

**Leadership Preparation for New and Aspiring High School  
Principals: A Case Study in South-West China**

**by**

**Sarah Xue Shan**

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# CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>X</b>
<b>DECLARATION</b> .....	<b>XI</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>XII</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
BACKGROUND .....	1
RATIONALE FOR LEADERSHIP PREPARATION .....	1
THEORETICAL CONTEXT .....	3
<i>Socialisation</i> .....	4
<i>Professional Learning</i> .....	6
NATIONAL CONTEXT .....	7
<i>Societal context</i> .....	8
<i>Policy context</i> .....	11
<i>Local context</i> .....	16
AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	18
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY .....	24
OVERVIEW .....	25
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>27</b>
OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE RELATED TO PRINCIPALSHIP IN CHINA .....	27
DEFINITIONS OF PRINCIPALSHIP .....	30
<i>Setting school vision and goals</i> .....	31
<i>Managing the school</i> .....	32
<i>Leading teaching and learning</i> .....	33
<i>School manager or instructional leader</i> .....	34
<i>Supporting teachers' professional learning</i> .....	35
<i>Establishing professional learning communities</i> .....	37
<i>Responsiveness to the government</i> .....	38
<i>Developing interpersonal competence</i> .....	39
<i>Paternalistic principalship in China</i> .....	40
THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING SCHOOL LEADERS .....	42
<i>Complexity of the principal role</i> .....	42
<i>Leadership preparation makes a difference</i> .....	43
DIFFERENT TERMINOLOGY FOR DEVELOPING LEADERS .....	45
<i>Leadership preparation</i> .....	45
<i>Leadership training</i> .....	46
<i>Leadership development</i> .....	47
<i>Leadership learning</i> .....	48
<i>Overview of four ways of developing leaders</i> .....	49
QUALIFICATIONS AND STANDARDS .....	49
CONTENT AND DELIVERY .....	51
<i>Content</i> .....	52

<i>Delivery</i> .....	54
CONTENT AND DELIVERY IN CHINA .....	57
PRINCIPAL SELECTION AND RECRUITMENT .....	60
<i>Talent pool</i> .....	60
<i>Accreditation process</i> .....	61
<i>Selection and Recruitment in China</i> .....	62
SOCIALISATION .....	63
<i>Personal socialization</i> .....	64
<i>Professional socialization</i> .....	65
<i>Organizational socialisation</i> .....	66
<i>Interrelationships among the three types of socialisation</i> .....	67
LEADERSHIP PRACTICE .....	68
<i>Contexts for school leadership</i> .....	70
<i>New principal difficulties</i> .....	71
OVERVIEW .....	75
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>77</b>
RESEARCH PARADIGMS .....	77
RESEARCH DESIGN .....	79
<i>Sequence</i> .....	79
<i>Priority</i> .....	80
<i>Data strand</i> .....	81
<i>Data integration</i> .....	81
RESEARCH APPROACH: CASE STUDY .....	82
MIXED-METHODS RESEARCH .....	84
<i>Elaboration and Complementarity</i> .....	86
RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION .....	86
<i>Documentary analysis</i> .....	87
<i>Questionnaires</i> .....	89
<i>Interviews</i> .....	90
<i>Field notes</i> .....	91
SAMPLING .....	93
<i>Population and sampling</i> .....	93
<i>Sampling strategy</i> .....	94
<i>Sample site</i> .....	95
<i>Quantitative sampling strategy</i> .....	96
<i>Qualitative sampling strategy</i> .....	97
INSTRUMENT DESIGN .....	101
<i>Questionnaire design</i> .....	101
<i>Qualitative instrument design</i> .....	102
<i>Piloting</i> .....	103
DATA COLLECTION .....	104
DATA ANALYSIS .....	106
<i>Quantitative data</i> .....	106
<i>Qualitative data</i> .....	107

<i>Combination of different data sets</i> .....	109
ETHICAL APPROACH .....	110
AUTHENTICITY .....	111
<i>Reliability and validity</i> .....	112
<i>Triangulation</i> .....	113
OVERVIEW .....	114
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: PARTICIPANTS' SURVEY FINDINGS</b> .....	<b>116</b>
PROGRAMME EVALUATION .....	117
<i>The perceived importance of compulsory content</i> .....	117
<i>Preference on delivery method</i> .....	119
<i>Open-ended Questions</i> .....	122
ARE THEY READY TO LEAD? .....	126
<i>Understanding of Chinese principalship</i> .....	126
<i>Are you ready to lead?</i> .....	127
<i>Are you a qualified leader?</i> .....	128
<i>Effectiveness of the Programme</i> .....	129
HOW THE PREPARATION PROGRAMME COULD CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR LEADERSHIP PRACTICE .....	130
<i>Leadership enactment</i> .....	130
<i>Factors that Impact Leadership Selection and Recruitment</i> .....	134
PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS .....	136
OVERVIEW .....	142
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: INTERVIEW FINDINGS FOR PROGRAMME PARTICIPANTS</b> .....	<b>143</b>
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT .....	144
<i>Different ways of developing a leader</i> .....	144
<i>Access to training opportunities</i> .....	150
<i>Programme evaluation</i> .....	153
PRINCIPALS' SOCIALIZATION .....	155
<i>Fast posting</i> .....	155
<i>Willingness to lead</i> .....	156
<i>Professional socialization</i> .....	158
<i>Contextualization</i> .....	162
<i>Advice for principals' socialization</i> .....	164
<i>Current principals' management system</i> .....	165
LEADERSHIP ENACTMENT .....	170
<i>Safety</i> .....	171
<i>Instructional outcomes</i> .....	171
<i>Relationships</i> .....	177
<i>Funding</i> .....	181
<i>Leadership strategy</i> .....	182
OVERVIEW .....	184
<b>CHAPTER SIX: PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION</b> .....	<b>186</b>
DIFFERENT WAYS OF DEVELOPING A LEADER .....	187

<i>Warm up</i> .....	187
<i>Formal lectures</i> .....	188
<i>Context-based learning: School visit</i> .....	191
<i>Group mentoring: '11110' case study</i> .....	192
<i>Context-based learning: Shadowing school</i> .....	195
<i>Peer learning</i> .....	197
<i>Limitations of the programme</i> .....	198
ESSAY EVALUATION PROCEDURE .....	199
<i>Hot issues for new principals</i> .....	200
<i>The impact of context on principals' choices of topics</i> .....	201
OVERVIEW .....	203
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH PROGRAMME PROVIDERS</b> .....	<b>205</b>
DEFINING THE PRINCIPALSHIP .....	206
DIFFERENT PROGRAMME PROVIDERS .....	209
<i>Different lecturers</i> .....	209
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TRAINING PROGRAMME .....	217
<i>Selection of programme organizations</i> .....	217
<i>Passive mediator</i> .....	218
<i>Lax evaluation systems</i> .....	219
<i>Government disregard</i> .....	220
<i>Features of the preparation programme</i> .....	221
SELECTION AND RECRUITMENT .....	223
<i>Principles and criteria</i> .....	224
<i>Selection procedure</i> .....	226
<i>Features of principal recruitment in China</i> .....	229
FUTURE ADVICE .....	231
<i>The absence of a principal evaluation and ranking system</i> .....	231
<i>The discontinuities of principal development providers</i> .....	231
<i>Innovative training approaches</i> .....	233
OVERVIEW .....	235
<b>CHAPTER EIGHT: MINI CASE STUDIES</b> .....	<b>237</b>
INTRODUCTION TO MINI CASES .....	237
DEFINING THE PRINCIPALSHIP IN CHINA .....	238
LEADERSHIP PRACTICE .....	239
<i>Socialization</i> .....	239
<i>Instructional strategy</i> .....	240
<i>Teacher development</i> .....	241
<i>Social resources</i> .....	242
NEW PRINCIPAL DIFFICULTIES .....	242
<i>Limited authority and overwhelming responsibility</i> .....	242
<i>Shortages of teachers</i> .....	243
<i>Student resources</i> .....	244
SETTING SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLANS .....	245

OVERVIEW .....	247
<b>CHAPTER NINE: DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>248</b>
CONCEPTUALISING THE PRINCIPALSHIP IN CHINA .....	248
<i>The role of principals</i> .....	248
<i>Definitions of principalship</i> .....	258
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT .....	264
<i>Leadership development programmes make a difference</i> .....	264
<i>The purpose of leadership preparation</i> .....	265
<i>Different ways of developing a school leader</i> .....	269
SELECTION AND RECRUITMENT .....	283
<i>Unwilling to lead</i> .....	283
<i>Principals' selection and recruitment</i> .....	286
<i>The discontinuity of principals' career paths</i> .....	289
PRINCIPAL SOCIALISATION .....	291
<i>Personal socialisation</i> .....	291
<i>Professional socialisation</i> .....	292
<i>Organisational socialisation</i> .....	293
LEADERSHIP PRACTICE .....	295
<i>Setting directions</i> .....	295
<i>Redesigning school organization</i> .....	296
<i>Leading teaching and learning</i> .....	297
<i>Developing people</i> .....	299
<i>How multiple layers of context shape leadership practice</i> .....	300
<i>New principal tasks and challenges</i> .....	303
OVERVIEW .....	308
<b>CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>309</b>
ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	310
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY .....	324
<i>Contextual significance</i> .....	324
<i>Methodological significance</i> .....	326
<i>Theoretical significance</i> .....	328
LIMITATION OF THE STUDY .....	333
IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY .....	334
<i>Professionalisation of principals</i> .....	335
<i>Re-define the role of government (LEA)</i> .....	336
<i>A more comprehensive training and development system for principals</i> .....	338
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH .....	341
OVERVIEW .....	343
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>345</b>
<b>APPENDIX ONE: QUESTIONNAIRE.....</b>	<b>390</b>
<b>APPENDIX TWO: INTERVIEW SCHEDULES .....</b>	<b>396</b>

INTERVIEW FOR PRINCIPALS .....	396
INTERVIEW FOR PROVINCIAL-LEVEL SUPERVISOR.....	398
INTERVIEW FOR PROGRAMME DESIGNER AND COORDINATORS .....	401
INTERVIEW FOR LECTURERS .....	404
INTERVIEW OUTLINE FOR SENIOR AND MIDDLE LEADERS IN MINI-CASE SCHOOLS .....	407
<b>APPENDIX THREE: CONSENT AGREEMENT.....</b>	<b>409</b>
<b>APPENDIX FOUR: ETHICAL APPROVAL.....</b>	<b>411</b>

## Table of Tables

<i>Table 1.1 Comparisons between the three levels of principal training in China</i> .....	15
<i>Table 2.1 Number of Publications on each theme</i> .....	29
<i>Table 3.1. Demographic Background of Survey Samples</i> .....	96
<i>Table 3.2 Backgrounds of Principals</i> .....	97
<i>Table 3.3 Interview Sample Strategies</i> .....	100
<i>Table 4.2 Importance of School Management Skills Based on School Size</i> .....	118
<i>Table 4.3</i> .....	118
<i>Importance of School Management Skills Based on Student-Teacher Ratio</i> .....	118
<i>Table 4.4 Preference for Lecture</i> .....	121
<i>Table 4.5 Preference for Mentor</i> .....	122
<i>Table 4.6 Ranked Order of the Frequencies of the Words that Mentioned</i> .....	123
<i>Table 4.7 Readiness for Principalship by School Size</i> .....	128
<i>Table 4.8 Self-evaluation as a Qualified Leader</i> .....	128
<i>Table 4.9. The Training Programme Makes the Principals' More Competitive for the Position</i> .....	129
<i>Table 4.10 Rank Order of Professional Growth of Leadership Ability</i> .....	130
<i>Table 4.11 Constructing School Organization Ability Depending on Experience</i> .....	131
<i>Table 4.12 Instructional Leadership Growth by School Size</i> .....	132
<i>Table 4.13 Instructional Leadership Growth by Student-Teacher Ratio</i> .....	132
<i>Table 4.14 Setting School Goals and Vision by Gender</i> .....	133
<i>Table 4.15 Setting School Goals and Vision by School Background</i> .....	133
<i>Table 4.16 Comparisons between Principals and Principal Candidates</i> .....	134
<i>Table 4.17 Compulsory Requirements for Chinese Principalship</i> .....	134
<i>Table 4.18 Posted with/without a Certificate Depending on School Background</i> .....	135
<i>Table 4.19 Posted with/without a Certificate Depending on School Size</i> .....	136
<i>Table 4.20: Frequencies and average years of different positions</i> .....	138
<i>Table 4.21 Number of positions before becoming principal</i> .....	140
<i>Table 4.22 Principals' career paths and school size</i> .....	140
<i>Table 4.23 Which career experiences benefited you the most?</i> .....	141
<i>Table 4.24</i> .....	141
<i>The Comparisons of Contribution of Managerial Roles and Instructional Roles to Leadership Practice – Based on School Context</i> .....	141
<i>Table 4.25</i> .....	141
<i>The Comparisons of Contribution of Managerial Roles and Instructional Roles to Leadership Practice – Based on School Size</i> .....	141
<i>Table 5.1 Backgrounds of Principals</i> .....	143
<i>Table 5.2 Speed of contextualization</i> .....	164
<i>Table 5.3 Instructional Strategies of Different Principals</i> .....	174
<i>Table 6.1 Observation of the behaviours of 11 principals during a morning lecture</i> .....	191
<i>Table 6.3 The schedule for Shadowing School</i> .....	195
<i>Table 6.4 How principals benefited from the Shadowing School</i> .....	197

<i>Table. 7.1 Basic Information about each Interview .....</i>	<i>206</i>
<i>Table 7.2 The cost-effectiveness of different lecturers .....</i>	<i>213</i>
<i>Table 9.1 Hierarchies of Principalship in China .....</i>	<i>263</i>
<i>Table 9.2 Perceived Content Knowledge Requirements of Three Principals at Different Phases of the Research .....</i>	<i>273</i>
<i>Table 9.3 Comparisons of Programme Content, Participant Preferences, and Normative Views about that is Required.....</i>	<i>279</i>
<i>Table 9.3 Differences in School Tasks between Urban and Rural Principals .....</i>	<i>304</i>
<i>Table 10.1 Comparisons among the Standards, the Delivery and the Practice .....</i>	<i>323</i>

## Table of Figures

<i>Figure 1.1: The Research Model</i> .....	19
<i>Figure 4.1 The Principals' Preferences towards Delivery Method</i> .....	120
<i>Figure 4.2 Principals' Preferences towards Programme Providers</i> .....	121
<i>Figure 4.3: Principals' Familiarity with the Standard</i> .....	127
<i>Figure. 4.4 The Trainig Programme was Beneficial for Principals' Leadership Enactment</i> .....	130
<i>Figure 5.1 Different levels of high schools in the sample province</i> .....	152
<i>Figure 5.2: Principals' leadership strategies</i> .....	183
<i>Figure 6.1. Duration of each delivery method (Days)</i> .....	187
<i>Figure 6.2: Content of Formal Lectures</i> .....	188
<i>Figure 6.3: Programme providers</i> .....	189
<i>Figure 6.4: Mentor's evaluation of new principals' topics</i> .....	193
<i>Figure 6.5: Topics of Principals' Essays</i> .....	200
<i>Figure 6.6: Proportion of essays from urban principals</i> .....	202
<i>Figure 6.7: Proportion of essays from rural principals</i> .....	202
<i>Figure 6.8: Comparisons between topics of urban principals and rural principals (%)</i> .....	203
<i>Figure 9.1: Relationships between Principals' Autonomy, Cost and Satisfaction</i> .....	280
<i>Figure 10.1 The research model</i> .....	310
<i>Figure 10.2: The research model</i> .....	329
<i>Figure 10.3 Factors that impact on leadership preparation</i> .....	332
<i>Figure 10.4: Four components of leadership preparation</i> .....	332

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# Declaration

The material included in this thesis is all from my own work, and I collected all the data personally. Further, none of this thesis has been either published in another form, or submitted for a degree at another university.

Sarah Xue Shan

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# Abstract

In 2013, the Ministry of Education in China launched a set of National Qualifications and Standards for Headship in China, which aimed at guiding and supporting the professional development of principals in China. This is also the first time that the concept of the professionalisation of principals was documented by policymakers. This thesis outlines research aimed at understanding the leadership preparation process, in terms of how new leaders were selected, recruited, and developed. Following the preparation process, the research also examined the impact of the preparation process, in terms of leadership enactment and principals' socialization.

There was an overarching research model to guide the implementation of the whole study, focused on three fundamental issues related to leadership preparation in China, as well as the relationships between and among these issues. The three issues in the model are Standards and Qualifications, the preparation process, and their impact on new principals. The study also explores the linkages and relationships among these aspects, as well as factors that impact on leadership preparation. Four main themes were identified from the literature; definitions of leadership, leadership development, principals' socialisation, and leadership enactment. The literature review showed that the number and quality of publications in China on this issue were limited, particularly in respect of leadership preparation and the professionalisation of principals, when compared to increasing interest and awareness at administrative and practical levels.

A sequential mixed-methods case study was applied when conducting the field study, using various instruments, including questionnaires, interviews, documentary analysis, field notes and mini case studies. Five findings chapters were generated from the data from various participants, including new and aspiring principals, programme providers, administrative officials and three mini school-based case

studies. The data analysis identified four overarching themes about leadership preparation in China; definitions of leadership, leadership development processes, principals' socialisation, and leadership practice. The research model helped to interpret the data, and also illustrates that leadership preparation in China requires a more systematic approach to programme design and implementation.

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## **Background**

This chapter provides the background to this study of school leadership preparation in China, by introducing the theoretical basis of the research, the contextual factors that impact on the issue, and the study's aims and research questions. The theoretical background reflects on previous research and literature on this topic, and also introduces certain concepts that underpin the issue, linked to previous global research on this topic. The chapter also explains the macro contexts of Chinese society and traditional Chinese culture, and the microenvironment of the sample province, including current educational provision, and its social and financial status. It also examines how principal management and leadership preparation are enacted at different administrative levels, and how this was constrained by various policy documents.

Finally, the author introduces the research model, as well as the aims and research questions of the study. The research model includes three very important facets connected to leadership preparation in China, namely standards and qualifications, the leadership preparation process, and new leaders. Six research questions are generated from the research model, and the study also explores the possible relationships and connections between and among these facets. This model informs the design and implementation of the field study, as well as the analysis and presentation of the research data in later chapters.

## **Rationale for Leadership Preparation**

School leadership is the second most influential factor for student outcomes (only behind classroom teaching) (Leithwood et al, 2006; Robinson, 2007), which leads to the question of whether 'a good principal equals a good school' (Bush, 1998), or to

what extent school principals could influence school development and student outcomes (Harris, 2002; Harris et al., 2002; Lortie, 2009). An increasing volume of research all around the world, including China, shows that the principal's job is demanding and requires special knowledge and skills. This indicates that principals need to be trained to address the increasing and challenging school tasks (Robinson, Lloyd, & Kenneth, 2008). The present research contributes to knowledge on this theme by exploring how new principals are prepared in China, and to what extent the current preparation system meets the needs of school development and principals' personal growth.

In certain developed countries and areas, such as Hong Kong (Ng & Szeto, 2016), Singapore (Beck, 2018), Scotland (Crawford & Cowie, 2012), and the US (Kilinc & Gumus, 2020), leadership preparation training has been, or used to be (England, UK compulsory before new leaders take up their roles (Bush, 2013; Bush & Jackson, 2002). Subsequent research from these countries shows that leadership preparation is necessary for both new leaders and their schools, and that these preparation programmes contribute to new principals' socialisation and professionalisation for the position. In China, principal preparation training programmes have also been compulsory since 1998, leading to a 'certificate for principalship'. In this research, the author investigates how principal preparation programmes are implemented in China, in terms of the delivery methods, curriculum content, providing organisations, and programme providers.

The international literature shows that novice principals are usually overwhelmed with issues such as isolation, lack of professional knowledge of leadership and a low level of confidence (Miklos, 2009; Tahir, et al., 2015). These 'novice' issues also varied depending on the context and on principals' personal circumstances. The present research also explores principal socialisation in the Chinese context, to investigate the difficulties encountered by new principals. Leadership preparation practices can contribute to the successful socialisation of principals, before being

appointed (anticipatory socialization) and after taking up their positions.

Overall, this research regards principal preparation as a comprehensive staged process, beginning with the principals' leadership aspirations, through their preparation programmes, and after they take up their positions. It also examines the involvement of different organizations, such as programme providers, local administration, and universities. The ultimate goal of this research is to explore how new principals are prepared in China through different stages, and how different organisations and individuals enacted their roles during this process. Further, the author explored the effectiveness and efficiency of principal preparation in China, especially in terms of how the preparation system contributes to new principals' socialisation, as well as to school improvement.

### **Theoretical Context**

Several researchers indicate that leadership preparation is a 'staged' process (Stephenson & Bauer, 2010; Watts, 2012; Weindling & Earley, 1995), which was not only about 'being appointed', but also more about new principals' readiness for their new roles and new contexts (Bush, 2013; Bush & Middlewood, 2005). Thus, 'socialisation' was selected as the fundamental concept for the research, as new principals' development includes three aspects of adaptation; personal socialisation, professional socialisation and contextualization (Cuddihy, 2012; Izgar, 2009). The author also explains what is meant by 'professionalisation' of new principals and discusses different types of professional learning for aspiring and new principals, which is also connected tightly to the research aim of 'how' to prepare new heads. The author also explores different terms for developing school leaders, including leadership preparation, leadership training, leadership development, and leadership learning (Crow, 2007; Kelly & Saunders, 2010). Lastly, principal selection or appointment is not the end of 'socialisation' or 'professional learning' for new principals, as previous research shows that contextual factors influence principals'

leadership enactment, and new principals often request more contextualized support after being posted (Daresh & Male, 2000a; Tahir et al., 2015). The notion of 'community of practice' indicates how principals could adapt to micro and wider communities, as well as how they could cooperate with other organisations to boost the development of their schools (Crow, 2007; Earley, 2012).

### Socialisation

Socialisation refers to the process by which a person selectively acquires the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions needed to perform an organizational role effectively (Merton, 1963; Parkay, Currie, & Rhodes, 1992). Furthermore, a useful approach to understanding leadership and principal development derives from Merton's (1963) socialization theory (Weindling and Dimmock, 2006). There are three main overlapping phases, which stress the two-way interaction between new leaders and school context:

- (1) *Personal socialization*, which involves the change of self-identity that occurs as individuals learn new roles (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003b; Matthews & Crow, 2003);
- (2) *Professional socialization*, which involves learning what it is to be a principal, prior to taking up the role, from personal experience of schooling and teaching and from formal courses (Weindling & Earley, 1995);
- (3) *Organizational socialization*, which involves learning knowledge, values and behaviours required to perform a specific role within a particular organization after appointment (Schein, 1968).

Most principals have been teachers, thus role-identity transference from teacher to principals is an essential component of successful principalship (Browne-Ferrigno and Muth, 2004). Personal socialization is also the initial socialization into a new

community of practice, although it is rarely recognized in the literature. For new principals, personal socialization can include identifying with the broader view of schools that goes beyond the classroom and with a different vision of the role (Ortiz, 1982).

Professional socialization is defined as the process through which one becomes a professional and later identifies with that profession (Heck, 2003). In principal preparation, professional socialization includes management courses for certification (compulsory and voluntary), first-hand experience of leadership and management tasks, modeling and social learning, and mentoring by existing principals (Weindling & Earley, 1995). This process generally starts in the pre-appointment phase of a principal's education career and continues to early post-appointment growth and development (Weindling and Dimmock, 2006).

Organizational socialization begins upon appointment and is specific to the school situation, which demonstrates that environmental and organizational factors exert a powerful influence in shaping the norms, values, and behaviour of new principals (Weindling and Dimmock 2006; Heck, 2003) . Hence, it requires the process of becoming familiar with the specific context where leadership is practiced (Bush, 2013). Although, organizational socialization emphasizes 'how things are done here', it appears to be weak and ineffective for new principals in a dynamic and complexity society. Daresh and Male (2000) found that both British and American principals experienced 'culture shock' in the transition into headship and principalship (Daresh & Male, 2000a). Holligan et al (2006) also found that novice English principals expressed low levels of confidence in respect of organizational practice (Holligan, Menter, & Hutchings, 2006). Broadening the notion of organizational socialization to include not only a particular school context, but also social, community and government entities, can strengthen the learning of beginning principals (Crow, 2016).

## Professional Learning

Some scholars point out that professional development is based on a notion of professional learning as active, social, continuing, and related to practice (Webster-Wright, 2009). Within the contemporary context of a rapidly changing society, there is consensus that preparation is only the beginning of the learning that continues throughout professional life (Day, Sammons, & Hopkins, 2009; Webster-Wright, 2009). In this study, the author explores different ways of developing a principal, through leadership preparation, leadership training, leadership development, and leadership learning. Among those approaches, leadership preparation and leadership training are more formal and learner-centered, which focus more on individual professional capacity growth (Avolio, 2005; Matthews & Crow, 2003). Leadership development and leadership learning are more reflective and dynamic, which are bonded to engagement with authentic work and practice (Normore, 2005).

Leadership has long been conceptualized as an individual notion, which emphasizes the individual knowledge, skills and ability associated with the formal leadership role (Bush, 2013). According to the Institution of Education in the USA, qualified principals for the 21st century should be visionary leaders, communicating leaders, and instructional leaders (ISLLC, 2000). These features call for enhanced individual knowledge, trust and personal power, which have been proposed as the fundamental leadership imperatives. In Bush and Jackson's (2002) study of international perspectives on leadership preparation found that there is a 'shared content' for new principals' professional growth among different countries. Most curricula focus on leadership, including vision, mission and transformational leadership, instructional leadership, administrative and managerial skills, and external relationships (Bush & Jackson, 2002). Yet, in constructing leadership capacity, individual-based knowledge and skills growth alone cannot ensure the effectiveness of leadership practice. Scholars point out that organizations need to attend to individual leader, and collective leadership, development (Crawford, 2008).

During the last two decades, empirical research has demonstrated that effective professional learning continues over the long term and is best situated within a community that supports learning (Hallinger, 2018; Wenger, 1998). Such situated learning at work can engage individuals in actively working with others on genuine problems within their professional practice (Boud & Middleton, 2008). Internship is well established as an important feature of leadership development in several countries, such as the United States (Crow, 2007; Cunningham, 2007), and Singapore (Kala, 2015). Internship provides multiple opportunities for gaining new insights about educational leadership, which enable new principals to make better transitions to their new positions (Cunningham & Sherman, 2008). However, some scholars point out that leadership capacity is better facilitated by both situating learning and formal guidance (Heck, 2003; Tulowitzki, 2019). Mentoring and coaching, through carefully matching between mentor/coach and mentee/coachee, involves more guidance and support, which emphasizes the self-exploration and purposive learning of new heads (Walters, Robinson, & Walters, 2019; Zentgraf, 2020). Mentoring and coaching are widely applied by different countries and areas, such as England (Bush, 2013), and Hong Kong (Cheung & Walker, 2006). Through challenging implicit assumptions, and questioning taken-for-granted practice, professional learning makes a contribution to changes in practice (Illeris, 2009).

### **National Context**

China, as the world's most populated country, faces as big a challenge for economic development as any other nation in the world. As with other nations, China's educational policymakers have already realized that China must raise the level of general education if it is to achieve its goals of economic and social development (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). Meanwhile, there is a widespread belief that the quality of leadership makes a significant difference to school and student performance, and in raising the quality of general education (Bush, 2013; Orphanos & Orr, 2013). This is

reflected in a growing interest in, and emphasis on, training for the nation's principals.

Within the growing recognition of the significance of leadership development, there is a continuing debate on what preparation is required to develop qualified leaders (Bush, 2013). The models of leadership preparation and development are differentiated among countries, as these models are rooted in specific national conditions and contexts, and are influenced by unique and dynamical political, economic, social, cultural, historical, professional and technical factors (Bolam, 2004). Hence, principal leadership in China is also influenced by multi-level contextual factors (Walker, Hu, & Qian, 2012). These include both micro and macro frameworks, including personal, organizational, political, economic, geographic, societal and culture factors. While acknowledging the importance of the range of factors identified by Walker et al (2012), this thesis focused mainly on the societal, policy and theoretical contexts.

### Societal context

The societal context includes the historically accepted patterns of behaviour, hierarchies of power, and norms of interaction that shape principal work. The most noticeable societal factor in China is traditional Chinese culture (Wang, 2006), mainly framed by Confucianism. Farh and Cheng (2000) use a three-dimensional model to describe paternalistic leadership in Chinese societies (Farh & Cheng, 2000). The dimensions are authoritarianism, benevolence and moral leadership. Thus, a series of widely cited Confucian values constitute ethical guidelines across Chinese social and personal life. These include the respect for authority, patriarchy, seniority and age, conflict avoidance and obeying superiors, and emphasizing relationships, networks, collectivism, harmony and order (Walker et al., 2012). These values have an impact, not only on the nature and construction of the principalship preparation system, but also on principals' perceptions of their leadership role.

### *'Authority centered' conception*

First, the conception of "authority centred" (*guan ben wei*<sup>1</sup>) has long been accepted and practiced in most of the administrative organizations in China, which means that the state maintains the control of authorization. Although the principal responsibility system has been implemented within a school-based management system, the party secretary still plays an important role within school organizations (Wang, 2019; MOE, 2018). Principals are often appointed by local education authorities, which also assess and evaluate their professional, moral and political suitability (Xue, Bush, & Ashley, 2020). The recruitment and selection system of new leaders is also very hierarchical, as only state appointees have access to, and are funded to attend, development programmes (MoE, 1999). As Young et al (2009) point out, certain qualifications are open to incumbent principals only, or those already appointed, not those aspiring to principalship (Young, Crow, & Murphy, 2009). Thus, the state controls the pathways between training and appointment. This excludes those aspiring to principalship or those seeking to build the capacity to position them for a leadership role in the future (Young et al., 2009).

The concept of *'authority centred'* has also influenced the role of principals in China. There is a divergent understanding of leadership between academic and practitioners in China. An increasing number of scholars have defined the complex role of the principal as an educator, a leader and a manager, and called for the professionalization of the principalship in China (Chu, 2003; S. Liu, et al., 2017; Qiao, Yu, & Zhang, 2018). Conversely, traditionally in China, the word *'leadership (ling dao)'* is more likely to refer to 'authority, power, and domination', which shapes the understanding of leadership by most leaders, teachers and students. In terms of practice, principals are more like managers and administrators of the school, rather

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<sup>1</sup>guan ben wei: "authority centered" means that the state administration takes most control of decisions.

than leaders. As a result, leadership training and development in China focuses mainly on administrative skills and managerial ability.

### *Core value of socialism*

In contrast to ‘authority, power and domination’, another aspect of Chinese culture stresses ‘servant spirits’, harmony culture and moral leadership. For example, one of the fundamental principles of MoE (Ministry of Education, 2013) is the requirement to implement the educational policies of the Chinese Communist Party and develop the core values of socialism. This requirement arises from the cultural heritage of Confucianism, according to which Chinese school leaders commonly consider it their obligation to serve the government and consider school as a place to nurture the talents needed for the prosperity of the state (S. Liu et al., 2017).

One example of the principles of Confucianism is that social relations should be conducted in a manner that maintains harmony (Hofstede, 2001). A leader who promises rewards on an individual basis is likely to violate this harmony principle. In contrast, societal norms in an individualist culture (e.g., Australia) support self-serving behaviour where people are expected to promote their self-interests. Chinese principals are expected to act selflessly and to lead by example (Farh, et al., 2008). Thus, a central theme of Chinese leadership philosophies is that leaders assume a parental-type role and care for subordinates’ livelihood and social-psychological well-being (Chen & Lee, 2008).

Confucianism has also traditionally connected leadership with culture building. Traditional expectations place culture building squarely on the shoulders of organisational leaders. Organisations are expected to ‘be cultured in ways that go beyond achieving task efficiency and productivity’ (Chen & Lee, 2008). For example, an important organisational goal is harmony (*he*) (Zhang, et al, 2008). For most leaders in the Chinese societies, harmony is precious (*he wei gui*); they need to

maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships within organisations and avoid open conflicts (Walker & Qian, 2012; Zhang et al., 2008).

Although the trend toward professionalization, and a research-based conceptualization of the role of school leader, is accelerating, the deeply embedded traditional belief of loyalty, and conformity with the hierarchical order of the political authorities, has a continuing influence on how Chinese school leaders think and function (Cravens, 2008). In this research, the author further shows how these cultural and societal factors impact on principals' leadership enactment, personal career choices and school developmental strategies.

### Policy context

#### *Policy making*

Before 1989 (the Eighth Five Year Plan), principal training programmes in China were considered unsatisfactory and informal, as they could not meet the various demands from principals (Guo, 2007). In 1989, the State Education Commission (SEC, renamed the Ministry of Education in 1998), issued an important policy document, "Strengthening Training for Principals of Elementary and Secondary Schools Nationwide". Since then, a number of policies and documents on principal development have been released over the last 25 years. Principal training and leadership development have been positioned as part of a national strategy for large-scale educational reform in general and school improvement in particular (Lo, Chen, & Zheng, 2010).

There are three main kinds of policies and documents related to leadership preparation in China. The first type includes macro educational reform policies that set a broad background for educational development, which are usually linked to China's social-economic policies within particular national goals and targets. For example, the quality education and curriculum reform in the late 1990s, which

shaped major policy goals in China, continues to have an influence today (Chen et al., 2011).

The second type includes policies that directly guide the administration and enactment of principal development, which is usually specific in terms of time range, targets and locations. The evolution of principal development in China roughly parallels the procession of the all-encompassing National Five-year Plans. During the twelfth five-year plan stage (2012-2016), there is a continued focus on quality and equity of principal training, which seeks to balance the concerted development of urban and rural education. Henceforward, during the thirteenth five-year plan (2017-2021), the policy sets higher standards for school innovations, which requires high performing and skilful leaders to lead overall school development and boost the quality of general education (MoE, 2016). Linked to that, the MoE also demonstrated that it is important to guarantee the stability and prosperity of educational funding at both national and provincial level.

The third category is about the expectations about principal certification, qualifications and evaluation, such as the New Qualifications for Headship of Compulsory Primary and Secondary Schools in China, which make explicit the obligations and requirements for Chinese headship (MoE, 2013). Above all, these policies provide important practical insights into principal development in China. Overall, three key features can be discerned from the development of these policies since 1989, namely comprehensiveness, professionalisation and digitalization.

#### *Comprehensive policies*

There has been a significant increase in the number of policies released from both central and local government since 1989. These policies not only illuminate the role of principal training within educational reforms, but also point to ways that are likely to enforce its ongoing implementation and improvement (MoE, 2002). Responding

to these various policies, training programmes are becoming more detailed and specific. For example, the syllabus moved from a national level (SEC, 1989) to the local level (SEC, 1995). Also, the target trainees are divided into different groups according to their different career stages, namely qualification training (*zi ge pei xun*, particularly for aspiring and new principals), improving training (*ti gao pei xun*, particularly for principals who had been appointed) and advanced training (*ming xiao zhang pei xun*, particularly for experienced and successful principals) (See Table 1)(SEC, 1995; MoE, 1999; MoE, 2013).

### *Professionalisation*

Cultural traditions in China have created certain obstacles related to concepts about, and access to, principalship, which are difficult to eliminate. The move towards the professionalization of the principalship is indicated by the increasing involvement of universities in principal development and delivery (MoE, 1995). Universities are encouraged to take more responsibility for principals' development, in terms of curriculum design and delivery. Moreover, not only normal universities and official educational institutions, but also comprehensive universities, have been granted the right to provide training (SEC, 1990). Along with these universities, a growing number of other bodies, such as research institutes, were encouraged to play an active role in principal development (MoE, 2007). '*The professionalization of principals*' has become one of the leading trends in principal development and preparation, in both research and practice (Chu, 2003; S. Liu et al., 2017; MoE, 2013). Moreover, research in the field of principalship has begun to be recognized as making a significant contribution to policy, theory and practice (Feng, 2003).

### *Informationization*

Given the size of the principal population in China, it is difficult to provide for so many people within face-to-face training programmes. Recently, distance

technology has been applied in many principalship programmes, which breaks the boundaries caused by time and space (MoE, 2010). Accordingly, computer and information technology has been recognized as an important skill for modern principals, and has been contained in the curriculum for principalship development. Digitalization changes the nature of principals' professional growth, which also benefits school effectiveness to a certain degree. As mentioned above, the inequity of educational resources has become a problem in China, while, through digitalization, more principals can be invited into training programmes through the Internet and computers, which helps to address the uneven educational provision in different areas.

Although there has been significant progress, there are still some problematic issues, especially in respect of application and practice. The Ministry of Education is not well recognized, organized and structured to create, as well as to sustain, the development of effective schools in China. In contrast to other countries and areas, which have designed principal training and development, these documents can be constructed as a set of goals rather than a document to guide the design of the curriculum used in principal training (Feng, 2003). Moreover, current policies stress the demands and requirements for current school leaders, rather than the qualifications for candidate leaders. Thus, principal training in China has been inadequate to develop the types of competencies and skills required for effective principal practice in a changing environment (Feng, 2003).

#### Administrative Background

China has long been a hierarchical society, which shapes what principal development should look like and how it is enacted. Under the macro-guidance of the Ministry of Education, principal development is coordinated and managed through four administrative divisions: national, provincial, municipal and county (MoE, 1999). Within these divisions, programmes are divided into three basic levels, namely,

qualification training, improving training and advanced training (see Table 1.1), which is based on the different career stages of principals (MoE, 1999). The table demonstrates how different levels of principal training programmes are shaped and delivered according to the different career stages of a principal, in terms of targeting principals, the nature of the programmes, providers, curriculum content and training hours.

Types of programme	Target Principals	Nature	Provider	Curriculum and teaching plan	Training hours
Qualification	New principals and those appointed as principals	Mandatory	Decentralized but state-authorized	Basic knowledge and skills development (State teaching plan)	No less than 300 hours
Improving	Principals who have already obtained the certified qualification for the principal position	Mandatory	Decentralized but state-authorized	State teaching plan	Minimum of 240 hours within 5 years
Advanced	Selected principals (Backbone principals <sup>2</sup> )	Voluntary	National principal training centres and other universities	Not standardized	Not standardized

*Table 1.1 Comparisons between the three levels of principal training in China*

From 1999, two principal training centres have been established for developing initial, ongoing and advanced level training for primary and secondary school principals. The centre for primary schools was set up in Beijing Normal University, and that for secondary principals at East China Normal University (Shanghai). These two centres have become the national level organizations for principals' training in

<sup>2</sup> Backbone Principal: *'gugan xiaozhang'*, which refers to the principals who perform excellently.

China. Other centres are located at the local 'normal' university<sup>3</sup> and Colleges of Education and Advance Schools<sup>4</sup>. Trainers of programmes for principalship in China are generally research fellows and professors from three main university faculties: management, psychology and education (Yan & Ehrich, 2009). Accordingly, the curriculum used in the initial preparation of school principals includes traditional university subjects, covering areas such as philosophy of education, management, and computer and information technology. Both short-term and longer-term programmes are provided for school principals. Short-term courses can last between one week to one month, while longer courses can take one year and are offered during summer/winter vacations and public holidays. Most courses offered to principals take place during weekends, school vacations or via part-time study.

### Local context

China is a huge country, with the largest population in the world, which makes it difficult to include such a large number of principals in training programmes (Chu, 2003). Educational funding is low (Dello-Iacovo, 2009), and educational resources are insufficient to meet the dynamic and changing demands of leadership (Chu & Yang, 2002). Meanwhile, China is also a country that has significant diversity and uneven development socially, economically and educationally (Li & Feng, 2001; Yan & Ehrich, 2009). Following the 1985 'Decision on the Structural Reform of China's Education System', the central government is no longer the main financier of compulsory education. Consequently, local government bears the main cost of financing compulsory education, which has exacerbated educational inequity among different areas (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). There are geographic differences in provision and resources, which make it difficult to generalise about leadership preparation in China. Geographic features have a significant influence on the implementation of principal

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<sup>3</sup> Normal university means the university specific for teacher training in China;

<sup>4</sup> These institutes provide 'on the job' training for primary and secondary school teachers;

preparation, as well as on its effectiveness in different areas.

#### *Local socio-economic status*

As mentioned above, principal management is the responsibility of the provincial administration, which means that the SES background of the province will largely decide the quality and procedure of principal preparation process. Therefore, this study was focused on the province as the unit of analysis, to explore how principal preparation is delivered and distributed at different administrative levels. Usually, the provincial factors influence preparation training in two different ways. First, the local SES status impacts on the availability of funding, affecting the quality and frequency of training programmes. Second, local universities and professional organisations have a significant impact on the quality of the training programmes. Therefore, the more developed provinces enjoy more funding and opportunities for principals' professional training, as well as higher quality training programmes.

This study is located in one of the least developed areas in China, and its GDP was constantly ranked in the bottom 10 (out of 32 provinces and areas in China) over the past five years (from 2014-2018). There is only one 'Top 100' university in the province, and none of the local universities is among the first-tier universities in China. Hence, the main programme-providing universities were two second-tier normal universities. Therefore, the quality and frequency of leadership training were weak, compared to other provinces and cities in China.

#### *The impact of policies on programme delivery*

As mentioned above, national policies and regulations are translated and interpreted by provincial administrations before being applied to practice. Further, the province also published certain regulations and documents to regulate the implementation of leadership preparation. As a consequence, the nature of

leadership preparation was influenced by a combination of national policies and local regulations. There were two policies that have a significant impact on the implementation of the training programmes:

1. *Supporting Plans for Rural Teachers (From 2015-2020)*, which has been transformed by the local government as *Action Plans for Supporting Rural Teachers (From 2015- 2020) of Province X*. This policy aims at establishing a high-quality teacher team, particularly for rural areas, and providing a healthy, fair educational environment for every rural child. The policy lists the main targets, significant actions and supporting plans to guide both local government and local education authorities during the five years period (from 2015-2020).
2. *Funding Management and Usage for Teacher Training of X Province (Provisional)*, developed by the local government, and based on two further policies, namely Special Funding Management for National Level Training Programmes for Nursery, Primary School and Secondary School Teachers, and Funding Management for Training Programme of the Party Organisation of X Province. This policy explicitly explains the usage of training programmes, including spending on the participants, the costs of lecturers, as well as the standard of accommodation.

