The guide contained open-ended questions, allowing participants to narrate their experiences freely while also ensuring that key areas of interest, such as strategies, perceptions, and challenges, were consistently addressed across interviews.

Before implementation, the guide was evaluated for clarity and relevance by the academic institution and was also pilot-tested with two education leaders who were not part of the final sample. Feedback from the pilot test was used to refine question wording, sequence, and depth, ensuring that the instrument effectively elicited rich, detailed responses. **Table 1** presents the list of guide questions used by this research study.

Table 1. Interview guide questions.

Objectives	Interview question
To identify and describe the specific strategies employed by education leaders in addressing faculty underperformance.	What strategies have you implemented to address underperformance among your faculty members? How do you determine which approach is most effective when dealing with under-achieving faculty? Can you describe a specific instance where your strategy led to noticeable improvement in a faculty member's performance?
To examine how education leaders perceive and respond to the challenges of managing under-achieving faculty members in their institutions.	How do you perceive the challenges of managing under-achieving faculty within your institution? What factors do you consider most difficult when responding to issues of faculty underperformance? How do you typically respond to resistance or lack of improvement from under-achieving faculty members despite interventions?

3.4. Data gathering procedure

Data were collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews, conducted either in person or via secure video conferencing platforms. The interviews followed the structured guide derived from the study's research objectives and the broader literature on faculty performance management. Open-ended questions were used to encourage detailed and reflective responses, and follow-up probes were added when necessary to clarify or expand participants' statements.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes, was audio-recorded with participant consent, and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. To minimize disruption and ensure confidentiality, interviews were scheduled at times most convenient to the participants and conducted in private settings. Anonymity was strictly maintained, with codes used in transcripts to protect identities.

While interviews served as the primary data source, triangulation with institutional documents or surveys was not employed. This limitation is acknowledged; however, rigor was reinforced through strategies such as cross-checking transcripts, engaging multiple researchers in the analysis, and comparing codes across the research team to confirm consistency of findings.

3.5. Data analysis

Interview transcripts were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's [37] six-phase approach: familiarization, coding, theme development, reviewing, defining, and reporting. Coding was done manually without the use of specialized software. To strengthen the reliability of the process, several authors independently coded segments of the data and then compared results. Differences in interpretation were discussed and reconciled, resulting in a shared understanding of the emerging themes.

Themes were generated inductively, meaning that they arose directly from the participants' accounts rather than being pre-determined by the researchers. This bottom-up approach allowed the data to guide the analysis while still being informed by relevant literature. Researcher reflexivity was maintained throughout the process, with authors reflecting on how their own academic backgrounds and professional experiences might shape interpretations.

Limitations and potential biases were also considered in the analysis. Since the study relied on self-reported accounts, participants may have presented their leadership practices in a favorable light. Furthermore, the sample was drawn exclusively from Philippine higher education, and this cultural specificity may limit transferability to other contexts. The absence of faculty perspectives also means that the

voices of those being managed were not directly represented. These limitations are acknowledged to ensure transparency and to guide readers in interpreting the results.

4. Results

Research Objectives 1. To identify and describe the specific strategies employed by education leaders in addressing faculty underperformance.

Question No. 1. What strategies have you implemented to address underperformance among your faculty members?

1.1 Progressive Discipline and Support

Ten (10) respondents expressed that their approach starts with supportive intervention. They provide clear benchmarks and frequent feedback. If no progress is seen, they escalate to structured remediation, and in rare cases, reassignment or formal disciplinary action. They also mentioned that they follow a step-by-step process beginning with informal feedback and coaching. If the issues persist, they move to a formal improvement plan that includes timelines, support resources, and regular check-ins. Ultimately, if there is still no improvement, they may explore reassignment or termination, though that is always considered a last resort.

> "Our approach starts with supportive intervention. We provide clear benchmarks and frequent feedback." (Respondent 4)

> "Ultimately, if there's still no improvement, we may explore reassignment or even termination, though that's always a last resort." (Respondent 15)

1.2 Data-Informed Reflection and Action

Ten (10) respondents shared that they use student feedback and peer evaluations to initiate conversations. When patterns emerge, they meet with the faculty member to reflect on the data. They then create an action plan, which may include observing other faculty classes, revising syllabi, or attending teaching seminars. Additionally, they mentioned using multiple sources, student evaluations, peer observations, and classroom recordings, to identify consistent performance issues. Once they gather evidence, they hold a reflective session with the faculty member to co-develop an improvement strategy grounded in real feedback.