### **Aims and Research Questions**

The aim of the research is to investigate how principals are prepared in Chinese schools, in terms of process and effectiveness. Figure 1.1 illustrates the research model underpinning the study. It shows three vital aspects of this process; professional qualifications and standards, the preparation process, and new principals. According to Fanoos and He (2020), qualifications and standards often construct the foundation of the whole leadership development process (Fanoos & He, 2020). However, the professional qualifications are just the first step in

leadership preparation. How to implement the preparation process requires more systematic thinking and consideration, or these qualifications and standards may not be achieved or may be marginalized. The preparation process may be influenced by the professional qualifications and standards, and in turn, it may also impact on the leadership enactment of newly qualified leaders, as well as their readiness for principalship positions, and the effectiveness of their leadership practice. New principals are influenced by the preparation process, and then become qualified via the standards and qualifications.

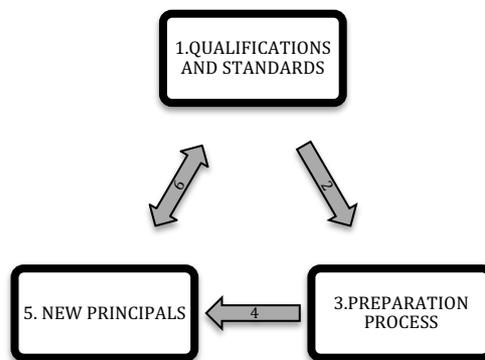


Figure 1.1: The Research Model

As well as the three aspects of the principal preparation process, Figure 1.1 also illustrates the tight linkages among these three facets. The first arrow (arrow 2) shows how preparation may be guided, or shaped, by the policies and documents. The second one (arrow 4) aims at exploring how the preparation process could contribute to the professional growth of principal leadership. Finally, arrow 6 examines the extent to which new leaders meet the requirements of these professional qualifications. It also considers the role of professional qualifications and standards in the process of evaluation. The research questions link to the model.

**1. What are the expected qualifications and standards for new principals in Chinese primary schools? (linked to box 1)**

The introduction of qualifications and standards for new principals is intended to

articulate the breadth and depth of leaders' roles, and to provide a framework for the design and delivery of the preparation process, as well as to inform the requirements and certification for new headship (Dinham, Collarbone, Evans, & Mackay, 2013). Such standards and qualifications demonstrate an understanding of principal leadership, connected to educational policies in particular contexts, and often have an impact on professional development (Gleeson & Husbands, 2003). Moreover, the standards usually connect the values, knowledge and practice of school leaders to the wider community (Dinham et al., 2013).

Another key role of standards and qualifications for principals is to inform professional learning, selection, appraisal and accountability processes (Liu et al., 2017). It also sets the terms by which the performance, disposition, behaviour and attitudes of aspiring principals can be controlled, measured and assessed (Cowie & Crawford, 2007). Research question 1 addresses how principalship is defined and conceptualized in China, and also the intended nature, audience and purpose of standards and qualifications. The study also explores what, if any, are the mandatory requirements and certification for new headship in China.

## **2. What is the relationship, if any, between qualifications and standards and the leadership preparation process? (linked to arrow 2)**

As our understanding and expectations of new headship grow, there is a greater emphasis on finding means of transferring that knowledge into practice (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000). Administrative qualifications and standards provide a basic understanding of school leadership and, to a certain degree, have influenced the design and shape of preparation programmes (Xue et al., 2020). In certain countries, such as Australia and Singapore, such standards act as the starting point for the leadership preparation process (Dinham et al., 2013; Walker, Bryant, & Lee, 2013). However, in some other countries, qualifications and standards appear to have a weaker impact on leadership preparation processes. In the US, although the

standards and policies are well-established, scholars argue that leadership preparation programmes lack purpose, curricular coherence, adequate clinical instruction, appropriate faculty, and high admission standards (Black, K, 2007; Levine, 2005).

Question 2 is designed to investigate whether and how formal qualifications and standards are integrated into the principalship preparation process in the Chinese primary school context. It examines if there is any relationship between the policies and the process, to what extent they are linked, and how they are connected. If there is no linkage between them, it is important to further explore the practical value of these policies, and how the preparation process is constructed, implemented and evaluated without such a foundation.

**3. What are the content and delivery modes of Chinese leadership preparation programmes? (linked to box 3).**

Bush and Jackson's (2002) study of principal preparation programmes in seven countries and areas found that there is an 'international content' for school leadership preparation in different countries. Most courses focus on transformational leadership, instructional leadership, administrative and management ability, and external relationships (Bush and Jackson, 2002). In China, however, some scholars argue that the knowledge base demonstrates an inadequate focus on curriculum leadership, teacher professional development, school-community relationships, and the application of information technology, which can hardly facilitate principals' behaviour in real-world contexts (Su et al., 2000). The purpose of the research question is to investigate the knowledge base of leadership preparation programmes in China, how the framework is shaped, and how it is related to the role and obligations of Chinese principals.

Bolam's (2004) categories of 'knowledge for action', and 'improvement for practice',

suggest an emphasis on processes, rather than content (Bolam, 2004). According to the policy documents, principal preparation is delivered through six modes in China: lectures, self-learning, self-reflection, essay writing, essay evaluation and school visits (MoE, 1999). With increasing recognition of principal development, different approaches and modes have been gradually applied by some districts and areas in China (Gong, 2013; Huang & Wiseman, 2011; G. Q. Zhu, 2010). The study also explores how different delivery approaches are stratified and applied to satisfy various objectives of principal preparation and to improve the professional growth of aspiring and new leaders, as well as the effectiveness of these modes.

**4. What is the relationship between the leadership preparation process and the recruitment and selection of principals? (linked to arrow 4).**

In some countries, the preparation process has a direct link with the recruitment and selection of principals. For example, in Singapore, the Diploma for Educational Administration, now replaced by the Leaders in Education, shapes the talent pool of principal candidates, which requires the aspiring principal to attend and successful completion is expected to ensure promotion (Bush and Jackson, 2002). In contrast, many developed nations, including England and Sweden, do not require specific preparation before appointing new principals, and training for other leadership roles is often inadequate, uncoordinated or worse (Huber, 2004; Klein & Schanenberg, 2020).

In some areas, leadership preparation acts as one of the requirements or prompts for entry to the principal position, in terms of training hours and certification. In China, aspiring principals are required to obtain 300-hours pre-service training to acquire the 'principal certification', which can lead to a leadership position (SEC, 1999). And Australian universities offer masters' degrees and graduate certificates in educational administration and management, which are taken voluntarily by participants. The purpose of research question 4 is to establish if there is any

relationship between leadership preparation and new principal selection and, if so, to what extent? If there is no direct link, which other factor(s) influence recruitment and selection decisions?

**5. How is leadership enacted by the newly appointed qualified principals?  
(linked to box 5).**

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) define core principal practice as: direction setting, developing people, and redesigning organizations (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). However, research demonstrates that new principals may face a variety of difficulties in leadership enactment during their novice years, for example in the US and Scotland (Cowie & Crawford, 2007; Hobson et al., 2002). Bush (2008) points out that the most challenging problems for the 21st century principal are the increasing complexity of school contexts, arising from globalization, technological and demographic changes, and the demands of enhanced site-based responsibilities (Bush, 2008). Hence, organizational socialization is regarded as one of the most important processes for beginning principals, requiring the knowledge, skills and disposition necessary to conduct the role in a specific environment (Crow, 2007).

This study examines the specific case of new principals in China, in terms of how well prepared they feel for their leadership positions, and the challenges they may face when they are practicing their leadership. Within the dynamic and changing social context, and the diversity of school environments in China, it is valuable to explore the effectiveness of organizational socialization for new principals.

**6. What is the relationship between the expected performance of newly qualified principals and their leadership practice? (linked to arrow 6).**

According to Murphy and Shipman (2003), the key aspect of formal qualifications and standards for new principals is how they can be utilized, and it requires a process

of adjustment and modification based on the effectiveness of leadership enactment (Murphy & Shipman, 2003). Similarly, during the development of the National Standard for principals in Australia, Dinham et al (2013) note that the Standard was not a one-off exercise but an iterative process, involving extensive consultation with principals, parents' associations, academics, state officials, professional associations and other stakeholders from across the country. The professional standards and qualifications may also be applied as guides to evaluating principal performance, and this also checks the feasibility of these qualifications and standards. For example, in the US, some districts and states (e.g., Delaware, California, and Kentucky) are using the ISLLC standards to create a new evaluation system for school leaders (Owings, Kaplan, & Nunnery, 2005).

In this study, the expected performance refers to the qualifications for principals that are derived from policies and documents. The author compares the professional qualifications and the leadership practice of newly qualified leaders to explore whether, and to what extent, the newly qualified leaders meet the professional standards for new Chinese principals. Moreover, as a mutual relationship, the author further explores to what extent the qualifications and standards define the leadership requirements and professional practice of effective principals. Hence, the effectiveness of these qualifications and standards are also evaluated, in terms of how they inform the strategies to attract, prepare and develop effective principals in dynamic and changing contexts.

### **Significance of the study**

Within the publication of Standards and Qualifications of Principals in China, there was a growing demand for professionalisation of leadership in China, as well as the increasing requests for professional preparation for the new leaders. While, leadership was not 'fixed at birth' (Avolio, 2005), which leads to more systematically preparation and specialised training for those who are new and aspiring to this

position. Unlike other countries and systems around world, where leadership preparation was formed through a professional-oriented way through university-based programmes or bachelor courses, such as US, Singapore and Hongkong, leadership preparation in Mainland China is top-down, and administrative-oriented, which requires for more systematic thinking towards the issue (Ng, 2013).

However, within the awareness of professionalisation at political and administrative level, the empirical researches for leadership preparation in China was deficient, and lack of critical thinking and reflection of the process. Particularly, since 2014, the principals' leadership training programs have been modified, with traditional lecture-based learning being replaced by a combination of formal lectures, situated learning and context-based practice. Training programs since 2014 typically follow a three-phase training strategy: formal learning (knowledge learning), context-based learning ('shadowing principal'), and action research (with the assistance of the professional mentor). This process is reflected in the national policies and has been applied in several training programs for principals (Tu, 2014; Zhu, 2019), which requests for more empirical evidences on the validations and effectiveness on this innovation.

## **Overview**

The chapter introduces the research in order to situate the study within particular theoretical, geographic, societal and political backgrounds, to help readers to understand the rationale for the research design, as well as to follow the research findings. This chapter also briefly reviews previous research and literature on this topic, to explain how this study differs from previous research. The author also introduces the research model that guides the design and implementation of the research, and also lists six research questions derived from the model.

First, the author introduces the importance of leadership preparation for quality

education, not only in China, but also in other countries. Principal leadership impacts profoundly on students' learning outcomes and school development, and previous research has shown that leadership preparation makes a difference to principals' professional growth, as well as to their readiness for the position. Second, this chapter also introduces the social background of this research, including the overall background of Chinese society, the policy background of leadership preparation and the social and economic status of the sample province. This research is located in an underprivileged area in China and, in later chapters, the author shows how local contexts impact on the implementation of leadership preparation. Third, the author introduces the research model, as well as six research questions generated from the model. The research model identifies three important facets connected to leadership preparation, particularly in this centralised system; standards and qualifications, the preparation process, and new principals. Six research questions relate to the model.

# CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

## Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature on leadership preparation and new principalship over the last 20 years, and also includes certain important earlier sources. Both Chinese and international literature are included, and both theoretical arguments and practical research are discussed. The chapter focuses on four themes related to leadership preparation; definitions of principalship, leadership development, socialization, and leadership practice. The author also includes a separate section to introduce the development of Chinese literature and research on leadership preparation over the last 25 years (1994 - 2019). This serves to underline the significance of the present author's research, and the need for more Chinese literature on this topic.

## Overview of Literature Related to Principalship in China

The significance of leadership for school effectiveness and school improvement is now widely recognized in China (Qiao et al., 2018; Q. Zheng, Li, Chen, & Loeb, 2017), with a corresponding increased interest in principal training and continuing professional development (Wilson & Xue, 2013). As well as the growing interest and investment in principal training, academic research in this area has also grown over the last two decades (Wang, 2020; Xue et al., 2020). The author reviewed the Chinese literature published between 1994 and 2020. This time frame was selected to align with the recent major changes to principalship in China, since *sushi jiaoyu* (quality education) reforms introduced in the 1990s (Feng, 2006).

Han's (2012) analysis of the literature on principal training in China from 1989 to 2009, shows that, although the number of sources on principal training has risen, it

is relatively small when compared with other sub-fields of education in China (Han, 2012). Moreover, Zheng et al.'s (2011) research on the literature on principal training in China shows variations in the attention to different themes in principal training. There is limited research literature that evaluates the programmes, or which discusses the implications of principal training (Zheng, Walker, & Chen, 2013).

### *Analysis of publications*

Within China, some academics argue that local knowledge is inadequate in a number of ways and needs to be further developed, as most research relied heavily on the traditional Chinese style of argument (Walker et al., 2012). Some sources are opinion pieces, descriptive accounts, and other forms of analytical/synthetic review. Many sources on principal training are too descriptive to provide insights on different aspects of the issue (Zheng et al., 2013). Some papers offering personal reflections and experiences, stories, or just illustrations of certain policies, are 'so-called' research papers, even though they were lack a theoretical constituent, practical evidences and logical reasoning (Hui, 2016; Wang, 2020).

The author's review shows that the theoretical and empirical basis for new principal preparation is weak and poorly established in China. The author reviewed articles related to these key words; new principals, new principal training, principal training, principal professionalization, and leadership practice of principals in secondary schools, and published in the past ten years. Searches were conducted through CNKI and Wanfang (two of the largest academic search engines in China). These found that the volume of literature was very small, particularly when compared with the high volume of western literature. The author also searched for English language publications, related to China, through Sage, Springer and Google Scholar, which also identified only a few articles, particularly in respect of newly-appointed principals. Table 2.1 shows the number of publications related to each theme. Most themes have only a small number of publications.

Themes	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
(Chinese/English)	C/E	C/E	C/E	C/E	C/E	C/E
New principals	19/0	17/0	24/0	13/0	10/1	5/0
Principal training	196/0	144/0	137/0	126/0	106/0	36/0
New principal training	4/0	2/0	4/0	6/0	0/0	1/0
Principal professionalisation	26/1	32/1	34/0	23/4	17/3	6/0
Leadership practices of principals in secondary schools	14/0	8/0	15/0	10/3	12/0	8/0

*Table 2.1 Number of Publications on each theme*

The author examined the 10 sources published in 2018, under the theme ‘new principals’, and found that the quality and relevance of these papers remains a problem. These ten pieces of work comprised eight journal articles, one newspaper report, and one postgraduate dissertation. Three of these articles reflect interpretation of western, especially American, experience. Only four of these articles are based on school principals, while the others are focused on university education, and only two of these are evidenced-based, while others relate to experience or concepts.

The number of sources on ‘principal training’ was relatively large, while new principal training received little attention during the last five years, with only seven pieces in total. Two of these were based on western cognition or experience, two were focused on university education, and one was based on personal experience. Only two of these sources were evidenced-based. There were many more articles on ‘principal training’, with more evidence-based work (14 pieces in 2018), and most of the sources related to basic education.

The English language literature is inadequate, particularly in terms of new principals and leadership preparation. The first relevant article on leadership preparation in China was by Wilson and Xue (2013), who investigated the preparation process in

the Fujian province. From 2014, only a few articles were found, none of which related to new headship or leadership preparation. Most of these works related to leadership practice and strategies (Liu et al., 2017), with a main focus on instructional leadership and professional learning communities (Liu & Hallinger, 2018; Qian, Walker, & Yang, 2016).

According to the Statistical Communique of the National Educational Development in 2017, there were approximately 24600 secondary schools in Mainland China, including 13600 normal high schools, 10700 secondary vocational schools and 392 adult high schools. However, research on principal leadership at high school or secondary level is very limited. There were only 18 publications on principal leadership at secondary school level, and only one of these was about high school principal leadership. Principalship, as one of the most important factors influencing school development and student outcomes, deserves more attention, research and publications, thus providing the warrant for the author's research.

### **Definitions of Principalship**

The international literature provides clear evidence of a meaningful connection between effective leadership and the improvement of student learning (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012; Teng, 2020). It indicates that principals hold responsibility for the development of their schools, and in supporting student achievement, both directly and indirectly (Hallinger & Hosseingholizadeh, 2019; Klein & Schanenber, 2020; Teng, 2020). Such evidence demonstrates that instructional leadership, and the professional development of principals, enhances teaching and learning in schools (Graczewski, Knudson, & Holtzman, 2009).

There is a consensus that quality leaders are those who 'understand teaching and learning; who are able to support their school staff, student bodies, and school communities; and who are willing to question structures and norms in their efforts

to meet the needs of those they lead' (Young & Crow, 2016). In China, principalship is also regarded as important in contributing to school development and student performance, particularly for underperforming schools (Li, 2017; Zhang & Hu, 2018). Similarly, through international literature, the role of the principal has been identified as the major source of school leadership and a key factor in achieving school change and development (Barber, Whelan, & M., 2010; Liu et al., 2017). Based on both international and domestic literature, five major functions of principals in schools were identified; setting school goals, managing the school, leading teaching and learning, establishing a supportive school environment, and developing teachers (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Shen & Sun, 2014).

#### Setting school vision and goals

Vision refers to future orientations, and usually appears to challenge and inspire people to embrace new ambitious and aspirations (Kantabutra, 2005, 2010). Goal-setting typically refers to a more narrowly definition of aims (Hallinger & Lu, 2013). Educational policy-makers around the world request principals and school leaders to virtualize their strategic and development planning processes of schools (Davies, Ellison, & Bowring-Carr, 2005; Reynolds, Stringfield, & Schaffer, 2006). Researchers even point out that it is hard to find a school without a vision declaration and sets of measurable goals, targets and tasks (Hallinger & Lu, 2013). Goal-setting is widely regarded as a core leadership practice (Kwan, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2006; Leithwood et al., 2008), which has been found to be one of the most powerful, but indirect, ways through which principals could contribute to student learning and outcomes (Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Robinson et al., 2008).

As well as setting vision and goals, scholars further stress the significance of sharing visions between leaders and followers (Hallinger & Heck, 2002). Sharing a vision, encourages followers to emotionally commit themselves to the organisation, which could further boost their progress and growth (Nanus, 1992). Scholars also stress the significance and advantages of having an effective leadership team to create a shared purpose and also to improve decision-making process (Bush & Glover, 2015; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009). In educational settings, these consensuses are transferred as transformational leadership, which requires for higher levels of teacher commitment, organisational efforts and student learning (Huffman, 2003; Kwan, 2020).

Researchers also point out that transforming 'visions of change or actions' into practice which demonstrates a central and challenging task of school principals (Huffman, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2008). In other words, it is necessary that leaders translate their beliefs into stimulating conceptual frameworks that echo with members of the school community and lead to actions and changes (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Ford, et al., 2020). Researchers also note that collaboration and participation of staff and teachers is the key for fulfilling these targets and moving the school forward (Carter, 2012; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

### Managing the school

The significance of principals' managerial role is through how they affect school effectiveness and student outcomes indirectly through certain leadership actions, such as establishing a safe and orderly environment for students, coordinating teaching, learning and curriculum (Marks & Printy, 2003), strategic resources (V. M. J. Robinson et al., 2008) and monitoring students' learning outcomes (Tiedan Huang, Hochbein, & Simons, 2020). The literature identifies six main managerial activities: administration; organisation management; day-to-day instruction; instruction programmes; internal relations; and external relations.

Despite the significance of instructional leadership, in reality, principals usually spent more time on managerial and administrative tasks. Horng, Klasik and Loeb (2010) found that principals, from large urban school districts, spend much of their time on student services, managing budgets and dealing with students' discipline issues (Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 2010). Similarly, Huang, Hochbein and Simon's study of American middle school principals (2020), indicated that principals regarded ensuring a well-organised environment, and establishing goals/expectations, as top priorities for school job, which left a limited time to moderate effects on student academic achievement (Huang et al., 2020).

In centralised systems, such as China and Thailand, principals were more likely to be regarded as a manager, rather than a leader, of the school. For example, Lee and Hallinger's (2014) study of Thailand confirms the difficulty of changing the principal's role emphasis from a managerial one to an instructional one as a highly centralised system that gives principals little authority for commencing policies (Lee & Hallinger, 2012). Accordingly, scholars indicated that it is necessary for principals to know how to share, delegate and distribute their leadership, in order to participate in high-impact instructional leadership practices (Carolyn & Seann, 2016; Gronn, 2009; Harris, 2013).

### Leading teaching and learning

The international literature provides clear evidence indicating a recognizable connection between effective leadership and the growth of student learning (Antoniou & Lu, 2018; Catano & Stronge, 2012). This evidence demonstrates that, when principals practicing their instructional leadership, or when their professional knowledge on instructional growing, it could be beneficial to teaching and learning in schools (Graczewski et al., 2009). Strong evidence also indicates that principals hold the major responsibility for the success or failure of their schools, and also in

supporting student achievement, through both direct and indirect ways (Hallinger & Heck, 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Teng, 2020).

Teachers are regarded as the most influential school-related factor in student achievement (Fryer, 2011; Hallinger & Liu, 2016), and the principal is the second most significant element (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Robinson et al., 2008). Robinson's (2007) meta-analysis showed that instructional leaders, who are focused on teachers and instructions, demonstrate a huge impact on improving students' outcomes (Robinson, 2007). As instructional leaders, principals impact teachers' teaching and students' learning through indirect ways, such as establishing school visions, enhancing teachers' instructional pedagogy, shaping school content and curriculum, and creating school culture (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016). A principal's instructional leadership practices could add on three to four times more influence on student learning than other leadership activities (Robinson et al., 2008).

Much research also suggests that successful school leadership emphasizes upon content and curriculum, instruction and pedagogy, learning processes, as well as staff motivation and satisfaction, and their capacity to develop (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; K Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010). Although there are numerous definitions, it is evident that instructional leadership focuses on the principal's behaviour in the areas of classroom supervision (Sally J. Zepeda, Lanoue, Price, & Jimenez, 2014), teacher development (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010), instructional support and curriculum establishment (Graczewski et al., 2009; Hallinger & Hosseingholizadeh, 2019), and how these factors affect student performance (Antoniou & Lu, 2018).

### School manager or instructional leader

Instructional leadership and management often stood opposite at the ends of a scale, usually positioned in tensions with each other. Principals are expected to be excellent

instructional leaders, to boost the development of the whole organization, while also being required to spend more time on school management. However, many principals find it challenging to keep a balance between their expectations as an instructional leader and effective managerial position, while continue to struggle between managerial stuff and instructional leadership activities (Huang et al., 2020).

Instructional leadership and management are, actually, interrelated components to each other in school leadership field (Qian et al., 2016). The ultimate goal of education is to boost students' performance, it is important to find a balance between managerial skills and instructional requirements, to assist teaching and learning as a whole (Huang et al., 2020). Some authors suggest that better management skills – which include the ability to set reasonable goals, monitor school progress, and remaining well-organized (Claessens, et al., 2007) - can lead to more positive personal and organizational outcomes, such as reduced job pressures and increased organizational outcomes (Jex & Elacqua, 1999).

There is an assumption that, within growing managerial effectiveness, principals are able to concentrate more on instructional work. The effectiveness of instructional leadership is equally important; particularly as not all activities by principals in classrooms could result in positive results. Instead, time spent on evaluating and coaching teachers is usually associated with higher school improvement (Grissom, Mitani, & Woo, 2019). Crowther et al. (2002) noted that instructional activities and management practices are not that contradiction, they further suggested that the optimum approach to leadership is the integration of management and instructional leadership (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002).

### Supporting teachers' professional learning

Schools are expected to 'be cultured in ways that go beyond achieving task efficiency and productivity' (Chen and Lee, 2008: 18). Principals influence student learning

through the way they shape the culture of a school, notably including how and why teachers teach (Camburn, Spillane, & Sebastian, 2010; Seashore-Louis et al, 2010). Teacher professional learning has been conceptualized in a variety of ways including pedagogical development, peer learning, group coaching, and professional learning communities (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Researchers stress that professional learning for teachers should include both externally provided support and job-embedded activities (Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Andree, 2009), as well as both subject knowledge and pedagogical methods (Chen, 2011). Further, these learning and support experiences should be continuous and sustained (Vescio et al., 2008), as the professional development of teachers has been linked not only to school improvement, but also to students' performance (Hattie, 2009).

The significance of teachers' professional learning in securing better outcomes for students is widely acknowledged and accepted. There are evidences about how teacher practices could largely affect student learning and performance (Hattie, 2009; Kenneth Leithwood & Azah, 2016). Meanwhile, professional learning practices also contribute greatly to teacher teaching and instruction (Timperley et al, 2007). Louis et al. (2010:37) claim that effective principal leadership strengthens teacher professional learning, which, in turn, 'directly responsible for the learning of students (Louis, Dretzke, & K, 2010). Liebman et al (2005) underscore five elements of teacher professional learning which are essential for school improvement, namely shared norms and values, reflective dialogue, deprivatization practice, focus on student learning, and collaboration (Liebman, Maldonado, & Lacey, 2005). Further, Australian researchers discovered that principal leadership demonstrated to be significant in establishing a positive staff culture, through appraisal and recognition, participative decision-making and professional growth (Morris et al., 2020).

However, according to Qian et al (2017), professional learning communities are still under researched by Chinese researchers. Several authors also found that Chinese principals tend to pay more attention to outcomes or performance, rather than to

individual development (Chu, 2013; Liu, 2019; Yang, 2007). Walker et al. (2012) also point out that Chinese principals appear more inclined to rely on hierarchical authority or power rather than professional power to lead their schools and teachers (Walker et al., 2012).

### Establishing professional learning communities

Socio-cultural theory suggests that learning occurs through interaction with others (especially with more skilful others), as well as the circumstances or culture in which they are located (Leithwood, 2018; Rogoff, Callanan, Gutierrez, & Erickson, 2016). By culture, we mean 'the stable, underlying social meanings that shape beliefs and behavior over time' (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Professional learning communities have spread quickly in many countries and contexts, as they are shown to have a positive impact on school development, teacher improvement and students' learning achievements (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Kruse & Johnson, 2017). Similarly, in China, professional learning communities are institutionalised at the national, provincial, county, district and school levels (Paine & Fang, 2006; Wang & Paine, 2003). For example, an important organisational goal is harmony (Zhang et al., 2008), which is in accordance with the expectations of Chinese society. Further, from political levels to administrative levels, the culture of 'harmony' has been stressed all around China. Many principals put 'harmony' at the centre of school culture construction, from inner culture to outer construction.

Transactional and transformational leadership models suggest that leaders' impact on student outcomes through managing interpersonal relationships and shaping school contexts (K Leithwood & Sun, 2012). More specifically, these models indicate that successful school leadership focuses both upon managing instructional programmes, and upon broader staff stimulation and their capacity to development (Hallinger & Heck, 2002; K Leithwood & Day, 2008; K Leithwood et al., 2010). Darling-Hammond and her colleagues have written about the significance of the principal in

establishing supportive environments for teachers' professional development (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Speck (1999) adds that 'the essence of principalship is creating a collaborative school where learning really matters, and the community of learners cares deeply about each student's achievement' (p. 5) (Speck, 1999). Numerous Chinese studies also indicated that principals in China influence on students' performance and teachers' efficacy through instruction organisations and professional learning communities of the school contexts (Liu & Hallinger, 2018; Zheng et al., 2017).

### Responsiveness to the government

There is strong evidence that, superintendents shoulder the main responsibilities in core values about teaching and learning under school contexts and provide the support necessary to reach school and system-wide improvement targets, student achievement can increase (Honig, 2012; Honig et al., 2010). Schools are expected to 'be cultured in ways that go beyond achieving task efficiency and productivity' (Chen and Lee, 2008: 18). For example, an important organisational goal in China is harmony (Zhang et al., 2008), which is in accordance with the expectations of the Chinese society. The administration and the Party organization are connected, so that principals are under the management, supervision and evaluation of both the Party and the LEAs.

Similarly, international literature, even in decentralized countries, reveals that principals faced increased levels of accountability at the local, state and federal levels (Clifford & Ross, 2011; Norman, 2004; Zepeda, Bengtson, & Parylo, 2012), for example, 'superintendents communicate their beliefs about what is important educationally and the roles they expect their principals to fulfill' (Spanneut & Ford, 2008). One of the many leadership responsibilities of the superintendent is to evaluate how principals lead school improvement and also how they support

teaching and learning in schools (Honig, 2013; Normore, 2005, 2010). This also indicates that it is principals' responsibility to discern sound relationships with their superintendent or district leaders, which has been shown to have a significant impact on school development (Ford, et al., 2020).

### Developing interpersonal competence

The notion of developing interpersonal relationships is consistent with Chinese collectivist values as, according to Chinese tradition, values, and perceptions, there is an urgent need for both sides to better understand each other. These Chinese researchers further found that interpersonal competence greatly shaped the leadership model in China. Chinese scholars, drawing on life history study, revealed that principals had to deal with internal and external relationships, including relationships with their peers, the Party, government organisations, local community, students, parents, and private enterprises (Gallo, 2008; S. Hu, 2015; Pittinsky & Zhu, 2005). These relationships created constraints and dilemmas that jeopardised the principals' effective running of their schools (Lv, 2002; Yu, Guan, & Liu, 2021).

The heightened importance of school leadership has expanded to examine the relationship of the superintendent and central office personnel to student achievement (Honig et al., 2010; LeChasseur, Donaldson, & Landa, 2019). Numerous studies in China show that supporting the dominant political ideology is an important requirement for school principals (An, 2006; Hu, 2007; Jia, Wang, & Chu, 2012). To a certain degree, principals worked as 'governmental officials' or a 'government megaphone', whose priority is to implement educational policies and government intentions (Chen, 2007; Lin, 2007; Zhu, 2008). Because of this, a principal's ability to build and maintain *guanxi* (good relationships) with these authorities is regarded vitally important (Ryan, Duan, & Merry, 1998).

Within the internal context, schools are also structured hierarchically in ways which very similar to government administrations (Wang, 2007). Leadership was normally assumed to be the absolute authority and responsibility of principals (Wang, 2007; Wang, 2004), who mostly preferred directive or top-down styles (Lu, 2007). Democratic leadership practices could hardly be applied, as subordinates usually left 'no debate, no argument'; the principal selects who would speak and ballots were held in relation to options put forward' (Ryan et al., 1998). Wong's (2006) study in Shanghai supported this assertion, as the principal holds the decisive authority in schools, while staff behaved in a deferential manner towards this authority (Wong, 2006).

#### Paternalistic principalship in China

As mentioned in chapter one, principals are regarded more as an administrator of the Party unit, rather than a school leader or manager, which requires the principals to transport and implement the voices and intentions from the government. In this way, the roots of traditional value impact on, and shape, the leadership styles in China, with collective values and Confucian ideologies.

One widely practiced leadership style among administrative and business leaders in Confucian heritage societies is paternalistic leadership (J. L. Farh & Cheng, 2000; Tan & Dimmock, 2014). In many organisations, the head is regarded as a father character who is expected to provide guidance, protection and nurtur for staff. This parental style of leadership also requires that the leader should be a wise person with superior knowledge and capacity, who are able to lead his/her subordinates (Lau, 2012). Farh and Cheng (2000) use a three-dimensional model to describe paternalistic leadership in the Chinese societies. The dimensions are authoritarianism, benevolence and moral leadership. Authoritarianism refers to the leaders' demand for unconditional obedience from subordinates (Farh et al., 2008). Benevolence refers to a leaders' 'individualised, holistic concern for subordinates'

personal and familial well-being' (Farhet al., 2008: 173). Moral leadership involves leaders' acting selflessly and leading by role models (Farh et al., 2008). Thus, a central theme of Chinese leadership philosophies is that leaders assume a 'father figure' image, who is responsible for staffs' maintenance, development and well-being (Chen and Lee, 2008).

Second, the ideal of harmony has also been deeply rooted in Chinese culture and is tightly associated with Chinese leadership styles. The major Chinese traditions – Confucian, Taoist, Legalist, and Buddhist – all valued harmony, in the general sense of getting along as an ultimate value. Westwood (1997) clarified that harmony is the basic requirement for any leadership situation in the Chinese context (Westwood, 1997). Researchers further developed this theory by defining the nature and content of harmony in China, and pointed out that equality, order, hierarchy, loyalty and obedience were basic elements for harmony situations (Lau, 2012). In the Asian culture, harmony is viewed significantly important for both internal management and external relationships, and also regarded as functional managerial tools for organisations (Gallo, 2008). Internally, this notion helps organizations to avoid conflict and maintain congruous contexts. Externally, it helps them to establish harmonious environments that are advantageous to the organisation. The philosophy of harmony has been translated as keeping harmonious interpersonal relationships, being kind to others (Chou, Cheng, & Jen, 2005), avoiding conflicts with others, and smooth cooperation with others (Farh et al., 2008) in the practice of management.

In summary, principals' impact on school development and students' performance in direct and indirect ways, and this also makes principals' leadership the major factor for school improvement. First, principals take the lead in the school, which requires them to set the vision and reasonable targets for future development of the school. Second, principals are expected to manage the schools on a day-to-day basis, including security of the environment, organizational management, dealing with

relationships and issuing instructions. Third, principals are also the instructional leaders of the school, and impact on instructional programmes directly and indirectly. Further, principals have an increasing obligation to establish professional learning communities for both teachers and students, which also aim at improving learning outcomes. Specifically, this section has situated leadership definitions within Chinese culture, and clarified how Confucian ideologies and other traditions have shaped the leadership role in China. Overall, the principal's job is defined as a specific and professional position, which requires professional knowledge and skills to support the needs of a demanding and changing school environment. The next section discusses the arguments for developing school leaders through professional programmes.

### **The Importance of Developing School Leaders**

The development of school leaders has grown in importance in the 21st century, for several reasons, as discussed below.

#### Complexity of the principal role

As discussed above, principals enact different roles in school development, and most of their roles are very significant for school development and student outcomes. Principals' roles have been entitled with more responsibilities and expectations, ranging from instructional leader to budget manager to policy implementer, decision maker, staff mediator and mentor. As well as the heavy workload of principals, researchers also stressed the complexity of leadership roles. Peterson and Cosner (2005, p. 29) stated that 'principals' daily work is characterized by brevity, variety, fragmentation, complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty' (Peterson & Cosner, 2005). Other researchers agree that principals in the twenty-first century lead very different schools from those of previous generations (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Scott & Webber, 2008). School contexts are more complex, change is constant and

increasingly rapid, public accountability is more demanding (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006).

Moreover, principalship is considered to be the primary driver of organizational improvement efforts at school level (Bryk, et al., 2010). An increasing number of empirical sources demonstrate that principal leadership is important for school effectiveness, including in England (Bush & Jackson, 2002), the US (Hopkins, Ainscow, & West, 1994) and Singapore (Kwang, 2008). For example, England's former National College for School Leadership (NCSL: 2005) states that effective principal leadership plays the pivotal role in securing high quality provision, as it is a key to both continuous improvement and major system transformation in schools.

Research has also consistently demonstrated that school principals are powerful players who effect school improvement and bring about changes (Wang, 2019). This significant impact of principals on quality education has been further supported by substantial empirical research over the last 15 years (Leithwood et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2008). Researchers point out that providing coherent and sustainable guidance for principals on school development encourages positive relationships with parents and communities, reinforces professional capacity, guides instructional ability and nurtures a student-oriented learning environment, which further contribute to students' learning achievement (Bryk et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2010). Due to the significance and complexity of leadership roles, leadership preparation and development are very important for effective leadership practice, particularly for new principals.

### Leadership preparation makes a difference

Due to the complex and demanding requirements of principal roles, there is a broad international consensus among policy-makers that the capacity of those who aspire to become a principal need to be developed (Cowie & Crawford, 2007; Ford et al.,

2020; LeChasseur, et al., 2019). Hence, systems around the world take seriously the need to develop school leaders (Zhang & Brundrett, 2010). For example, in Singapore, there has been a national programme - Leaders in Education, since 2001 (Tan & Dimmock, 2014). In England, the former NCSL established a higher profile for school leadership and leadership preparation. Bush's evaluation on programme for early headship in England shows significant evidence of its impact on the participants. The survey results demonstrate that principals are benefiting in both professional development and interpersonal skills (Bush, 2013).

Both formal and informal types of leadership development are greatly affected by the role of current principals (Kelly & Saunders, 2010; MacBeath, 2011). The widening expectations of the principal's role demands broad skills and knowledge for school management (Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). However, principals are experiencing pressures from different groups of communities, such as parents, local government and the wider public, which requires them to be more skilled in communicating and collaborating (Bush, 2008). Principals are expected to expand their responsibilities for leading schools and collaborate with the wider community. Thus, principals in the 21st century need to be equipped with knowledge and skills on managerial, instructional and collaborative leadership (Grissom et al., 2019; Huber, 2004).

Walker, Qian and Chen (2007) state that leader development is crucial to successful leadership. Within this context, many countries and districts have listed preparing effective school leaders as their top priority, terms of placing it at the core of many educational reform agendas (Bryant, Walker, & Lee, 2012) and has been the subject of much research. Researchers developed a consensus on leadership preparation and development programmes, as these programmes could significantly contribute to candidates' readiness and ability to lead, with rigorous recruitment, research-based content, curricular coherence, field-based internship, problem-based learning strategies, coherence mentoring, and university-district partnership (Davies et al.,

2005). Research also identified positive linkages between programme features and principals' leadership performance (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, & Orr, 2010; Orphanos & Orr, 2013; Orr & Orphanos, 2011).

### **Different Terminology for Developing Leaders**

The impetus for the international recognition of the need to develop school leaders is the contested conception that principal leadership makes a difference to effectiveness, measured in terms of higher standards and provision. This section discusses different ways of developing leaders and considers differences in the terms used to describe provision; leadership preparation, leadership training, leadership development and leadership learning.

#### Leadership preparation

The school leader's world is created by constantly changing external pressures, as well as the need to respond to continuous internal demands, both of which bring multiple liabilities (Cosner, et al., 2015; Ehrich, et al, 2015). Leadership preparation refers to a pre-service activity, which focuses on initial preparation for aspiring principals. Hence, initial principal preparation and training of school principals tends to differ considerably across countries throughout the world. Some programmes are well-established, for example in Singapore and the US, while others are more recent, such as those in England and South Africa (Beck, 2018; Moorosi & Bush, 2020).

Bush (2008) describes leadership preparation as a moral obligation, which allows professionals to move from classroom instruction to school leadership. Thus, the process of developing principals involves not only completing professional training but also engaging in personal transformation (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003b). Daresh and Male's study (2000), with first-year principals in England and the USA, identifies the 'culture shock' of moving into headship for the first time. Reeves and Forde (2004: 9)

found that, through the preparation process, Scottish principals develop their new identity as the new 'head', which provides them 'a means of entry into a particular social status' (Reeves & Forde, 2004).

There is a view that systematic preparation, rather than inadvertent experience, is more likely to produce effective leaders (Avolio, 2005; Bush, 2008). Empirical evidence demonstrates that leadership preparation programmes can stimulate changes in aspiring principals' educational orientation, perspectives, attitudes and skills (Matthews & Crow, 2003; Okoko, 2020), all of which are essential to effective leadership practice. For example, Cowie and Crawford's (2007) study on Scotland's new principals demonstrates that the influence of leadership preparation does not directly link to specific skills or knowledge, but, more importantly, to a process that helps to establish new leaders' identity as a school principal (Cowie & Crawford, 2007).

### Leadership training

Leadership training is defined as a way of delivering individual-based knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with formal leadership roles, when developing principals' leadership, which relates tightly to the concepts of *human capital* (Day et al., 2016). The core value of leadership training is the power of change, which focuses on changes in the knowledge, attitude, skills and performance of trainees. In the US, Levine (2005) points out that training for school leadership needs to be 'fit for purpose' because of the profound economic, demographic, technological and global changes that have converted the jobs of school principals (Levine, 2005).

Although leadership training may be delivered through different approaches, leadership training, in many countries and areas, such as Singapore, England, and Canada, usually focuses on delivering a fixed body of knowledge (Bush and Jackson, 2002). For example, in Singapore, the former Diploma in Educational Administration

(DEA) programme for aspiring principals was particularly job-specific, with strong practical orientation and the learning of management theory, which is related directly to school administrative practice (Bush and Chew, 1999). Thus, effective professional training – whether formal or informal – requires the replacement of those traditional approaches, such as course-led workshops, and lectures (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Cosner et al., 2015), to rely more on ‘conditions of trust, openness, risk-taking, problem identification problem solving and goal setting’ (Hansen & Matthews, 2002).

### Leadership development

Leadership development is defined as enlarging the collective capacity of organizational members to participate effectively in leadership roles and process (Gronn, 2009). Day (2001) emphasizes that leadership development focuses on the effectiveness of social capital, which is building interactive relationship among individuals that enhance cooperation and resource exchange in creating organizational value. Hartley and Hinksman (2003) distinguish between ‘human capital’ and ‘social capital’, stressing that the latter gives more emphasis to structure, system, people and social relations (Hartley & Hinksman, 2003). As each school has a unique context, this requires understanding and integration of a particular array of people, policy, process and priority (Norman, 2004).

The notion of leadership development focuses on the interaction between an individual and the social and organizational context, which connects tightly to the effectiveness of leadership enactment in real-world settings (Mertkan, 2011). Thus, there is a need to develop a sound foundation of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills within a more shared and relational approach (Day, 2001). However, there is no single way in which management and leadership capacity can be generated (Burgoyne, Hirsh, & Williams, 2004); rather, there are many different types of

approaches to stimulate leadership ability boost, such as mentoring (Burk, 2012), coaching (NCSL, 2005), and internship (Barnett, Shoho, & Copland, 2010). Moreover, leadership development usually comes as an in-service training, which aims at developing leadership skills and solving real-world problems after the position post (Bush, 2008).

### Leadership learning

Wenger (1998) suggest that leadership learning, through the process of socialization, offers pathways of participation, and creates a sense of leadership learning (Wenger, 1998). Walker and Dimmock (2006) define leadership learning as the 'process, contexts and mechanism within particular courses or programmes', which emphasizes the amalgamation of formal guidance and situating learning in facilitating leadership learning. Thus, 'ongoing evaluation and supervision, and coaching', and 'continuous career-long professional development' (Kelley & Peterson, 2000), are critical strategies to ensure that schools are led by effective leaders.

However, despite formal professional support, leadership learning as a process of informal learning occurs over a considerable period of time, which also implies that it is entwined within a dualist interrelationship of agency and structure (Archer, 2000). Some scholars conceptualize leadership learning as the process in and through which professionals interact with real-world experience they encounter in their workplace (He, 2012; Illeris, 2009). For example, Elmore (2004) discovered that, in the UK, successful leadership learning starts from the inside, with school staff, rather than through external mandates (Elmore, 2004). Research indicates that leadership learning arises from a variety of informal routes, such as group work (Bush & Jackson, 2002), learning communities, and collaborative work within and across schools (Zhang & Brundrett, 2010).

## Overview of four ways of developing leaders

The four terms used to describe how to develop school leaders appear to diverge in terms of their definitions, aims, contents, approaches and functions, but they all serve to explain how school principals are developed.

Leadership preparation comes first, as it is regarded as the initial step into the principalship. It reflects the requirement of national policies, and the diverse context of different nations and areas. It also emphasizes the role transition from teachers (or any other positions) to principals through pre-service training, as well as the qualification procedure towards leadership positions, where this applies. This is followed by leadership training, which emphasizes the specific knowledge, skills and abilities of principalship, targeted at role transformation and personal professional growth, and usually in the form of fixed knowledge content and particular training objectives (Day, 2001).

The third step is leadership development – usually in the form of in-service training. This process of leadership development emphasizes the collective capacity of social capital, where principals are viewed as organizational members (Burgoyne et al., 2004; Bush, 2008). Thus, leadership development is a broad concept, which includes interpersonal skills and capacity of social interaction and team collaboration. Leadership learning is ongoing, as it is an enduring and flexible process, which may start before leadership preparation, and last throughout the career of a principal, and can be delivered through both formal and informal methods, and it be coupled with succession planning (Stoll & Temperley, 2009).

## **Qualifications and Standards**

International evidences demonstrated that leadership preparation, in any kinds of forms, make a difference to principals' leadership behaviours (Gurmu, 2020). And

this also raise the ongoing debate about 'how to prepare' (Bush, 2013), and the British academics further pointed out this further related to the issue on 'prepare for what' (G. M Crow, 2007), which closely connected to requirements and expectations on principalship. Throughout the literature, the author found that principalship was dynamic, contextual and complicated, and in certain countries and area, the definition for principalship was closely related to culture and ideology of the society and also transfer the values and desires of the governing classes (Chu, 2013; Chu & Jia, 2013). Thus, there was no 'one fits for all' principles towards headship, and further there was no universal preparation strategy for principal preparation.

In 2013, the Ministry of Education in China published a policy documents on Standards and Qualifications for Principalship in China, and this is the very first policy that defined the professional principles of Chinese headship. Within the publication of the Standards, principalship in China has been gradually moving from administrative-oriented role to a professional vocation, alongside with the innovation and improvement for leadership preparation (Chu & Jia, 2013). The policy carefully illustrated the basic ethics, fundamental contents, professional requirements and principles for application for principalship in China (see in Table 2.1).

### **Standards and Qualifications for Principalship in China**

#### **Basic Ethics**

- Taking morality as first.
- Educating people as priority.
- Leading professional development for school improvement.
- Establishing capacity as a professional leader.
- Lifelong learning.

#### **Fundamental Content**

- Setting school developing plans.
- Creating learning and cultivating culture.
- Leading teaching and learning.
- Leading professional development of teachers.
- Optimizing internal relationship.
- Adapting to external environment.

#### **Principles for Application**

- Apply to all the principals for nursery and K12 education.
- Principles for principal's selection and management.
- Principles for training organisations when implementing the programmes.
- Principles for principals 'self-evaluation and lifelong development.

Compared to other qualifications for principalship worldwide, such as NPQH (UK), ISLLC (USA), EDB (HK), SQH (Scotland), and Blueprint (Malaysia), the Chinese one demonstrated a shared value with these systems on the emphasis on setting visions, instructional leadership, developing people and school management. Meanwhile, it also bonded to the societal, cultural and political features of Chinese society, as its emphasis on loyalty to the Party, moral leadership, cultivating people, establishing school culture. And these features further shaped the construction and content of leadership preparation in China.

### **Content and Delivery**

According to Kelly and Peterson (2000), effective preparation programmes are characterized by 'significant coherence in curriculum, pedagogy, structure, and

staffing' (2000: p.37) in which the experiential component is viewed as the core, with 'class-delivered curriculum content designed to support and make meaning of the experiential component' (2000: p.37). The following section focuses on the design of principal preparation programmes, in terms of how curriculum is established, how the knowledge is delivered, and who is involved in the process.

## Content

The ongoing debate on 'prepare for what', to develop appropriate school principals, relates tightly to the conception of the principal's role, and it also influences the design of content of principal preparation (Bush, 2013; Lumby, Crow, & Pashiardis, 2008). The US Institute of Educational Leadership (2000) defines three important roles for principals in the 21st century, as instructional leader, community leader, and visionary leader. Bush and Jackson's (2002) study of 'international content' for principal development programmes shows considerable similarities of content design in developing principals' capacity, which could be compatible with leadership roles in the 21st century, which can be regarded as instructional leadership, community skills and visionary capability. Similar findings are evident in other research. These three dimensions are summarized below.

### *Instructional leadership ability*

Instructional leadership gives prominence to issues of learning and teaching, such as monitoring students' outcomes and evaluating teachers' classroom teaching (Heck & Moriyama, 2010; Price, 2012). It is then incumbent upon university principal preparation program faculty to ensure that principal candidates are prepared for this role (Goddard, Bailes, & Kim, 2020; Hallinger & Volante, 2017). However, US principals have continuously expressed that their leadership preparation programmes did not adequately prepare them for this role (Cosner et al., 2015;

Hewitt, Davis, & Lashley, 2014). Principals have contended that their on-the-job experience, rather than their university preparation programme, better prepared them for instructional leadership (Gilliat-Ray, 2011; Service, Dalgic, & Thornton, 2016).

#### *Managerial and communication skills*

These skills include consideration of the main task areas of administration or management, such as human resources, strategic planning and policy analysis (Davies et al., 2005); business management skills of financial and material resources (Cowie & Crawford, 2007); and external relations with parents, local districts and special interest groups (Zheng et al., 2017). This literature suggests that better managerial skills, such as the ability to set reasonable targets, identify priorities, monitor one's own progress, can reduce job stress and avoid conflicts, and lead to more effective time use and ultimately more positive personal and organisational outcomes (Jex & Elacqua, 1999). Accordingly, such a reality calls for pre-service and in-service professional development to sharpen principals' distributed leadership expertise (Zhang, 2013).

#### *Visionary capability*

During the early 1980s, researchers identified a 'clear academic mission' as a hallmark feature of effective schools and instructional principalship (Nanus, 1992). Further, this research profoundly expanded this notion with 'vision' and 'goal setting', as well as how these could be applied as strategic tools for school development (Huffman, 2003; Kantabutra, 2010). Visionary leadership also took a prominent position in the most influential and successful leadership models, such as instructional leadership and transformational leadership, which have been adopted over the past several decades. Indeed, education scholars have asserted that delivering and transforming 'visions of change' into practice represent central tasks

of school principals (K Leithwood et al., 2008).

### Delivery

There is no single way in which management and leadership development creates leadership capacity (Burgoyne et al., 2004). Therefore, the multiple challenges to traditional content-led principal preparation, such as lectures and reports, cannot be countered without empirical evidence about the value of pre-service training (Xue et al., 2020; Young & Crow, 2016). In Singapore, there has been a shift in the national programme for school principals from 'curriculum content' to 'delivery approaches' since 2001 (Kala, 2015). Moreover, a British study on new headship transition also demonstrates that, when compared with formal training, mentoring and coaching opportunities provided by former professional relationships have a significant influence in shaping new heads' thinking (Kelly & Saunders, 2010). These examples demonstrate a widespread shift in the emphasis of leadership development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, from content to process, from 'what to teach' to 'how to deliver' (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009).

### *Lectures*

Formal lectures are common features of leadership preparation, but they have been criticized, by practitioners and researchers, for being out of touch with today's school reality (Hess & Kelly, 2007). Some scholars identified that some high performing countries train school leaders through formal and systematic professional development programmes, such as US, Australia and Singapore, while other countries focus their attention on early detection and capacity development under the school contexts (Barber et al., 2010).

### *Mentoring*

Mentoring is widely applied as an important aspect of leadership development in many countries, such as the US (Piggot-Irvine, 2011), England (Bush, 2013; Zhang & Brundrett, 2010) and Malaysia (Tahir et al., 2015), particularly when preparing future leaders. Typically, mentoring is defined as a person-centred professional relationship that deepens over time (Bush, 2013). It also refers to a process where one person provides individual support and challenge to another professional, with reciprocal effects (Bush, 2013).

Mentoring indicates a process that involves more guidance and support, which emphasizes self-exploration and self-reflection (Walters et al., 2019). During principal preparation, the mentor may be a more experienced person or the process may be one of peer mentoring (Bush, 2013). Scholars further note that, through carefully matching of mentors and mentees, the mentoring process can be reinforced by increasingly person-centred training, which ensures the proper development of the mentees (Stehling, Richert, & Isenhardt, 2016). Bush's (2013) research on British new principals, the researcher showed that a mismatch between leadership styles of practicing and future leaders is often reported as problematic in mentoring relationships (Bush, 2013). In contrast, research by Cunningham and Sherman (2008) demonstrated that the relationships between interns and mentors are facilitated when mentors and mentees hold similar leadership styles (Cunningham & Sherman, 2008).

### *Coaching*

The broader literature distinguishes between two different types of coaching: performance-based coaching which aims at specific skills or practices, and in-depth coaching that focuses on a client's deeper intellectual or psychoanalytical changes and progresses (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005; Huff, Preston, & Goldring,

2013). Robertson (2005) states that coaching involves two people setting and achieving specific professional goals, being open to new learning, and engaging in dialogue for the purpose of improving leadership practice (Robertson, 2005). Bush and Glover (2015) raise similar points by arguing that coaching appears to work best when training is meticulous and with specific targets, enhancingly, which indicated that a careful matching of coach and coachee was the key point for learning process .

However, despite the interest in coaching as a strategy for leadership development for school leaders, little research has examined these coaching strategies and their impact (Goldring, et al, 2008; Huff et al., 2013). Researchers suggests that success in coaching depends on four variables: the task focus of the coaching, the ability and competences of the coach, the skills, attitudes and knowledge of the coachee, and the context or ecology of the school (O'Mahony & Barnett, 2008). Aravena's research in Chile found that in-school coaching can be an effective strategy in promoting leadership learning, and it is also regarded as an important network of professional support for new heads (Aravena, 2018).

### *Internships*

An internship is defined as something that 'engage[s] students in a process of active learning that links work experience with opportunities for critical analysis and reflection' (Barnett et al., 2010). When developing educational leaders, American scholars describe internship often begins with activities with which leadership aspirants are familiar and gradually build toward activities that require increasing amounts of knowledge, skill, and responsibility, moving from simple to complex (Cordeiro & Cunningham, 2013). Several definitions refer to internships as 'experiential', 'active', and 'real world' (Simkins, Close, & Smith, 2009).

Leadership development with a practice orientation, as with internships, is more about helping people to learn from work rather than taking them away from their

work to learn (Gilliat-Ray, 2011). Successful internships develop, expand, and deepen leadership capability for the participants (Cunningham, 2007). Cunningham and Sherman (2008) also point out that the internship provides multiple opportunities for gaining new comprehensions about educational leadership, while making theory-to-practice transitions. Simkins, Close, and Smith's (2009) research shows that, after a shadowing programme within schools, participants positively change their perception towards the role of principals, acquiring a thorough understanding of the complexities of the position and its relevance for student's performance (Simkins et al., 2009). Similar results could also be noted in Crow's (2007), and Earley and Bubb's (2013), research on new leadership preparation (Crow, 2007; Earley & Bubb, 2013).

### **Content and Delivery in China**

Lectures and case studies continue to predominate in training programmes for Chinese principals (Walker, Chen, & Qian, 2008; Zheng et al., 2013). A typical principal training programme in China usually forms of formal lectures and sessions, which included professors sharing management theories, or respected or high-performing practitioners sharing practical strategies for action based on their experience (Walker et al., 2008; Yan & Ehrich, 2009; Zheng et al., 2013). Chinese principals report that their preparation is all too often unconnected to their work roles (Huang et al., 2020; Li & Feng, 2001; Yan & Ehrich, 2009). In response, scholars have proposed alternative strategies to improve the quality of principal training in China (Li & Feng, 2001; Wilson & Xue, 2013). Proposed innovations include school improvement-based training (Feng, 2003), skills-based training (Zhang & Hu, 2018), and problem-based learning (Wilson & Xue, 2013).

## *Content*

The content is essentially top-down and highly controlled through a series of regulations from the MoE, including prescribed topics of training, a stipulated number of hours of training for each topic, and lists of recommended textbooks and training manuals (MoE, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2007, 2008). This has resulted in uneven coverage of knowledge, with overwhelming emphasis on regulations, legal knowledge, Party education, and limited focus on curriculum leadership, teacher professional development, school-community relationships and the application of information technology (Markus, Stefan, & Eveline, 2019). For example, government officials are regularly invited to report on the latest policy developments, and this is considered to be an important part of all programmes (Walker & Qian, 2012). Wang (2014) argues that programme content is often perceived as irrelevant and poorly connected to the tasks of school leadership. For example, Zhu's (2010) research on the knowledge and skills that new principals want to acquire, through a training programme in the Suzhou province, show that that curriculum leadership capacity, teacher motivation, and communication skills, are the most desired (Zhu, 2010).

Although local government providers in China have room to adjust some components to address specific local needs, this discretion is restricted by required reform-linked knowledge and political norms, and relatively standardized materials (Walker & Qian, 2012). There has also been an absence of leadership issues related to diversity, poverty, ethnicity, special educational needs and social justice, which lead to a slow process of organizational socialization of new principals (T Huang & Wiseman, 2011).

Moreover, Hu (2013) argues that curriculum content is not differentiated in terms of the different career stages of the participating principals and different training needs (Hu, 2013). This may be because most principal training programmes in China have a mix of participants, including aspiring principals, new principals and experienced

principals. Although some training programmes are aimed at a certain group of principals, the topics are often broad-spectrum themes, such as the school environment, and the latest policy analysis (Xue et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2013). As a result, programmes tend to concentrate on political issues, what is seen as contemporary management theory, and technical skills.

### *Delivery*

Just as East Asian teachers have developed culturally adaptive ways of large-class teacher-centred teaching, most leader development programmes, particularly those adopted in China, are built around lecturing and textbook learning (A Walker & Qian, 2012). This is particularly so in China where formal lecturing is used overwhelmingly, although often in concert with visits to well-known, high-performing schools. Wu's (2003) research, with 49 organizations in the *Guangxi* Province, including both teachers and principals, found that most (73.5%) of the training programmes are conducted by formal lecturing, within more than half (55.7%) of the principals regarding this approach as ineffective. Wu (2003) also showed that internships (52.1%), case study (51.1%), and research (38.9%), were regarded as the most appropriate approaches by the participants, while formal lectures were supported by only a small minority (19.4%). YU (2018) add that conventional leadership preparation is too theory-oriented to reflect school reality or to provide practical help for people preparing for administrative roles in changing schools (Yu, 2018).

However, in recent years, some scholars have noticed the importance of leadership practice in school contexts, and have begun to look for new approaches to boost new principals' leadership growth (Wang, 2006). For example, Yang (2007) suggested that, due to the diversity of training objectives in principal training, there is a requirement for a multiple-level strategy in training programmes (Yang, 2007). Zhang and Hu (2018) discuss 'systematically-designed and innovative-created' principal

development modes in China, with various approaches; mentoring, problem-based learning, case study, and internship (Zhang & Hu, 2018). Some districts have started to introduce new approaches and strategies in leadership preparation programmes. For example, in three provinces in northeast China (Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning), problem-based learning has been applied in principal preparation programmes to enhance new principals' management skills, through peer coaching, group discussion and experiential learning.

## **Principal Selection and Recruitment**

### Talent pool

Different countries and areas shape their talent pool for school leadership in different ways. For example, Singapore selects its principal candidates through the mandatory training programme – Leaders in Education (Bush, 2002). In England, there was a succession plan for leadership development, which is applied to enable those with actual or potential leadership talent to be systematically developed and enter the pool of talent, so that leadership positions can be addressed from within the school context (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009), but this is less evident following the demise of the NCSL (Bush, 2013). Further, British researchers further illustrated that current access for school leaders to principalship demonstrated to be fragmented, which could hardly provide inclusive and sustainable opportunities for succession of school leadership (Cliffe, Fuller, & Moorosi, 2018).

However, it appears that when teachers have more understanding about the propositions and responsibilities of the principal position, they may be less willing to apply (Al-Omari & Wuzynani, 2013). MacBeath (2011) shows that only 8% of teachers desire to apply for a principalship in Scotland. Barty et al. (2005) say that, while around 30% of the teachers in Australia desire to apply for a principalship, only a few of them actually do so. Despite the evidence about the importance of the

principal's role, there is a global tendency that fewer people would like to apply for this position. Since then, studies in different countries have also evidenced a scarcity of candidates interested in assuming the principalship (D'Arbon, Duignan and Duncan, 2002; Gaus, 2011).

Partly because of a potential, or actual, shortage of teachers' interests for principal positions, many countries have implemented national preparation programmes, not only aiming to improve school leaders' professional quality, but also to attract more people to get into the 'pool' (Bush, 2011). While leadership training has been identified as a major opportunity for increasing interest in administrative positions, the evidence is not cohort to its results. While some studies have identified that preparation and support lead to an increase in the participation of teachers in the principalship, others offer a different picture. For example, the English NCSL (2010) shows an increase in the interest of teachers applying for a principalship after their participation in a long preparation programme. However, MacBeath (2011), in Scotland, and D'Arbon, Duignan, and Duncan (2002), in Australia, indicate that teachers highly prepared in leadership are often not interested in becoming principals.

### Accreditation process

There is a broad international consensus among policy-makers that the capacity of those who aspire to become a principal needs to be developed (Cowie & Crawford, 2007). In some countries and areas, formal preparation programmes are directly connected to the accreditation of new principals, for example in the US (Huber, 2004), Hong Kong (Cheung & Walker, 2006), and Singapore (Bush & Chew, 1999). In Hong Kong, the Certification for Principalship (CFP) is established as a mandatory entry requirement for principals, and a compulsory 30 hours training programme for potential heads is also provided (Bush & Jackson, 2002; Walker et al., 2013). However, elsewhere, for example in Sweden, there is no requirement for formal accreditation

(Bush & Jackson, 2002).

As well as the accreditation process, some other elements and requirements may also be taken into consideration in making leadership appointments (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015). For example, in the US, there is a comprehensive system for selection and recruitment, including teaching experience, certificates, degrees, and internships. Principals must have at least three years of teaching experience, a university master's degree, and must have completed mandated programmes of study leading to a license or certificate to serve as school principals in their respective states (McCarthy & Forsyth, 2009). According to the Education Commission of the States (2017), most state requirements for the principal's license include some form of educational experience (47 states), such as mentor and internships, and a minimum of a master's degree (45 states). Moreover, every state also requires aspiring school principals to complete a brief internship in the field of administration prior to accepting the state's approval to practice (Huber, 2004).

### **Selection and Recruitment in China**

From 2001, the MoE has published a series of policies and regulations aimed at establishing a suitable system for principal selection and recruitment. Within the national policy, different area and districts issue their own regulations on the selection and recruitment of new principals (Sun, 2007). However, scholars argue that principal selection and recruitment in China remains incomplete and unsophisticated, especially when compared with western countries (Wilson and Xue, 2013). Some claim that the employment system of principals tends to be like an 'appointment process' rather than a 'recruitment process', as the Chinese principal preparation usually follows the sequence of 'appointment –training - position' (Lo et al., 2010). In Sun's (2007) study on the strategy of principal employment of 58 secondary school principals in China, 74% of the sampled principals were directly appointed by the administration, while only 10% were recruited. As a result,

leadership preparation programmes are mainly targeted at those who are already principals or who are already appointed to become a principal, which means that the selection and recruitment process is not well connected to the principal training system (Lo et al., 2010).

Becoming a principal in China requires formal certification. Although policies have clarified the standards and qualifications required for headship recruitment and selection, such as a degree, teaching experience and relevant previous positions, other immeasurable factors are more important in principal recruitment, for example, management experience, morality and educational vision (MoE, 2002; Sun, 2007). Although these factors demonstrate an emphasis on leadership ability and management skills, due to the incompleteness of the recruitment system and informal assessment process, it is questionable in terms of the fairness and effectiveness of selection and recruitment. In Sun's (2007) study on principal employment strategy, 31% of the principals state that the process of recruitment lacks justice and sound evidence, as the evaluation factors are immeasurable, and the selection process is concealed from the public. According to the policy documents, the final assessment for the formal certificate is to write a thesis on principalship (MoE, 1999), which is too limited to evaluate the principal's professional growth during the preparation programmes. Sun (2007) adds that a formal certificate is the least influential factor in principal selection and recruitment.

### **Socialisation**

Duke (1987: 261) points out that 'becoming a school leader is an ongoing process of socialization', since school principals do not emerge solely from training programmes (Duke, 1987). Ribbins (1999: 82) explains that the stages taken by principals are 'Formation, Accession, Incumbency and Moving on' (Ribbins, 1999). In the formation process, future heads are socialised into deep-rooted norms and values by the action and interaction of key agencies, which shapes the kinds of people prospective heads

become. Following formation, candidates gain access to their chosen career as a principal. Incumbency marks the period of principalship and runs from the time a principal is first appointed to headship until he/she departs. Northern American research (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003b; Crow & Whiteman, 2016) also demonstrates that the development of principals often focuses on socialization processes, which may be divided into personal, professional and organizational socialization. Professional and organisational socialisation needs emotional intelligence as well as leadership capacities (Cheung & Walker, 2006; Zhang, 2013). and any uncertainty in these areas, which have such high-stakes accountability, can cause significant stress for the new heads (Celoria & Roberson, 2015).

### Personal socialization

Personal socialization is how we perceive ourselves in relation to specific context and roles in life and work (Jenkins, 2004). For beginning principals, personal socialization highlights the need to understand the central role of socialization processes as teachers move into and through their principalship. This transition usually involves the gradual accumulation of leadership responsibilities, linked to a reduction in the teaching role (Bush, 2008). Weindling (1999) also points out that personal conceptions of headship, available role models, and managerial and leadership experience prior to appointment, especially those serving as a deputy or vice head, were factors influencing the process of preparation (Weindling, 1999).

Holquist (1990) notes that personal identity may be formed and re-formed through the socialization process, and by diverse situations. Similar to Ribbins' (1999) perspective on formation, Holquist (1990) stresses that personal socialization is the production of both structure and agency, and the interplay between them, and it may shift and change over time (Holquist, 1990).

Weindling and Earley (1987)'s longitudinal study of head teachers in England and Wales showed that school heads go through six transitional stages; preparation prior to headship; entry and encounter; taking hold; reshaping; refinement; consolidation; plateau (Weindling, 1999). The model is offered to show how principals understand the likely phases they will experience during headship, however, the particular circumstances in each school make it unique (Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). Parkay and Hall (1992) also suggest that heads may move with different paces and speeds, depending on their preferences and the situations they face when appointed (Parkay & Hall, 1992).

Earley et al. (2011) found that only 17 per cent of new headteachers thought that they were 'very prepared' for headship, with nearly one-in-ten indicating that they were 'not prepared at all' (Earley et al., 2011). Only a small proportion (15 per cent) of the new heads responding to their survey rated themselves as well prepared for headships, whilst 16 per cent rated themselves as poorly or less than adequately prepared (Weindling & Earley, 1995). Chinese scholars mentioned two aspects of 'transformation' from a teacher to a qualified principal: first, to transform from 'academic professional' to 'instructional professional', then from 'instructional professional' to 'leadership professional' (Wang, Song, & Wang, 2020).

### Professional socialization

Through professional socialization processes, principals internalize what it means to be a principal, and are likely to see beyond the boundaries of their school settings (Parkay et al., 1992). Professional socialization is a process of developing expertise through course learning, experience and reflection (Heck, 2003). In 2013, the Ministry of Education published Standards (2013) for the professional practice of principals, like other qualifications and standards around the world, China should have its own standards for principals (Hu, 2013), which further indicated on the job description, evaluation and expectations of principalship in China (Chu, 2007).

Course-led educational programme is one of the traditional approaches utilized to deliver theoretical based knowledge to new principals, which usually includes courses derived from management science and industrial psychology, e.g. finance, law, leadership and organizational theory (Bush & Jackson, 2002; Crow & Grogan, 2005). Learning through experience is widely applied in the US, as university-based preparation programmes include a field component, typically in the form of an internship (Barnett et al., 2010; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004). The process may also include mentoring or coaching, under the supervision of both the school district administrator and a college instructor. This aims at providing support for aspiring and practicing leaders (O'Mahony & Barnett, 2008).

Crow (2006) identifies the increasing changes in knowledge, technology, and the demographics of American society. He stresses that, in order to be compatible with the complexity of society, the knowledge, skills and dispositions during professional socialization should reflect the dynamic and changing situations (Crow, 2006). Similarly, Dinham et al. (2013) found that the ongoing challenges for Australian schools are the sheer diversity of the contexts, in terms of size, location, socio-economic status, and language background. They add that school leadership is a vital factor in stimulating school effectiveness, teacher quality and student achievement.

### Organizational socialisation

Whilst professional socialization is focused on equipping the conceptions and skills of the role for newcomers, organizational socialization is focused on making these newcomers effective organizational members (Crow, 2006). Organizational socialization processes come strongly to the fore as the organization learns to adapt to the leaders, but also the leader learns to adapt to the organization (Stevenson, 2006). Weindling (1999) offers a three-stage model to explain the organizational socialization of principals:

- Encounter, anticipation, confrontation;
- Adjustment, accommodation, clarity; and
- Stabilization, role management, location.

In the first stage, new principals need to be familiar with the new school environment, as well as the people who work with them (Weindling, 1999). This is because each school has a particular context requiring understanding and integration of a complex array of people, policy, processes and priorities (Norman, 2004). During the second stage, new principals may face a series of new interpersonal relationships with established group members and stakeholders (Cheung & Walker, 2006). 'Situating' is the main concern of the new principals, as they are required to look for role clarity in this new context. Schein (1968) also argues that it is essential for new principals to understand and analyze the particular organizational culture into which they are placed, stressing that leadership is entangled with each particular context. The last stage is stabilization, in which some stable patterns establish, although for some principals this stage may not occur. In order to boost the process of organizational socialization of new principals, certain approaches are utilized to facilitate, such as mentoring and internships.

#### Interrelationships among the three types of socialisation

Several researchers explain that the socialisation process is potentially difficult, challenging, stressful and sometimes even quite upsetting and disappointing (Crow, 2007; Daresh & Male, 2000a). They add that socialisation represents interplay among an individual, the role and the context. First, professionalisation enables the new leaders to learn what the role requires through personal experience of schools, and from formal training programmes, prior to taking up the position (Greenfield, 1985). This is the first step for new and aspiring principals to become familiar with the principal's job, which is fundamental for further personalisation and

contextualisation.

Organisational and personal socialisation underpin the two-way interactions between the individual and context after being posted. Organizational socialisation refers to situational learning, which emphasizes learning the knowledge, values and practices required to perform a specific role within a particular organization after appointment (Schein, 1968). This also stresses situational learning and trying to make the individual an effective member of the school (Greenfield, 1985). While personal socialisation stresses the renewal of self-identity, it usually occurs through making sense of their identity within the workplace, as well as how principals define their roles, linked to both professionalisation and contextualization (Crow, 2006; Crow, 2007).

### **Leadership Practice**

Gunter (2005) shows that the labels used to define this field have changed from 'educational administration' to 'educational management' and, more recently, to 'educational leadership' (Gunter, 2005). Successful school leadership, therefore, includes practices helpful in addressing every aspect of performance, particularly in relation to teachers' professional growth and well-being, whose performance is central to student learning. Kruse (2013) has defined leadership as "a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal" (p.2) (Kruse, 2013). In accordance with this definition, Leithwood and Riehl (2003: 4) stated that 'at the core of most definitions of leadership are two functions: providing direction and exercising influence.' In an educational context, therefore, school leadership can refer to 'the work of mobilizing and influencing others to articulate and achieve the school's shared intentions and goals' (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003: 14). Leithwood and Riehl (2003) define four core leadership practices: setting direction, developing people, redesigning organization and managing the teaching and learning programmes, to determine whether principals were demonstrating

necessary practices for success (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

*Building vision and setting directions:* The more specific practices in this category are building a shared vision, fostering and delivering the acceptance of shared responsibilities among staff, and demonstrating high-performance expectations. Through Yukl's managerial ideology, goal setting refers to motivating, inspiring, clarifying, planning and organising. Scholar further stressed that effective goal setting requested for internal and external developmental agendas (Meyer, Sinnema, & Jacqueline, 2018), and it also worked as an important mechanism to boost teachers' motivation and participation in actions and practices (Locke & Latham, 2002).

*Understanding and developing people:* The more specific practices in this category are providing individualised support, fostering intellectual stimulations, and modeling appropriate values and behaviours. According to Yukl's managerial theory, this concluded supporting, developing, mentoring, evaluating and rewarding people (Yukl, 2002). Further, it also requires collective collaboration and efforts to make a positive difference to teaching and learning in schools (Timperley et al., 2007).

*Redesigning organisations:* Specific practices include building collaborative cultures and school environment, restructuring and reculturing the organisation, building dynamic relations with parents and the community, and connecting the school to its wider environment. According to Yukl's (2002) managerial taxonomy, this item also includes managing conflict and team-building, delegating, consulting and networking (Yukl, 2002).

*Managing the teaching and learning programmes:* Specific practices include managing the teaching programme, providing professional teaching support, monitoring school activity, constructing a professional learning environment,

learning, and buffering staff against distractions from their work (Leithwood et al., 2006).

Although international literature tends to emphasize the significance of instructional leadership and distributed leadership for modern principalship, in reality, principals, particularly newly appointed principals, are still expected to engage with managerial and administrative work. Huang, Hochbein and Simons' study (2018), based on a secondary analysis of Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study data, found that American middle school principals' job continues to be administration-related, unprompted and fragmented (Huang, Hochibein, & Simons, 2018). Sebastian et al. (2018) observed a similar pattern of a fragmented workday in their recent study of 52 school principals in an urban school district in the US (Sebastian, Camburn, & Spillane, 2018). According to Horng et al. (2010), on average, principals spent most time on administration activities, within limited time addressing everyday instructions (6%) and general instructional development (7%) (Horng et al., 2010). This provides a contradictory picture, because principals have consistently indicated that instructional leadership is important and an area, they would like to spend most time on (Sergiovanni, 2009).

### Contexts for school leadership

Research indicates that leadership enactment of the four core leadership practices mentioned above are highly contextually sensitive, in relation to both macro policy contexts, and to micro school contexts, such as diverse student populations. Leithwood (2018) further developed and refined the nature of 'context' by referring to 'person-specific' and 'widely-shared contexts' (Leithwood, 2018). The person-specific context consists of a principal's job knowledge, skills, attitudes and experience a leader brings to the job. Widely shared contexts refer to the broader organisational contexts and outer environmental setting within which the school and the principal are situated in (Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2016; Goldring et al., 2008).

Hallinger (2018) also broadens leadership contexts to include institutional, political, community, economic, school improvement, and national cultural contexts, all of shape the behaviours of leaders.

Similarly, Cheung and Walker (2006), from a study on beginning school principals in Hong Kong, argue that 'inner worlds' and 'outer limits' combine to shape the practice and behaviour of beginning leaders. Inner world refers to personal expectations, emotions and value systems, while 'outer limits' describes both the organizational and the wider system environment (Cheung & Walker, 2006). Principals have to find ways to respond creatively and coherently to all of these contextual features (Brauckmann & Schwarz, 2014; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Principals' change-oriented actions are moderated by school conditions and their own priorities (Klar & Brewer, 2013). Yukl's (2002: 32) model of contextual leadership suggests 'a theory of demands, constraints and choices', which demonstrates that principal leadership is sensitive to a wide spectrum of internal and external environmental factors. These further indicate that principals should bring more reflection and responsiveness to school contexts when applying these leadership practices. This links to Hallinger's (2018: 5) comment about "bringing contexts out of the shadows of leadership". Consequently, understanding context is an important initial step for a new headteacher, before making any decisions (Hallinger, 2018).

### New principal difficulties

Day (2003) argues that enthusiasm, uncertainty and adjustment are characteristics of the initiation phase of principalship. Crawford (2009) adds that a certain degree of uncertainty is inevitable for novice principals (Crawford, 2008). Similarly, Kelly and Saunders' (2010) study of new headship in British primary schools also suggests that, due to the uncertainty and adjustment at the initial phase of leadership enactment, the transition to headship is a complex process: from anticipatory socialization to the

establishment of occupational identity (Kelly & Saunders, 2010).

Empirical studies on leadership enactment of new principals identify a variety of problems they may face during their novice years on the job, such as: transforming school workforce; managing tasks; dealing with ineffective staff; managing premises; dealing with personal stresses and role pressures; and managing time (Holligan et al., 2006). Similarly, Parkay et al. (1992: 108) report that new principals experience stress from six major sources: professional inadequacies; management tasks; faculty, staff, and administrative team; policy; students; and parents (Parkay et al., 1992). Apart from 'professional inadequacies' and 'management tasks', these items are derived from the school context and the wider community.

Researchers pointed out that, overall, new principals' challenges were similar across various countries and different culture settings, while, the ways principals handling conflicts seemed to be culturally different (Garcia Garduno, Slater, & Lopez-Gorosava, 2011). Garcia-Garduno et al. (2011) summarized studies conducted in English-speaking countries that converge on the main problems of newly appointed principals. These include unpreparedness, unexpected demands, the legacy of the previous principal, interpersonal relations and feelings of isolation. Further, in China, Spain, South Africa, Thailand and Korea, they identified problems related to local educational authorities, pressures exerted by educational reforms, teachers' burn-out and motivation. Day (2001) argues that the skills of teamwork and collaboration with school staff are also part of the transition for beginning leaders (Day, 2001).

### *Principal isolation*

Isolation or loneliness is defined as when someone feels isolated or lonely due to factors such as age, marital status, socio-economic levels, attitude and work (Lashway, 2013). New principal isolation occurs when the leader feels that he/she is alone because the position as a leader demands them to make decisions alone for

the organization (Tahir, et al., 2017).

Novice head teachers are usually suffered from issues such as the experience of isolation, lack of professional knowledge and skills in leadership and a low level of confidence (Hobson et al., 2002; Holligan et al., 2006; Male, 2006; Miklos, 2009). Marshall and Hooley (2006) also define isolation as the perception of individuals that they feel isolated from others at work (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). This is particularly obvious for new heads when they are deprived of support, good relationships and companionship with others under new workplaces, which in turn causes concern and anxiety (Garcia Garduno et al., 2011; Kilinc & Gumus, 2020; Tahir et al., 2017). Hobson et al. (2002) found that, in England, new principals suffered from variety types of professional isolation. Some related to their inadequate professional capacities, such as coping with the multiplicity of tasks, managing school budgets, dealing with stubborn teachers, and managing school properties, while some emerged from the legacy, practice and style of the previous principal, and some arose from their initial socialisation to this specific role, including low confidence levels.

However, unlike decentralised systems, principals in centralised systems express little concern about isolation or loneliness. Principal isolation is rarely mentioned in Chinese literature as a challenge for new headships. Principals usually demonstrate quick adaption to the leadership role and feel confident when practicing in schools. Similarly, a study in Malaysia of 170 novice principals indicated that their level of isolation was quite low, and the principals believed that their isolation experience was temporary (Tahir et al., 2015). Some researchers also argue that it is good to be alone. As school leaders, there are times when they need to be alone and keep their distance, since they need to solve problems and make decisions on their own without disturbance from their teachers (Sindberg & Lipscomb, 2005). A possible reason for principals' reduced isolation in China might be Confucian ideology, which clarifies the notion of distance in relationships. The notion of order and boundary

are the foundation for leaders in a Chinese context, thus, any attempts to narrow this distance can cause conflict and discomfort (Lau, 2012; Littrell, 2002).

### *Gaining trust*

As long ago as 1985, Bennis and Nanu pointed out that effective leaders earn the trust of their followers. Casimir et al (2006) support this idea by verifying the mediating effect of trust on relationships between leadership and performance (Casimir, et al, 2006). Trust is defined as ‘a person’s expectation, assumptions, or beliefs about the likelihood that another’s future actions will be beneficial, favourable, or at least not detrimental to one’s interests’ (Robinson, 1996). However, unlike western society, Chinese people have a more difficult time when becoming corporate professional managers because of their inclination to deeply trust only people with whom they have a very close relationship (Littrell, 2002). Usually, the subordinates give the leader plenty of respect, but hold back their trust until they see the behaviour that backs up their words (Casimir et al., 2006). Therefore, Chinese leaders need to pay more attention to gaining trust from the teachers.

From the employees’ perspective, trust means being faithful or loyal to the leader (Casimir et al., 2006). These authors emphasize the significant role of trust in the leadership process in the Chinese context. The results show that trust creates loyalty among employees and builds a good relationship between manager and employees (Zhang et al., 2008). This positive relationship also induces positive emotional feelings in their leader by the employees and therefore taps into positive evaluations about the effectiveness of their leader (Boal & Bryson, 1988).

### *Leadership practice for new principals*

Several studies indicate that new principals learn about their school culture by observing and asking questions. For example, a Canadian study on new headship

shows that principals chose to talk less, and listen more, at the novice stage (Dhuey & Smith, 2014). Principals collected data about their new contexts in different ways, including staff, students, parents, community members, school alumni, school yearbooks, school display cabinets, and school newsletters (Sackney & Walker, 2006). A recent study in Chile indicated that new principals' initial impressions of their school's culture were formed through their informal conversations, their observations and documentary analysis (Galdames, et al, 2018). According to Walker et al (2003), following the observation process, principals were still cautious about making changes, as they felt that changes within the school required them to fully understand the school culture. Thus, many of the initial changes of the school started in a small way.

Sackney and Walker (2006) argue that it is important for beginning principals to establish a collaborative and communicative community in schools, and to develop a culture of shared responsibility for teaching and learning. They add that the development of an interactive and supportive environment is crucial, with trust as a foundational element. Tahir et al's (2015) Malaysian study of new principalship demonstrates that novice head teachers preferred to work as a team with their teachers, as the best way to minimise isolation. These authors also stress the importance of sustained interactions with teachers and the establishment of an open communication climate (Tahir et al., 2015). Previous studies also show that collaboration between the principal and the teachers in problem-solving and decision-making can reduce isolation among principals (Barth, 1990; Stephenson & Bauer, 2010).

## **Overview**

This chapter reviews international and Chinese literature on leadership preparation and development, focusing on five broad themes; definitions of principalship, leadership development, socialisation, leadership enactment and literature

development in China. The literature shows that contextual and culture factors greatly shape our understanding of principalship in China. First, Confucian ideology, and the highly centralised system, add a dimension about principals' role as an administrator or 'parent' of the school. Meanwhile, the basic role of principals, such as school manager, instructional leader and culture builder, are also emphasized.

The literature also discusses four different terms for principal development; leadership preparation, training, development, and learning, and shows how these four notions interrelate to impact on principal development. However, the Chinese literature shows that very limited approaches are applied in developing Chinese principals, and there is also a lack of consistency. Due to the inadequacy of professional support, training facilities, and budgets, certain approaches, such as mentoring, group learning, internship, cannot be widely applied in China (T Huang & Wiseman, 2011). However, some areas and districts have started to reform principal training into a more participant-centered, and practice-oriented, mode, and this may provide a guide for future development.

The literature also stresses the importance of socialization for leader development, including personal, professional and organizational socialization (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003b; Day, 2001). However, in China, both professional and organizational socialization are inadequately developed. For professional socialization, there is an unbalanced knowledge base, with a strong emphasis on regulations and policies, and limited focus on leadership capacity or communication skills (Su, Adams, & Mininberg, 2000). Organizational socialization is also limited, as traditional lectures constitute the largest part of training programmes, providing few opportunities for new principals to practice their leadership skills in real-world contexts (Zhu, 2010).

# CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), the process of developing research methodology includes a number of stages sequentially; ontological assumptions, epistemological assumptions, methodological considerations, and research instrument design (2000:5-8). This chapter explains the methodology, including how this research was designed and implemented. It also addresses research paradigms, research design, research approach, methods, and sampling strategies. It also explains how research data sets were collected and analyzed during and after the field study. Overall, it was an interpretive case study with both qualitative and quantitative approaches, involving different groups of participants. This chapter outlines the reasons for selecting an interpretive case study approach, and it also describe the research methods applied when conducting the field study.

## **Research Paradigms**

Paradigm refers to a collection of beliefs, assumptions, values and methods, which inform and formulate a research plan (Aaron, 2007). Qualitative and quantitative research are often presented as two fundamentally different paradigms, each of which refers to different views of the purposes and focuses of research, reality, knowledge, what is useful in terms of research data, analysis and interpretation (Brannen, 2007). The most common distinction is that between the positivist and the interpretive paradigms, as each of them represents a different approach to the choices of research strategy, research tools, data collection procedures and data analysis techniques (Md, 2016).

The positivism paradigm aims to determine the rules governing human behaviour, seeks to make generalizations, and describes reality in terms of objective structures or systems (Briggs, Coleman, & Morrison, 2012). Researchers stress the 'science

value' and 'objectivity' of positivist research, arguing that social reality which can be studied objectively and that the knowledge resulting from research can accumulate over time (Benton & Craib, 2001). Positivism is characterized typically in the methodological literature as exhibiting a preoccupation with operational definitions, objectivity, replicability, and causality (Amaratunga & Baldry, 2001). A survey approach is often preferred within this tradition, because it can be readily adapted to such concerns. Through questionnaire items, concepts can be operationalized; objectivity is maintained by the distance between observer and observed, along with the possibility of external tests. Replication can be carried out by employing the same research instrument in another context; and the problem of causality has been eased by the emergence of path analysis and related regression techniques to which surveys are well suited (Amaratunga & Baldry, 2001; Briggs et al., 2012).