> "We use student feedback and peer evaluations to initiate conversations. When patterns emerge, I meet with the faculty member to reflect on the data." (Respondent 11)

> "Once we gather that evidence, we have a reflective session with the faculty member to co-develop an improvement strategy that's grounded in real feedback." (Respondent 6)

1.3 Coaching and Developmental Conversations

Five (5) respondents expressed that they usually begin with informal coaching. When they notice consistent underperformance, they schedule a one-on-one conversation to understand any underlying issues, personal, professional, or otherwise. From there, they agree on clear goals and timelines. If improvement is still lacking, they move into a formal performance improvement plan with documented expectations and follow-up. They added that their first step is always to have a

private, non-judgmental conversation, asking open-ended questions to understand the context, sometimes it's burnout, other times it's unclear expectations. Then they move into coaching sessions with short-term, achievable goals. The focus is on helping, not penalizing.

> "I usually begin with informal coaching. When I notice consistent underperformance, I schedule a one-on-one conversation to understand any underlying issues personal, professional, or otherwise." (Respondent 2)

> "My first step is always to have a private, non-judgmental conversation. I ask open-ended questions to understand the full context sometimes it's burnout, other times it's unclear expectations." (Respondent 17)

Question No. 2. How do you determine which approach is most effective when dealing with under-achieving faculty?

2.1 Faculty Responsiveness and Willingness to Change

Ten (10) respondents expressed that the faculty member's openness to feedback is a big factor. If faculty are receptive and reflective, coaching or peer collaboration can be very effective. If they are resistant, leaders need a more structured, documented process with clear performance benchmarks. Respondents also mentioned that they usually gauge the faculty's willingness to engage in self-assessment. If a faculty member can acknowledge areas for improvement, then collaborative approaches like peer observation or mentoring work well. But if faculty are defensive or dismissive, leaders shift to a formal improvement plan with specific deliverables.

> "The faculty member's openness to feedback is a big factor. If they're receptive and reflective, coaching or peer collaboration can be very effective." (Respondent 7)

> "But if they're defensive or dismissive, I shift to a formal improvement plan with specific deliverables." (Respondent 13)

2.2 Contextual and Case-by-Case Decision-Making

Ten (10) respondents expressed that effectiveness depends on the individual case. They consider the faculty member's history, current workload, and any personal challenges. There's no one-size-fits-all solution, some respond well to mentoring, others need clearer accountability structures. They also mentioned that every situation is different. Leaders take into account not just performance data but also teaching load, research commitments, and personal circumstances. If a seasoned faculty member suddenly underperforms, they look deeper before deciding on any intervention.

> "It really depends on the individual case. I consider the faculty member's history, their current workload, and any personal challenges they may be facing." (Respondent 1)

> "Every situation is different. I take into account not just their performance data, but also their teaching load, research commitments, and even life circumstances." (Respondent 18)

2.3 Stakeholder Feedback and Collaboration

Five (5) respondents mentioned that they consult with department heads, student services, and sometimes student representatives to understand the scope of the issue. Collaboration provides a fuller picture, and from there, they can decide whether to focus on pedagogical training, workload adjustment, or formal review. They also said that before making decisions, they speak with colleagues who work closely with the faculty member. These perspectives often reveal patterns or challenges not visible in formal evaluations.

> "I consult with department heads, student services, and sometimes even student representatives to understand the scope of the issue." (Respondent 10)

> "Their perspectives often reveal patterns or challenges I wouldn't see from formal evaluations alone." (Respondent 3)

Question No. 3. Can you describe a specific instance where your strategy led to noticeable improvement in a faculty member's performance?

3.1 Enhancing Faculty Performance Through Targeted Mentorship and Time Management Support

Ten (10) respondents expressed that one of their junior faculty members was struggling with time management and meeting publishing expectations. After noticing a pattern of missed internal deadlines and rushed student feedback, they implemented a mentoring strategy. They paired the faculty with a senior mentor who had strong organizational skills and publication success. Respondents also mentioned that they worked with the junior faculty to block off dedicated "research-only" time. Within a semester, she submitted two articles to peer-reviewed journals and received higher student evaluations due to more timely feedback. The mentorship provided structure, accountability, and confidence.