In contrast, interpretivism entails gaining access to people's understanding of their situations, including their accounts of their own actions or behaviour, and generating understanding on that basis, which requires more reflection and inquiry (Brannen, 2007). Unlike the positivism paradigm, interpretive research encourages people to create their own meanings through interactions with each other, and also with the world around them, and so interpretive research targets to understand phenomena through accessing the meaning that participants assign to them. The qualitative approach is often applied in interpretive research, as it embraces greater reflexivity and deeper investigation (Creswell, 2012).

The aim of the present research is to investigate how principals are prepared in Chinese high schools, with a specific focus on national qualifications, district regulation, and individual development. Cohen et al (2011) argue that the aim of an investigation for the interpretive researcher is to understand how this glossing of reality goes on at one time and in one place (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Through the interpretive paradigm, the researcher gains a broad-spectrum understanding of how principals are prepared and appointed in the sampled area.

Briggs (2012) stresses that the central endeavour in the interpretive paradigm is to explore the 'meaning' of events and phenomena from participants' perspectives (Briggs et al., 2012). The present research involved several perspectives, including new principals and other people actively involved in the preparation process. The study also explores the leadership enactment of the newly appointed qualified principals, requiring a flexible, in-depth approach.

## **Research Design**

In the research design of a mixed methods study, it is important to identify the advantages of different methods, and then apply them within a specific situation (Bryman, 2009; Creswell, 2003). Scholars draw attention to the different aspects of mixed methods research, namely, sequence (Creswell, 2012; Morgan, 1998), priority (Morse, 1991), data strand (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003), and integration (Creswell, 2003; Greene et al., 1989).

### Sequence

As suggested by Brannen (2005), working qualitatively and quantitatively involves considerations at each phase of research enquiry (Brannen, 2005). The present study had four stages. The researcher took the preparation training programme as the starting point for the research, and the first phase was focused on the programme participants and the programme itself. The research began with a quantitative survey, which aimed at collecting baseline information about the sample, as well as examining the 'effects' of the preparation process. The research included a self-completion questionnaire survey of all new and aspiring principals who participated in the preparation programme. This was followed by semi-structured interviews, with a sub-sample of the survey principals, based on their willingness and personal background. Nine principals were included at this stage.

The second phase included people involved in the delivery and implementation of the programmes; three programme lecturers, one programme coordinator and one programme designer. This stage employed semi-structured interviews. Documentary analysis was also involved, including programme brochures, participant's training diaries, participants' essays, and relevant policy documents. The researcher also made field notes of what she observed during the programme.

The third phase involved semi-structured interviews with two people from the provincial educational authority, who were in charge of principal training and management, respectively. The analysis of policy documents was also included in this phase.

The final phase comprised mini case studies in three schools, involving interviews with one middle leader, and one senior leader, from each school, and the principal. The participating principals were a sub-sample from the nine interviewees, based on the principals' willingness and the availability of their schools.

### Priority

This issue refers to decisions about what kind of data has priority in the study – quantitative or qualitative (Morgan, 1998; Morse, 1991). In the present study, each phase included various methods and samples. The research was formulated primarily through the interpretive paradigm, which prefers qualitative rather than quantitative data (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative data were given priority in answering the research questions, including interview transcripts, field notes and documentary analysis. Interview comprised the main data sources, reflected in four of the finding chapters.

### Data strand

Data strand is an important construct used in describing mixed-methods sampling procedures (Brannen, 2005). The mixed-methods researcher sometimes chooses procedures that focus on generating representative samples, especially when addressing a quantitative strand of a study. On the other hand, when addressing a qualitative strand, the mixed-methods researcher typically utilizes sampling techniques that yield information rich cases (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). In the present research, there were three sequential data strands; the survey, interviews and documentary analysis, and mini case studies. This shows that qualitative research was the main data strand.

First, the research was formulated primarily through the interpretive paradigm, which prefers qualitative rather than quantitative data (Creswell, 2003). In this study, qualitative data were given priority in answering the research questions, including interview transcripts, field notes and documentary analysis. Interviews were the main instruments, providing research data for four of the five findings chapters. Second, documentary analysis was significant as, in this centralised system, policy documents conveyed the voices of the government and administrators. Analysis included consideration of six government policies, and other complementary resources. The survey results comprised only one findings chapter, but it was also important in influencing the design of the subsequent research instruments. Combining the two orientations allows the mixed method researcher to generate complementary databases that include information that has both depth and breadth regarding the phenomenon under study (Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

### Data integration

Mixed methods research is a systematic integration of quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study for purposes of obtaining a fuller picture and deeper

understanding of a phenomenon (Aaron, 2007). Greene et al (1989: 259) define complementarity between two approaches as 'elaboration, enhancement, illustration, [and] clarification of the results from one method with the results from another'. Qualitative methods provide in-depth and detailed answers to the research questions. In contrast, quantitative research enhances the reliability and accuracy of the study, as numerical statistics stand for a more objective and rational perspective from a larger sample of participants. As a result, the breadth and range of enquiry could be extended by using different methods for different inquiry components (Greene et al., 1989: 259).

Mixed methods can be integrated in such a way that qualitative and quantitative methods retain their original structures and procedures (pure form mixed methods). Alternatively, these two methods can be adapted, altered, or synthesized to fit the research (modified form mixed methods) (Creswell, 2012). This research mainly relied on qualitative data sets, while the quantitative data was a complementary resource to demonstrate certain trends. Hence, the outcomes from the quantitative research provided categories for the qualitative research, in terms of the design of interview guides and strategies. Elaboration also refers to how the qualitative data analysis illustrates how the quantitative findings apply in particular cases (Brannen, 2007).

### **Research Approach: Case Study**

According to Yin (2009), the choice of research approach represents different ways of collecting and analyzing empirical evidence. He stresses that the path begins with a thorough literature review and the careful and thoughtful posing of research questions or aims. Leadership preparation can best be understood through the eyes of participants and so this research has an interpretive dimension. A case study approach was selected for this research, so that leadership preparation can be

understood through the eyes of people providing, or participating in, the programmes, linked to the wider context (Yin, 2009).

#### Rationale for case study

First, a case study approach is relevant when the research questions require an extensive and 'in-depth' description of a social phenomenon (Yin, 2009). Yin defines case study as an exploration of a contemporary phenomenon in depth, and within real-world settings, particularly when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. Cohen et al (2011) add that case study allows the researcher to take account of the political and ideological contexts of the study. The present research was conducted within the general background of Chinese society, which is top-down, centralized, and deeply influenced by Confucian ideologies. A case study allowed the author to explore how leadership preparation was interpreted and delivered, providing a holistic and integrative perspective (Nisbet & Watt, 1984).

Second, the case study approach allows researchers to understand complex social phenomena, within specific settings (Yin, 2009). Case study also allows the researcher to observe the issue in a real context (Yin, 2009), and it recognizes the complexity and 'embeddedness' of social truths (Nisbet & Watt, 1984). Principal preparation is a complicated process, which may involve three different stages of socialization (G. M Crow, 2007), and involves contributions from different organizations and individuals (Norman, 2004). In this study, leadership preparation was tightly connected, not only to principals, but also to LEAs and professional organisations. Leadership preparation took place in schools, but also in training organisations and the local educational administration.

Third, this is an explanatory case study. This type of case study is useful when seeking to establish causal links in real-life interventions that are too complex for survey or

experimental strategies. Yin (2009) identifies case studies as having explanatory, exploratory, illustrative and evaluative dimensions. The present study included establishing the nature of leadership preparation, as well as providing an evaluation of the whole system. In evaluation language, the explanation would link programme implementation with programme effects (Yin, 2009). The research model for the current study indicates that the preparation procedure is complicated and inter-related, including different groups of participants, and complex linkages between and among them. This allowed the researcher to explore how different processes or entities supported and constrained each other, within the leadership preparation process in this Chinese province.

The case is defined by Miles and Huberman (1994) as 'a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context'. The case is, 'in effect, your unit of analysis' (p. 25) (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The management of high school principals is undertaken by provincial level administrators, and leadership preparation within a province in China was defined as the case. The focus was on the preparation process in this context, including both provider and participant perspectives.

### **Mixed-Methods Research**

Punch (2009:3) defines methodology as 'the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes (Punch, 2009). Mixed research is defined as the broad type of research in which elements or approaches from quantitative and qualitative research are combined or mixed in a research study (Creswell, 2003). Employing a cross-sectional design for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data is by far the most common design combination in mixed methods (Bryman, 2004). Through this integration, it systematically combines aspects of quantitative and qualitative research methods into a single study to take advantage of each paradigm's strengths (Hibberts & Johnson, 2012). In the present

study, both qualitative and quantitative methods were applied, including questionnaires, interviews, field notes and documentary analysis

Quantitative and qualitative methods can be used together as long as the assumptions of both paradigms are respected and the approaches are thoughtfully combined to complement each other for specific research purposes (Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Mixed methods, through collecting both closed-ended quantitative data and open-ended qualitative data, provide both breadth and depth, which, collectively, can be advantageous in addressing the research aims.

In the present research, the methods were of differing significance. Interviews were particularly important. As noted earlier the research is formulated primarily through the interpretive paradigm, which prefers qualitative rather than quantitative data (Creswell, 2012). Well-informed interviewees can provide important insights and can act in conjunction with other research methods to produce a fuller picture of the phenomenon (Briggs et al., 2012). The participants in the present study were very well-informed; new and aspiring principals, programme providers, administrative leaders, and teachers.

Second, analysis of policy documents was essential, particularly in this centralised system, where policies represent the requirements of the government. Such government papers often act as policy intentions that provide guidance and assessment for practice (Feng, 2005; Zheng et al., 2013). Documentary research is valuable partly because it can be deployed to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources (Yin, 2009).

Third, the questionnaire was helpful in generating a significant amount of quantitative data, from principals, at the beginning of the research, to provide an overview of general trends and background information, and to contribute to the design of the interviews. The application of the survey also allowed the author to

adopt a pragmatic, mixed methods, approach to case study (Morgan, 1998), which helped methodological triangulation. The numeric data also enabled comparisons to be made across groups in the sample (Oppenheim, 1992).

### Elaboration and Complementarity

The justification for combining quantitative and qualitative research includes benefits such as corroboration, elaboration, complementarity and contradiction (Bryman, 2009; Morgan, 1998). This study seeks, in particular, complementarity and elaboration. Complementarity indicates that the qualitative and quantitative results differ but, together, they generate insights (Brannen, 2007). Elaboration 'seeks to use the results from one method to help develop or inform the other method, where development is broadly construed to include sampling and implementation, as well as measurement decisions' (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). The outcomes from quantitative research provided guidance and categories for qualitative research, in terms of the design of interview guides and interview strategies. Elaboration also refers to how the qualitative data analysis illustrates how the quantitative findings apply in particular cases (Brannen, 2007). In this study, for each research question, more than three data sources, while both quantitative and qualitative data contributed to answering the research questions.

### **Research Methods and Data Collection**

Scholars stress that the methods to be used should be 'fit for purpose', and the chosen instrument should be appropriate to answer the research questions (Bell & Woolner, 2012). For example, when using structured questionnaires, Bell and Woolner (2012) stress that the decisions have to be made about "*precisely what it is you need to find out*", which requires the accurate use of language, without any leading, ambiguous or double questions. Similarly, the interview schedule should be designed 'adequately to reflect what the researcher is trying to find'. In the following

section, the author explains why and how the different instruments were selected, related to the research questions, the features of the instruments, as well as the characteristics of the sample. The methods used in this research were:

- Documentary analysis
- Interviews
- Survey Questionnaire
- Field Notes

#### Documentary analysis

Documentary analysis refers to a form of qualitative analysis that requires the researcher to locate, interpret, analyze and draw conclusions about the evidence presented (Morrison, 2002). Documents usefully provide access to the underlying sophisticated world of organisations (Bryman, 2004). In analysing documents, distinctions are drawn between primary and secondary sources (McCulloch & Richardson, 2000). Primary sources usually refer to the 'raw' data, which have not been interpreted, while secondary sources were generally regarded as literature as they have been subject to a level of interpretation and analysis. The sources used for this thesis were mainly primary sources, including policy documents, government reports, and institutional documents. The authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning of the documents (Scott, 2008), were taken into consideration in analyzing policy documents, government reports and institutional documents.

Four main types of documents were analysed:

- *Policy documents:* These documents comprised policies that were officially released by government, including both national and local government. Five national-level policies and four local ones were directly connected to the topic. Some other policies targeting general educational development in China were also included.
- *Institutional documents:* One programme brochure was included, which was provided to the programme participants to briefly introduce the programme, such as timeline, workshops and lecturers. It involved archived information to provide some baseline information on principals and schools.
- *Training minutes:* The training diaries of participants were collected, and the training diary was an undertaking for all 58 programme participants. The researcher chose eight of them randomly, with the permission of the programme provider and the eight principals. These eight diaries were chosen due to their qualities and completeness of training diaries, with detailed and insightful descriptions, and clear handwriting. These documents were complementary resources to evaluate the effectiveness of the training programmes, as well as principals' reactions to the content and training approaches.
- *Essay booklet:* At the end of the programme, every principal was requested to submit a 3000-words assignment. Following presentation, evaluation and amendments, these essays were published as a collection, and released to the public. This collection of documents was applied as a complementary resource for research questions on leadership enactment and practice.

## Questionnaires

Questionnaires are widely used for collecting survey data. They are usually administered without the presence of the investigator and are often straightforward to analyse (Wilson & McLean, 1994). The process of operationalizing a questionnaire is to take general research aims and turn these into concrete, researchable, fields about which data can be gathered (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The questionnaires provided the chance to gather data from a wide community of participants in the preparation programme.

In this research, this approach was employed to collect quantitative data from new and aspiring principals at the beginning of the preparation programme. The content and design of the questionnaire were based on previous working on policy analysis, documentary analysis, and literature review, within the consideration of the boundaries, relevance and accuracy of the expressions. The questionnaire comprises four sections (see Appendix 3.1), including geographical background, single- and multiple- choices questions, Likert scale questions and open-ended questions.

The first page of this questionnaire was devoted to explaining the purpose of this research and the role that the participant had in completing the questionnaire. This was intended to ensure that individuals choosing to complete the questionnaire were giving their informed consent (see ethics section below). The actual design of the questionnaire was split into sections according to the nature and forms of the questions being asked.

A structured questionnaire form was developed, mainly comprising closed questions, which are useful in generating frequencies amenable to statistical treatment and analysis (Cohen et al., 2011). In this study, the questionnaire was structured to include dichotomous questions (factual questions, such as gender, age, occupation, years in post, educational background, etc.), multiple-choice questions (closed

questions about given statements), and rating scales (closed questions that seek responses on attitudes, perceptions and views). The author added an open-ended question to collect complementary information on programme evaluation. The sequence demonstrates a move from objective facts to relatively subjective attitudes and opinions.

### Interviews

Interviews are the most common method of data collection and provide access to the phenomena, as perceived by humans (Arksey & Knight, 1999). Further, interviews are an essential source of case study evidence as most case studies are about human affairs or behaviours (Yin, 2009). The research interview has been defined as “one human being interacting with another and using their resources of interpersonal sensitivity to do so” (Gillham, 2000). Through direct verbal interaction between individuals, data can be gathered. Moreover, the interview enables the investigator to go deeper into the motivation of interviewees, which could also validate other methods (Kerlinger, 1970).

Interviews were applied strategically throughout different stages of the field study, within various participants and interview guides. Different types of interview are commonly related to the level of structure applied by the researcher, with a continuum being described from unstructured to fully structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were applied in this study, as they provide greater flexibility and freedom, as well as an emphasis on research purposes (Yin, 2009).

#### *Semi-structured interview*

Forms of interview are commonly related to the level of structure applied by the researcher, with a continuum being described from unstructured to fully structured interviews (Campbell, McNamara, & Gilroy, 2003; Seidman, 2006). Fully structured

interviews seek to elicit data similar to a questionnaire. Semi-structured interviews were applied in this study, as they provide greater flexibility and freedom, as well as an emphasis on research purposes (Yin, 2009).

The semi-structured interview often takes the form of a few major questions, with sub-questions and follow-up questions. Follow-up questions and probes, an essential feature of semi-structured interviews, were also used to develop an in-depth understanding of the issue (Coleman, 2011). In this research, each sample group has their own interview guide, designed and developed based on their roles and positions, while there were also certain similarities, as the author aimed at providing different perspectives on the same issues. The interview guides were based on three main resources, policy analysis, literature review and survey outcomes (see Appendix 3.2). The main themes were understanding of principalship, leadership preparation, preparation programmes, principal selection, leadership enactment, and leadership practice at schools.

#### *Interview sample strategy*

Well-informed interviewees can provide important insights and can act in conjunction with other research methods to produce a fuller picture of the phenomenon (Yin, 2009). In this study, interviews were used with different groups of participants to gain a comprehensive picture of the issue. The interview participants include administrative officials, programme providers, lecturers and teachers, who are directly connected to leadership preparation. The interview strategy followed the sequence of the research phases.

#### Field notes

Field notes were applied as complementary resources to support the research. They were taken to secure more 'personal' and informal information through the

author's perspectives (Briggs et al., 2012; Morrison, 2002). The author participated in the 'three-week' new principal preparation training programmes as a researcher, and took field notes throughout the whole programme, with the permission of the programme organizers. It allowed the author an opportunity to 'walk into' the real preparation programmes, which may be more 'authentic' and 'spontaneous' than other methods (Briggs et al., 2012).

Scholars distinguish two different types of field notes (Blum-Kulka, Hamo, & Habib, 2010). The first is a chronological record of events (Mulhall, 2003), taken during the event itself, which gathers information on context, non-verbal cues, and the situational background. The second is a historical recording of events, often taken shortly after the event, which is more interpretive and contains summaries of interviews and the researcher's impressions. The approach taken by the research was mainly chronological, leading to the following data sets:

1. Chronological records of everyday learning activities.
2. Participants' reflections and behaviours towards particular events or lectures.
3. Programme providers' reflections about their sessions.
4. Informal discussion with participants.
5. Minutes of particular events.
6. Attendance rates for each session.
7. Researcher's reflection on the programme.

Although it is 'authentic', 'spontaneous' and broad, this method has several disadvantages, including that field notes cannot be replayed, and the event cannot be encountered more than once (Reed & Ashmore, 2000). This leads to a loss of information and a loss of detail. Scholars argue that field notes should not be used on their own unless the research question is very simple, or time is very short. Other authors reject this method when used alone, because it is not reliable enough. In this study, field notes were a supplementary mode of data collection, analysis and presentation (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017).

## **Sampling**

According to Morrison (2002), the sampling strategy has a significant impact on the quality of the research. However, there are no 'fit for all' answers to find the correct sampling strategy, which is largely determined by the nature of the research and the population under investigation. Cohen et al (2011: 93) say that there are four key factors in determining sampling; the population, the sample size, access to the sample, and the sampling strategy to be used. The decisions about these four facets determine the nature of sampling.

### Population and sampling

The *population*, in statistical terms, is the group of people or things we want to reach a conclusion about (Mujis, 2010). In this study, when researching how high school principals were prepared in the sample province, the researcher was interested, not just in how the sampled principals were prepared, but also about how this system is implemented all over the sample province. The population comprises all new and aspiring high principals, who participated in new principal preparation programmes and were preparing for their leadership role in this province. However, due to the limitations of cost, time and accessibility, often only a small group or population subset can be involved in the research. This small group or subset is referred to as

the '*sample*' (Morrison, 2002). The correct sample size depends on the style of the research, the nature of the population under scrutiny, and the purposes of the research (Cohen et al., 2011).

In 2015, 120 new and aspiring principals participated in National Level Principal Preparation Training Programmes in the sample province. The programme designer divided the participants into two groups, one of 62 principals, and one of 58. The two groups were provided with separate but similar training programmes, with only minor differences in respect of programme lecturers and assistants. The author chose the second group (58 participants) as the main sample case. The first group was chosen as a pilot study, with some participants involved in the survey or in interviews.

### Sampling strategy

Cohen et al (2000) argue that the sampling strategy should be determined to some extent by the style of the research. Probability sampling techniques are primarily used in quantitatively oriented studies, and involve 'selecting a large number of units from a population, or from specific subgroups of a population, in a random manner where the probability of inclusion for every member of the population is determinable' (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003: 713). Purposive sampling techniques are primarily used in qualitative research and may be defined as selecting units, based on specific purposes associated with answering research questions (Teddlie and Yu, 2007). Mixed methods sampling involves the selection of units of analysis for a mixed methods study, through both probability and purposive sampling (Teddlie and Yu, 2007). In the present study, sequential mixed methods sampling was applied, in which probability and purposive sampling techniques were used in sequence. Volunteer and convenience sampling were also applied (Kemper, S, & Teddlie, 2003). Convenience sampling involves drawing samples that are both easily accessible and willing to participate in a study. Two types of convenience samples

are captive samples and volunteer samples (Teddlie and Yu, 2007). For this study, we recruit a convenience sample basis through survey questionnaires by asking participants' willingness in getting involved in further investigation.

### Sample site

*Province FC*, located in southwest China, was selected as the sample site for this research for several reasons. First, convenience sampling was applied when selecting the sample site of the case study, as this is the author's home province, which facilitated access. Second, *FC* is one of the least developed provinces in China, which includes urban, suburban and rural areas, and varied SES backgrounds. This diversity allowed the author to examine how contextual factors could impact on leadership preparation and leadership enactment, even within the same province. Finally, unlike many other provinces and cities, the majority of high schools are public schools, under the management of the administration and the Party. This allowed the author to explore how political and administrative powers impact on leadership preparation and principals' leadership practice.

Almost everyone involved in the preparation process was interviewed by the researcher, from very senior officials from the LEA, different programme providers, related principals and schoolteachers. Different aspects of the preparation process were also carefully investigated, including principals' selection and recruitment, preparation programmes and leadership practice in school contexts, within the umbrella of the 'unit' – the sample province.

The researcher contacted the chief designer of the program to articulate the aims of the study and to seek permission to conduct the research. Permission was granted to observe the three-week training program, and to conduct other aspects of the research including a survey of participants, interviews with selected candidates and school-based mini case-studies. All the samples were voluntarily involved in the

study. Ethical approval was granted by the researchers' university, and by the local authorities responsible for the program.

### Quantitative sampling strategy

A random and convenient sampling strategy is generally applied in quantitative studies, in which each unit in the accessible population has an equal chance of being included in the sample (Teddlie and Yu, 2007). In this study, a full population (census) sampling strategy was applied to explore the co-relationships between different facets of principal preparation, which requires the researcher to make generalisations and comparisons based on the quantitative data. There were 58 participants all over the province engaged in the specific principal preparation programme studied for this research. All participants were invited to become involved at the survey stage, meaning that each participant had an equal chance to engage in this research, reinforcing the representativeness and reliability of the study.

Totally 31 principals, from different backgrounds, voluntarily involved in the survey, and their demographic data are illustrated below.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	22	70.97%
	Female	9	29.03%
<b>Age</b>	31-40	9	29.03%
	41-50	20	64.52%
	51-60	2	6.53%
<b>Education Background</b>	College degree	2	6.53%
	Bachelor's degree	27	87.10%
	Master's degree	2	6.53%
<b>Position</b>	Principal	13	41.94%
	Vice/deputy principal	18	58.06%
<b>School location</b>	Urban	9	29.03%
	Rural	22	70.97%

*Table 3.1. Demographic Background of Survey Samples*

## Qualitative sampling strategy

### *Interview sampling*

In deciding the principal sample groups, the researcher used multiple purposive techniques (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). Kemper et al (2003: 284) note that, in a sequential mixed methods study; information from the first sample is often used to draw the second sample. In this study, the interview sample group was derived from the survey, depending on principals' willingness to participate. The researcher scaled the interview sample size in the range of 10 to 20 percent of the whole population (6-12). Volunteer sampling was applied at this stage. If the number of volunteers had exceeded 20 percent, they would have been stratified and selected through gender and school types, in order to provide a balanced sample. More than 60 percent of principals were willing to become involved in the next phase of the research (n=36). The researcher selected the interview sample purposively, by balancing age, gender, school location, and principals' current positions (including both vice principals and current principals). The final sample was nine principals (coded from P1 to P9), 25% of the principal volunteers, with varied backgrounds (see table 3.2).

Code No.	School SES	School Performance <sup>5</sup>	Gender	Position/Years
P1	Rural-County	High performing	Male	Principal/3
P2	Urban-Capital	High performing	Female	Vice-P
P3	Rural	Low performing	Male	Principal/1
P4	Rural-County	Low performing	Female	Vice
P5	Rural-County	Low performing	Female	Principal/1
P6	Rural	Low performing	Male	Principal/1
P7	Urban	High performing	Male	Vice
P8	Urban-Capital	Low performing	Female	Principal/2
P9	Urban-Capital	High performing	Male	Principal/1

*Table 3.2 Backgrounds of Principals*

<sup>5</sup> School Performance is defined by two factors: 1. School performance when compared with other schools in the same districts; 2. Performance of College Entrance Examinations of 2016.

### *Mini case-study sampling strategy*

The mini case-studies were derived from the interview stage, and sampling also depended on the willingness of the principals. Six of the nine principals were willing to progress to the next stage of mini case study. Three current principals and their schools were included, based on the agreement of these new principals, as well as consideration of their school locations; one urban, one suburban, and one rural. The rationale for this decision is that educational development is rather different in urban and rural contexts, as frequently stressed in official documents (SEC, 1999; MOE, 2002; MOE, 2005; MOE, 2012). A number of Chinese researchers also point out the gaps between urban and rural in educational development, including principal training and leadership preparation (Feng, 2005). The selection of this stratified sample enabled the author to make some generalizations within the province, while also distinguishing between rural and urban contexts.

### *Purposive sampling strategy*

Purposive sampling was used to identify programme organizers and providers, and local administrators. Purposive sampling techniques are often used in qualitative research and may be defined as selecting units (e.g. individuals, groups or institutions) based on specific purposes associated with addressing particular research questions. Maxwell (1997) further defined purposive sampling as a type of sampling in which, 'particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices' (p. 87) (Maxwell, 1997). Teddlie and Yu (2007: 80) also points out that purposive sampling usually involves two goals:

- sampling to find instances that are representative or typical of a particular type of case on a dimension of interest.

- sampling to achieve comparability across different types of cases on a dimension of interest.

For this study, a purposive sampling strategy was applied with consideration of these two aspects; representativeness and comparability. The researcher handpicked the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of her judgment of their characteristics (Cohen et al., 2011; Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Specifically, the author handpicked two government officials based on their positions and job characteristics. One of them was in charge of professional training for teachers and principals for the whole province, while the other was in charge of the selection and recruitment of high school principals for the whole province. The programme designer was also selected as he designed the whole preparation programme and invited most of the programme lecturers. The programme coordinator was also involved, as his work is directly connected to training participants, such as participants' attendance rates, levels of satisfaction, and essay submissions. In addition, three lecturers from various backgrounds were included, namely a university professor, a trainer from a commercial training organisation and an experienced school practitioner. This enabled the researcher to explore how programme providers from different backgrounds prepared for their sessions, and how they situated their courses to meet participants' practical needs. Table 3.3 illustrates how strategic sampling was applied in this study in terms of their sequence, duration, features and significance, as well as the relationship between research questions and aims.

Participant (No.)	Seq.	Duration	Sig.	RQ	Features	Aims
New and aspiring principals; (9)	4	40-75 minutes, each	Most important	3,4,5	The author tried to keep a balance among gender, age, positions, school locations and their previous working experience.	To explore how different personal status could impact on new principals' leadership preparation and enactment, as well as their perspectives towards leadership preparation programmes
Government officials (2)	6	60 minutes, each	Very important	3,4,5	One official in charge of the management of principals and one in charge of the professional	To further explore how new leaders were prepared and selected through government perspectives, as well as

					development of principals and teachers.	how government support and supervise the preparation programmes.
Programme Providers (3)	1	15-20 minutes, each	Complimentary	1,3	Three programme lecturers from different backgrounds – one university professor, one experienced practitioner and one trainer from commercial organisation.	To explore the content of leadership preparation programmes, in terms of knowledge base, delivery modes and other professional support
Programme Designer(1)	2	75 minutes	Very important	2,3,4	Who framed the whole training programme, including content and delivery methods, and also invited most of the lecturers, model schools in person	To explore how the preparation programme was designed and implemented, as well as how preparation programme was influenced by the administrative policies and administrations
Programme Coordinators (1)	3	30 minutes	Complimentary	2,3	Who was in charge of contacting the principal participants, and helping the participants to register, and also worked as an assistant for programme lecturers.	To explore how preparation programme was prepared, formed, implemented and evaluated
Senior and middle leaders (6)	5	15-20 minutes, each	Complimentary	1,5	From the three mini case study schools respectively.	To provide complementary information on how new leaders enacted their leadership roles in schools, as well as, to what extent, new principals adapted themselves into the new position

*Table 3.3 Interview Sample Strategies*

To conclude, the whole study, combining the two orientations, purposive and probability sampling, allowed the researcher to generate a complementary database that has both depth and breadth regarding the phenomenon under study (Teddlie, 2005). Purposive sampling leads to greater depth from a smaller number of carefully selected cases, while probability sampling leads to greater breadth of information from a large number of units selected to be representative of the population (Patton, 2002; Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

## **Instrument Design**

The research instruments were carefully designed and piloted to ensure their reliability and feasibility, to make sure that these instruments would address the research questions. Piloting was carried out with principals and other sample groups, to ensure the validity and feasibility of the research (see below).

### Questionnaire design

The questionnaire was first developed based on national and provincial policies and standards of principalship and principal management, and on international and Chinese literature, linked to the research questions. Second, the researcher continually discussed the content of the questionnaire with her supervisors, in order to ensure the accuracy and validity of the survey. Third, the questionnaire was piloted.

The questionnaire comprised four parts with varied targets, namely geographic background, single choice questions, Likert Scale questions and open-ended questions (optional), which directly linked to Research Question 2 and 3. The questionnaire comprised four sections:

*Section One* asked participants to complete biographical information, including gender, age, positions (in school), political background, educational background, school location and previous career experience. This dichotomous information was widely used in subsequent factor analysis, in order to explore how personal and school background could impact on leadership preparation and leadership practice.

*Section Two* was formed by single choice questions, which were focusing on the content and delivery of preparation training programmes. The main aim of this section was to explore principals' preferences towards various knowledge content,

delivery methods, and curriculum providers. Through these questions, the author developed an overall understanding of participants' views about this training programme, as well as their training history.

*Section Three* was aimed at identifying participants' understanding of principalship, and whether, how, and to what extent, the training programmes contribute to their leadership preparation. Using a modified Likert Scale, the respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with certain statements. To avoid the neutral central point, there were only four options; strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree.

*Section Four* comprised two open-ended questions, in order to obtain complementary data sets for programme evaluation. The participants were asked about "the most useful" and "the least useful" parts of the training programme.

The questionnaire was designed and developed in English, and then translated into Chinese for implementation with principals. A mutual translation process was introduced at this stage, involving two professional interpreters. First, one interpreter was asked to translate the English questionnaire into Chinese. Then, the researcher refined a small number of expressions to make it more professional. Second, the Chinese questionnaire was sent to another interpreter to translate into English. Finally, the original English questionnaire was compared with the translated version, to establish whether these two versions expressed the same meaning. The outcome was positive.

### Qualitative instrument design

Semi-structured interviews were applied in this study for new and aspiring principals, programme providers, government officials and school teachers. Each sample group had their own interview guides and probes, which were designed and developed

based on their roles and positions, as well as their relevance to the research theme. The interview guides were based on three main resources, policy analysis, literature review and survey outcomes. General topics were selected, such as understanding of principalship, leadership preparation, preparation programmes, principal selection, leadership enactment and leadership practice at schools. The interview guides were the most significant research tools for the study, leading to detailed and descriptive data sets, related to almost every research question.

Field notes were arranged through both 'chronological recording' and 'historical recording', and the author shadowed and observed the whole process of the three-week preparation programme. The field notes were valuable in respect of Research Question 2 on programme delivery. Field notes in this research were taken during through unstructured observations, informal interviews and documentary analysis. All these data sets acted as supplementary resources for the research, which provided the researcher with a 'vivid' picture of preparation programmes.

### Piloting

The research instruments were piloted to ensure the reliability of their design. Both professionals and similar sample groups were involved at this stage, to ensure its academic value, as well as the feasibility of the field study. As mentioned above, there were two groups for the preparation training programme that year, thus, the author selected one for the pilot study, and the other for the main research. Five principals were invited to participate in the pilot survey, three of them became involved at the pilot interview stage, and one of the principals, and her school, were selected for the pilot mini case study.

For survey research, Bell and Woolner (2012) point out that it is not easy to explain what you need to find out precisely, and that this stage may be hurried or even overlooked. Consequently, the design may result in low quality responses, with

implications for reliability and validity. Thus, a sophisticated piloting process was applied before conducting the survey. Pilot participants were asked to review the survey instrument and they felt that this documentation was satisfactory. These pilot participants were also asked to complete the questionnaire and to meet with the researcher to discuss its design. This meant that detailed responses could be gathered from participants about the design of the questionnaire. This feedback was noted on the questionnaire and prompted further editing.

The qualitative research instruments were also piloted with the same group of participants. Three interviews were conducted during the training programme and these interviews were recorded, with transcripts produced from these recordings. Then, one principal and her school progressed to the mini case study. The interview outlines for other school leaders were developed, and they were also piloted with the middle leader and senior leader in the pilot study school. These transcripts were analysed through NVIVO, and the thematic analysis helped to judge whether the interview guide would be able to address the research questions. These transcripts also contributed to the redesign of the questionnaires.

### **Data Collection**

Data sets were collected sequentially; documents, field notes, questionnaires, and interviews. Collecting data in this sequence contributed to building the knowledge base for the study.

The documentary materials comprise three types of resource; policy documents; official records and regulations, and programme resources. Some of the national policies were accessed through government websites, while others were inspired by Chinese literature on policy analysis. Most of the provincial and local policies and regulations were provided by the programme designer or administrators, with clear indications that current actions and practice were based on these policies. These

documents are not confidential, as they which could be found on government websites or open access online. Documents related to the preparation programme, such as participants' handbook, training diaries and essay booklets, were provided by the programme provider, with permission to apply them in this research. These written and public documents provided the official starting points for the research.

Following the documentary analysis, the questionnaire was distributed and collected by the author in person during the preparation programmes, which contributed to the very good 79% return rate (46/58). All 46 respondents completed background information and single-choice questions, 31 of them gave meaningful answers to the Likert-scale questions, and 34 of them answered the open-ended questions.

Field notes were taken throughout the training programme, and were developed with a detailed timeline of the different activities each day. These were contemporaneous field notes, including both oral and visual data. The author applied different approaches to observing the training process, including unstructured observations of lectures and other activities, informal interviews with participants and providers, and researchers' daily logs to record information that relating to specific situations. These field notes included informal conversations with the principals, conference notes on group learning activities, daily activities and routines, curriculum delivery, and principals' spontaneous responses to the lecturers.

Interviews took place in participants' workplaces. Interviews with the principals were held in their own schools, from two to four weeks after the training programme. By the time the interviews were conducted, the researcher had some insights about principals' attitudes towards leadership preparation, arising from the analysis of questionnaires. The short time lag also allowed the principals to digest, and reflect on, what they had learned through the preparation programme.

New tools, such as transcription software, allow researchers to create new forms of transcripts and to organize data in ways that would not have been possible a few decades ago (Mondada, 2007). Interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of 20 of the 22 participants. Two participants declined to be recorded and the researcher made near-contemporaneous notes of their interviews. The audio records were transferred into *Word* documents through the APP, called '*xunfei yuyin*', a digital translator to transform audio records into written language.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was also conducted in sequence, with quantitative analysis first, followed by the qualitative analysis. The researcher then combined different data sets to obtain a broad picture of the issue, and to facilitate comparisons between and among different data sets and different sample groups.

### Quantitative data

An overview of the issue was obtained through descriptive statistics, notably in respect of the biographical background of new principals, programme satisfaction, and new principals' readiness for leadership positions. The purpose of quantitative data analysis is to provide a 'broad simplification' of the study, and to answer some of the 'what' questions of the research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In addition, through statistical analysis, the author sought to establish whether leadership preparation is *making a difference*, or whether there were any patterns or relationships in respect of leadership preparation in China. Multiple types of statistical analysis were applied, including univariate analysis, bivariate analysis and factor analysis, presented in various figures and tables (see Chapter 4).

First, there was univariate analysis. The researcher examined individual variables and generated certain descriptive statistics, for example, frequency distributions,

central tendencies, and dispersion. These helped to answer research questions about selection criteria, principals' previous experience, and issues of concern to the principals.

Second, there was bivariate analysis, exploring the relationships among different variables and data sets. Certain statistical results were generated through this procedure, such as *average, standard deviation, and t test*, to describe the central tendency and levels of dispersion. The study model shows three arrows, which demonstrate the possible relationships between different data sets. The quantitative data were applied to explore the relationship between leadership development and leadership appointments, as well as leadership development and leadership enactment.

Finally, factors that could have an influence on principal preparation and leadership enactment were also explored. Factor analysis is a way of determining the nature of underlying patterns among a large number of variables. Based on the relational analysis above, the author established a factor analysis of the total correlation matrix that could describe the situation, in terms of what factors have an impact on leadership development and enactment.

### Qualitative data

According to Yin (2009), there are limited fixed formulae or tools to assist researchers on how to analyze a case study. Instead, the analysis depends on the researchers' own style of empirical thinking, as well as the existing evidence and alternative interpretation. For this study, qualitative data comprise documentary evidence, interview transcripts and observation records. The research model and quantitative pattern assisted the researcher to establish a basic coding system at the beginning of the analysis. The software mentioned above (*xunfei yuyin*), proved to save time, and increase accuracy, compared with analyzing the data manually.

Subsequently, the author refined the records one by one, and then categorized and analysed them through Nvivo8 software. Coding is fundamental to qualitative data analysis, and Miles and Huberman (1994) point out that pattern coding allows researchers to break down large interview data into smaller analytical units based on similar themes. For this study, certain themes were generated following quantitative data analysis, including conceptions of principalship, leadership preparation, principal selection and recruitment, leadership socialisation, and leadership enactment.

In this research, the model provides a framework for the study, through which the researcher could classify the qualitative data into different categories. Coding of qualitative data through Nvivo was carried out by creating a set of nodes. This process involves putting tags or labels against large or small pieces of data, in order to attach meaning to them and to index them for future use (Watling, James, & Briggs, 2012). For this research, the labels originating from initial coding patterns were arranged in hierarchies to indicate levels of association between the coding concepts identified. Free-standing codes were then applied for emerging themes. Then, the researcher conceptualized elements and developed meaningful categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Through open and axial coding, categories were established. Examples of free-standing codes include willingness to lead, new principal difficulties, and socio-economic status variables.

However, codes are re-assessed as the process of analysis proceeds and understanding of the topic deepens (Cohen et al., 2011). After the initial stage of analysis, the coding patterns were assessed and redefined, in order to better describe the issue. Where this happens, code categories have to be redefined and initial drafts of analysis re-coded. Moreover, for advanced analysis, the processes of collation and comparison of data were applied, in order to demonstrate the links between concepts being analyzed (Rice et al., 2014). For this study, most of the qualitative data emerged from interview transcripts of different groups of interviews,

including principals, officials, programme providers, lecturers and school teachers. Both inter-section analysis and cross-section analysis were applied to illustrate how different groups of qualitative samples responded to these issues.

### Combination of different data sets

The researcher combined and integrated the results from both quantitative and qualitative methods during the data interpretation stage. A thematic analysis was applied at this stage, as the author generated themes from different data sets, and made comparisons between and among these findings. Four broad themes were identified; conceptualising the principalship, leadership development, selection and recruitment, and leadership practice.

Interpreting results collectively allows the researcher to have a more 'comprehensive view' and construct meta-inferences. A meta-inference is an interpretation drawn from multiple methods and sources that integrate the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data (Cohen et al., 2011). Multi-dimensional data sets are engaged in the analysis process, which are complementary to each other. A quantitative study provides statistical results or tendencies on certain issues, and provides direction and guidance for the subsequent qualitative data analysis (Rice et al., 2014). In contrast, a qualitative study may 'test and retest' the quantitative outcomes, to test the validity of statistical conclusions (Sipe & Curlette, 1997). Moreover, through detailed qualitative information, the author could explain not only 'what it is', but also 'how it comes' and 'why it occurs' (Watling et al., 2012).

Subsequently, policy documents and research records were included and compared, which allowed the author to verify the questions about how policies and regulations impact on leadership preparation, which is particularly significant in centralized systems. International literature reviews also contributed to the analysis of the research results, in terms of the theoretical framework, successful experience and

contextual considerations. The analysis also involved grounded categories that arose from the respondents, which allowed for the authentic voices of respondents and improves the process of data interrogation and analysis (Rice et al., 2014). The subsequent analysis for different groups of people helps the researcher to understand their attitudes and influence on the same issue, which in this case relates to the research questions on the effectiveness of leadership preparation.

### **Ethical Approach**

Being ethical means being respectful for human dignity, even though this may hinder the pursuit of truth (Cavan, 1977). Guillemin and Gillam (2004) stress that there are two major dimensions of ethics in qualitative research. First, there is procedural ethics, which usually involves seeking approval from a relevant ethics committee to undertake research involving humans. Second, there is ethics in practice, which refers to a professional code of ethics or conduct (Coady & Bloch, 1996; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

Permission to access research sites is highlighted at the initial stage of the research as it relates to where the research is to be conducted (Silverman, 2005). In keeping with the ethical requirements of doctoral study, this research was approved by the University of Nottingham's ethics committee. The research plans, including ethics, were assessed through the confirmation of status process, and subsequently, the ethical approval process ensured that ethical protocols were followed.

Informed consent is at the heart of an interpersonal process between researcher and participant, where the prospective participant comes to an understanding of what the research project is about, and what participation would involve, and makes his or her own decision about whether, and on what terms, to participate (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). The ethical frameworks also require that research does not harm participants, that there is a positive outcome, and that the values and

decisions of participants are respected (Murphy & Dingwall, 2001). In this research, the interviews and observations were based on the willingness of participants, and also respected participants' choices on when, where and how to participate. There were no particular risks to participating in this study, but the author ensured that harm was avoided through the data collection process.

Anonymity and confidentiality were also guaranteed to ensure the privacy and security of organizations and individuals. The sample province was located in Southwest China, but there are four provinces in this region, which means that the province could not be identified and tracked. Most of the documentary resources could be approached through open access, while private documents provided by the organization and the schools were kept confidential by the researcher. Questionnaires were collected anonymously in order to protect respondents' identities. Interview data were treated confidentially and seen only by the interviewees and the researcher. Interviewees were asked to check their transcripts in order to confirm their accuracy, and to avoid any potential harm to the interviewees. It is more difficult to ensure confidentiality in field notes, but recorded data were kept private.

### **Authenticity**

Educational researchers have a responsibility to ensure that research is enacted within a rigorous framework that addresses the epistemological complexities of a study's methodological process and intellectual focus in an ethical manner that allows the recipients of the research to have trust in its outcomes (James & Busher, 2006). The authenticity of the study is closely related to the samples (James & Busher, 2006), to the overall research design, and to the processes used to analyse data (Jones, 2000). This means that qualitative researchers need to reinforce the validity and reliability of their studies, even if they choose to use other terms such as credibility and authenticity, to describe the qualities that establish the

trustworthiness of their studies (Flick, 2009). This section explains the authenticity of this research through a discussion of reliability, validity and triangulation.

### Reliability and validity

Reliability is defined as the probability that repeating a research procedure or method would produce identical or similar results, which refers to the consistency and stability of the measures (Bush, 2012). Researchers point out that reliability could be approached through four ways; highly structured methods, methodological triangulation (Youngman, 1984), piloting process and 'test and re-test' procedures (Bell, 2010).

Bush (2012: 81) explains that "the concept of validity is used to judge whether the research accurately describe the phenomenon that is intended to describe". Cohen et al (2000) stress that the validity of quantitative data might be improved through carefully sampling, appropriate instrumentation and appropriate statistical analysis of the data. In qualitative research, reliability can be regarded as a balance between what researchers record as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting being researched (Cohen et al., 2007).

Scott and Morrison (2006: 208) note that, sometimes, reliability and validity might be in contradiction to one other, meaning that the finding might be 'reliable but not valid', particularly in qualitative research. Reliability requires a standardised approach while validity is likely to be a friendly, human approach which allows the participants to answer in their own way, rather than being restricted by the artificiality of a standard instrument. Hence, reliability may be achieved only by reducing validity. In this study, the author applied both a highly structured instrument, as well as friendly and human approaches, in order to keep a balance between reliability and validity, and to boost the authenticity of the study.

For survey research, Bush emphasizes that (2012) reliability depends on highly structured and standard instruments, as well as a “test-retest” procedures. In this survey, a structured questionnaire was used as the primary research tool in collecting new principals’ viewpoints, which demonstrated a high level of standardization. Moreover, the questionnaire was carefully designed and checked, in terms of language, sequence, outlook, and the piloting process, to enhance reliability. A piloting procedure was employed to double check the validity of the questions and the questionnaire format.

For the qualitative part of the study, validity was addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the qualitative data (Cohen et al., 2011). In this study, validity was enhanced by involving different sub-samples and comparing the findings. Interview transcripts were sent to the interviewees for confirmation and amendment, to reduce respondent invalidity (Scott & Morrison, 2006). Furthermore, pilots were also conducted to certify that the interview guide was appropriate, discrete, and unambiguous (Cohen et al., 2011). . Interviews were semi-structured, which increased the reliability of the study compared to unstructured approaches.

The validity and reliability of documentary analysis is believed to be enhanced through the use of primary sources (McCulloch, 2004; McCulloch & Richardson, 2000). As noted earlier, the documents analysed in this research were public policies, and the originals produced by principals, such as training diaries and essays, and so were all primary sources.

### Triangulation

Bush (2012: 84) states that “triangulation means comparing many sources of evidence in order to determine the accuracy of information or phenomena”. In addition to the benefits of piloting the research, the adoption of a mixed-methods

approach also enables a process of triangulation which can test one of the outcomes of the research against those of others (Golafshani, 2003). In this study, both respondent triangulation and methodological triangulation were applied.

Methodological triangulation, defined by Morrison (1993) as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study, was employed. Questionnaires, interviews, field notes and documentary analysis were all used as instruments for data collection in this study, which allowed the researcher to compare the results obtained by all these methods.

Respondent triangulation refers to asking the same or similar questions of many different participants (Bush, 2012). In this study, there were four groups of participants; new and aspiring principals, programme providers, provincial supervisors, and teachers. Data from different groups were cross-checked to establish the validity of the study. The samples also included diverse categories; for example, this research included both rural and urban principals, and also different types of programme providers. This enabled the author to make comparisons during data presentation and analysis.

## **Overview**

This chapter explains the research design used to investigate how new principals were prepared in China. Because of the nature of leadership preparation, as well as the contextual background in China, the most appropriate approach is to regard it as a distinctive phenomenon, and to treat it as a case study, which applied a mixture of methods to explore the issue. In order to respect the individual contribution of each method, the researcher indicated the sequence, priority, and significance of each method, as well as how they were applied in the field study. Overall, the design was a sequential mixed method case study, beginning with the survey to explore the basic information and tendencies among new and aspiring principals, followed by

interviews with principals and other key actors, concluding with three school-based mini case- studies.

Data analysis began with separate processes for quantitative and qualitative data, followed by cross-sectional analysis, comparing data sets, linked to the analysis establishes what is believed to be an abductive approach (Morgan, 1998), an approach distinctive to pragmatic mixed methods research (Yin, 2009).

# CHAPTER FOUR: PARTICIPANTS' SURVEY FINDINGS

The survey was the first phase of the study, as it allowed the author to collect a large number of data in a relevant short time, which enabled the researcher to understand the general situation of the issue. Moreover, as a mixed method research, the quantitative survey outcome helps to ensure validity and trustworthiness of the study. Data triangulation can also facilitate cross-checking and verification of the accounts made by participants. The main aims of the survey were to: 1. Explore the general evaluation for the programme through participants' perspectives; 2. Explore how the programme could have an impact on new appointed principals' and aspiring principals' leadership enactment and practice; 3. Explore how different factors could have an impact on the selection and recruitment of principals.

New high school principals, and aspiring principals, who were attending 'National Training Plan (2015) – Term 2, for the high school principal certification programme in Forest Province<sup>6</sup>, were invited to participate in the survey. New principals were defined as those in their first, second, or third year as either, while aspiring principals are now vice principals, or Secretaries of the Party Committee in Schools, and are likely to be selected as principals in the future. Questionnaires were distributed at the end of the training programme, and all the attendees of the programme were asked to participate. The survey explored the issues that related to the training programme, in terms of its content, delivery, efficiency and impact on leadership enactment, and also included issues that connected to leadership enactment and leadership practice.

A total of 58 questionnaires were distributed, and 46 of them were returned, indicating a 79% return rate. All 46 respondents completed background information and single-choice questions, 31 of them gave meaningful answers to the Likert-scale

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<sup>6</sup> Forest Province: Pseudonym.

questions, and 34 of them answered the open-ended questions. See appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire. In order to clarify the validity of the findings, the author will indicate the participation rate of each question during later analysis.

## Programme Evaluation

### The perceived importance of compulsory content

Based on the national documents on new principal training, there are four compulsory courses included in current principal certification training, namely *legal and legislation regulations, basic theory of education, school management skills, and instructional leadership capacity*. New principals and principal candidates assessed the importance of all these domains, with a mean rating of over 4.00. The domains that scores higher than 4.4 were *school management skills and instructional leadership capacity*, showing that these principals perceiving these two areas of knowledge to be very important. The ranking of *legal and legislation regulations* was also very positive, with a mean of 4.11. Lowest ranked was *Basic educational theory* with 3.5116. No domain was rated less than 3.5, indicating that all these courses were regarded as important in preparing for their leadership practice (see table 4.1). Through one-way ANOVA tests, and an independent t test, the outcomes demonstrated that various sub-groups, such as gender, student-teacher ratios and school size, might react differently in perceived importance of knowledge content (see below).

Table 4.1. *Importance of Knowledge and Skills*

	n	M	SD
Instructional Leadership Capacity	43	4.4419	0.54782
School Management Skills	43	4.4419	0.62877
Legal and Legislation Regulation	43	4.1116	1.13499
Basic Educational Theory	43	3.5116	1.22226

One-way ANOVAs showed that there was no significant difference in respect of years

of being appointed to a principal/AP position, whether he/she stayed in the same school, or school contexts (rural or urban). The few significant differences are noted below.

*Table 4.2 Importance of School Management Skills Based on School Size*

School Size	n	M	SD
Below 3000	17	4.2353	0.56230
3001-5000	20	4.5500	0.51042
5001 and above	6	4.6667	0.51640

Instructional leadership capacity: A one-way ANOVA demonstrated significant differences in the perceived importance of instructional leadership ability according to the size of schools. Principals of the larger schools assigned a significantly higher value than those in smaller schools (see table 4.2).

*Table 4.3*

*Importance of School Management Skills Based on Student-Teacher Ratio*

Student/Teacher Ratio (r)	n	M	SD
$r < 14.99$	11	4.0909	0.53936
$15.00 < r < 16.99$	20	4.5500	0.60481
$r > 17.00$	12	4.5833	0.66856

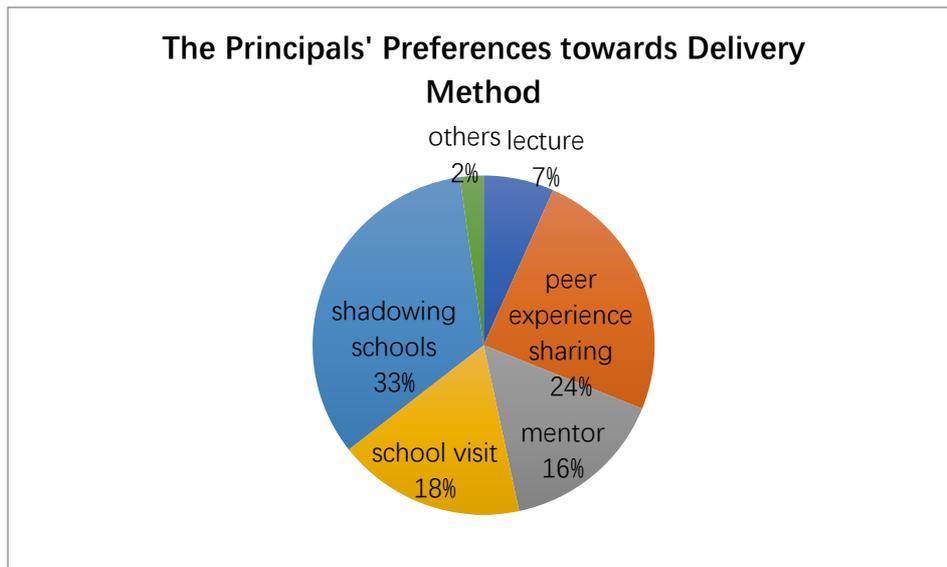
School management skills: A one-way ANOVA determined that there was also a minor significant difference ( $0.05 < p < 0.1$ ) in the perceived importance of skills related to school management when analyzed in respect of the student-teacher ratio (r),  $p=0.097$ . A higher student-teacher ratio was linked to a higher score for school management skills, when compared to a lower student-teacher ratio. This may be because each teacher needs to take care of more students. Post hoc tests indicated that those with a higher student-teacher ratio ( $15 < r < 17$ , and  $r > 17.01$ ) assigned a significantly higher importance value ( $M=4.5500$  and  $M=4.5833$ ) than those with a smaller student-teacher ratio ( $r < 14.99$ ,  $M=4.0909$ ).

### Preference on delivery method

Survey respondents were also asked to complete two single-choice questions to describe their preferences towards the training methods and programme providers. The outcomes demonstrated the new principals' strong preference towards practical-oriented training methods and training providers, and that the traditional form of principal preparation was unpopular.

#### *Preferred delivery method:*

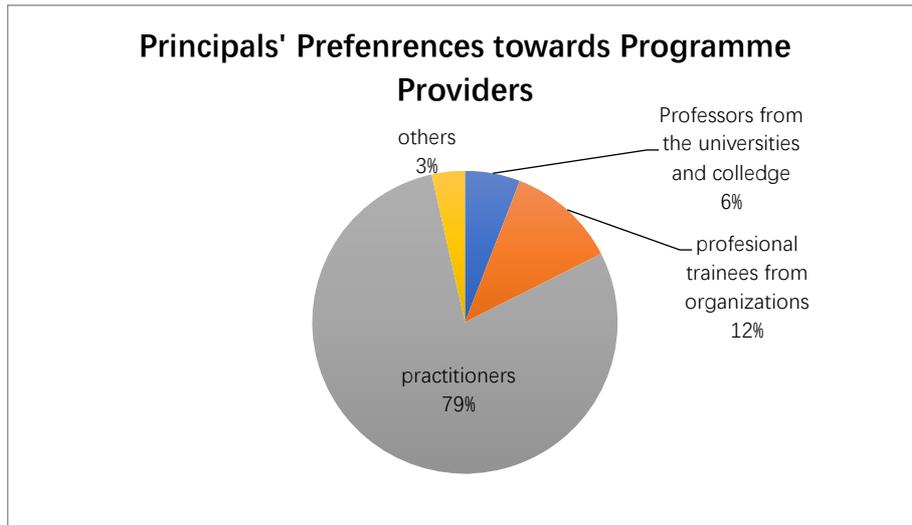
As indicated in Figure 4.1, lecture-based learning was the least favourite of the five main delivery methods, with only 3 respondents' supporting this (6.7%). On the other hand, shadowing schools, which provided the participants a chance to deeply investigate the model or high-performing schools, and also allow them to communicate with the staff and teachers from the model schools, was the most popular method, with one-third of respondents supporting this. Peer learning, which was underestimated in Chinese literature and government policies, was the second favourite way of training chosen by new principals (24.4%). Finally, school visits and having a mentor had similar percentages, with 17.8% and 15.6% respectively. The results demonstrated that the context-based delivery methods, such as shadowing schools, peer learning and school visit, are preferred by the new principals, while the less context-based methods, such as mentors and lectures, received less support from the respondents.



*Figure 4.1 The Principals' Preferences towards Delivery Method*

*Preferred programme provider:*

The choice of programme provider confirmed the same trend as the programme delivery methods, as the practical-oriented provider is the most popular. Practitioners from the real-world context were overwhelmingly preferred, with 82.2% support. Government officials were the least favourite, with no support for this type of provider. Similarly, professors and experts from universities and colleges received little support, with only two votes (4.3%). Trainers from professional training organizations or companies received a little more support (8.7%) from the new principals. The data show that the practical-oriented providers were emphatically preferred by the new principals, while theory-based or government-based providers received little support.



*Figure 4.2 Principals' Preferences towards Programme Providers*

There were a few differences when compared across various groups. ANOVA analysis indicates there were no significant differences according to gender, educational backgrounds, school contexts or the number of years in their position. The only two significant differences were as follow:

Preference towards Lecture: A one-way ANOVA indicated a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) in how various age groups perceived the traditional way of training – lecture ( $p = 0.026$ ). The following post hoc test indicates that the older age-group preferred the lecture training method ( $M = 1.5$ ,  $SD = 0.70711$ ), while a few from the middle-aged group also preferred this delivery method ( $M = 1.0667$ ,  $SD = 0.04632$ ), while none of the youngest age group preferred lecture ( $M = 1$ ,  $SD = 0.00000$ ).

*Table 4.4 Preference for Lecture*

	n	M	SD	p
31-40	14	1.0000	0.0000	0.026
41-50	30	1.0667	0.04632	
51-60	2	1.5000	0.50000	

- Preference towards mentor: A one-way ANOVA determined that there was also a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) in respondents' attitudes to mentor

training, according to school size  $p=0.027$ . Post hoc tests indicate that principals from those school size ranging from 3000 to 5000 were not positive about this ( $M=1$ ), while principals with school sizes below 3000 and above 5000 assigned a higher value to mentor training, with  $M=1.2632$  and  $M=1.3333$  respectively.

*Table 4.5 Preference for Mentor*

	n	M	SD	p
Below 3000	19	1.2632	0.45241	0.027
3001-5000	21	1.0000	0.00000	
5001 and above	6	1.3333	0.51640	

Overall, the survey outcomes show that new principals stressed the significance of practical knowledge, such as instructional leadership ability and school management skills, while, the more curriculum or policy-based knowledge, such as legal and legislation and basic educational theory, were less valued by the principals. Similarly, the respondents also demonstrated their preferences towards practical-oriented delivery methodology, such as shadowing schools and school visits.

Subsequently, through the One-way ANOVA test, factors such as age, gender, and school sizes were shown to have only a limited influence in terms of the respondents' perceived significance of different types of knowledge, as well as their preferences for delivery methods. The next section reports the findings from open-ended questions.

### Open-ended Questions

There are two dimensions of the open-ended questions, one is about the professional growth of the principals through the training, and the other is about the least valued part of the programme. 34 new or aspiring principals completed the questions (58.6%). The following table demonstrated the frequencies of the words mentioned in open-ended questions, some of them defined as 'beneficial', and some

as 'unnecessary'. Table 4.6 shows certain similarities with the findings from the closed questions, for example in terms of the participants' preferences towards knowledge content, delivery methods, and programme providers. Answers to the open-ended questions provided detailed supplementary information about whether and how the programme was beneficial.

*Table 4.6 Ranked Order of the Frequencies of the Words that Mentioned*

Word	Frequencies	Beneficial	Unnecessary
School-based research	14	14	
Theory-based learning	10	2	8
School management skills	9	9	
Shadowing school	8	8	
Leadership enactment	6	6	
Legal and legislation	6	5	1
Experts/professors	6	3	3
College entrance examination (gao kao)	4	4	
Teachers' professional growth	4	3	1
Peer experience sharing	3	3	
School improvement and innovation	3	3	
School visit	2	2	
School culture construction	2	2	
Instructional leadership	2	1	1
Mentors	2	2	

Table 4.6 shows a number of significant trends:

- The programme's contribution to principals' content knowledge

The respondents assigned positive comments about the training programme's contribution to knowledge content about school management skills. 'School management skill' is the second most popular word mentioned in the open-ended responses (9 times), and all the comments are in the 'beneficial' dimension. As shown in the closed question findings, 'school management skill' ranked No.1 in respect of the importance of knowledge content for new and aspiring principals, so

it appears that the training programme has met the knowledge requirements of the participants. Surprisingly, legal and legislation knowledge, which was underrated in the survey, received more attention in open-ended questions, with five respondents saying that this is beneficial to their professional growth, with comments such as ‘enable us to protect the school, and ourselves in legal ways’ (P46).

Surprisingly, the knowledge content that ranked very high in the survey – instructional leadership - was seldom mentioned by the respondents in the open-ended questions, with only one saying that the programme was beneficial for his professional growth on instructional ability. However, college entrance examination (gaokao), one of the most important subdivisions of high school instructional targets and student performance, was perceived significantly by the respondents, and mentioned four times as a contribution to the programme.

- Principals’ preferences of delivery methods and providers.

Similarly, to the closed questions responses, shadowing school received many mentions (8) from the principals as a beneficial part of the programme, and peer experience sharing was also complimented by some principals (3 times). Both ‘lecture-based learning’ and ‘professors from universities and college’ were ranked lowly in the closed question responses, and the findings were similar for the open-ended questions. There are eight negative comments about ‘theory-based’ learning, which was the most frequently mentioned in the ‘unnecessary’ part. Some respondents felt that the theory-based learning was ‘helpless at all’ (P33), while some complained that there was ‘too much time for theory-based learning during the programme’. Some principals also listed the names of the courses that were not necessary (P36, P37).

The participants also made some critical comments about professors and experts, in terms of their curriculum content and teaching ability. Some principals described the

lecturers as someone who 'has a 'professor' position but does not know how to teach at all' (P43) or someone who 'feels good about him/herself, actually, their lessons were boring' (P29). Some respondents advised that 'pure theory-based lectures provided by 'big name' experts should be deleted' (P6), as these made the training programme 'lack practical meaning' (P15, P42) and 'less effective' (P43).

'Some lectures that were provided by the 'so-called experts' were lack of pedagogy targets, and they should focus more on the backgrounds and requirements of the participants, as well as their working contexts' (P33).

- 'School-based research' and leadership enactment

"As a principal, it is necessary to implement 'school-based research' in the schools and become the instructor of the 'school-based research', as well as the leader of teachers' professional growth." (P3)

'School-based research' is a mini-case study conducted by principals, which is based on each principal's own school context and personal needs, and it started before the training programme, through a proposal provided by the principals. During the programme, principals accepted assistance from their mentors, usually the practitioners from high performing schools, and the professors or experts from the college. The proposal will be developed into an essay, as one part of the assessment for their principal certification.

'School-based research' was the most frequently mentioned word in response to the open-ended questions (14 times), and all the respondent regarded it as a great contribution to supporting their professional growth and leadership enactment in schools (6 times), as it 'provided us a chance to learn more details about the school context' (P, 39) and also allowed them to 'self-diagnose the school's problems'. The advantages of 'school-based research' mentioned by respondents related to

different aspects of leadership enactment and school development, namely strategies for college entrance examinations (4 times), leading teachers' professional growth (3 times), school improvement and innovation (3 times), and school environment construction (twice). Some principals also complimented the contribution of mentors in 'school-based research' (P8, P19).

- Comments on the programme design

As well as comments on content and delivery, a few principals offered advice on the design of the programme. There was a strong call for 'practical and realistic exercise experience', rather than 'theoretical learning in the classroom'. A number of principals complained that there was too much time for theoretical learning, which made the programme 'lack practical meaning'.

### **Are they ready to lead?**

#### Understanding of Chinese principalship

In 2013, the Ministry of Education in China published the new set of Professional Standards and Qualifications for Chinese Principalship (for Compulsory Level: K1-K12), which clarified its basic conceptions, and also illuminated the basic standards and qualifications for principal's leadership practice in schools. In the last paragraph of the document, it is noted that 'principals should apply the Standards as the foundation for their personal professional growth'. The survey explored to what extent the new principals understand and apply the Standard to improve their leadership ability. However, in response to a Likert-scale question, the new and aspiring principals mostly showed limited understanding of the Standard,  $M=2.5161$ ,  $SD=0.72436$ . According to table 4.8, nearly half of the principals (48.4%) were not familiar with the Standard, and only two of them were quite accustomed to it (6.5%).

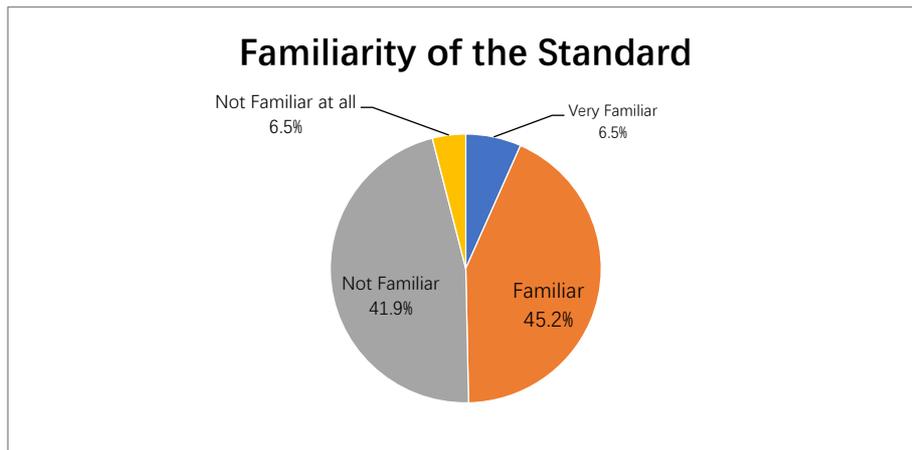


Figure 4.3: Principals' Familiarity with the Standard

### Are you ready to lead?

The survey asked the participants to comment on their readiness to lead. This showed a significant lack of confidence, as 41.9% felt that they were not prepared enough for the position. Only one principal strongly agreed that he/she was totally ready for the position. Even the principals who had been appointed for several years demonstrated inadequate confidence for the position (include table or figure here).

The research also showed that school size, and whether the principals have been appointed or not, had a significant impact on their readiness for the position. Other factors, such as gender, age, and school context, appeared to be insignificant.

### *Principal position*

An Independent t test indicated a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the readiness for leadership position based on whether they have been appointed or not,  $M = 2.6129$ ,  $p = 0.046$ . A t test demonstrated that those who have already been appointed ( $M = 2.8462$ ,  $SD = 0.55470$ ) assigned higher degrees of confidence than those who have not yet been appointed yet ( $M = 2.4444$ ;  $SD = 0.51131$ ). Thus, preparing through learning and/or experience may assist new principals' preparedness for their leadership position. However, a one-way ANOVA test discovered that the years that they have

been appointed to the principal position had little impact on their readiness for this position, as there were no significant differences among different stages of principals.

*School size*

The survey also found that school size influenced the principal’s readiness for the position. As indicated in table 4.11, the post hoc test indicated that principals from smaller schools had more confidence than the principals from the larger schools. In particular, the table demonstrated a significant difference between school sizes below 3000 and those above 5001.

*Table 4.7 Readiness for Principalship by School Size*

	n	M	SD
Below 3000	11	2.8182	0.60302
3001-5000	15	2.6000	0.50709
5001 and above	5	2.2000	0.55842

Are you a qualified leader?

Although the principals demonstrated a modest level of readiness for the principalship, most of them evaluated themselves as a qualified leader, with a mean of 2.9032. Through the one-way ANOVA test, it is also surprising to note that those with no experiences, or in their first year as principal, gave a higher self-evaluation as a qualified leader than those in their second or subsequent years in their position (see Table 4.8).

*Table 4.8 Self-evaluation as a Qualified Leader*

Years as principal	n	M	SD
None	10	3.1000	0.53882
One to two years	9	3.0000	0.75593
Two years and above	12	2.6250	0.51755

### Effectiveness of the Programme

Although new principals demonstrated modest readiness for taking the principal role (M=2.6129), the programme seemed to have a positive impact, as, through the preparation training, the new principals felt more competitive when competing for the leadership position, with a mean of 3.0645, suggesting that the preparation programme could be regarded as beneficial. Only five respondents (10.9%) disregarded the value of the training programme, while the other respondents acknowledged that the preparation-training programme made them more competitive, with various levels of agreement.

There was no significant difference among variables such as age, gender, school context, and the year the principals were appointed. However, a t test demonstrated that the principals who have already been appointed benefited more from the training programme than those who have not yet been appointed, with a mean of 3.2308 and 2.9444 respectively (See in Table 4.9).

*Table 4.9. The Training Programme Makes the Principals' More Competitive for the Position*

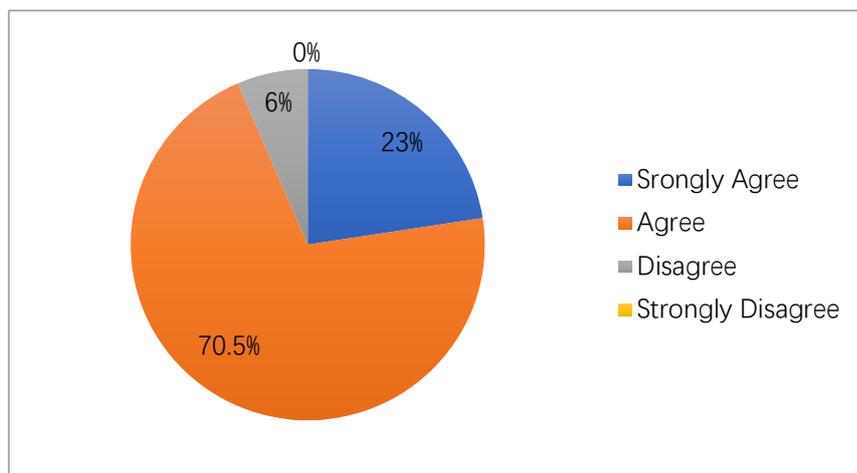
	n	M	SD
New Appointed Principals	13	2.9444	0.43853
Aspiring Principals	18	3.2308	0.72536

Overall, the survey indicated that the preparation for new principals and candidates for principalship was inadequate in terms of their readiness for the role, as a number of them knew little about the Qualifications and Standards for Principalship in China, and some of them felt a lack of confidence for the position. However, the preparation-training programme was seen to be effective when competing for the position, and most of the participants regarded themselves as qualified leaders.

## How the preparation programme could contribute to their leadership practice

### Leadership enactment

The researcher explored how the preparation programme impacted on new principals' future leadership enactment and practice. Most of the principals claimed that the preparation programme would be helpful in respect of their leadership practice in schools, with a mean of 3.1613. Only two respondents disregarded the programme's possible contributions to their leadership enactment, while another 29 respondents admitted its value with various levels of agreement (93.5%) (See figure 4.4).



*Figure. 4.4 The Trainig Programme was Beneficial for Principals' Leadership Enactment*

The study further investigated how the preparation programme could contribute to different aspects of leadership practice, including school organization, instructional leadership, visionary leadership, leading teacher's professional growth and developing social networks.

*Table 4.10 Rank Order of Professional Growth of Leadership Ability*

Leadership Practice	Mean	SD
Leading teachers' professional growth	3.2581	0.51431

Developing social networks	3.1935	0.60107
Leadership Enactment	3.1613	0.52261
Constructing school organization	3.1613	0.45437
Instructional leadership	3.0968	0.39622
Visionary leadership	3.0645	0.57361

Generally, the preparation programme demonstrated constructive contributions to every aspect of the new principals' leadership practice, as all of the means are over 3.0000. There were minor differences from one aspect to another, in a rank of leading teachers' professional growth (M=3.2581), developing social networks (M=3.1935), constructing school organization (M=3.1613), instructional leadership (M=3.0968), and visionary leadership (M=3.0645) (see figure 4.4). The survey findings also show that principals with different contextual or personal background might respond differently for some of the leadership abilities (see Table 4.10).

#### *Constructing school organization*

A post hoc test showed that those who have not been appointed as principals were benefitted more on constructing school organization ability (M=3.2222), than those who have already been appointed (3.0769). Similarly, another t test indicated that the respondents with no school management experience assigned a higher gain to constructing school organization ability than those with experience (see Table 4.11).

*Table 4.11 Constructing School Organization Ability Depending on Experience*

Years of the position	n	M	SD
None	10	3.4000	0.51640
Experienced	21	3.04762	0.53452

#### *Leading teaching and learning in school:*

Overall, the training programme demonstrated a smaller influence on instructional leadership in schools when compared with other factors. In the following t test and one-way ANOVA tests, the author found that the principals that were less

experienced, came from rural schools, or suffered higher student-teacher ratios, were more likely boost their instructional leadership ability through this preparation programme.

In particular, the one-way ANOVA test showed a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) in how the programme had contributed to their instructional leadership ability growth depending on the number of years that the principals had been in the position ( $F(3,28) = 3.0968, p = 0.015$ ). Post hoc tests indicated that principals with no experience benefited more than those who had been appointed for one or two years, while the principals who had been appointed for two to three years gave the least positive response (see table 4.12). The principals with less experience gained more in respect of instructional leadership.

*Table 4.12 Instructional Leadership Growth by School Size*

	n	M	SD	p
No experience	10	3.3000	0.48305	0.015
One to two years	8	3.0000	0.00000	
Two to three years	8	2.8750	0.35355	

An independent t test showed that principals from rural schools ( $n=9; M=3.2222$ ) indicated a higher level of instructional leadership ability growth through the training programme than those from urban schools ( $n=22, M=3.0445$ ). The post hoc test also demonstrated that schools with higher student-teacher ratios benefited more in respect of leading teaching and learning in schools compared with those with lower student-teacher ratios (see table 4.13).

*Table 4.13 Instructional Leadership Growth by Student-Teacher Ratio*

Student/Teacher Ratio (r)	n	M	SD
$r < 14.99$	7	3.2857	0.48795
$15.00 < r < 16.99$	20	3.0769	0.27735
$r > 17.00$	12	3.0000	0.44721

### *Setting school goals and vision*

In general, the programme demonstrated the least impact in terms of developing capacity to set school goals and vision ( $M=3.0645$ ). In the following t tests, the author found that there were certain differences according to gender and school background. Overall, principals who were male, or came from the urban area, demonstrated relevantly higher gains in setting school goals and vision (see tables 4.14 and 4.15).

*Table 4.14 Setting School Goals and Vision by Gender*

School Background	n	M	SD	p
Male	22	3.1818	0.58849	0.074
Female	9	2.7778	0.44096	

*Table 4.15 Setting School Goals and Vision by School Background*

School Background	n	M	SD
Urban Schools	9	3.3333	0.50000
Rural Schools	22	2.9545	0.57547

Overall, significant differences across various group characteristics for leading teachers' professional growth and developing social networks were far less evident than other leadership practice aspects, although both activities ranked very high in terms of the programme's possible contribution to respondents' leadership growth in the future.

### *Before or after*

As the preparation programme included the principals who have already been officially appointed ( $n=13$ ), and those who have not ( $n=18$ ), the author further explored whether the effectiveness of the training would be different in terms of their current positions. Table 4.16 shows that, overall, training after appointment produced better perceived outcomes in terms of leadership enactment, with principals acknowledging more gains for most of the leadership practice aspects,

although the significances were slight. Principal candidates only showed more gains for instructional leadership and constructing school organization (see table 4.16).

*Table 4.16 Comparisons between Principals and Principal Candidates*

Items	Principals	Principal Candidates
Competiveness for the position	3.2308 ↑	2.9444
Leadership enactment	3.2308 ↑	3.1111
Instructional Leadership Ability	3.0769 ↓	3.1111
Developing Social Networks	3.3077 ↑	3.1111
Constructing School Organization	3.0779 ↓	3.2222
Leading Teachers' Professional Growth	3.3077 ↑	3.2222
Setting School Goals and Visions	3.0769 ↑	3.0556

### **Factors that Impact Leadership Selection and Recruitment**

#### *Qualifications and standards*

The Standards and Qualifications include two different groups, the compulsory requirements, and the preferred features, which are not compulsory. Table 4.17 demonstrates the outcomes of the compulsory factors that were collected from their background information, which were regarded as the 'steppingstones' for the headship position in China.

*Table 4.17 Compulsory Requirements for Chinese Principalship*

Items	Qualification	Survey Percentage
Political Background	Support Communist Party	100% Party Member
Teaching Experience	No less than 5 years	100%
Management Ability	Strong ability	100% with managerial experience
Educational Background	College and above	100%
Accreditation Process	Principal certification	47.8% of the principals post without a certificate

#### *Political background and teaching experience:*

Based on the survey data, all of the respondents were Party members (46 respondents), and with teaching experience for more than five years, which means that all of the new principals and principal candidates met the requirements of

political background and teaching experiences.

*Educational background:*

According to the policy, the basic educational background standard for high school principals is a bachelor's degree, at least at college level. The survey demonstrated that 45 out of 46 respondents held a bachelor's degree, and 44 of them were at the university and above level, while only one of them was at college level. However, only one of them held a postgraduate degree. It could be concluded that most principals and principal candidates met the basic requirement on educational background, while the higher levels of degree did not show any advantage in terms of principals' selection or recruitment, or the current high school principalship system is not able to attract the candidates with a higher educational background.

*Certificate for principalship*

As shown in Table 4.17, although a 'certificate for principalship' was one of the compulsory requirements in the written documents, nearly half of the participants (47.8%) achieved their position without it. The survey also demonstrated differences in respect of school background and school context. According to the Independent t test, it showed that the principals from urban areas were more likely to be appointed before they get the certificates, rather than the principals from the rural schools (see Table 4.18). The following one-way ANOVA test demonstrated that principals from smaller schools were more likely to be appointed before the formal procedure (see Table 4.19).

*Table 4.18 Posted with/without a Certificate Depending on School Background*

School Background	n	M	SD
Urban Schools	15	1.4667	0.51640
Rural Schools	31	1.5484	0.50588

*Table 4.19 Posted with/without a Certificate Depending on School Size*

School Background	n	M	SD
Under 3000	19	1.4211	0.50726
3001-5000	21	1.5741	0.50709
Above 5000	6	1.6667	0.51640

Usually, a certificate comes after the formal preparation training hold by provincial level organizations, as a proof and assessment for the principals' preparation for the principalship. As noted earlier, most of the principals agreed that the preparation-training programme made them more competitive when competing for the leadership position (M=3.0645). However, during the selection and recruitment procedure, there was no direct or necessary linkage between the preparation training programme and leadership posts. In practice, the certificate for principalship was not a compulsory requirement or a 'stepping stone' for headship.

### **Preferred Qualifications**

There were no written policies or regulations clarified the standards or preferred qualifications. However, through the background information survey, certain personal background factors were identified that could have an impact on principals' selection and recruitment and were more preferred by the administrators when choosing a new principal. Regarding to the optional factors, the study discovered that gender and age, in certain degrees, could impact their selection and recruitment of principalship. First of all, male candidates were overwhelmingly preferred than the female ones. And then, principals in their forties were more favored than those in their thirties and early fifties.

#### *Gender preference*

Male principals hold the overwhelming percentage in this position, particularly at high school level. Among 61 candidates who participated in this preparation-training

programme, only 9 (14.75%) were female principals, all of whom are now vice-principals in their schools, whereas the 22 participants who have already been appointed as principals are all male.

#### *Age preference*

According to the background information of the principals, the candidates' age range from 34 to 51, and the largest proportion appears in the range of 40 to 49 (60.7%), then followed by the principals aged from 31 to 39 (34.4%), while the over 51 group constituted the smallest proportion (4.9%). According to previous analysis, the compulsory standards require a principal to possess a large amount of teaching and managerial experience, and a high job title. As all of these facets require plenty of time for their professional growth and personal development, it is harder for a young person to get the headship position very soon.

Thus, principals aged from 40 to 49 years old were most preferred by the government when selecting and developing candidates, as principals in this age range owned sufficient career experience, and also had a great space for progress. Then followed by the principals ranged from 31 to 39 years old, although they may lack of managerial experience, they still had enough time to learn how to be a school leader. However, new principals or principal candidates who above 50 years old constituted the smallest proportion, as the legal retirement age for a Chinese principal was 55 years old for women, and 60 years old for men.

#### *Previous Career Path*

The requirement for principals to 'acquire strong managerial ability' does not have a measurable standard in the policy documents. The survey demonstrated that most of the respondents had plenty of experience in school management, as middle or senior leaders, except for one participant, who had no previous high school

experience. Then, the study further explored their managerial experience in different aspects, including how many positions they had experienced before, what kind of positions were they, how long is the duration of each position and the further influence of these positions.

*Instructional position or managerial position*

Positions in Chinese high schools can be divided into two categories. The first is a managerial position, including grade leader, moral leader and office administrator, while the other is an instructional position, including curriculum leader and instructional leader. Table 4.20 shows the frequencies of each position mentioned by the respondents (n=38) according to their previous career path (multiple-choices).

*Table 4.20: Frequencies and average years of different positions*

Position	Frequencies	Average years
Curriculum leader	15	4.5 years
Grade leader	14	4 years
Moral leader	10	2.9 year
Instructional leader	17	6.4 years
Office administrator	15	4.3 years
Other middle leaders	3	3.6 years
Vice principal	31	3.2 years
Principal Assistant	3	3.5 years
Secretary of Party Committee	5	2 years
LEA officials	2	4.5 years

Table 4.20 shows that the instructional positions were the most frequently mentioned during various stages of their career paths, notably curriculum leader (15 times) and instructional leader (17 times), and the most frequently mentioned among all positions. However, the gaps between instructional positions and managerial positions were not significant, with office administrator mentioned 15 times, grade leader 14 times and moral leader 10 times. Thus, there was no significant difference between managerial and instructional roles as previous

positions before the principalship.

Although there was no significant difference in terms of frequencies, principals or principal candidates were likely to spend more time on instructional roles, rather than managerial roles. As indicated in Table 4.20, those who had been instructional leaders spent an average of 6.9 years in that position, and those who used to be a curriculum leader, spent 4.5 years. For managerial roles, the average time the principals had spent as grade leader and office administrator was approximately 4 years, and was only 2.9 years for moral leaders.

As a great number of participants for this study are now vice principals, or secretaries of Party committees, who were not yet appointed as principals these positions cannot represent the exact and final data. Although the average duration for vice principals was 3.2 years, the longest duration was 8 years, and one principal was only in post for one year. The data for LEA officials was not representative, as only two participants had this experience. One had been working in the LEA for less than one year, while the other had been worked there for more than 8 years.

Overall, instructional positions were significant for principals' career paths, as these positions were more frequently experienced by the respondents and, on average, principals spent more time in these positions. Both office administrator and grade leaders were also significant but for shorter periods of time. It was very unusual for principals to be promoted directly from middle leaders to principal position, thus being a vice principal, principal assistant, or Secretary of the Party Committee, was expected before being appointed as principals.

### *Career path*

The survey also calculated how many positions the respondents had experienced before the principalship (see Table 4.21). The majority of the principals (62.2%) had

experienced at least two different positions, while some of them (13.5%) had worked in four different positions before. A significant number of principals (37.8%) had worked in only one position before being posted to the (vice) principalship. Table 4.25 demonstrated that few principals could be appointed directly from the middle leaders to principals, as most of them (36/38) were posted as a vice principal or secretary of the Party committee after the middle position, and before the principal position (94.7%). Overall, the table indicates that the selection and recruitment system encouraged a variety of managerial and leadership experience of principal candidates before being appointed to the principal position.

*Table 4.21 Number of positions before becoming principal*

No. Of Positions	1 position	2 positions	3 positions	4 positions
Frequencies	14 (37.8%)	10 (27.1%)	8 (21.6)	5 (13.5%)

In the following independent t tests, there were no significant differences by gender or school context but the one-way ANOVA test found that the size of the school might have an influence on their career paths. The larger the school, the more positions the principals might experience before their appointment (see table 4.22).

*Table 4.22 Principals' career paths and school size*

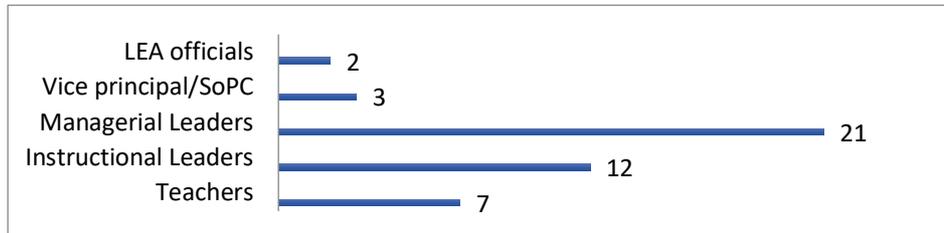
School Background	n	M	SD
3000 and below	15	1.4667	0.51640
3001-5000	17	1.6471	0.49259
5001 and above	6	1.8333	0.40825

- *The most beneficial position*

The participants were asked which previous positions were most beneficial for their principalship practice. Table 4.23 shows that nearly half of the principals (45.7%) mentioned the importance of managerial roles in helping them with their leadership practice after post, followed by the instructional roles, with 26.1% of respondents' support. Senior positions such as principals' assistant (6.5%) or LEA official (4.3%),

appear to be much less significant. Similarly, teaching experience, which was one of the compulsory requirements of principalship, was perceived to have very limited impact for their future leadership practice (15.2%).