> "One of our junior faculty members was struggling with time management and meeting publishing expectations. After noticing a pattern of missed internal deadlines and rushed student feedback, I implemented a mentoring strategy." (Respondent 6)

> " Additionally, I worked with her to block off 'research-only' time in her calendar. Within a semester, she had submitted two articles to peer-reviewed journals and received notably higher student evaluations due to more timely feedback." (Respondent 12)

3.2 Improving Teaching Effectiveness Through Pedagogical Coaching and Active Learning Strategies

Ten (10) respondents expressed that they had a faculty member known for excellent research but poor classroom engagement. Student evaluations consistently cited limited interaction and unclear grading criteria. To address this, leaders initiated a classroom observation and follow-up coaching plan in partnership with their Center for Teaching Excellence. The faculty member also attended a workshop on active learning strategies, which produced a dramatic shift. He began incorporating structured discussions and transparent rubrics, leading to a 30% increase in student

satisfaction scores the next semester. His promotion case was later strengthened by this positive teaching trajectory.

> "We had a faculty member known for excellent research but poor classroom engagement. Student evaluations consistently pointed to a lack of interaction and unclear grading criteria. I initiated a classroom observation and follow-up coaching plan, where he worked with our Center for Teaching Excellence." (Respondent 8)

> " He also attended a workshop on active learning strategies. The shift was dramatic—he began incorporating structured discussions and transparent rubrics, which led to a 30% increase in student satisfaction scores the next semester. His promotion case was later strengthened by the positive teaching trajectory." (Respondent 16)

3.3 Fostering Faculty Ownership to Drive Curriculum Innovation and Change Adoption

Five (5) respondents expressed that one senior faculty member resisted updates to their simulation-based curriculum. They took a collaborative approach by holding a curriculum retreat where she co-led a session with a simulation specialist. This gave her a sense of ownership, and she eventually piloted the modules herself. Within a semester, she became a vocal advocate for the changes. Respondents noted that her course outcomes improved, and student pass rates on certification exams increased. It was not only about technical adoption but also about involving her as a leader in the process rather than an obstacle.

> " One senior faculty member was resisting updates to our simulation-based curriculum. I took a collaborative approach: we held a curriculum retreat where she co-led a session with a simulation specialist." (Respondent 5)

> "It wasn't just about technical adoption it was about involving her as a leader in change rather than seeing her as an obstacle." (Respondent 14)

Research Objectives 2. To examine how education leaders perceive and respond to the challenges of managing under-achieving faculty members in their institutions.

Question No. 1. How do you perceive the challenges of managing under-achieving faculty within your institution?

1.1 Balancing Support and Accountability in Addressing Faculty Underperformance

Ten (10) respondents expressed that the key is to set clear expectations early and revisit them regularly. Faculty are more receptive when goals are transparent and jointly agreed upon. Respondents also mentioned that they conduct structured check-ins, framing them as supportive rather than punitive. By using this method, accountability is embedded in the process, while faculty feel guided instead of policed.

> "One of the biggest challenges is balancing accountability with empathy. Under-achievement can stem from many causes burnout, personal issues, lack of mentoring, or resistance to change." (Respondent 2)

> "You want to support growth without enabling continued low performance, but formal remediation often feels like a last resort." (Respondent 9)

1.2 Navigating Structural and Cultural Barriers to Faculty Performance Improvement

Ten (10) respondents expressed that accountability must be documented, especially when improvement is slow. They use written improvement plans with timelines to ensure clarity, but they also provide coaching and mentoring alongside those plans. Respondents also mentioned that this balance allows them to keep a supportive stance while still protecting institutional standards.

> "Managing under-performing faculty is especially complex because of tenure protections and shared governance structures. We can't simply mandate change." (Respondent 11)

> "Culturally, there's also sometimes hesitancy among colleagues to provide honest peer evaluations, which weakens internal accountability." (Respondent 4)

1.3 Driving Instructional Improvement Through Outcome-Based Accountability

Ten (10) respondents expressed that in their setting, the main challenge is aligning expectations especially when long-standing faculty become complacent or resistant to new pedagogical methods. You can't always rely on traditional evaluations to create urgency for change. Additionally, they mentioned that they've found that tying improvement to concrete outcomes like licensure pass rates or student retention helps. But it's emotionally taxing and time-consuming to continually address performance that falls short, especially when student success is on the line.

> "In our setting, the main challenge is aligning expectations especially when long-standing faculty become complacent or resistant to new pedagogical methods. You can't always rely on traditional evaluations to create urgency for change."