*Table 4.23 Which career experiences benefited you the most?*



The survey also showed the contribution of different positions based on their school background. Principals from urban contexts, or larger schools, assigned a higher significance to managerial roles, while principals from rural, or smaller, schools appreciated the instructional roles more (see tables 4.23 and 4.24). For schools with more than 5000 students, none of the respondents acknowledged the contribution of instructional leadership roles (see table 4.25).

*Table 4.24*

*The Comparisons of Contribution of Managerial Roles and Instructional Roles to Leadership Practice – Based on School Context*

	n	M of Managerial Roles	SD of Managerial Roles	M of Instructional Roles	SD of Instructional Roles
Urban School	15	1.6000	0.50709	1.1333	0.35178
Rural School	31	1.3871	0.49514	1.3226	0.47519

*Table 4.25*

*The Comparisons of Contribution of Managerial Roles and Instructional Roles to Leadership Practice – Based on School Size*

	n	M of Managerial Roles	SD of Managerial Roles	M of Instructional Roles	SD of Instructional Roles
3000 and below	19	1.3684	0.49559	1.3158	0.47757
3001 - 5000	21	1.4286	0.50709	1.2857	0.46291
5001 and above	6	1.8333	0.40825	1.0000	0.00000

## Overview

The survey investigated different aspects of the preparation process, including knowledge content, delivery methods, and effectiveness of preparation training, as well as their previous career paths and the participants' readiness for the position, based on personal background and school context of each principal. Two main features emerged from the data.

Both instructional leadership ability and managerial ability were emphasized throughout the preparation process, from principals' career experience to the preparation programme's curriculum content. Technically, instructional ability and managerial ability were perceived to have almost the same importance in terms of the knowledge content valued by respondents, as well as the practical experience of their previous career paths. Also, in respect of previous career experience, instructional leadership roles were of higher importance and for a longer duration. However, the whole preparation process demonstrated more gains for growth in managerial ability and their previous managerial leadership roles were perceived to be most beneficial for their current leadership practice. Instructional leadership ability indicated a weaker outcome in relation to principals' professional growth.

The survey analysis applied one-way ANOVA tests and Independent t tests to investigate how different groups perceived the issues. As shown above, differences in school background, particularly school context, and diverse personal backgrounds, particularly gender differences, led to different reflections about the whole process, including the perceived importance of knowledge content, preference towards delivery method, improvements through the training programme, contributions of previous career paths, readiness for principalship and the selection and recruitment procedure for the position.

# CHAPTER FIVE: INTERVIEW FINDINGS FOR PROGRAMME PARTICIPANTS

## Introduction

The interview participants were chosen from the survey candidates, and nine principals were selected. In order to provide a comprehensive understanding of new principalship in the sample province, the author selected the principals with different personal and school backgrounds. This was a purposive sample that balanced several different features (see Table 5.1). Each interview lasted for between 30 and 40 minutes, and most of them (8/9) were audio recorded with the permission of the principals. To comply with ethical considerations, the principals are coded with numbers, and all the names schools and places are pseudonyms.

Table 5.1 explains the background features of each principal.

Code No.	School SES	School Performance <sup>7</sup>	Gender	Position/Years
P1	Rural-County	High performing	Male	Principal/3
P2	Urban-Capital	High performing	Female	Vice-P
P3	Rural	Low performing	Male	Principal/1
P4	Rural-County	Low performing	Female	Vice
P5	Rural-County	Low performing	Female	Principal/1
P6	Rural	Low performing	Male	Principal/1
P7	Urban	High performing	Male	Vice
P8	Urban-Capital	Low performing	Female	Principal/2
P9	Urban-Capital	High performing	Male	Principal/1

*Table 5.1 Backgrounds of Principals*

This chapter provides a thematic discussion, with three different dimensions; leadership development, socialization and leadership enactment.

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<sup>7</sup> School Performance is defined by two factors: 1. School performance when compared with other schools in the same districts; 2. Performance of College Entrance Examinations of 2016.

## **Leadership Development**

### Different ways of developing a leader

The principals discussed four main types of leadership development, before and after their appointment as principalship: formal lectures, context-based learning, internship, and online study. Each of these is discussed below.

#### *Formal Lectures*

The formal lecture is one of the traditional content-led delivery methods for principal preparation. Some principals claimed that formal lectures brought them new concepts and skills, which, to a certain degree, were beneficial for their leadership enactment (P1, P6), and also addressed some of their confusions about practice (P2). However, most of the participants explained the limitations of formal training programme, as the lecturers were not 'impressive' or 'influential' enough (P1), and the knowledge was far removed from real leadership practice (P9).

'To be honest, some concepts and knowledge are great, however, the influence of lecturers, in my opinion, was not significant enough. No matter theory construction, intelligence inspiration or practical case analysis, these are all in a normal and peaceful pace. In my perspectives, a training programme should be inspiring and appealing. Only after the mind shock, the principals will start to rethink their previous leadership practice, and then make changes. Otherwise, a mind-numbing programme will not trigger any self-examination and revolution.' (P1)

The principals also preferred practitioners as lecturers, rather than professors or researchers from the universities. Similarly, principals also preferred more practical-based content rather than theoretical-based inputs.

'I prefer teachers and principals from the fieldwork, as their lessons are more experienced oriented, rather than theory only. A pure theoretical-based lecture cannot explicate everything explicitly, sometimes, if you want to explain a situation clearly, it is better through experience sharing.' (P3)

Formal lecture was one of the most frequently applied delivery methods, as it could include a great many principals in one training programme, with less cost and time. This is also a traditional Chinese teaching style. However, principals demonstrated that formal lectures lacked 'impressiveness' and 'mind shock', some lecturers lack practical experience which impedes the delivery of knowledge, and some content was far removed from principal practice in the real-world context. Thus, the overall effectiveness of this method could be described as 'limited' (P1, P2, P3, P9).

#### *Context-based Learning*

The participants have experienced two main kinds of context-based learning. The first relates to the shadowing school (approximately one week), and the shorter period refers to the school visit (approximately one day). These two types of school observation were also applied in this training programme, and also investigated in chapter four, including its effectiveness and its attractiveness for principals. Similar to the survey outcomes, this practice-based learning received high praise from the interview participants, particularly the shadowing school, who stated that the shadowing school was one of the most beneficial ways for their leadership enactment and practice.

First, it allows the principals to observe every aspect of the school operation, including organizational construction, instructional routine, human resource management, student activities and classroom teaching (P2, P4, P7). Principal 2 stated that, 'the same leadership practice may be enacted differently in different schools, and shadowing school allowed me to discover their secrets or keys of

success.’ Principal 9 also mentioned that he would make comparisons between his school and the model school on the same issue, through this process. It created more sparks and ideas on school development and leadership enactment. Further, an outside perspective makes the principals more objective and critical in observing a school, and then, triggered their inner motivation for leadership innovation at their own schools (P2).

‘Even the best school has its weaknesses, if I had discovered some, I will examine my school, like “does my school have this kind of shortcoming” or “how can I avoid these kinds of problems”’ (P8).

Second, in this training programme, the shadowing school involves two activities, one is the report from the model school, including the reports from its principal, senior leaders and heads of different departments, in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the school, and the other is fieldwork study, which invites participants to join and observe different activities in schools. It allows these new principals to become familiar with different departments of schools, as well as how these departments work.

Finally, the schedule was quite flexible in the model school, as it allowed the participants certain freedom to choose the sessions in which they would like to participate, which means that principals could participate in the reports, lessons and school activities based on their needs. In the model schools, the new principals could book the curriculum they want to listen to [unclear], and also make the appointment with the head of department to communicate their management experience, which makes the training procedure more targeted and purposeful (P2, P3, P4, P7).

Overall, context-based learning received lots of compliments from the principals, as it allows them to learn from the local high performing schools in different aspects, through both reports from the school administrators and teachers, and a variety of

observations of activities at schools. This process also makes them rethink their leadership strategies, make comparisons between the sample school and their own school, and consider the further development of their schools. As the participating schools and the sample (model) schools shared a quite similar macro context (in the same province), it makes the new principals clear on how to implement their leadership strategies within current policies and regulations.

### *Internship*

Internship was most frequently mentioned and complimented by the principals, as it made them feel inspired by the high performing schools in China, and triggered them to think further about their school development. Usually, principals act as vice-principals or principal assistant during their internship, under the supervision or guidance of the experienced principal, and the internship may last from one month to half a year (P1, P2, P3, P9). The principals' perceptions are mixed, with some saying that the mentor offer them some help and guidance (P1, P2), but others saying they do not.

'My internship experience is more like mentor and mentee, and it is a one-on-one relationship, that the experienced one would pass their knowledge and experience to the novice ones.' (P1)

Many principals demonstrated how they were 'impressed' (P1, P2) or 'touched' (P3, P5, P9) by the schools that they had interned before, such as Shanghai (P2), Fuzhou (P3), Suzhou (P1), and Beijing (P9). Some principals pointed out that the most impressive and effective training opportunity they had was the internship in the developed cities (P1, P3, P9), and some principals were looking forward to more opportunities like this (P1, P5, P7). They noted that they were inspired in terms of school culture construction (P1) and school character establishment (P9) through internship. They also admire these schools' diligent attitude towards education (P1,

P2, P9) and their devoted spirit for schools and students (P3).

However, most of their attention was paid to the facilities or the appearance of the schools, rather than the inner operation system or the leadership style of the principals. For example, principals always noted 'how affluent these sample schools are' (P1), 'how hard working the teachers are' (P3), or 'how supportive the LEA or the government is' (P2), or 'how advanced their educational cognitions are in the developed cities' (P9). In terms of how to introduce these ideas into their own schools, most of the principals demonstrated that both macro and micro context did not allow this (P1, P2, P3), or 'it would take them much more energy and time to push the school step forward a little' (P9). Principals also pointed out that 'there is no best or better pattern of school management to learn from, it is more about how much you could do under the particular context' (P9).

'My biggest impression for education in *Shenzhen* is that they never need to worry about money, which, in other words, is 'wealthy'. What the principals there thought of was how to use up the money; otherwise the funding will be given back to the local government. While, when it comes to *Beijing*, it is not only about money, as the capital city in China, it possesses the resources in nearly every aspect.' (P1)

Although it seems that internship opportunities in other developed cities were preferred by the principals, they also demonstrated that the location was not the most important factor; what matters the most is the unique culture or the flashpoint of the school for them to learn from (P1, P2, P3, P7). Principals also demonstrated that, the huge gaps in socio-economic background and school contexts make it difficult to accomplish these ideas in their own contexts. As most of the model schools that they had been to were privileged ones, which enjoyed an affluent economic status (P1, P3), more open and leading educational concepts (P1, P9), better student quality and teacher resources (P3, P7), and longer history of school

culture construction (P1, P2). While, the most of the sample principals were from lower SES schools, which were struggling for inadequate funding (P1), decreasing student attendance rate (P3), teachers' burnout (P3) and strong pressure for students' learning outcomes (P1, P2, P3, P7, P9). Thus, there is a huge contradiction between participants linking internships but not able to implement their learning from it.

### *Online-course Learning*

Online learning is an essential part of the new principal training system, as well as the after-post training programme, as it breaks the boundaries of time and spaces. It is established through an online platform, which provides numerous video-courses, a forum for experience sharing among principals, and Q & A sessions (P3). However, during the interviews, few principals mentioned that it is beneficial for their professional growth. Instead, most of the principals described it as 'useless' (P1, P8, P9), 'an extra burden' (P4, P6), and 'repetitive' (P7). Few of them took this training opportunity seriously.

'If I took it seriously, it may work. However, I never take it seriously, and I just coped with it passively, and finished the points as soon as possible.' (P3)

Some principals stated that they had a quite busy schedule, and arrived home very late after work. It was really an extra burden for them to finish another online course after their schoolwork, which left them no time for themselves (P7).

Overall, there were four main methods applied for current and new principal training and development in this province of China. These methods are quite dissimilar but, collectively, they comprised a comprehensive system of new principal training in the sample province, which included theory-based learning, context-based learning, campus-based learning, and online learning. However, different methods

demonstrated quite divergent outcomes in terms of their training effectiveness due to the principals' preferences towards learning methods and environments. Overall, online course was least preferred by the principals, as it was very time-consuming, while its contributions were small. Then, the traditional Chinese way of teaching -- formal lectures, were also criticized by a number of principals, as some lecturers were lack of 'impressiveness' and the content of knowledge can hardly be applied for real practice. Further, the context-based learning and internship received more compliments by the principals, as these methods allow them to understand how to operate a school, and also enable them to get familiar with those high-performing schools and successful principals. While, the researcher also demonstrated that due to the differentiates in social and economic status and school context, it is hard to implemented their learning from them.

#### Access to training opportunities

The previous training experience of the principals was quite varied, in terms of their quality, frequency, formulae and location. Their school background, LEA and motivation for learning, were three important factors that influence their access to training programmes.

#### *School background*

The background of the school had a significant impact on the principals' access to training and development. Principals from urban schools enjoyed more training opportunities (P2, P8, P9), even, for some leading high schools in the province, they were allowed certain authorities in choosing the training programme they need (P2). Thus, the content, delivery methods, providers and the format of training programme were more targeting and various for those better SES schools. Principals from rural or lower SES areas had fewer opportunities, and most of these training

programmes were formal lectures provided by the LEA (P3, P4, P7), which left them limited scope for choosing the programme that they really wanted. As the cost of training is partly connected to the local public finances, urban districts, or better-off SES districts, may be able to provide more funding for education than those in the lower SES areas. The better SES districts were likely to access better educational resources, including more experienced programme providers and more professional experts, so that principals were able to enjoy better quality development opportunities (P2).

There are 438 high schools in the sample province, classified by the Provincial Educational Bureau, according to their student performance, school size, school history and other evaluating factors (See figure 5.1). In general, high schools were categorized into two different types; the *provincial level model school* (116 high schools), and the *normal high school* (322 high schools). The *provincial level model schools* were further categorized into three different levels; level A (6 high schools), level B (63 high schools), and level C (46 high schools), while there was no further categorization for the *normal high schools*. Principals demonstrated that the various levels of the schools also have an impact, as higher level schools could provide better platforms for principals, relating to school funding for in-service training, relationships with the LEA, and cooperation with other schools and organizations (P2, P3, P5).

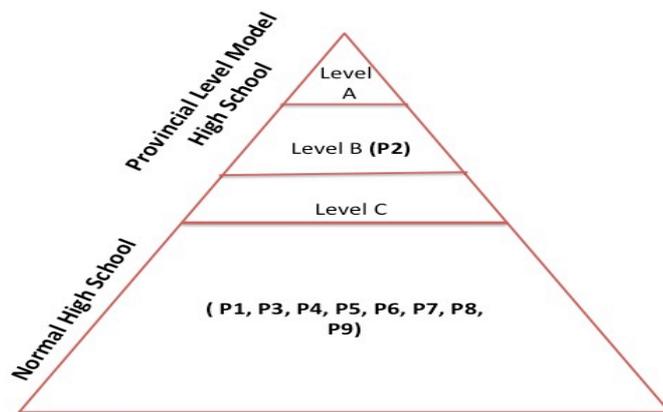


Chart 5.1 Different Levels of High Schools in the Sample Province

Figure 5.1 Different levels of high schools in the sample province

‘Different levels of the schools will provide you with different opportunities. In general, the higher the school level is, the more opportunities you will get and vice versa.’ (P6)

#### *Relationships with LEA*

The principal’s personal relationship with the LEA, and their communication with their superiors, were very important when seeking training opportunities. Principals mentioned that, first of all, it is important to make the LEAs familiar with the school, and the principal (P1, P6, P7, P9). A very effective way to do this is to go to the LEA very often (P6, P7), and update them on the progress of the school (P1). Principals should also have a clear idea about their personal training requirements and targets (P1, P9). Following this, it is essential to express their personal requirements to the superior leaders appropriately, thus communicating and social skills were very important during the procedure (P6, P7).

‘If you communicate with them [administrators from the LEA] appropriately, for most of time, they will respect your necessity and requirements. Learning is always good, thus, if the policy and funding allow,

they will not forbid you from learning.’ (P9)

### *Motivation of principals*

Despite the external factors, such as school SES levels and the relationship with the LEA, principals also pointed out that inner motivation is a vital factor in accessing learning and developing opportunities in China. Some principals demonstrated great passion and willingness for learning and developing through these training opportunities, while some principals indicated that they were ‘too busy to take a break’ (P6).

‘It is also related to the motivation of principal themselves, in terms of how he/she could impact on his/her superior leaders and colleagues to create these learning opportunities for him/her. Some principals, in my perspective, they already have a great platform, however, they do not want to progress, thus these opportunities seem to be irrelevant to them.’ (P1)

Overall, principals from different school backgrounds had different levels of access to diverse training opportunities, which meant that preparation and training for principals were quite dissimilar in terms of their results. Although the current system is quite completed as a whole, terming to its target population, delivery methods and knowledge content, it is unbalanced in terms of training opportunities, and the results differed from person to person.

### Programme evaluation

The research evaluated the whole of the ‘Principal Certification Training Programme’. It lasted for nearly half a year, and comprised four different aspects as noted above: in-campus training, including formal lectures and context-based learning, online-

course learning, and final assessment. The author monitored the three-week in-campus training programme, which included formal lectures and context-based learning. The overall comments on the quality of the training programme were positive, as principals acknowledged the value of the programme through different aspects, including overall design (P1), effectiveness of the delivery method (P9), networks established through the programme (P2, P3, P7, P8) and some impressive lectures (P6). However, in spite of the knowledge and skills gained through the programme, the principals gave more emphasis to their gains through peer learning and experience sharing (P1, P2), as the programme provide them a chance to meet other new and aspiring principals from all over the province (P3, P4).

‘The overall design of this training programme is great. Although I have experienced similar patterns of these training programmes many times, this training programme makes me feel new and fresh, and worth expecting.’ (P1)

‘One of the flashpoints of this training programme is that it introduces some conceptions and skills in business management into principal training and school management. I think it is great, as it is one step further towards principal’s professionalization.’ (P7)

The interviewees also acknowledged the contribution of the training programme to their peer learning environment, as it provided the principals with a chance to communicate with their peers, and also self-evaluate their leadership enactment at schools.

‘The training programme triggered the inner resources of participants, although, it is far from enough at this stage. As a principal training programme, every participant could be a case to learn from, and the programme has already taken the first step in doing so, which was very

stimulating. Through self-examination and peer-communication, principals could rethink and re-establish their previous leadership practice, and get promoted as a result.' (P1)

However, a number of principals also described the programme as 'normal' (P8), or 'tasteless' (P6), as they cannot tell the originality of this one when compared with numerous training programmes they have experienced before. They also complained about the lecturers, as they felt that, in general, the lecturers were lack of influence, and were not inspiring enough (P1). Some even demonstrated that certain curricula, such as *Virtuosity*, were irrelevant to their leadership practice, and that it was 'not necessary to listen' (P7).

### **Principals' Socialization**

#### Fast posting

The research found that the time left for principals to prepare for their leadership position was quite limited, as most of the principals were informed by the LEA only one week before being posted to a principal's position in a new context. Four principals were informed by the LEA or their superior leaders less than one week before posted to a new school, and 3 of them were less than 2 days.

'They (Local Organization Department) talked to me two days before the post, and on the third day I was already in the principal's office.' (P3)

'They talked to me about one month before, however, I refused at very first. And then, they came back for me again, said that I am the only person who could take this job. And I was sent to the school three days after that conversation.' (P6)

Some principals noted that they were promoted to principal level first, and participated in the preparation training programme which was held by the Organization Department, but they did not know which school, and when they were to be appointed, until the last minute.

During the interviews, some vice principals have already participated in the preparation programme held by the LEA and the Organization Department and, according to the policies and documents, they were qualified to be principals. However, they were uncertain about their future, and had no idea where and when they were going to be appointed. The only thing they can do is to 'try my best and wait' (P2, P4).

### Willingness to lead

As noted earlier, principals' selection and recruitment was a government decision rather than a personal choice, so this study further explored participants' willingness to become principals. However, the results were not positive, as most of the principals showed little willingness to fulfil this position. Some principals regarded this position as a 'springboard' for their political career (P1, P3, P6); some principals would like to be a teacher rather than a principal (P2, P4, P8); and two vice principals who were interviewed demonstrated little interest in competing for a principal position (P2, P4).

'I may be a little conservative, or passive. That is, for this position, I will do my best, once you accomplish your work well, the organization (LEA) will offer you another platform, and then, under that platform, I will also do my best. The platform is passive for me; however, I choose to accomplish my work well on these platforms.' (P2)

'Although principal may be a clear target, I do not have any particular plans of competing for one ... However, I will continue to work hard. While prospects are bright, the roads have twists and turns. I am not very sure about the future.' (P4)

Principal 8 refused this position at very first, and she told the administrator that she did not want to leave the previous school, and she would like to be a normal teacher, rather than a principal. However, the administration disregarded her choice, and sent her to the school the day after the conversation. In contrast, a number of male principals regarded this position as a 'springboard' for their political position (P1, P3, P6), as in China, a principal is more a '*guan* (administrator)', rather than a teacher or educator (P6).

'As far as I am concerned, there are lots of barriers between schools and administration, such as the financial issue and school management system. Even though I frequently report my opinions to both government officials and the LEA, they have their own working system, and I cannot simply put my thoughts to them. What I want is to break this system and entitle more authority and freedom to principals and schools, thus, I want to be promoted to a senior position in local educational authority as an official, and have some influence on local education improvement.' (P1)

'What I am thinking now is to accomplish some achievements through this position, and make the school totally different after three or five years. This could offer me a better position when I am back to the *Organization*, as this could be one of my achievements during my official career.' (P6)

As seen above, there is a big difference between male principals and female principals, as most of the male principals demonstrated their career ambitions through the principalship, while female principals were less focused on their future

career. However, both genders demonstrated little interest in their future development as a principal.

### Professional socialization

Principals also stated that their previous career experience had a certain influence on their current leadership enactment, and both instructional ability and managerial experience had a great impact on their professional socialization in schools (P1, P2, P5, P7, P8, P9). Instructional ability determined the reputations and abilities of principals (P2, P4), as in China, there is still a conception that 'a good principal equals to a good teacher' (P2). Also, previous instructional experience influenced new principals' current instructional strategies and instructional activities in schools (P2, P8). Previous managerial roles provided principals with experience and insight into solving current problems in the schools (P1, P2, P7), and it also enables them to practice communicating and management skills through these managerial positions.

### *Instructional ability*

A number of principals regarded themselves as excellent teachers (P1, P2, P4, P5, P8), and their instructional abilities were acknowledged through outstanding student performance during their teaching career (P1, P2, P7, P8). Some principals even claimed that they were better teachers than principals (P2, P8). Further, principals admitted that better instructional performance was beneficial for them to establish their reputation and authority for their new post (P1, P2, P5, P7, P8). Moreover, in most of the high schools, principals still need to teach at the same time, thus, 'teachers [in the school] will always keep an eye on your teaching performance' (P2).

'In my opinion, a good principal must be a good teacher, however, a good teacher is not necessarily a good principal. As a good principal, you should

be familiar with instructional practice. Your instructional ability represents the level of your professional ability, as a principal, it is not only about delivering good lessons, but also about assessing lessons and leading curriculum. But a principal should have the ability to lead, including the direction of the curriculum, and curriculum reform. In other words, at least, a principal should provide the strategy and concepts for innovation.’ (P2)

Most of the principals are still teaching at schools now, and some of them are teaching core subjects (P2, P4, P5, P7, P8), while some are non-core curriculum (P1, P9). You need to be a role model for other teachers, that is the subject you are teaching cannot be left behind, otherwise, people may criticize your ability. (P5)’

#### *Managerial experience*

Principals also mentioned that previous managerial experience was beneficial to their current leadership development in different aspects, and different managerial positions had various impacts on their leadership ability. Moreover, most of the principals had diverse backgrounds and long durations in managerial positions before being appointed, and these backgrounds allow them to be familiar with different aspects of school management routine. Most of them followed the pattern from teachers, to middle leaders, and then senior leaders, and finally principalship (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9).

For example, principal 6 worked in the LEA for a long time. This role helped him to accumulate lots of experience in how to communicate and deal with government and officials appropriately, which helps him to strive for more resources and opportunities for his school from the government. This principal also continued his social relationships and personal interconnections from the bureau to his school development, which provided more ‘green lights’ and access to the school.

Principal 2 mentioned that being an official administrator was a most beneficial position for her current leadership practice. The occupation of an official administrator is more about keeping a balance between different departments of schools, and communicating with different people.

‘You need to find out people’s talents and also drawbacks and allocate the human resources appropriately. Then, talk to them in an appropriate way and trigger their inner motivations and inspiration for work. That is what I have learnt from that position. (P2)’

#### *Limitations of professional skills*

Principals also expressed their concerns about their limitations in professional knowledge and skills as a principal. Unlike teachers or other leaders in the school, as a principal, they need to report directly to the government and other social groups. Thus most of the principals were concerned about their ability in coping with government or other officials. And also, principals’ work is much more complicated and consuming than teachers or other positions they have experienced before, thus it is very challenging for them to ‘think and act’ like a real principal.

- *How to cope with official inspections effectively?*

The LEAs assess and evaluate the school in different aspects, and the inspections are frequent. Moreover, principals are usually responsible for all these inspections, thus, their first problem was how to cope with all these inspections affluently (P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P9). Usually, there are two kinds of inspections. The first is the school visit to evaluate and monitor the basic facilities, culture construction, teaching and learning atmosphere, and classroom teaching of the school. Also, through communicating with teachers and students, the LEAs supervise and assess the leadership practice of the principals. The second is through ‘paperwork’, like

documents and reports, to reflect the development of the school, and also to understand the visions and strategies of the school leaders.

‘Every day, we are facing a variety of inspections, not only from the LEA, but also from other official departments. For example, the Food Security Department will come to check the sanitary condition of our canteens regularly, and Fire Department will come to make sure that all the fire protection construction is well-established.’ (P7)

‘After work, my teachers and I have to deal with numerous paper work, and categorise all the documents into different boxes, in order to cope with different inspections. I want to find out a way to have these things done quickly. (P9)’

‘There are two types of principals in China, one is reporting their work to the administrators now, and the other is on their way to report their work.’ (P3)

- *Think like a real principal*

Few participating principals demonstrated their long-term development plans for the schools, as for now, their ability and energy allowed them to only focus on current challenges and issues. Moreover, some principals mentioned that, before principalship, they were in charge of one particular part of school business while, after post, they had to be responsible for every aspect of the school (P4). Thus, it would take them some time to get familiar with other parts of school business in which they have not worked before, and it also required them to think how to operate the school as a whole, rather than a separate department (P2, P4, P7). The new position was demanding and tough for most of the new principals, as it challenged their professional ability as a school leader and manager. As a result of

this role transformation, time management is also a big issue.

‘Everyday, before I entered into the school, I have millions of things on the to-do list. However, when I arrived in school, there are millions of things come to me directly. Thus, I have no time for my plans, no time to think the future of the school, all I can do is to accomplish these tasks one by one.’

(P8)

### Contextualization

The research explored what kind of information of about school would contribute to better contextualization before taking up the principal’s post, how long it would take for them to adapt to the new environment, and how they become familiar with the school context.

#### *Additional assistance*

As noted above, most of the principals were offered very limited time to prepare for leadership in the new context. However, most of the principals claimed that additional school background information, and more time for preparation, was unnecessary.

P5 noted that ‘actually, principal rotation is a common situation in China, however, the rotation usually happens in a limited area, which means that, although I have not worked there before, I knew the macro context, previous leaders and also basic information of the school, such as location, performance, and SES levels. Thus, I do not need any extra ‘database’ or documents to become familiar with the school (P5)’. Some principals also pointed out that the information that could be offered ‘on paper or documents’ was not something that they really want to know.

'As a new principal, what I really want to know is the complexity of relationships, and the different personalities, in the school. Who is the stubborn member of the team, who is the weird one, and is there anyone hard to get along with? Or, how many small groups are there in the school, what are they, what are their positions in the school? However, these are the things that I cannot prepare for, but to discover later.' (P3)

#### *How to contextualize*

After posting, principals become familiar with the school context and their new positions through a variety of methods, such as reading through school documents (P2), becoming familiar with every teacher (P8), and talking to senior people in the school (P7). It takes time for principals to become fully familiarized with the school; the duration ranges from one month to half year. A number of principals also mentioned that passion and motivation for this position, and for education, were the vital factors that could decide the procedure and speed of the contextualization (P1, P2, P9).

'At the beginning, I forced myself to remember all the names of teachers and staff, and it took me approximately two week. And then I started to become familiar with the school, section by section, first was the middle leaders, secondly was the headteachers, and then instructional leaders, and the last was the teachers in different curricula. It took me nearly one month to clarify the situation of the school.' (P8)

'When I first came here, I was in charge of preparing documents for annual assessment at the coming semester. Thus, I spent the whole winter vacation with my team to look through all the school documents, and it was more than 700 brochures, approximately 300 boxes of documents. Through this opportunity, I became familiar with different aspects of the school,

including its overall cognitions, teachers and managerial procedure.’ (P2)

Some other principals also claimed that they adapted to the school context very quickly, usually within one week.

‘I adapted to the school context as soon as I came here. The point is, once you love this job, you will get used to any situation quickly, otherwise it will torment you all the time.’ (P9)

Table 5.2 shows the time that principals took to adapt to their school context and the principal’s role.

Principal	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Duration	Stay in the same school	Half year	One year	Stay in the same school	One week
Principal	P6	P7	P8	P9	
Duration	N/A	One month	One Month	Immediately	

*Table 5.2 Speed of contextualization*

### Advice for principals’ socialization

#### *Take your time*

Several principals observed that, at the beginning, most of the teachers and staff ‘are observing you’, to find out the principals’ personalities (P2), abilities and also the possible changes they may bring to the school. Most teachers and staff are perceived to hold a ‘neutralizing attitude’ of the new principalship (P3). Thus, principals had better not make any huge and compulsive alternatives at first (P5), it is better to wait and see, once you are familiar with the school, then you can start to make changes, but in a tender way (P2). And ‘do not claim your cognitions or opinions forcefully; it is better to introduce these conceptions and your ideas gradually through talking and communicating to them. (P3)’

'At very first, people will observe you, as they are not familiar with you. Thus, I actively get close to them through daily routines, for example, participating in the teaching and research groups, entering into their offices, and listening to their lessons. That is communicating with teachers through different approaches, and trying to understand their situation, in this way, they will be willing to talk to you, and soon adapt to your leadership.' (P2)

### *Be fair*

As noted above, principals need to handle a complicated relationship map, which means that, in schools, they need to keep a good balance among the profits of different teachers (in terms of rewarding, bonus, promotion opportunities and etc.), and also take good care of their emotion and satisfaction towards the job. Thus, some principals noted that the easiest way of avoiding themselves from getting trouble is to be fair.

'There is an old saying in China, that is 'focus on the issues, rather than the people', which means that you should be fair to everybody, no matter what the positions they are, how old they are, or what is their background. Once somebody makes a mistake, I am always very restricted and make an impartial judgment, no matter who are you; however, I will not have any bias or preference towards the people after all. It is important to make people feel that you are fair and have integrity.' (P8)

### Current principals' management system

Despite the recruitment and leadership enactment issues that mentioned above, principals also complained that current principals' selection and promotion system was too 'deficient' to encourage principals or aspiring principals to progress in their careers as a professional leader (P2, P4, P6). First, the turnaround principal strategy

makes the principals hardly adapt themselves to the school context. Second, it also makes the continuity of school culture and developing plans a problem. Third, due to the incomplete principals promotion system, most of the principals felt vague about their future. Finally, the imbalance between principals' obligations and authority, pay and feedback, impedes principals' passion for the position.

#### *Turnaround principal strategy*

In order to optimise the distribution of educational resources, and boost the quality of general education as a whole, the Chinese government published a set of policies and regulations on the principal rotating system from 2013 (MoE, 2013). The policy indicated that the turnaround principal strategy should be normalized within 3 to 5 years, and local government were asked to formulate a set of regulations and action plans to support the principal turnaround system (MoE, 2013). Although the intention of this strategy was to allocate educational resources better, and to reinforce weaker schools' performance, the principals were more concerned about the possible drawbacks of this policy.

- Airborne troops

Some principals said that this turnaround strategy made potential principal candidates (teachers and middle leaders) feel less confident about their future, as the school leaders were not developed and promoted through the schools (P1, P3, P4). In China, principals, who came from other schools or departments, and directly became the head of a school, were called 'airborne troop' (P3, P4). Only two of the participants were developed and promoted in their current schools. Only one of these is a principal (P1), and the other is the vice-principal of the school (P4). The other principals were 'airborne troops' for their new context.

‘Most of the middle leaders or senior leaders had a very vague and negative attitude towards principalship. In my perspectives, you’d better select a principal from the middle or senior leaders of the school, as they are more familiar with the school context. However, the current situation is ‘airborne troops’ everywhere.’ (P3)

‘People always said that I was exceptional, as I was a ‘native born’ principal of my school.’ (P1)

- *Continuity of school development*

Principals claimed that the implementation of the turnaround principal strategy made it hard to make further plans for school development, and also impossible to create the school culture and spirit (P2, P3, P6, P8). Principals were also worried about the stabilization of school organization and the teacher team (P7, P9). Moreover, under this policy, principals regarded themselves as more ‘passing-by’ the school, rather than a member or a leader of it (P2, P6, P8). Further, this policy also made them feel confused about their future career, as they did not hold the future in their hands (P2, P4, 09).

‘During the last five years, the high school has six different heads. It was totally a mess.’ (P7)

‘What I am concerned about is the inheritance of school culture. The frequent alteration of school principal may interrupt the existing concepts, culture and spirit of a school. Moreover, the maintenance of headship, in certain degree, could decide the stabilization of the organization and teacher team. It is very challenging for teachers to adapt to different principals in a short time.’ (P2)

Despite the possible drawbacks of turnaround principals, some principals acknowledged the value of this strategy, particularly for those lower performing or problematic schools.

‘Despite the possible advantages, staying in a school for years may also accumulate numerous problems which need to be addressed. Or, particularly for those lower performing schools, sometimes, the new heads could make the ‘dead water’ alive.’ (P9)

#### *Incomplete principal career development system*

Some principals noted that the current system was incomplete for principals’ personal development, including both the evaluation and promotion systems. Traditionally, principals were evaluated through four aspects, namely ‘morality, capacity, diligence and official achievements’ (P2, P5, P6, P7). However, in reality, there was no clear standard or guidance on how to evaluate a principal through these aspects (P2, P5). These standards and qualifications seemed to be immeasurable or hard to be evaluated (P2, P6). Further, due to the limitations of the evaluation system, it may not distinguish between a dedicated principal and an unenthusiastic principal (P3, P7). As a result, it decreased principal and aspiring principals’ motivation and inspiration of being a principal. And, ‘sometimes, this job is much more dependent on your conscience and sense of responsibility. (P7)’

However, when it comes to establishing a separated evaluation or promotion system, some principals described it as ‘a world-class challenge’, as the standards are hard to be measured (P1, P3). And it is hard to create a ‘fit for all’ or ‘fair enough’ standard to evaluate and assess all the principals, disregarding the background of the school and the principals (P2).

In the sample province, there is no separate system in ranking or rating principals, thus, principals were still ranked and rated through the teachers' ranking system (P1). Thus, the career path for principals here is very blurred, as there was no degree or ranking system to distinguish different levels of principalship, thus, there was no space for principals to be progressed or developed after they have been posted (P2, P7, P9).

'For example, teachers, they could be developed and promoted step by step, from an ordinary young teacher to the municipal-level backbone teacher<sup>8</sup>, provincial-level backbone teacher, national-level backbone teacher, and this is a professional career path. And the requirements are quite clear. And your position and salaries will be raised correspondingly through your progress. However, for principals, where are the evaluation, assessment and encouragement systems.' (P2)

#### *Imbalance between challenge and rewards*

Some principals also mentioned that the imbalance between what they have sacrificed for this position, and what they have been given back, also makes them feel 'less satisfied' or 'less happy' than most of the teachers (P2, P3, P9). First of all, most of the principals stated that they were paid no more than the teachers who shared the same official levels with them (P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9). They may even be paid less than those teachers with higher positions or higher instructional outcomes (P3, P5). Such teachers could get money rewards, or other awards based on their outstanding instructional outcomes, while there was no bonus for managerial activities (P3, P6).

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<sup>8</sup> Backbone teacher: refers to the elite teachers who: 1. Had higher levels of morality and professional accomplishment; 2. Represented good reputations in teaching and students' performance; 3. Owned affluent experience in curriculum teaching and researching; 4. Were able to lead the instructional progress of the schools (MoE, 2015).

Moreover, 'being a principal in China, sometimes, means that you need to sacrifice yourself to maintain the harmony of school, thus, you have to give all the awards and praise from the government, as teachers felt that they need these awards more than you do' (P3). On the contrary to limited bonus and awards, principals have to shoulder the stress of being responsible for the whole school, and have numerous routines to deal with. P2 complained that 'being a teacher, you only need to be responsible for your students, or precisely, the curriculum that you teach, however, as a principal, you need to be responsible for everybody' (P2).

### **Leadership Enactment**

Principal 1 explained that 'there are four 'knives' on the head of a principal, these are: safety, (instructional) quality, relationships and funding' (P1), which are the four main difficulties and challenges that they may experience during the novice years. The principals indicated that safety is 'the priority of all the school routine' (P2), and 'cannot have any oversights' (P5). Although safety comes first of all the school business, it is not that challenging and consuming for new leaders, as most schools already have a completed and meticulous security system (P1), and when it comes to the security issues, schools could easily get support from government and parents (P6, P9). Student outcomes were the area most emphasized by the principals, as it is the 'lifeline' of a school (P2), and also a vital evaluation index for principals' leadership performance (P5). Relationships here refer to principal-teacher relationships, and principal-administration relationships, and the quality of these relationships usually depend on the personality and communicating skills of principals. Finally, inadequate funding was the biggest issue for some principals, particularly in lower SES schools, and it varied from one school to another.

## Safety

The principals mostly stated that their schools already had a 'complete and meticulous security system' (P1), or 'safety was not the biggest challenge for the schools' (P4), as they felt that the 'school context now was safe enough' (P2). Another principal also stated that 'the overall context of school is safe, however, it is hard to avoid small conflicts between students or between students and teachers', particularly, when there is some 'violent and fierce student', they will be the huge 'hidden trouble' for school safety (P5). And then, some unexpected injuries during the athletic or outdoors activities or PE lessons are also inevitable (P4). However, once there is an accident, there are always emotional parents and restricted administrators, who blame the schools and principals (P8), which makes the teachers and principals very stressed.

In order to reinforce the security levels of the school, the only possible strategy for new principals was to decrease the possibility of accidents through limiting potentially dangerous school activities, as new principals would like to 'play safe' during their novice years. There are 'no more spring or autumn tour plans' (P9), and 'no more basketball and football league, as they may cause strong physical confrontation' (P3). Also, some schools had a 'strong limitation on dangerous chemical experiments in the classroom, particularly explosive and inflammable substances (P1). Overall, it could be noted that the macro environment for schools was secure, and most of the principals felt confident about the school security system. However, small conflicts and accidents inside schools cannot be avoided.

## Instructional outcomes

At high school level, students' performance or, more precisely, college entrance examination outcomes, was a vital factor, or sometimes, the only factor when evaluating a principal's leadership performance (P2). Based on the current

evaluation system, there are two important outcomes for evaluation, one is the number of high performing students, which refers to those who got higher marks and better offers in College Entrance Examination, and the other is the average outcome of a school, which refers to student online ratio towards First Tier University, Second Tier University and independent college (P1). Basically, these two outcomes shared the same importance when evaluating or assessing a school, but the high performing outcome demonstrated more importance for a school's reputation and a principal's leadership ability (P6). This evaluation system had a direct impact on new principals' leadership strategies towards instructional activities.

#### *Distinguished student quality<sup>9</sup>*

During the interview, many principals reflected that student quality was one of the biggest challenges they encountered, and improving the quality of students' resources was the working focus during their novice years. The research showed that the quality of students varied from one school to another and that, specifically, there was a huge difference from urban schools to rural schools, and also model schools and non-model schools. Even, within the same city or district, this variation could be obvious. The principals also stressed that the quality of students could lead to different student outcomes in later college entrance examinations.

Moreover, it is generally accepted that better educational resources are more likely to be gathered in the developed area, thus, it is harder for rural high schools or schools with lower SES levels to attract and keep good quality students.

'It is just like a circle, the best students in the rural schools go to the good high schools in the county, the best students in the county go to the good

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<sup>9</sup> Students Resource: refers to incoming quality of freshman (Grade 1), and it usually decided by the admission lines of the high school. The admission lines were varied from school to school, and usually higher ranked ones need higher scores, thus the original quality of student resources distinguished from school to school.

high schools in the developed cities near the county, the best students in the developed cities of the province go to the top schools in the capital city. I have been a principal for two years, and this situation really makes my teachers and me very frustrated. Sometimes, once you see the improvement or progress of a student, he/she will leave directly for better educational resources.’ (P3)

### *Developing students*

‘The most important factor in influencing students’ outcomes is the student themselves.’ (P7)

‘Seed plan’ (P1, P6) and ‘stratified teaching plan’ (P2, P7, P9) were the most frequently mentioned instructional strategies, particularly in lower SES schools. As mentioned above, one of the main reasons for students choosing an urban school was the high standard of educational resources, thus, a ‘seed plan’ is to gather the best teachers and best students of a school in one class, and provide them with better teaching and learning quality (P1, P4, P8). For example, Principal 6 applied a very extreme method to attract, keep and support the only high performing middle school graduate in his school:

‘I offered the student a large amount of scholarship to keep him in the school, and then send him to SC<sup>10</sup> city for high school learning, thus, the student is not educated or taught in our school. And then, he will come back for College Entrance Examination three years later. Hopefully, the school could have its first Tsinghua University or Beijing University offer at that time. And this will be one of my instructional successes during the

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<sup>10</sup> One of the developed cities in China, and its educational quality is far better than the sample province.

tenure' (P6).

For other high schools, a 'stratified teaching plan' was more frequently applied, which considered the interests of more students, and overall, these schools focused on the general outcomes of the school rather than the high performing group of students. A 'stratified teaching plan' is another form of 'seed plan', which is to stratify students into different levels of classes based on their performance, and then provide them with different strategies of teaching according to their learning ability (P2, P7, P8, P9). Usually, the students were divided into three different levels, as 'excellent', 'average' and 'lower performing' (P2, P7, P8, P9). Within each level, there were also slightly different for each class, and all these levels and classes were categorized depending on the performance of each student (P2, P7). This is one of the most frequently applied instructional strategies, thus, most of the schools had a meticulous system of grouping students.

However, in some rural districts, or for those extremely low performing schools, instructional outcomes were not the priority for principals. Instead, they emphasized students' moral education rather than academic outcomes, and put more energy into organizational transformation rather than into instructional progress (P3, P5). Thus, different principals behaved differently in reinforcing students' resource, in order to improve the school's instructional outcomes (see table 5.3).

Issues	Sample	Leadership Practice	Expecting outcomes
Inadequacy in students' sources	P1, P6	Quick: seeds plan	Three years: A few top students
	P2, P7, P8, P9	Slowly: stratified teaching plan	Three years: Several top students and overall improvement
	P3, P4, P5	Postpone: Organizational and school restructure first	Change through organizational improvement

*Table 5.3 Instructional Strategies of Different Principals*

Overall, gathering the best educational resources of a school, typically better teacher resources and high-quality learning peers, and putting these resources into a small number of students, in order to create the best outcomes, has become the priority approach for some schools, particularly those lower SES and lower performing schools. Those schools with higher SES levels and better performance focused more on the different levels of students, rather than the high performing groups only. In those schools that had very limited resources in teaching and learning, principals did not put instructional performance as a priority, as 'there is something more important to change', for example 'moral education for students' (P3) or 'wellbeing of rural students' (P4). Such principals would like to improve their instructional outcomes through the improvement of other aspects of the schools.

### *Developing teachers*

Promoting teachers' professional growth was also one of the direct methods of boosting the schools' instructional outcomes. There were two main approaches to developing teachers (P1, P2, P8): one is off-campus teacher training, and the other is school-based development activity. Off-campus training is much more dependent on the financial situation of a school or the district, as schools with better financial foundations may enjoy more off-campus teacher training opportunities. School-based teacher development plans related strongly to principals' instructional background and leadership strategies.

#### *(1) Off-campus training opportunities*

Through the study, the author discovered that the off-campus training opportunities varied from school to school. Usually, school with better SES enjoyed superior training chances, vice versa. Principal 2, who came from a high performing school in GY city, defined the number of training opportunities for teachers in her school as 'affluent', in terms of frequencies, authorities and qualities, as the they could enjoy

the best training opportunities nationwide, such as customized training programmes that offered by Eastern Normal University or Beijing Normal University.

Principal 8, who is also from the capital city, stated that training opportunities were 'satisfied', but 'limited' in certain degrees, as these opportunities were depended on the LEA, and the LEA could decide on the contents and delivery approaches, as well as who could be get involved, and the school 'had limited funding and ability to satisfy the training requirements of every teacher' (P8). Principal 9 also indicated that current provincial training programme could only take core curriculums teachers into considerations, and mainly focused on pedagogies. However, they also noted that every teacher could be offered these opportunities at least once a year, regardless of their subjects.

However, unlike urban schools, teacher-training opportunities were defined as 'inadequate' and 'unsatisfied' in rural areas, as not all the teachers could take in-service training opportunities every year (P3, P4, P6), and the principals tried to keep a balance among different teachers and subjects. The principals also doubt the quality of teacher training programme offered by LEAs (district-level), as some of the programmes were 'effective less' (P1) and even 'duplicated'(P3).

Overall, the training opportunities and qualities were different from school to school, and teachers' attitudes varied from one to another. Most of the principals treasured every opportunity for teachers' professional development, and noted its value for bringing new conceptions and skills (P9), building social networks (P1, P2), and widening visions (P3, P4, P5, P8, P9).

## *(2) School-based teacher development*

*Jiaoyanzu* is the defining feature of school-based professional development sessions for teachers, through which teachers worked intensively with peers. Each

group consists of six to eight teachers, categorized through their subjects or grades, including a head teacher assigned by the principal. Principal participation in teaching and research group activities was one of the frequently applied approaches when monitoring and assisting the instructional progress of schools. Most of the principals would like to provide guidance in teaching and research groups, and always tried their best to participate (P1, P2, P3, P5, P8, P9).

'I participated in as many teaching and research groups as I could, to provide some assistance and guidance to the teachers. Sometimes, I will enter into the classroom directly during the lessons, to discover their (teachers') problems or difficulties during teaching. It is important to monitor and update the instructional strategy of a school in time.' (P8)

For principals who worked in the better SES schools before, or had a strong social relationship, they were sometimes able to invite instructional experts or high performing teachers to participate in their teaching and research groups to communicate with their teachers (P2, P7, P9). Through participating in teaching and research groups, principals were able to get close to, and communicate with, teachers (P2, P5, P8, P9), become familiar with teaching and learning (P2, P4, P7), and also allow them to monitor and assess the progress of students' performance (P1, P3).

### Relationships

The principals pointed out that there were several relationships that they need to maintain after post; teachers and staff (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P8), LEA (P1, P6, P7, P8), peers from other schools (P2, P3, P4, P9), and potential sponsors (P6). Since China is a society of human relationships, maintaining and developing good and healthy relationships with different groups of people, related to the development of the

school, was also one of the biggest tasks and challenges for new principals.

### *Stubborn staff*

Older teachers were mentioned a lot by the principals (P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P9), as they were perceived to be stubborn and, often, they refused to make changes in instructional approaches and insisted on their traditional way of teaching (P3, P4, P7). Most of the principals commented that young teachers, particularly those who had just graduated from the university, seemed to be much more positive, hardworking and cooperative, when compared with the older generation (P2, P4, P5, P7, P9).

In addition, some experienced and high-performing teachers were also troublesome for new principals (P2, P5, P7). As these teachers hold very high positions in their career path as a teacher, a principal can 'hardly lead or command them' (P7). These principals often have to pay more respect, or even 'yield to' these experienced and excellent teachers, as these teachers influence the fate of the school – high performing student outcomes (P5).

Small groups in schools may also obstruct principals' leadership enactment (P2, P4, P8). Generally, there were more female teachers than male teachers in the school, and it is like the 'nature of women to unite together and fight for their shared interests', thus, once 'you cannot satisfy all the people, there are always groups of people opposed to you (P4)'. As 'they have alliances, thus, they are not afraid of you at all (P2)'.

### *Teacher burnout*

Most of the principals revealed that 'teacher burnout' was one of the toughest issues that they faced (P2, P3, P4, P5, P8, P9). However, due to limited policies and funding,

they had little practical solutions for this issue. Most teachers are over-working but they are not paid more for this (P1, P2, P8, P9). Several schools had vacancies or inadequate teachers, which meant that every teacher had to shoulder more responsibilities and a heavier workload in teaching and other school routines (P4, P5, P7, P8, P9). However, according to the policy, teacher's salaries are fixed, and they cannot be paid more for their extra workload, which influenced their motivation for work. Principals had no authority in encourage or praise excellent and hard- working teachers or staff through payment, promotion or rewards, so there was no differentiation between those who worked very hard and those who 'did nothing' (P3, P4, P8, P9).

#### *Support from the LEA*

Principals claimed that the relationships with the LEA could impact on how much support they could get from the government, particularly in respect of political support and funding (P1, P6, P9). The principals who were directly selected and recruited by the government were much more likely to maintain a good relationship with the LEA, and could more easily get support from the LEA for their leadership practice (P6, P9). The LEAs also gave a preference to the schools with higher local reputations (P1, P2). Moreover, principals who had more administrative experience, or previously worked in the LEAs or other administrative departments, had great advantages in communicating with LEAs, as they were more familiar with this process (P6).

#### *Developing other relationships*

The previous findings demonstrated that peer learning was one of the most effective and popular ways of learning during the leadership preparation and training. The research also showed that the benefit of peer learning continued even after the programme, as through the networks established through the programmes or other

training opportunities, principals could assist each other in practice.

‘If I had some misunderstanding or uncertainty about the new policy or regulation, I will call other principals or peers for help, and to ask them about how these policies are implemented in their schools. Sometimes, several principals will sit together, and discuss how to implement the new regulations, which makes us more secure for leadership practice, as you are not alone. (P4)’

Also, some principals demonstrated that, when they encountered difficulties or uncertainties, they would also like to contact their previous leaders or colleagues for help (P2, P8, P9).

‘I worked with Mr. An several years ago, who is now in the Diamond High School, and now, we are really good friends. I have asked him to help me with the school culture construction, as he is very talented and experienced in this area. And he really inspired me a lot. (P9)’

Even at high school level, some principals started to utilize the alumni resources to reinforce the influence of the school. For example, Principal 6 gathered a great number of donations for school construction from successful alumni, and also gets some convenience in administration from their alumnus who worked in the relevant department. For example, an alumnus who worked in the *Financial Department* could help School 6 get a quicker access for money allocation, and an alumnus worked in the *Health Department* could help the school pass the food security check easily (P6). Principal 9 started to contact earlier alumni to trace the history of the school, as they could be precious resources to build the reputation of the school (P9).

## Funding

Most of the principals stated that the money issue was the most difficult and sensitive challenge that they experienced during their novice years, and this problem is more severe in rural areas than in urban schools. Some principals reported that inadequate money was the first issue they encountered after appointment, as it is the foundation of school operation. Financial problems are also connected closely to legal issues. In recent years, more and more policies and local regulations have been published, which specified the use of school funding and narrowed down the authority of principals in financial management.

### *Inadequate money*

A number of principals noted that their schools had inadequate funding, so they have to spend a lot of time and energy in thinking about how to solve the money issue (P1, P4, P6, P7). When it comes to how to solve this issue, most of them have to 'walk on the line' (P3, P6), or 'play with fire' (P1), and sometimes they have to be 'cheeky and shameless' when apply for money from the superior administration (P6, P9).

The principals reported on three main ways of gathering funding in high schools, and some of them are through a formal process, while some could be regarded as informal or out of line. Most of the funding for school operations is allocated by the government, which is dependent on the size of the school and its requirements. At high school level, each student could get 800 RMBs public funds per year, which is managed and allocated by schools for regular expenditure, including facility construction, instructional cost and other daily expenditure (P2). Schools could also apply for extra funding from the government through a formal process, if necessary, particularly when it comes to infrastructure construction (P8, P9). Another way of gathering funding is to get 'selecting school fees' from students and their parents,

which is to collect extra fees from the lower performing students who want to study in the high school (P1), or accepting returning students for extra classes with special fees (P4).

Schools in rural areas, or with smaller student numbers, or underperforming, were more likely to struggle with money, as government appropriation is tightly connected to local economic status and school size. Further, the research found that principals' personality, intelligence and eloquence could also have an impact on how much funding they can gather for their schools. Principals with affluent communication skills or eloquence were more likely to get funding for school development (P6 and P1).

#### *Use of funding*

Principals also claimed that there were many detailed and specified regulations on the use of funding, which left them little authority in allocating and using the funds. In the sample province, there are some government authorized shops and online platforms for principals to buy the facilities and other school necessities, which make the principals with little authority in choosing the product that the school really needs.

'The policy has detailed every proportion of public funding; thus the school has to spend money based on this proportion, otherwise, it will bring troubles to the school and principals.' (P2)

#### Leadership strategy

As noted in the literature review, Leithwood and Riehl (2003) defined core principal practices as: direction setting, developing people, and redesigning organizations. Despite these, this study found that school culture construction was also one of the important leadership practices in China. However, most new principals cannot

handle all the school business at the same time, particularly during their novice years; thus, the study further explored their leadership strategies for school development. Figure 5.2 shows the leadership practices of new principals since they were appointed,

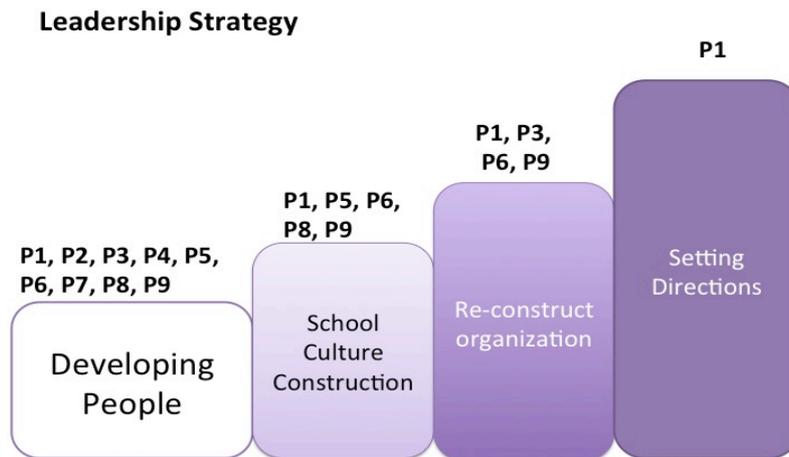


Figure 5.2: Principals' leadership strategies

Figure 5.2 indicates four stages of leadership practice for new leaders in their novice years. All the principals focused on 'developing people', which includes both students and teachers, as the instructional outcome was the foundation of a school and also an important index when evaluating principals' work performance. Thus all the interview participants explained their strategies towards developing people, which is to promote the professional ability of teachers and increase students' learning outcomes.

School culture construction is one of the evaluation factors for both schools and principals in China, when evaluating or inspecting a school, so most of the principals also put school culture establishment as one of their priorities during their first few years. However, most of the principals just focused on the outside construction of the schools to cope with the inspections, as they also realized that the inner culture

or of the school usually take time to form and fulfil.

Organizational construction is a subtle conception under Chinese context. On the one hand, principals were not entitled to make organisational changes and, on the other hand, the ideology of Confucious on '*relationships*' (*guanxi*), '*faces*' (*mianzi*) and '*harmony*' (*hexie*), means that few principals would make any organizational changes until they are fully familiar with the context (P2, P4, P5).

The research demonstrated that most of the principals set up short-term and detailed goals for their schools, which were specified into various categories, including students' performance (P1, P2, P6, P7, P8, P9), school culture construction (P1, P5, P6, P8, P9), teacher management (P1, P2, P5, P9) and the progress of the school in the model school lists (P1, P6). Due to the policy of rotating principals, and their vague career path road, most principals did not mention the long-term goals for school development at all.

## **Overview**

The interviews explored different aspects of principal preparation process in China through new principals' perspectives. Based on the findings, there were certain trends that could be generated: firstly, there was a strong calling for practice-based and context-based training opportunities; secondly, diverse school background could have a huge impact on new principals' leadership preparation, including training opportunities, socialization and leadership enactment; thirdly, current administrative and promoting system for principals could be regarded as incomplete, which, in certain degree, makes the principals felt less satisfaction for their current work, and also vague for their future career.

First, most of the principals admitted that the context-based learning opportunities

allowed them to get something 'real and useful' for their leadership practice, and it also allowed them to think more about their school's development. Theory-based learning was criticized as it was 'too far away from the reality', and the lecturers were not 'attractive and impressive enough', thus its contribution to their leadership practice were very limited.

The nine principals were from different school backgrounds, in terms of their school location, levels of the school, school history and student performance, and these diversities impacted on their development opportunities, leadership enactment and challenges and tasks in reality. Overall, principals from better SES schools enjoyed better training chances, and also had more alternatives in choosing the training programmes.

The data show that the principal administrative system is ineffective and inadequate in selecting, developing and promoting principals. As a result, a number of principals demonstrated a lack of willingness, passion and further plans for their current work and career. Further, the selection and promotion system is incomplete when compared with the teachers'system, which makes the principals vague and ambiguous about their future development.

# CHAPTER SIX: PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION

The aim of the chapter is to understand the new principal training programme through the details of programme implementation. At the beginning of the study, the researcher conducted an in-campus observation to inspect the implementation of the three-week 'National Principal Certificate Training Programme' in the sample province. In order to further explore the issue, the author participated in one learning group for deeply observation during their group mentoring and shadowing school sections. Hence, during the programme, the programme designer and coordinator also provided certain related materials that were beneficial to understand the purpose and nature of the training. After the programme, the researcher also gained access to some principals' training diaries and their final essays. Thus, there are five main data sets for this chapter, and they are coded in different ways:

1. 11 principals from the learning group attended by the author, coded from P-a to P-k;
2. Eight principals' 'training diaries' provided by the programme, coded from P1 to P8;
3. 53 final essays submitted at the end of the programme;
4. Field notes of informal discussions, and of the researcher's observations;
5. One training brochure provided to the principals, which clarified the curriculum, timetable and guidelines.

## Different Ways of Developing a Leader

The on-campus training lasted for 17 days (15-31 March 2016), and there were five main delivery methods during the programme. These were formal lectures, school visits, group mentoring, shadowing school, and peer learning. Each delivery method has varied foci and characteristics (see figure 6.1). However, formal lectures comprised the largest proportion of time, with seven days, followed by shadowing school (five days), while group mentoring (one day), and peer learning (one day), comprised the smallest proportion of time. There was also a short 'warm up' session.

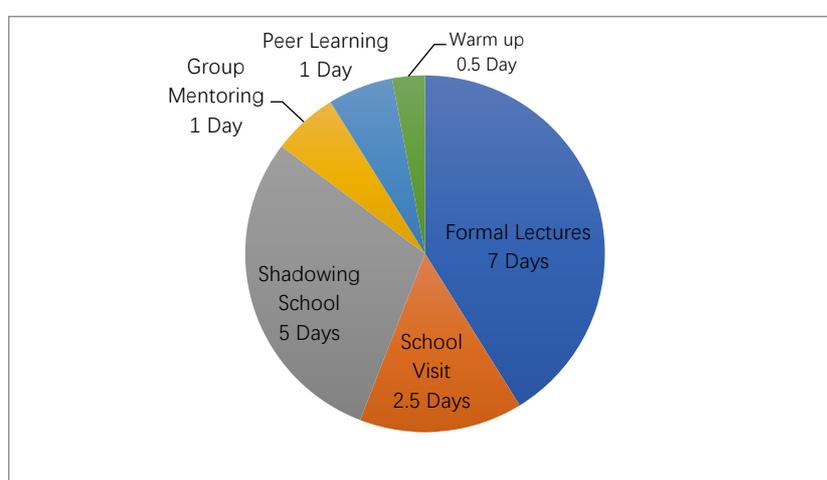


Figure 6.1. Duration of each delivery method (Days)

### Warm up

According to the programme brochure, the warm up session focuses on explaining the aims of the training programme, clarifying training requirements, and constructing the learning groups, which is the unit for principals' further learning and practicing during the programme. The session was conducted by staff from the organization, through games and group activities, which were called 'icebreaking' activities. Principals welcomed the warm up session, as it made them more familiar with the programme, as well as with their peers (P1 and P2).

During the warm up session, the 59 principals were divided into five groups, which was the unit for their further learning and activities in the programme, and each group also selected their leaders. The warm up session worked as preparation and introduction for the whole programme, which also helped the participants to better adapt to the campus and to their peers.

Formal lectures

Formal lectures, which took up the largest proportion of training time, were delivered by different lecturers, and with varied content. The main focus was on school organization, followed by teacher management, school management skills, and legal and policy analysis (see figure 6.2).

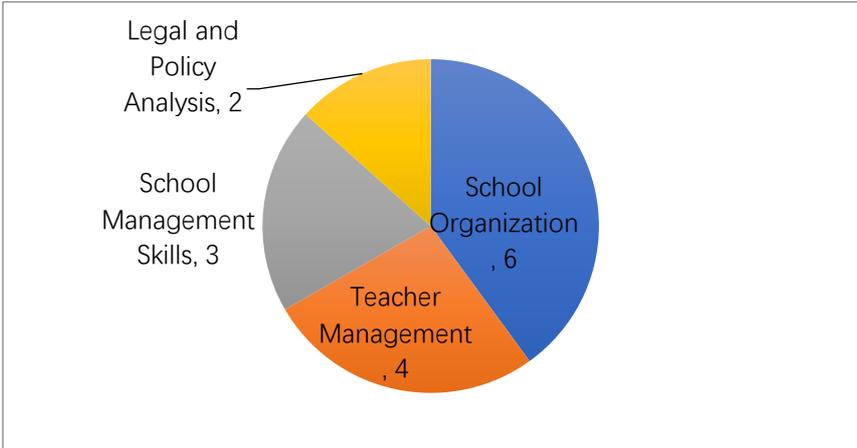
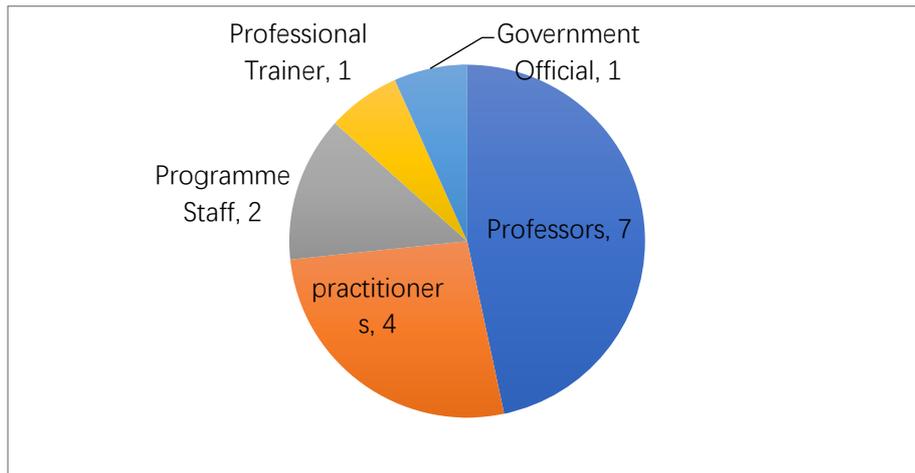


Figure 6.2: Content of Formal Lectures



*Figure 6.3: Programme providers*

Figure 6.3 shows that lectures were provided by professors, government officials, practitioners and trainers from professional organizations were participated in this section. University professors provided 46% of the lectures but most of the principals described their lectures as ‘boring’, ‘too remote from practice’ or ‘has nothing to do with their current work’ (Field Notes). The practitioners, (27%), comprised both high school principals and teachers. Some principals (P2, P4, P6) spoke highly of the effectiveness of the lectures delivered by these practitioners, as they showed how to be a leader and also how to develop their schools according to their experience (P1, P2).

‘Principal L’s lecture not only inspired me on how to manage a school, but also on how to be a great leader. That is the personal charisma and behaviour could have a huge impact on the quality and feature of a school. And Principal L makes me understand how to be a charming person before being a great school leader.’ (P1)

However, some principals also argued that these experiences could hardly be repeated in their own schools due to diversity and the political contexts (P4, P7).

There were diverse views about the professional trainers. The principals acknowledged that they have good teaching skills, and advanced knowledge of leadership and management. However, a number of principals also complained that 'such commercial-style lectures gathered all the leading and trending theories together, making it hard to absorb in such a short time' (Field Notes). Principals also complained that 'although the commercial-style lectures seem to be fascinating and attractive, it usually disregarded the requirements of the targeting clients,' (P5), as 'different types of clients were given the same content' (P6). The researcher's observations showed that, during the five-hour lecture on Time Management of Principals, 14 theories on management were presented to the principals, which was too much for principals to absorb in the three hours section. And, among ten cases that provided by the trainer, only two cases related to school management, while the other eight cases were more related to business management (Field Notes).

The report from the government administrator was about current policies on school management and education, particularly at the provincial level. Most of the principals regarded this kind of report as 'a convention for almost every government-organized training programme' (Field Notes), and also described the content as 'repeated' or 'useless' (P3, P8, Field Notes).

Most of the lectures followed the traditional Chinese way of teaching, with the lecturer teaching, while other participants are listening. According to the programme brochure, only one of the 14 lectures involved interaction and participation, while the other 13 were all in a lecture format. Although the attendance rate for the formal lectures was high, as most principals were present at every lecture, the principals were not very engaged. Table 6.1 shows the researcher's recording of the behaviours of 11 principals during a morning lecture, at half hour intervals:

	Looking at the Board	Taking Notes /Pictures	Playing on Phones	Take a nap	Chatting
10:05	2	2	3	4	
10:35	6		2	3	
11:05	3	6	2		
11:35	6	1	2		2

*Table 6.1 Observation of the behaviours of 11 principals during a morning lecture*

Table 6.1 shows that, at every time point, many principals were absent-minded, and doing something else, instead of focusing on the lecture. The researcher also found that the most frequently applied method of taking notes was to take pictures of the presentations. When asked whether the principals would go back to these pictures after the lectures, some principals gave a very direct 'no'. Some principals said that these pictures were proof of their learning, and some of them would use these pictures to report to their superior administrators in LEAs or teachers in schools.

Overall, the formal lectures comprised various types of lecturers, themes and delivery methods. While, there were still certain obvious preferences towards to the selections of providers and curriculums, that is, professors from universities were preferred, and themes on school organization construction was preferred and traditional teaching-listening style was preferred. Consequently, some principals criticized the effectiveness of formal lectures, and the levels of interaction and participation were low (P4, P6, P8).

#### Context-based learning: School visit

During the programme, the new principals visited one of the high performing high schools in the GY city -- QZ NO.1 High School. The school visit had three parts, a school tour, a report from the school principal, and communication with the school leaders and teachers. Some principals valued the school visit, as it allowed them to learn and practice through 'visiting, listening, asking and communicating' (P7).

Further, getting close to these high-performing and famous high schools is also a good chance for the new principals to eliminate their previous prejudices on high performing schools. Before visiting, some principals thought that these high performing and famous high schools were affluent in funding, resources, opportunities and government support, while after visiting, principals realized that these high performing schools also faced certain shortages and difficulties (Field Notes). Hence, the model schools' stories on innovation and development motivated the new principals to better construct their schools, and made them feel more confident for their career (Field Notes).

'Before visiting, I thought that a high performing school was definitely affluent in resources, such as policy support, teacher resources and funding. However, through this visiting, I found that this high performing school also faces lots of difficulties and pressures like my school are experiencing now. Then, through the efforts of school leaders and teachers, the school tried different ways to solve the problems, and finally stimulated the development of the school, and reinforced student performance. This makes me feel more confident about the future of my school and my personal career, and also inspires me how to solve the school's problems, such as money shortage, inadequate support from the government and so on. (P1)'

#### Group mentoring: '11110' case study

The 11110 Case Study was specifically designed for the programme, and aimed at helping the principals to solve their practical issues at school. The 11110 represented: one hot issue on school management, one practical problem related to the hot issue, one possible solution, and a ten minutes presentation. In the programme brochure, the programme organizer claimed that the '11110 case study' was a one-on-one mentoring procedure, that is one experienced principal from a high performing

school will mentor one new principal on their 11110 Case Study. The ultimate goal of the '11110 case' study was to establish a long term and personal relationship between the mentor and mentee, so that the experienced mentor could help and guide the new principal when they encountered any problems. However, during the programme, there were no one-on-one mentoring sessions, instead, it was a group mentoring session, with one mentor and 11 mentees, and the whole session lasted around 3 hours.

The researcher observed one group mentoring session on 11110 case study (11 participants), and the session was recorded. The mentor was changed at the last moment, from the principal of a high performing high school (Mountain High School) to the vice principal of that school, as the principal was away. The mentor started the session by introducing the history and current situation of the school, and then briefly introduced the schedule for shadowing school (as this group of new principals will go to the Mountain High School for shadowing school later). Then, the new principals began to present the issues or topics on school management that they had prepared before the programme started, and the mentor evaluated and analyzed the feasibility of each topic. However, the results were not encouraging (See figure 6.4).

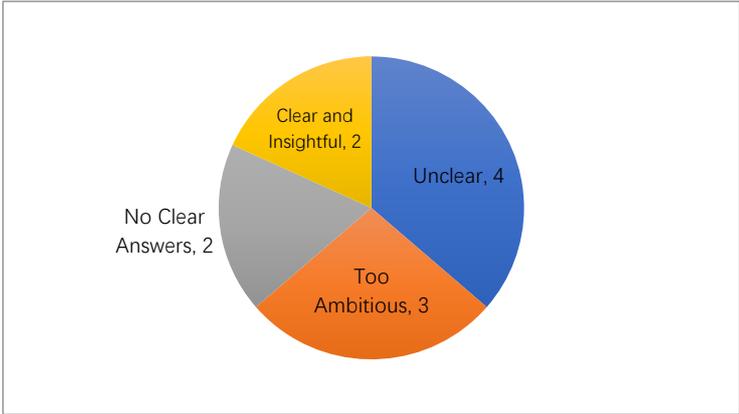


Figure 6.4: Mentor's evaluation of new principals' topics

Figure 6.4 shows that the majority of topics (81.82%) were regarded as inappropriate. Only two principals, from high performing schools in the capital city, received compliments and agreement about their topics, as the mentor regarded their topics as clear and insightful. The mentor criticized that some of the topics were unclear, and even the principals themselves could not describe their topics very clearly. One principal explained that, 'I don't know how to raise a question, although I felt like there were numerous problems on school management in practice, it is hard to extract and refine these issues in words' (P-h). Some principals raised more than one question at a same time, and could not focus on his/her point.

Some of the topics were too ambitious to solve a particular problem at their schools, and were more like general issues on education, rather than the particular problems in their schools. The mentor suggested that these principals narrow down their topics, and be more focused and targeted on their school context.

There were some issues on which the mentor could not offer any practical advice or solutions, as the contexts were so different, for example rural and urban schools. For example, the Left-behind Children issue is a problem that only exists in the rural area; there are few left-behind children in the cities, particularly at high school level.

One of the original intentions of '11110 Case Study' was, through the mentoring process, to foster personal relationships between principals from high performing schools and new principals. Thus, the mentors could help the mentees with their essay writing, and help them to solve the practical problems that the mentees were facing. Further, through these personal relationships, the mentors were expected to provide further support for the mentees after their leadership post. However, according to the informal interviews, few mentees established these personal relationships with their mentors after the group mentoring session. Most of the new and aspiring principals finished their essays independently, and lost contact with their mentors after the programme.

### Context-based learning: Shadowing school

The shadowing school lasts for five days, and the session comprised two important sections; instructional routine and organization construction (see table 6.3). The schedule included fixed elements, including majority routines on school leadership and management, and flexible ones, including classroom observation and personal communication with different heads of departments.

	Shadowing School Activities
Instructional Routine	Attending certain open classes <sup>11</sup> ;
	Participating in the discussion of the Teaching and Researching Group after the open classes;
Organization Construction	Reports from different Heads of Department
	Tour of Campus
Flexible Routine	Observing the regular classes (pre-book)
	Attending 20 open classes
	Personal communication with a particular head of department (pre-book)

*Table 6.3 The schedule for Shadowing School*

The Shadowing School started with a fixed schedule, where one of the heads of the school – the Party Secretary (SoP) - introduced the timetable and other details. The SoP also briefly introduced the historical background and current situation of the school, including the size of the school, the previous performance of the school, and also the future plans for school development. Subsequently, one head of department per day introduced how different sections were operated at the school, including the head of the instructional department, the head of the moral department, the head of the student activities department, the head of school logistics and the head of Grade 2.

The flexibility of the schedule allowed the principals to learn and experience the different aspects of the shadowing school based on their personal requirements or

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<sup>11</sup> The classes that are more carefully prepared, and opened for other teachers and staffs in and out of school to observe.

their school needs. Thus, some principals participated in the open lectures that they were teaching, while some principals attended lectures. They could also pre-book regular classes based on their requirements. As well as the formal reports from different school leaders, and HoDs, principals could also have personal communications with these different HoDs based on their needs. However, this flexibility resulted in relatively low attendance. As principals learned separately, there was no effective supervision of their attendance. The researcher's observations showed that some principals were sometimes absent.

Overall, most of the principals spoke highly of their Shadowing School experience, as it provided them a chance to familiarize themselves with how a large and high performing high school was operating in different respects (P1, P3, P6, P7). The sample school also shared almost the same macro context with the schools of the new principals (P1, P6, P8). Based on their programme diaries, Shadowing School inspired them in school management and leadership in three different aspects – moral education<sup>12</sup> leadership, instructional leadership and school logistics. Instructional leadership, in particular, was most frequently mentioned by the principals. Table 6.4 shows the key words of Shadowing School mentioned by the principals in their programme diaries, demonstrating what they have learned from this experience.

	Leadership Enactment
Moral Education Leadership	Making plans (P1, P2); setting goals (P1, P2); taking responsibility (P3, P5); step by step (P2, P3); establishing system and rules (P6);
Instructional Leadership	Making plans (P1, P4); establishing rules and regulations (P7, P8); developing evaluation and supervision systems (P1, P2); instructional research activities (P2, P3, P4, P5); encouragement system (P1, P8); training and developing younger teachers (P3, P6, P7); student outcome analysis (P3); school-based research (P1, P6); strategies for preparing for Gaokao (P2, P3, P6); strategies of

<sup>12</sup> Moral Education: it refers to the education for students that focus on ideology, politics, moral and behaviours. Mao Zedong's work "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People" pointed out that 'Our policy for education is to develop students through intelligence education, moral education and physical education'.

	student enrollment (P2);
School Logistics	Socialization of school work (P2); service consciousness (P2, P3); coordination awareness (P4, P5); familiarization with policies and context (P1, P3, P7)

*Table 6.4 How principals benefited from the Shadowing School*

Some principals also noted that the Shadowing School inspired them on how to manage a school as a whole (P1, P4, P5, P8). Three principals mentioned that teamwork was very important when managing and leading a school (P1, P5, P8). Through this experience, principals not only recognized the importance of teamwork (P1, P5, P8), but also learned how to establish an effective team in their schools (P5, P8), particularly on how to motivate young teachers and staff (P8). Principals also acknowledged the importance of setting rules and regulations in school management (P4, P8). The principals also found that the personalities and abilities of a principal could have a vital impact on the development of the school (P4, P5, P8). The design of Shadowing School allowed the new principals to learn how to manage a school through both formal reports and observations in person, which reinforced the effectiveness of the training.

### Peer learning

In order to encourage communication among the new principals, the programme also organized several informal sessions to help the participants to establish networks and connections with each other, and also provide them a chance to learn from their peers. The activities on peer learning included:

1. Mini lectures provided by participants to share their anecdotes or successful experience of school management.
2. Principals discussed the same educational issues through brainstorming.

3. Book club: Several principals introduced good books on school leadership and management or education to other participants.
4. Educational role-play: Role-plays acted by principals to illustrate the educational scenes that frequently happened in schools.
5. Online forum: An online forum for participants to communicate with each other before, during and after the programme.

Principals stated that the informal learning among new principals made them feel more confident about their new or forthcoming post, as it made them feel that they are 'not alone' (Field Notes). The relationships among the classmates last a long time after the training programme, and benefit them a lot for their leadership practice (Field Notes).

'The relationship with other principals and the classmates is valuable for me, and are the most important benefits in almost every training programme. We usually visit each other's schools after the training. And if there is any misunderstanding or confusions about the policies and regulations, we will phone each other for advice.' (P-a)

'(For our group), we have a deal that if we came to someone's place, we will contact, and have a meal together to share and communicate the latest news of the schools.' (Field Notes)

#### Limitations of the programme

Although the programme showed an emphasis on practical issues, most of its content was still delivered through a traditional way of teaching. Formal lectures comprised about one-third of the programme, and professors comprised 50% of the programme

providers, while practitioners comprised less than 305. The observation also showed that the context-based learning lacked supervision to some extent, which may reduce the effectiveness of this method.

Subsequently, the programme tried to establish a long-term mentor relationship between new principals and successful principals. However, few relationships have been built up through the programme (Field Notes). The informal interviews with six new principals, six months after the programme, showed that none of the mentors provide further assistance for the new principals after the programme, in terms of their essay writing or leadership practice.

## **Essay Evaluation Procedure**

After the programme, principals were asked to submit an essay about principalship within six months, focused on practical aspects of school leadership and management. At the end of the training, the staff from the programme introduced the requirements and format of the essays, and also provided the principals with some sample essays. After submission, their essays were reviewed by the staff from the programme, in order to check the format and for plagiarism. Then, the essays were handed to the professors or lecturers in the university for further evaluation. Those whose essays were qualified at second stage, the principals will participate in the later presentation and Question & Answer sessions, which is conducted by the programme organizations.

The observation showed that there were two examiners, a professor from the university, and a practitioner from a high performing high school in the province. The principals were asked to present for ten minutes on their essays, with slides. The two examiners then asked questions about their essays, and also provided certain guidance on the issues mentioned by the principals.

### Hot issues for new principals

The essays were based on the practical issues that new principals cared most about on leadership practice at schools. 53 essays were collected, on different aspects of school leadership, including instructional leadership, moral education, school management, teacher development, student development, and other issues that related to school leadership and management (see figure 6.5).

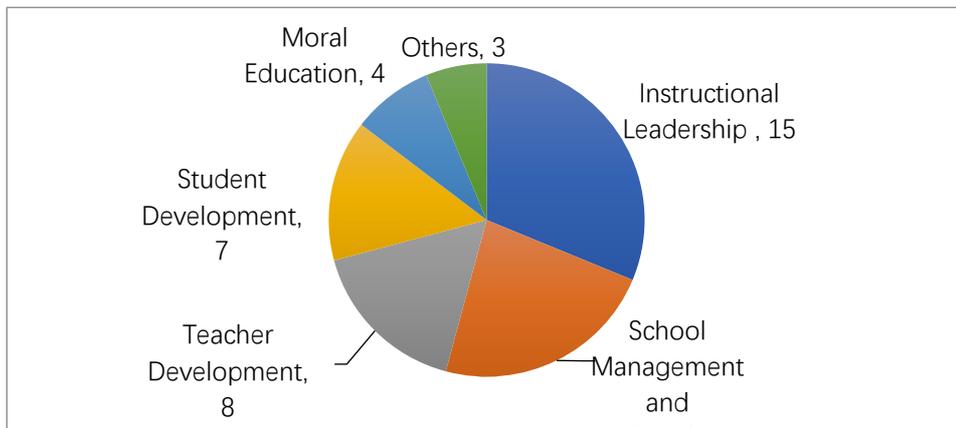


Figure 6.5: Topics of Principals' Essays

Figure 6.5 shows that instructional leadership was the most popular topic among principals, with 15 essays. The topics included how to prepare 'Gao kao' (the College Entrance Examination), how to stimulate the effectiveness of classroom teaching, and how to implement teaching and research group activities at schools. There were 11 essays on school management, involving different aspects of school operation. Some principals focused on the macro version of school management, while some focused on a particular issue of school operation, such as dormitory management or class management.

The new principals were also concerned about the development of teachers and students, with eight essays on teacher development and seven essays on student development. The teacher development foci included the wellbeing of teachers (three essays), their job satisfaction (three essays), the development of younger generation

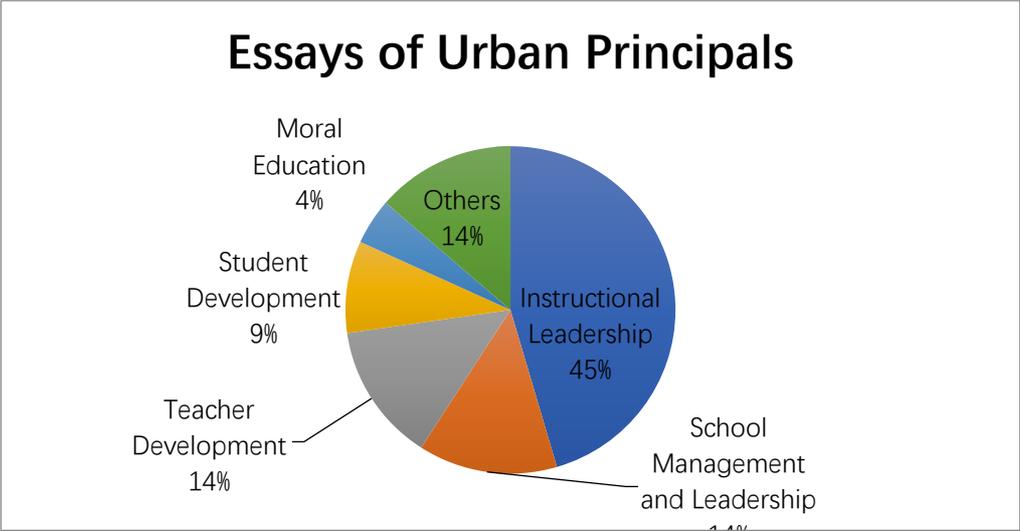
teachers (two essays). For student development, principals concentrated on their behaviors (two essays) and mental health (three essays).

Four essays were about moral education in schools, and most of them focused on how to implement moral education, and how moral education could have an impact on student behaviour and school effectiveness. Other school leadership and management topics including school security (two essays), parental involvement (two essays), special education needs (one essay), school culture construction (two essays), and left-behind students (one essay).

### The impact of context on principals' choices of topics

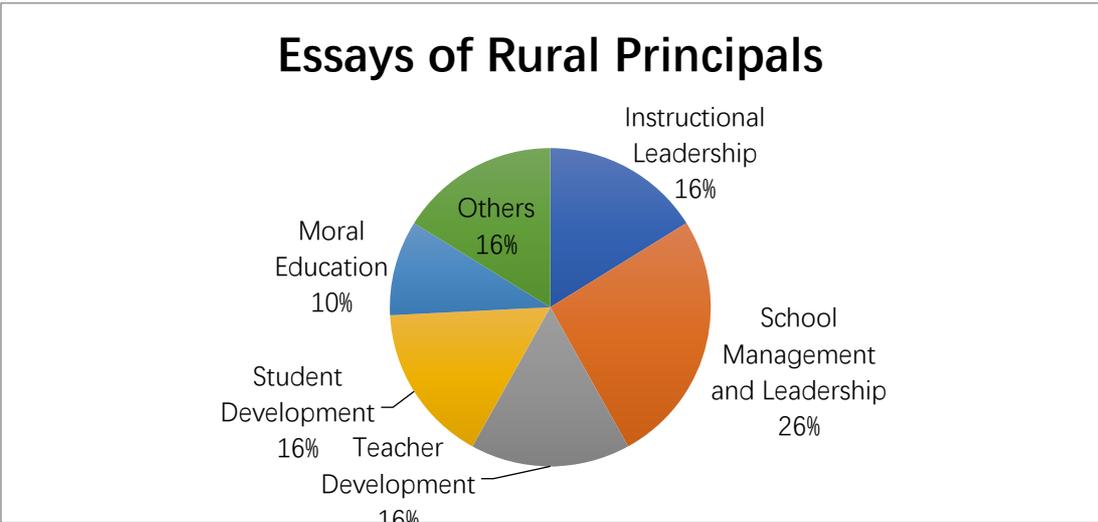
The researcher found that there was a big distinction in the principals' topics, related to different school contexts. The focus from urban principals was quite different from those in rural schools. Of the 53 essays, 22 were from urban principals, while 31 were from rural principals.