> " I've found that tying improvement to concrete outcomes like licensure pass rates or student retention helps. But it's emotionally taxing and time-consuming to continually address performance that falls short, especially when student success is on the line."

Research Objectives 2. To examine how education leaders perceive and respond to the challenges of managing under-achieving faculty members in their institutions.

Question No. 1. How do you perceive the challenges of managing under-achieving faculty within your institution?

1.1 Balancing Support and Accountability in Addressing Faculty Underperformance

Ten (10) respondents expressed that one of the biggest challenges is balancing accountability with empathy. Under-achievement can stem from many causes such as burnout, personal issues, lack of mentoring, or resistance to change. They added that institutional processes for improvement are often slow and, at times, inconsistent. Additionally, they mentioned that while leaders want to support growth without enabling continued low performance, formal remediation usually feels like a last resort. It requires patience, tact, and extensive documentation.

> "One of the biggest challenges is balancing accountability with empathy. Under-achievement can stem from many causes burnout, personal issues, lack of mentoring, or resistance to change." (Respondent 2)

> "You want to support growth without enabling continued low performance, but formal remediation often feels like a last resort." (Respondent 15)

1.2 Navigating Structural and Cultural Barriers to Faculty Performance Improvement

Five (5) respondents expressed that managing under-performing faculty is especially complex because of tenure protections and shared governance structures. They explained that change cannot simply be mandated. Instead, they often rely on coaching, peer mentoring, and improvement plans, though results vary. Additionally, they mentioned that the biggest challenge arises when faculty fail to acknowledge the issue, without buy-in, even the best support strategies fall short. Culturally, there is also sometimes hesitancy among colleagues to provide honest peer evaluations, which weakens accountability within the institution.

> "Managing under-performing faculty is especially complex because of tenure protections and shared governance structures. We can't simply mandate change." (Respondent 7)

> "Culturally, there's also sometimes hesitancy among colleagues to provide honest peer evaluations, which weakens internal accountability." (Respondent 19)

1.3 Driving Instructional Improvement Through Outcome-Based Accountability

Ten (10) respondents expressed that in their setting, the main challenge is aligning expectations, especially when long-standing faculty become complacent or resistant to new pedagogical methods. They noted that traditional evaluations do not always create urgency for change. Additionally, they mentioned that tying improvement to concrete outcomes, such as licensure pass rates or student retention, can be more effective. However, they emphasized that it is emotionally taxing and time-consuming to continually address performance gaps, particularly when student success is at stake.

> "In our setting, the main challenge is aligning expectations especially when long-standing faculty become complacent or resistant to new pedagogical methods. You can't always rely on traditional evaluations to create urgency for change." (Respondent 11)

> " I've found that tying improvement to concrete outcomes like licensure pass rates or student retention helps. But it's emotionally taxing and time-consuming to continually address performance that falls short, especially when student success is on the line." (Respondent 4)

Question No. 2. What factors do you consider most difficult when responding to issues of faculty underperformance?

2.1 Addressing Faculty Underperformance Amid Ambiguity in Institutional Policy

Ten (10) respondents expressed that one of the hardest aspects is the lack of clear or consistent institutional policies for addressing chronic underperformance. There's a gray area between "not excelling" and "failing to meet minimum standards," and navigating that space without appearing

punitive is tricky. Additionally, they mentioned that it can feel like walking a tightrope between advocating for students and protecting faculty autonomy.

> "One of the hardest aspects is the lack of clear or consistent institutional policies for addressing chronic underperformance." (Respondent 8)

> " It can feel like walking a tightrope between advocating for students and protecting faculty autonomy." (Respondent 17)

2.2 Navigating Difficult Conversations with Tenured or Senior Faculty

Five (5) respondents expressed that the most difficult factor is initiating the conversation itself, especially with senior or tenured faculty. They noted the fear of damaging collegial relationships or facing formal grievances. Additionally, they mentioned that often these faculty are respected in other areas, which makes it harder to address deficiencies in teaching or service without it being taken personally. This theme highlights the interpersonal and institutional sensitivity required to confront underperformance, particularly when dealing with experienced faculty where respect, reputation, and the risk of conflict complicate accountability.

> "The most difficult factor is initiating the conversation itself especially with senior or tenured faculty. There's a real fear of damaging collegial relationships or facing formal grievances." (Respondent 5)

> " Often, these faculty are respected in other areas, which makes it harder to address deficiencies in teaching or service without it being taken personally." (Respondent 13)

2.3 The Emotional and Time-Intensive Nature of Managing Faculty Underperformance

Ten (10) respondents expressed that time and emotional labor are major challenges. Responding to underperformance isn't just about documentation, it's about coaching, follow-up, mediation, and sometimes conflict resolution. They emphasized that meaningful change can take months or even years, which is draining, especially when the issues directly affect students or staff morale. This theme underscores the sustained effort and emotional burden involved in managing underperformance.

> "Time and emotional labor are major challenges. Responding to underperformance isn't just about documentation it's about coaching, follow-up, mediation, and sometimes conflict resolution." (Respondent 10)

> " It can take months or even years to see meaningful change, which is draining, especially when the issues directly impact students or staff morale." (Respondent 1)

Question No. 3. How do you typically respond to resistance or lack of improvement from under-achieving faculty members despite interventions?

3.1 Transitioning from Developmental Support to Formal Accountability Measures

Ten (10) respondents expressed that when improvement doesn't occur after multiple interventions, they shift to a more formal approach. This often involves documenting all previous support and clearly outlining expectations in writing. They bring in HR or faculty affairs to ensure

procedural fairness. Additionally, they mentioned that at that point, it becomes less about coaching and more about establishing a clear performance improvement plan with consequences. While uncomfortable, they stressed it is necessary to uphold departmental standards.

> "When improvement doesn't occur after multiple interventions, I shift to a more formal approach. This often involves documenting all previous support and clearly outlining expectations in writing." (Respondent 12)

> " At that point, it becomes less about coaching and more about establishing a clear performance improvement plan with consequences. It's uncomfortable, but necessary to uphold departmental standards. It's uncomfortable, but necessary to uphold departmental standards." (Respondent 3)

3.2 Ensuring Accountability Through Structured Reviews and Formal Escalation

Ten (10) respondents shared that if resistance continues despite developmental support, they emphasize accountability through structured annual reviews. They incorporate specific, measurable goals tied to teaching, service, or research. Additionally, they mentioned that if there's still no progress, they escalate through formal channels, usually involving the provost or faculty performance committee. They highlighted the importance of balancing fairness with the need to prevent repeated non-performance from undermining the department.

> "If resistance continues despite developmental support, I emphasize accountability through structured annual reviews." (Respondent 6)

> " If there's still no progress, we escalate through formal channels usually involving the provost or faculty performance committee." (Respondent 15)

3.3 Reframing Underperformance and Maintaining Consistent Accountability Amid Institutional Resistance

Five (5) respondents mentioned that they try to reframe the issue from "personal failure" to "professional responsibility." If that still doesn't drive improvement, they document everything and begin including performance expectations in the faculty's merit evaluations or tenure/post-tenure review. Additionally, they shared that what's frustrating is that sometimes colleagues or administrators are reluctant to support decisive action, which sends mixed messages. Despite this, they emphasized the importance of staying consistent to preserve program integrity.

> "If that still doesn't move the needle, I document everything and begin including performance expectations in their merit evaluations or tenure/post-tenure review." (Respondent 2)

> "What's frustrating is that sometimes colleagues or administrators are reluctant to support decisive action, which sends mixed messages." (Respondent 14)

5. Discussion

This study demonstrates that education leaders employ a stepwise approach to managing faculty underperformance, beginning with coaching, reflective conversations, and feedback, and escalating to formal accountability measures only when necessary. While performance evaluations are commonly described in prior literature as the primary tool for identifying underachievement [15,17], our findings extend this by

showing that leaders do not rely on evaluation alone. Instead, they integrate mentoring, peer collaboration, and outcome-based measures, thereby blending developmental and accountability-oriented strategies. This dual emphasis suggests that evaluation frameworks may be insufficient unless paired with relational support, an insight that strengthens ongoing calls for holistic approaches to faculty performance [22,4]. Industry-based professional development has similarly been found to significantly improve science and technology education by building instructional confidence, enhancing curriculum relevance, and fostering interdisciplinary teaching strategies in developing nations [38], reinforcing the value of developmental support alongside accountability.

Faculty responsiveness emerged as a decisive factor in shaping leaders' strategies. While previous research emphasizes that improvement is most likely when faculty are provided with clear feedback and actionable steps [28], our study highlights that the willingness to change on the part of faculty often dictates whether coaching suffices or whether formal plans become necessary. This finding nuances existing frameworks by illustrating how leader adaptability to individual faculty contexts—not simply the provision of strategies, determines effectiveness. Related studies show that balancing administrative and teaching responsibilities can improve teacher self-efficacy, but achieving a balance between efficiency and autonomy is crucial for reducing burnout and stress [7].

Collaboration with colleagues, department chairs, and student stakeholders also proved important. Whereas prior literature has often emphasized formal evaluation and managerial oversight [15,22], our study extends this by showing that collaboration also builds faculty ownership of change. In cases where resistant faculty were engaged in shaping curriculum or peer-led initiatives, resistance diminished and innovation followed. This demonstrates that shared responsibility and inclusivity can transform accountability processes into opportunities for professional growth. This aligns with evidence that interactive, tailored, and engaging workshops promote inspired participation and sustainable knowledge construction among Education, Language, and Social Science teachers, with follow-up sessions and reflective activities ensuring sustained support and impact [39].

At the same time, leaders face constraints rooted in institutional structures and culture. Tenure protections and shared governance complicate accountability processes, confirming earlier concerns about the difficulty of enacting change in higher education [36]. Cultural hesitancy toward direct confrontation or critical peer evaluation, already noted in the literature as a limitation of evaluation systems [20], was particularly salient in this study. Leaders often had to balance empathy with firmness, a task that required emotional labor and prolonged timelines. Our findings therefore add to existing research by underscoring the emotional and temporal costs of leadership strategies, which are often underemphasized in policy-oriented discussions of faculty performance. This resonates with research emphasizing that educators need to align teaching practices with psychological principles like emotional intelligence, autonomy, relatedness, and balanced technology integration to create motivating and engaging classrooms for 21st-century learners [23].

In hierarchical institutions, leaders found it easier to escalate cases formally but risked alienating faculty if processes felt punitive. In contrast, in more collegial settings, mentoring-based approaches were more sustainable but often slowed by cultural reluctance to criticize peers. These patterns suggest that strategies effective in one institutional type may not be directly transferable to others. Rather, successful management of underperformance depends on aligning interventions with institutional culture and governance structure, a contribution that adds nuance to existing research on faculty leadership [34,29]. Comparable evidence indicates that program administrators and faculty are highly confident in implementing new curricula, though improvements in facilities and library resources remain necessary [40]. Similarly, the positive reception of

generative AI among science, mathematics, and Tech-Voc educators highlights its potential to significantly enhance educational practices and outcomes [41], while other research shows that generative AI in higher education improves efficiency, interactivity, and supports student understanding of complex topics [38].

Overall, this study contributes to knowledge by demonstrating that while established frameworks highlight evaluation and professional development, education leaders in practice employ a hybrid model that integrates supportive coaching, collaborative reflection, and structured accountability. It also underscores that transferability of such strategies requires sensitivity to institutional diversity and cultural context, making faculty performance management not a matter of applying universal models but of adapting leadership practices to complex organizational realities. By situating these findings in the Philippine higher education context, this study supports emerging evidence that leadership practices which foster motivation, confidence, and adaptability, whether through faculty development, workshops, or innovation-oriented strategies, are more likely to achieve sustainable improvements in performance [42,38,39].

6. Conclusion

This study shows that education leaders address faculty underperformance through a stepwise, hybrid model that begins with coaching, feedback, and mentorship, and progresses to formal accountability measures when needed. Faculty responsiveness strongly shapes outcomes, while collaboration with peers and stakeholders fosters ownership of change. At the same time, leaders must contend with tenure protections, ambiguous policies, cultural hesitancy toward confrontation, and the emotional demands of leadership. These findings highlight the importance of balancing empathy with accountability and adapting strategies to institutional diversity, cultural norms, and leadership hierarchies, factors that influence how far practices can be transferred across contexts.

This study is not without limitations. It was conducted in a limited set of Philippine institutions, relied on qualitative accounts from leaders, and did not include the perspectives of underperforming faculty or students. These constraints, noted in the methodology, suggest caution in generalizing results. Future research could build on this work through comparative studies across diverse institutions, mixed-methods designs that test themes quantitatively, and inclusion of faculty and student perspectives to provide a more holistic view. Longitudinal approaches may also clarify the sustained impact of leadership strategies on faculty performance and institutional quality.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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