Many of the principals from urban schools focused on instructional leadership, as nearly half (45.45%) wrote essays on teaching and learning (45.45%). Some principals focused on the effectiveness of classroom teaching and learning, some focused on instructional strategies of the school, and some focused on instructional innovation. There were three essays on school management, three essays on the development of teachers, two essays on students' development, and only one essay on moral education (see figure 6.6). The figure shows the emphasis on instructional leadership among the urban schools, with a reduced focus on other topics.



*Figure 6.6: Proportion of essays from urban principals*

However, the principals from rural areas demonstrated a strong emphasis on school management (see figure 6.6). More than a quarter of rural principals chose school management as the topic for their essays, 73.73% of all essays on this topic (8 out of 11). Their interest in other issues was quite balanced, with five essays each on instructional leadership, teacher development and student development. Although moral leadership still constituted the smallest number of submissions, rural principals showed more interest in this topic, with three essays.



*Figure 6.7: Proportion of essays from rural principals*

Figure 6.8 shows that the greatest divergences in the choice of topics between urban and rural principals arose in instructional leadership and school management, followed by student development and moral education. Urban principals were more concerned about instructional work at schools, while rural principals focused more on school management. Rural principals were also more interested in student development and moral education compared with urban principals.

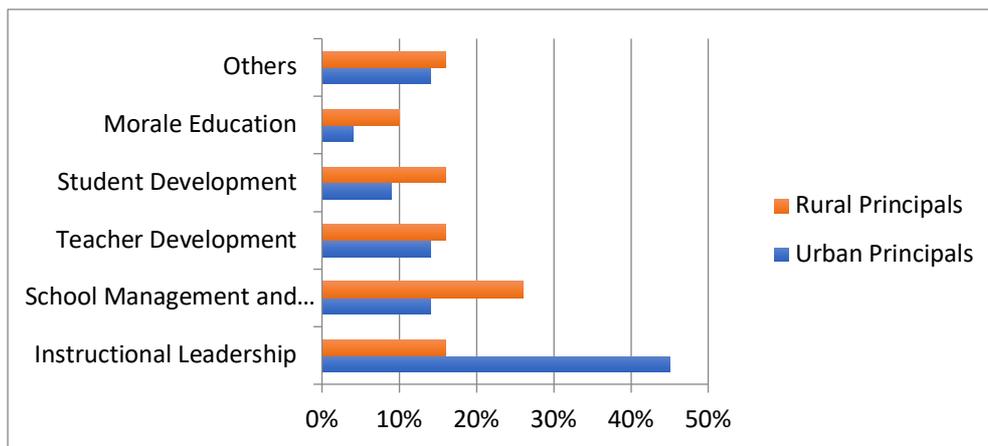


Figure 6.8: Comparisons between topics of urban principals and rural principals (%)

## Overview

The programme comprised various content types and delivery methods when training new and aspiring principals, however, there is a huge imbalance between different content and delivery methods. Thus, it demonstrated an overwhelming reliance on traditional Chinese way of teaching and learning, as well as a huge reliance on professional support from universities, as formal lectures and university professors were most frequently applied during the programme. While, these traditional ways of teaching and learning demonstrated fewer contributions to principals' professional growth. On the other side, the off-campus training methods provided principals a chance to get closer to those higher performing high schools and successful leaders, which gave these new and aspiring principals more inspirations and encouragements.

Further, according to the participants' final essays, there was a huge preference towards instructional leadership among both rural and urban principals, however, the design of in-campus training demonstrated little consideration towards instructional leadership, as none of the formal lectures was about instructional leadership. Instead, school management demonstrated to be the most important sections of all. Although, instructional leadership was mentioned and delivered during the off-campus training, the whole procedure was lack of well establishment and formal supervisions.

Hence, the working foci or the hot issues between urban principals and rural principals were so different, as predominant proportion of urban principals concerned more about the instructional leadership, while rural principal demonstrated more interests on school management.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS

### WITH PROGRAMME PROVIDERS

The aim of this chapter is to explore provider perceptions of how new principals are prepared, developed and selected. As mentioned in chapter one, China is a centralized country, and the voices from government were vitally important for the implementation of principal training programmes, as well as in the selection and recruitment for new principals. The impact of government is displayed through two different aspects; national and local policies, and the perceptions of government officials in the LEA. Thus, two officials who hold senior positions in the provincial educational authority were interviewed, in order to explore how national policies were interpreted at the provincial level, and how principal training programmes were shaped by the LEA. In addition, two staff from the cadre-training centre (*gan xun zhong xin*)<sup>13</sup> of the local normal college were interviewed to explain how the ‘Certification Training Programme for New Principals’ was designed and implemented. Finally, three programme lecturers from different organizations were also involved; one university professor from the local normal college, one professional trainer from a commercial organization, and one practitioner from a local high school. Depending on participants’ preferences, some interviews were recorded and transcribed, while some were not. Table 7.1 provides details of these interviews:

	Position	Job Description	Interview Duration	Recorded Y/N	Coded as
1	Official from LEA	In charge of the management of high school principals	30 min	Y	O-Management
2	Official from LEA	In charge of the professional development of teachers and principals	120 min	N	O-Training

<sup>13</sup> Cadre training center: *gan xun zhong xin*, the organization that particularly for the training and developing of local education leaders and school leaders.

3	Programme Designer	Chief designer of this preparation programme	62 min	Y	PD
4	Programme Co-ordinator	Involved in programme preparation, delivery and evaluation	20 min	Y	PC
5	Lecturer	Professor of education in local normal college	18 min	Y	L1
6	Lecturer	Professional trainer from the commercial organization	12 min	Y	L2
7	Lecturer	Practitioner from a high performing high school	21 min	Y	L3

*Table. 7.1 Basic Information about each Interview*

## **Defining the Principals**

The participants offered different views about the definition of principals in China. Government officials demonstrated quite high expectations for principals in China, which were a kind of ‘empty phraseology’ and hard to achieve (L1). For example the local government claimed to develop the principals as ‘master educator’ or appealed to ‘craftsman spirits’ in education industry. One official (OT) described an ideal principal as a ‘successful practitioner with his/her own ideology on education’, which requires a principal to be an effective manager and a visionary leader at the same time. The OM portrayed the principal as one who ‘belongs to the Party Organization’ and ‘is suitable for the *‘cabinet team’* of the Party group, and that ‘achieving the intentions of the (Party) Organization was their first priority’.

The participants also described what they regard as successful principals in China. Although the officials stressed the importance of regulations, vision, and management skills, when explaining the principals in China, they also defined a successful or ‘famous’ principal as someone who ‘leads a top performing school in the province’ (OT and OM). The evaluation of successful principals was overwhelmingly based on student outcomes, and disregarded other aspects of principals’ leadership performance, particularly at high school level, where the

outcomes of *gao kao*<sup>14</sup> are direct and measurable (OT). The OT also stressed that the influence of principals was quite significant for this position. 'As a principal, it is not enough to only influence the teachers, students and parents around you, but also to inspire the peers all over the country, and to contribute to the society that you work in.'

However, the university professor (L1) and practitioner lecturer (L3) hold a different view in defining the principalship and successful principals, and their explanations were more detailed and practical. The university professor described a qualified principal as someone who knows how to solve all the possible situations and crises at school, which means that, 'if anything happens, the principal at least knows where to get support and assistance' (L1). The practitioner emphasized the importance of personality and of establishing school culture construction and setting correct orientations for school development (L3).

'Seldom principals had the chance to lead a high performing school, and the principals did not need to reproduce a high performing or famous school under the shadows of these model schools. It is important to have your own thinking and find your schools' characteristics on developing orientations and culture construction, rather than imitate or mimic the path-ways of these successful ones.' (L3)

### *The roles of principals*

Although definitions of the principalship varied, the obligations and responsibilities of principals are similar, according to their job descriptions. The principals were expected to be effective instructional leaders, active school managers, and qualified cadre for the Party (L1, L3, OT, and OM).

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<sup>14</sup> *Gao kao*: the college entrance examination in China.

First, principals were expected to be instructional leaders in their schools. Most interviewees pointed out that leading the teaching and learning activities in school was principals' first priority (OT, OM, L1, and L3), as student outcomes are the most important indicator for all educational activities (OT). Most of the providers also link instructional leadership ability to the principals' previous instructional outcomes as teachers (OT, OM and PD). The OT mentioned that a qualified principal should be someone who was excellent in teaching; thus, high instructional outcomes were a 'must-have factor' for the principal's position. In other words, 'without higher student outcomes as a teacher, the principals even will not be considered as candidates for the position' (OT). The L1 also claimed that a principal with higher instructional performance demonstrated higher ability in leading teaching and learning in schools. Further, as there was no individual evaluation and promotion system for principals in the sample province, the principals were still assessed and graded through the teachers' evaluation system, focused on students' performance and their instructional ability (OM).

The principals were also expected to be effective managers of their schools. The interviewees identified several managerial skills, including communication, (L3), managing tasks (L1), coordinating ability (L1), and coping with different inspections from the government (OM).

'As a principal, the managerial ability is quite fundamental, it is about how you run a school, and put everything on the right track.' (OT)

'[An ideal high school principal] should own coordinating ability. Once he/she is in the position, he/she should know the situations of students, parents and teachers, be clear about the orientations of the school, and then try to coordinate everything on the same track, to keep stimulating his/her students and teachers.' (L1)

The OM and OT also stressed the importance of completing the missions from the Party organization, which means that the principals are not only the leader and manager of the school, he/she is also the cadre of the Party (OT). Thus, Party construction work was one of the important parts of school routine, and realizing the intentions of the Party was one of the principals' prior duties (OM).

L1 holds an open perspective on the roles of principals, as there is no standard job description or obligation for high school principals, because every school is unique. As a result, the roles of the principals should be customized based on the needs and features of the school (L1).

'For example, for a lower SES school, which is weak in financial and policy support, a 'Diplomat type' of principal will be preferred, as this kind of principal is good at striving for resources from different sources. While, for a weak performing school, the instructional ability of a principal will be stressed. It should depend on the situation of the school.' (L1)

## **Different Programme Providers**

### Different lecturers

During this programme, there were three types of lecturers; university professors, practitioners and professional trainers from commercial organizations. The programme also included experts from local and other provinces. This section compares these different types of lecturers in respect of cost, lecturing skills, and the degree of customization of their curriculum, and also compares the efficiency of different lecturers. The professors from local universities demonstrated the largest efficiency, while some famous professors from other province lacked cost effectiveness.

## Cost

The cost of different types of lecturers varied. The professional trainers from the commercial training organizations were the most expensive, while the professors and practitioners from local universities or schools were the least expensive (PD and PC). For example, in this training programme, the salary for professional trainers was triple that of the professors from other provinces, and eight times that of the professors and practitioners from local universities and high schools (PC). Even though the professors and practitioners hold equivalent job positions, the salary of those from other provinces was much higher than the local lecturers, often two to three times more (L1 and PC).

‘The programme cannot afford the section (that provided by the professional training organizations) alone, so we put two programmes together today. Thus, for this section, principals had their lectures with the headteachers in the *Headteacher Training* programme. We even could not afford for the famous ones in the organization, and the one we invited this time was a relatively cheaper person in that organization when compared with his colleagues.’ (PC)

As well as salaries, there were also other additional costs for experts from other provinces, including flight tickets, accommodation, dining fees and other expenses, which made their overall costs five to eight times higher than those of local lecturers (PD and L1).

‘Most of times, money cannot solve the problems here. If you wanted to invite a famous lecturer, they are definitely not coming for money, it is more about my personal relationships and social connections with these lecturers, and their coming is more like doing me a favour. Thus, it takes me lots of time and energy to keep a good relationship with them outside the programme.’ (PD)

### *Lecturing skills*

Although the costs of different programme lecturers varied, as noted above, the perceived effectiveness of these lecturers was also dissimilar, and there is no link between costs and lecturing efficiency.

Both PD and PC admitted that the professional trainers had the best lecturing skills when compared with other types of lecturers, as 'this (training) is their everyday job, and it is also what they are expert at' (PC). Usually, a professional trainer had a resonant speaking voice, humorous cases to share, a charming personality and excellent speech skills, which are very attractive for the listeners, and make their lectures appealing (PC). However, for these courses, the lecturer was 'usually the definite centre' (PC) of activity, and they often had 'neither participation of the new principals, nor interactions between the trainer and trainees' (L2).

This study discovered that it is hard to control or predict the quality of lecturers, as well as the curriculum that they offered, particularly those lecturers who are from other provinces. The PD also mentioned that they were more familiar with the local professors, in terms of lecturing skills, previous feedback, course quality, and their personalities, so the courses provided by local experts were more predictable and less risky, when compared with those from other provinces. Further, the interactions between the local lecturer and listeners tended to be more frequent, including case studies, communications, and question and answer sessions (L1). For those from other provinces, the PD only acknowledges their reputations, positions, and the background of their universities, with little knowledge of their classroom teaching and course feedbacks, which made the quality of their lectures hard to be guaranteed. In this programme, local professors were perceived to be more skilful in lecturing compared with those from other provinces (L1, PD and PC).

Practitioners demonstrated little skill in teaching, as they were not trained in how to give a lecture (L3), and the content was more experience-based, not systematic and lacked theoretical foundation (L1, L3 and PD).

### Levels of customization

The research also explored levels of customization; how these lecturers could meet the requirements of the new principals, and how they adjusted their courses to the needs of new principals. The overall level of customization was low, as the programme curricula were based on the availability of the lecturers, rather than the practical requirements of new principals (PD, L1, and L3). Although a few lecturers made certain changes based on the characteristics of the participants, these changes tended to be peripheral and superficial.

The local university professors and practitioners demonstrated high levels of customization (L1, L3 and PD). L1 mentioned that she would change the cases that applied in the lectures according to the types of participants, and also adjust her teaching methods based on the attitudes and ages of the participants.

‘When I am arriving at the classroom, I will have a look at the ages of the participants, and the atmosphere of the class first. If it was a young group, which is full of energy, I will add on more interactions and participations for my course, while reducing my own speech time. If the participants tend to be an older generation, I will say more, and the interactions will be less.’

(L1)

Although the practitioners lacked capacity to adjust their courses to the participants, their curricula, which focused on school management and leadership practice, could meet the demands of the new principals, to a certain degree (L3 and PD).

However, the professors from other provinces demonstrated only a slight level of

customization, as ‘they usually come with their skilful topics, which were given all over the country with no distinction’ (PD). Moreover, some of the topics were ‘far away from leadership practice’ (L1 and PD), and some of the topics were ‘inapplicable’ in the sample province (L1 and L3). Also, the professional trainer barely customized his lecture to the new principals. One interviewee commented that this was the first time this trainer had given a lecture to the principals, and his lecture on management was exactly the same one that he gave to commercial organizations (L2).

*Lecturing efficiency*

As mentioned above, the costs of different programme providers varied but value of these courses did not demonstrate a positive correlation with the costs (L1, PD and PC). In this study, both PD and PC simply evaluated the quality of different types of lecture providers, in terms of their costs, effectiveness and their levels of customization to the programme (see table 7.2).

	University Professors (local)	Trainers	Practitioner	Other-province Experts
Salary	1X (salary)	5X(salary)	1X(salary)	2X(salary)
Total Cost	Reasonable	Expensive	Reasonable	Expensive
Lecturing Skills	Great	Excellent	Amateur	Unstable
Customization	Partially	Rarely	Partially	Rarely
Cost-efficiency	High	Average	Average	Low

*Table 7.2 The cost-effectiveness of different lecturers*

For this programme, lecturers from local universities showed greater perceived cost-effectiveness when compared with those from other provinces and from professional organizations, as they exhibited skilful teaching, their courses were more customized, and their cases were closer to the local context (L1, L2 and L3). Professors from other provinces demonstrated little cost-effectiveness, as they cost a lot, while their curricula were too ‘theoretical’ and ‘hard to apply to school

leadership'<sup>15</sup>(PD). The cost-effectiveness of professional trainers and practitioners was average, as the trainers were expert in lecturing skills, while the practitioners had a relevant job background and were able to contextualize (L2, L3, PC, and PD).

### *Policy influence*

The research shows that extra costs cannot guarantee the quality of the curriculum. However, a large proportion of costs are spent on the experts from other provinces, and this situation will not change in the short term (OT and PD).

At government level, there was a preference towards experts from other provinces. The OT described this tendency as 'providing the principals a chance to have a look at the world outside, in order to broaden their eyesight, particularly those lecturers who are famous or from famous universities'. Meanwhile, the PD also mentioned that 'it does not matter what precisely they (principals) could learn from the lectures, but to feel the influence of the masters.' According to the local regulations and educational policies, there was a fixed proportion on different types of programme providers, and experts from other provinces should constitute no less than two thirds of the experts (PD).

The programme designer also mentioned that the prices of each type of lecturer were also specified in the local regulations, which were labeled by the LEAs, and the programme implementers strictly followed these regulations (PD). Thus, the 'majority of the money was taken by the other-province experts' (PD). Local programme providers also mentioned that their prices were higher in other places than in the local training programme, and also higher than that of local training

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<sup>15</sup> According to the interview, the qualities of other-province professors were quite unstable, and hard to guarantee, while, in this training programme, some other-province professors demonstrated to be lack of cost efficiency. While, the situations may be different in other training programme, or the preparation programmes (PD).

providers in other provinces (L1 and L3).

#### *Two special programme providers*

Despite formal lectures, contextualized learning and mentoring were also applied in this training programme. There were two special programme providers who also facilitated the professional growth of new and aspiring leaders, namely model schools for contextualized learning, and mentors.

#### Model school

Two model schools were involved in this training programme, one for the school visit, and the other for five days' contextualized learning, named 'shadowing school'. The PD noted that the quality of the context-based learning depended on the attitudes of these sample schools, as well as the attitudes of the participants. The PD also described the attitudes of these sample schools in the province as 'diligent', however, their influence was limited, and 'it is hard to add on any extra requirements on these famous high schools' (PD).

Most of these famous high schools have quite busy schedules, from their school leaders to teachers and very few had spare time to prepare for the context-based learning for these new principals (PD). Frequent school visits or training cooperation with the LEA would add too many extra burdens on these famous and high performing high schools, which may influence school management (L3). Further, for these famous schools or famous principals, the training organization or the LEA could hardly tempt them through financial compensation or by giving them encouragement (PD).

'Most of the contextualized learning sections were compulsory and obligatory for these high performing schools, as they do not need any other reward or compliments to reinforce their influence in the local education

area. Thus, instead of the administrative affiliation, the emotional attachment between the LEA and these high performing schools was more stressed during this process.' (PD)

The PD stressed that context-based learning was a mutual learning opportunity for both sample schools and the participants. As the programme provider, the school leaders and teachers were required to prepare reports, presentations and slides to introduce different aspects of school management, and they also needed to answer the questions that related to the experience of school development, which induced them to review and rethink their previous work (PD). Moreover, the OT also noted that it would be better if these sample schools could hold a more open and positive attitude as programme providers, as being a model, it is their responsibilities to transport their positive influence and precious experiences for other schools in the province.

### Mentoring

Mentoring was applied in this programme to boost the professional development of new and aspiring principals, in the area of leadership practice and school-based research. The mentor team comprised principals from high performing high schools in the capital city. However, mentorship between the participants and these high performing principals were weak, as few mentoring relationships were established (PD).

Both the university professor and the practitioner suspected the mentoring ability of these successful principals, as they noted that 'a successful principal does not equal a qualified mentor' (L1 and L3). They also noted that the mentoring relationships established through the short-term programmes were superficial and temporary, which can hardly have any substantial benefits for new principals (L1).

## Implementation of the Training Programme

In the previous chapter, the author explored the implementation of the programme in depth through observations, field notes, programme diaries and other related documents. In this chapter, through interviews, the author examines provider perspectives on programme implementation and principal recruitment.

### Selection of programme organizations

Before the programme started, different organizations needed to compete for the projects. The opportunities were not open to everyone; only faculties in universities, training centres attached to universities, or the LEAs, and other educational organizations are qualified to compete to provide the programmes (PD, L1 and OT). However, the bidding process was confidential, without clear criteria, and all the competitors need to submit was a proposal on training plans. In the PD's words, 'we hardly know why we get the project, or why we failed' (PD).

'It only takes few minutes for the review committee to decide the qualification of each bid book, without any bidders' present, so that the whole process was reckless and speedy.' (PD)

Further, the choice of programme providing organizations lacked consistency, in terms of programme providers, content, curricula, and delivery methods. First, the programme-providing organizations for new principal preparation and training were different from year to year, picked by the MoE, based on their bid books (PD and L1). Thus, the content and delivery methods for new and aspiring principals differs from year to year, as the programme-providing organizations and programme designers changed. Then, there was no consistency between principal preparation programmes and other principal development programmes, as their providers were different and

unconnected. Sometimes, the same topics, or the same lecture, will be taught in both the preparation programme and the development programmes, as the lecturer was invited for both programmes (L1 and L3).

### Passive mediator

The lead body for programme implementation, the *cadre-training centre*, has little authority when running the programme. The preparation training programme was largely constrained by both government and programme providers, in terms of fair opportunities in bidding for the programme, use of funding, selection of programme providers and curriculum content.

Under the centralized system, both national policies and local regulations had a significant influence on the implementation of the training programme. These policies clarified the framework and content of the principal preparation programmes, including compulsory learning hours, time allocation, delivery methods and curriculum content, constitution of programme providers, allocation of funding and examination approaches (PD and OM) (see in MoE, 2013).

For example, as noted earlier, local university professors demonstrated a higher cost efficiency when compared with other lecturers. The PD also admitted that the quality of lecturers provided by local experts was more stable, as the PD was more familiar with these lecturers. However, according to local regulations, the proportion of local experts should be less than 40% and the majority should be from other provinces (MoE, 2013). Further, the salaries for different types of lecturers were not dependent on the quality of the courses, and the PD and PC were expected to strictly follow these written rules (PC).

The availability of lecturers and other programme providers also made the PD and

PC very passive when implementing the programme. The curriculum content was based on the availability of these experts, and these experts usually lecture about their specialism or what they are familiar with previously. As the PD and L1 both mentioned, lecturers seldom customized their content to the needs of the programme. Similarly, the lecturers also mentioned that programme designers or coordinators seldom discussed the design or the requirements of the programme with them before it began (L1 and L3).

‘Usually, they will directly ask you to give a lecture that you are familiar with. Every professor or lecturer will have one or some ‘signature’ topics that he/she has lectured many times.’ (L1)

Without an effective pre-discussion on programme implementation, the programme coordinator had little authority on the content and curricula of the programme. The programme providers described the preparation training programme as ‘sale by bulk’, or just ‘assorting the cold dishes together’. Current system made them passive on both sides. On one side, as programme provider, they had little authority on the selection of lecturers and approaches, funding allocation and budget management. On the other sides, as programme designer, they also demonstrated little control of contents of curriculum and effectiveness of lecturing.

### Lax evaluation systems

At the end of programme, the principals were asked to provide an essay on principal leadership as the final evaluation for principal certificates. However, according to the interviews, this evaluation was a formality, and often insignificant and non-distinguishable (L1, L3, OM, and PC).

First, the choice of essay examiners was random, and sometimes, the examiners are

unprofessional. The PC noted that, 'although we have plenty of experts on leadership and school management, sometimes, we had to give this job (examining the essays) to the leaders (*guan*) in the faculty. As it is a paid job, and the salary is quite considerable, thus, we have to give the "earning money" opportunities to these faculty leaders, although they were not professional enough.'

Second, as an evaluation, the pass ratio for the final essays was too high to be critical. The PD pointed out that 'around two or three participants will fail on final evaluation every time (out of approximately 60 participants for each training programme), but they will be given a second chance half a year later, and no one would fail at that time'. The L1, who has participated in essay evaluation for Principal Preparation Training before, described the pass ratio as 'who fails? No one.' There were no requirements for the quality or content of these essays at all, and the only requirement for the essay was the format, such as font size, paragraphs and the patterns (L1, PC and PD).

However, the university professors (L1) noted that it was hard to add any standards or requirements on these principals' essays, as there was no session during the training programme on essay writing or educational research. Thus, there was a huge gap between what the principals had learned from the course and what they were expected to perform after the programme.

### Government disregard

Finally, the principal certificates are disregarded by the LEA when selecting and recruiting new principals. The new principal training programme did not share the same importance as the training programmes for the experienced and 'famous' principals (OT and PD).

First, little attention was paid to the principal preparation programme, particularly when compared with the development programme for experienced principals and famous principals. The OT stated that the preparation-training programme for new principals was 'mainly targeted at vice-principals', and it 'just contained something you need to know about being a principal' (O-Training). The OT also admitted that the current focus on principal training was on the 'famous principal workshop', which is a development programme for famous principals.

Second, there was a weak link between the principal preparation training programme and the selection and recruitment of new principals. The PD admitted that his understanding of principalship had little impact on the recruitment of the principals, as he regarded the criteria for principal selection as: 'none of my business, so that I have not thought about it'. Meanwhile, OM admitted that the certification for headship had little impact on the selection and recruitment for principal positions. In the rural districts, 'being posted without a licence' was quite common, and the principals are allowed to 'get on the bus first, and then, buy the tickets' (OM).

### Features of the preparation programme

#### *Sale by bulk*

The majority of programme providers were aware of current issues about the principal preparation training programme and gave quite critical comments about it. Some described it as 'sale by bulk' (L1, L3, PC and PD), and some illustrated it as 'assorted cold dishes' (L1, L3 and OT).

The university professor explained 'sale by bulk' as meaning that all the training programmes were quite similar, in terms of their curricula, delivery methods and formats, without taking account of the characteristics and positions of the

participants. The same topic or the same set of presentation slides could be given to new teachers, experienced teachers, school leaders, new principals, and experienced principals, without making any adjustments (PD).

The L3 used 'assorted' to describe the training programmes as they lacked careful design and appropriate customization, which just filled in the training programme with lecturers without carefully thinking on the demands of principals. The government official also demonstrated that the training programmes were 'processed sequentially automatically every time', without top-level design and overall thinking about the professional development of the principals. (OT). This 'piece-together' programme was based more on the availability of the programme providers, rather than the requirements of new and aspiring principals.

#### *Disregarding principals' requirements*

Under the centralized system, current programmes were shaped by the regulations and policies written by government, and reflected the conceptions of principalship understood by programme designers and lecturers, disregarding the views and requests from new principals. Also, as noted above, the implementation of the programme was based on the availability and expertise of the lecturers, and sometimes, the social networks of the programme designers. Requests from new or aspiring principals were not taken into consideration. However, although the requests of new and aspiring principals were disregarded, PC and PD also noted that the principal participants did not provide any constructive advice on the design and implementation of the programme.

'We tried to collect some opinions about the content and delivery of the programme, however, their advice was inapplicable. For example, some

principals asked me to invite Fan Ruo<sup>16</sup> to give a speech for the programme, which is like mission impossible for us. (PC)'

'When it comes to the delivery methods, context-based learning in other provinces always comes first, as principals regard the training programme as an opportunity to relax themselves and get rid of busy school work. If we collected opinions from the public, all the votes will go for long-term internship in developed provinces and cities. These requests, on the one side, [are not] constructive; moreover, we do not have enough funding and resource for it.' (PD)

Further, the programme designer pointed out that 'it is better to be a product designer, rather than being an advice listener' (PD). Here, the PD take iPhone as a pompous to illustrate that the training programme was actually created something that 'beyond their [these participants'] imagination'.

'Just like the iPhone, before it, the cell phone was only for phone calls and texts, and the clients cannot imagine how multi-functional a cell phone could be. What we need to do is to create something that is beyond their imagination, they may not know what they need before the programme, but once they come to the programme, they will find that this is what they need.' (PD)

## **Selection and Recruitment**

The official commented that the 'in (selection), out (dismissal) and management of principals was strictly under the guidance of the policies', and there were two

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<sup>16</sup> Fan Ruo: Fake name, which is a very famous university principal in China, and could give excellent speeches in public, and became a 'star principal' because of his excellent speeches on the Internet.

main policies tightly connected to the appointment of new principals, which were published by the Organization Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee. These policies are: *'Regulations on Management of Leaders of Public Institutions (Provisional)'* (P-PI for short) and *'Regulations on Management for Leaders of Primary and Secondary School Principals (Provisional)'* (P-SP for short) (OM). The *Standards and Qualifications for Principalship in China*, published by the Ministry of Education, had little impact on the selection and recruitment of new principals in China (L1, OT and OM).

### Principles and criteria

According to the policies, a Party cadre should be someone who is 'moral, capable, hardworking, accomplished and honest' (P-PI). These two policies clarified the detailed principles on the requirements for a school principal, including ideology, working ability and working attitude (P-SP).

First, in terms of ideology, supporting the Communist Party is a priority for principal recruitment. Whereas the principal is not necessarily a Party member, he/she should be familiar with the policies and regulations published by the Party, as well as the codes of Marxism and core socialism values. Further, principals should keep highly correspondences with the Party's cognitions and its lead, which means that the principal should support the lead of Communist Party, understand the policies of the Party and spread the spirit of the Party into school development.

The policies also described the working abilities of a school leader, which comprise both managerial ability and instructional leadership capacity. A school principal should be a skillful leader who is familiar with educational legislation and regulations, and good at managing a school appropriately. Also, a principal is required to be an innovative instructional leader, who is able to lead curriculum innovation, and

teachers' professional development, and provide a better learning environment for both teachers and students.

The policies also require the principals to be self-disciplined in their behaviors, be passionate and devoted to educational work, and also be responsible and respectful for their schools and society.

These three principles are not of equal importance when selecting a leader. As the ideology of a principal comes first, supporting the Communist Party is quite elementary and the baseline for a 'cadre for the Party'. Then, according to the policies, morality has more importance than principals' working ability.

Meanwhile, despite these principles, the policies also specified other criteria in terms of the educational background and previous working experience of the candidates:

1. A bachelor's degree or above;
2. At least five years' teaching experience;
3. At least two years' management experience as vice-principal (or other equivalent) position; or at least three years management experience in a middle leader position;
4. Owning a teacher certificate; and a job position on 'Supreme Grade in primary and secondary school';
5. Owning a principal certificate, otherwise, the principal should finish it within one year after being posted;
6. Being in good physical condition;

The OM mentioned that the local government had certain authority to adjust these

criteria to make them more suitable for the local context. However, the principals should at least meet the basic requirements mentioned in the policies, that is, 'they could go beyond these criteria, while, these standards are the baseline.'

### Selection procedure

According to the policies, there are four ways of selecting a school principal; internal selection, government appointment, competition for post, and open recruitment (P-PI and P-SP). However, in reality, these four methods did not apply equally, and internal selection and government appointments were the most frequently applied (L1 and OM). Sometimes, internal selection and government appointment were applied at the same time when selecting a principal for a school (OM).

For internal selection and government appointment, usually, the Organization Department of the LEA will select a small group of principal candidates from the schools, and these candidates may be vice principals or middle leaders of the school (OM). Then, '*Party intention*' will start to work, as the officials from the Organization Department will retain those who are able to carry out the intentions from the Party, and are appropriate for the constitution of Party group, and delete those who are not (OT and OM).

According to the principles of '*mass line*', the officials will go to school to collect advice from teachers and staff, which is a mandatory step according to the policies (OM), for internal selection only. Usually, the voice from the '*mass*' will be regarded as complementary evidence when evaluating a candidate, which has a slight influence on the final decision (L1, L3, and OM).

Once the candidates have passed the evaluation, the Organization Department will produce a recruitment plan to specify the criteria for the position, although the principal position has been almost settled (OM). He/she will then be informed directly by the Organization Department to prepare for the coming position, and their preparation periods are usually very short (OM and L3). All these procedures are implemented secretly. In certain circumstances, the candidate will be appointed to an unfamiliar school, even though they will not be informed in advance (OM). Hence, the Organization Department seldom asks the candidates' willingness or opinion about their forthcoming roles (OM and L1).

The interviewees also explained why open recruitment and competition for posts are seldom applied in practice:

1. Stability of Organization

The official mentioned that holding the authority in principal management could ensure the stability of the school context and Party group, which could be beneficial to the development of the school (OM).

'We did hire some principals from other places through open recruitment; however, the issue is that they come and go freely. They feel less attached to the school, so that they lack responsibility towards the city, and to the school. These alternatives on leadership team and Party group make the school unstable, and also make it hard to manage the school organization.'  
(OM)

2. Connections

*Guanxi* (social occasions) could have a huge impact on principal power in Chinese society. These *guanxi* (social occasions) included not only the connections with the

teachers and staff at school, but also the networks with local communities and the LEA. Thus, a local principal bonds to the society and the school, which could be beneficial for their leadership execution after posting (L1 and OM).

‘The biggest challenge, for those principals who were selected through open recruitment or competition, was how they could contextualize themselves to the school environment . . . As in China, *guanxi* (social occasions) were everywhere, as a principal, it is hard to implement his/her work in a completely unfamiliar environment.’ (L1)

### 3. Encouragement for local talent

The sample province is one of the less developed areas in China. As a result, when it comes to open recruitment for leadership positions, local candidates were less competitive when compared with those who come from other provinces, in terms of their knowledge base, educational background and presentation skills (L1 and L3). Thus, the local government found that open recruitment resulted in a huge discouragement for local talents, which had a detrimental impact on the talent pool for the local educational team (L1 and L3). Particularly in China, almost every teacher followed a quite similar career path, and wait to be get promoted, while the newcomers from other places affected this balance (OM).

‘A few years ago, we have tried open recruitment to select leaders for educational departments and institutions in the province, including schools. To be honest, candidates from other places were more skillful and knowledgeable for certain positions, while it was a huge depression for local talents who worked in their departments for years, as their career paths or promotion opportunities were blocked by those newcomers. So that we stopped doing that for years.’ (L3)

## Features of principal recruitment in China

The recruitment of principals is under a 'socialist system with Chinese characteristics', and certain significant features could be observed:

### *Cadre for the Party*

The official mentioned that the principle of principal administration is 'the Party manages the cadres'. Thus, the recruitment and transfer of a principal should be with the permission of the Party Organization of the institution (OM). High school principals were recruited and managed by the local Organization Department or local Party Committee, while the educational authority had little influence on the selection and recruitment of new principals (OT, OM, and L1). Then, although being a Party member was not a necessary element for principal position, it was preferred when selecting school leaders (OM).

Further, as mentioned above, the two policies that directly impact on principal selection were published by the Organization Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, while the '*Standards and Qualifications for Principalship in China*' had little impact on the appointment of new principals (OT, OM and L1). Hence, the selection of principals also obeyed the principles of *Regulations on Management of Leaders of Public Institutions (Provisional)*, in which the school is regarded as a unit or organization for the Party group, rather than a professional institution for teaching and learning. Thus, the recruitment of a principal is more like selecting a cadre for the Party rather than selecting a leader for the school.

### *Party intention*

'Party intention' was the most frequent term mentioned by the official from the Organization Department of the LEA (OM). As the candidates should be able to carry out the intentions of the *Party*, the constitution of the school leadership team should be beneficial for the stability of the *Party group* (OT and OM). The Organization will select the person who they feel is appropriate for the development of the school and the stability of the Party group.

'What we are concerned [about] the most is the balance of the *banzi (Party Group)*<sup>17</sup> of the school, that we try to keep the equilibrium among gender, age, and curriculum. For example, if there were too many science teachers in the group, a liberal arts candidate will be considered to get involved to reinforce the balance of the curriculum.' (OM)

### *Confidentiality*

Confidentiality is also one of the significant features of principalship appointments in China, and it also aims at fulfilling the intentions of the Party, to make sure that the principal position is taken by someone chosen by the Organization (OM and L3). As a result, government appointment is the most frequently applied method when recruiting or transferring a school leader (OT, OM, L1, and L3).

'Most times, the [selection] procedure is definitely confidential to make sure the appointments system goes on smoothly. If the news had been leaked out, there will have two possible situations, one is that the chosen candidate is unwilling to take the role; or, despite the candidate, there are other people who want that position. Both situations will make our work

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<sup>17</sup> *Banzi (Party Group)*: the unit for Party Organization. And in China, a school is regarded as a form/unit of Party Organization.

hard to carry on, you know, there will be rumours and *guanxi* (social connections) everywhere, thus, the best way is to keep the news secret, and inform the candidate directly' (OM).

## **Future Advice**

Government officials, training organizations and professional supporters recognized the problems with the current principal training and development system. These are discussed below:

### The absence of a principal evaluation and ranking system

At policy level, there are no descriptions or details on how to evaluate principals' leadership performance or their practical abilities. The official (OT) admitted that the standards for the assessment of principalship were missing in both national and local policies. In the sample province, the principals' ranking and grading system was as same as that for the teachers, so that student performance and teaching experience were the most significant factors that could influence the promotion and rewarding of principals. The principals' job positions had the same titles as teachers, such as Superior Teacher in Primary and Secondary Schools. Although most of the new principals hold the highest position in the teacher evaluation system, they still want to be rewarded and recognized as a principal (L1, L3).

### The discontinuities of principal development providers

Despite the centralized system, the researcher found that there were so many discontinuities and missing links in principal preparation, development and recruitment in China.

First, the *Standards and Qualifications of Principalship in China* had little impact on policy or decision-making in LEAs when preparing, selecting and recruiting a principal. The policies that do impact (P-PI and P-SP), had little information or details on the professional development of principalship or leadership in practice. The *Standards* also demonstrated little impact on the establishment or design of principal preparation and training programmes (OT, PD, PC and L1). Further, *the Standards* showed limited impact on the courses provided by lecturers, as few lecturers would take *the Standards* into considerations when designing or preparing their curricula, and some of them are not even familiar with *the Standards* (L1, L2, and L3).

There were also no interactions among the departments and organizations related to principal training and recruitment. First, the department of principals' professional development training, and the department of principals' management, in the LEA were totally separate, and lacked communication about the establishment of school leadership teams in the province (L3, OT and OM). Thus, the professional development of new principals and principal candidates had a weak connection to principal recruitment. As a result, the professional principal development system does not necessarily bring the most appropriate leaders into schools, as the development system was based on the requirements of leadership practice in the school context, while principal appointments were based on 'Party intentions' (L1, OT and OM).

In addition, the procedures of programme delivery were separate and optional, and there was no 'big-picture' thinking about the preparation process. Firstly, the selection of programme providing organizations was quite optional, and the LEA seldom provided further guidance or requirements on how to design and implement the programme (PD and OT). Moreover, there was no supervision or evaluation on the effectiveness of the programme from the government (PD and OT). Secondly, the programme providing organization seldom provided guidance or requirements to the lecturers on how to shape the content of their courses, as most of these training

programme were a kind of ‘put the cold dishes together’, which were based on the availability of lecturers (L1, L3, PC, PD and OT). Hence, lecturers seldom designed or customized their curricula based on the needs or features of their clients – new principals and principal candidates (L1, L2, L3 and PD).

Moreover, there were no connections among the different stages of principal development training programmes, including the certificated training programme, senior principals’ development programme, and famous principals’ training programme. These training programmes were provided by different organizations, and the selection of these organizations was optional. Despite the mandatory certificate-training programme, the training opportunities for principals’ further development mostly depended on the backgrounds of the school and the capacity of the principals themselves (PD and OT).

### Innovative training approaches

Some interviewees mentioned the significance of professionalisation of new principals and pointed out that the current training system can hardly assist principals to achieve their professionalisation before being posted (L1, L3, and OT). L1 mentioned that the attention for new principal training was insufficient and that the government should add more emphasis and significance on certificate training, as it is the ‘stepping stone’ to principalship (L1). Some interviewees advise that a degree in educational leadership and management could be a good way for principals’ professional socialization. Through a formal degree learning process, new and aspiring principals will take the programme more seriously, which could enhance the importance of the preparation training programme (L1 and L3).

Some lecturers also suggested a new way of contextual learning, which is ‘experts in, rather than principals out’ (L1 and PD). That is, instead of contextual learning in the

high performing schools, it will be better if the experts could get into the new principals' schools, and help them to find out the problems, and solve the issues together (L1 and L3).

'After the programme, the expert team and I will go to some of these principals' schools for further assistance, to help them with school action research and school transformation. Unfortunately, we do not have enough funding to support this action, only a number of schools which were able to pay for the travelling and experts fees could have the chance to get guidance by the team.' (PD)

'Professor Liu<sup>18</sup>, and I, and our team have been continuously paying close attention to the development of No. 13 High School in ShuiLi<sup>19</sup> during the past three years. ... This context-based learning made the principal and other school leaders more active in making changes in schools, and also provided the substantial assistance on principals' leadership practice.' (L1)

'Schools are run and managed not only by principals alone, but also a leadership team, which included principals and other school leaders, even other teachers. The 'experts in' approach could help the improvement and development of the school as a whole, rather than the personal progresses as a principal.' (L3)

The idea of 'expert in' just fits the demands for context-based leadership development that mentioned in previous chapters and also suits for the idea of contextualisation for new principals' socialization. And it also revealed that leadership preparation was not a 'once for all', instead, principals are in need for

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<sup>18</sup> Professor Liu: Pseudonym .

<sup>19</sup> No. 13 High Schools in ShuiLi: Pseudonym .

continued and context-based support for their future development.

## **Overview**

This chapter presented providers' perspectives on new principals' training and recruitment in the sample province through three different aspects; the definition of principalship, principal certificate training programmes, and the recruitment of new principals. The discussion examined how different levels of programme providers cooperated with each other, as well as how they were constrained and supervised by each other.

First, most of the interviewees set high standards towards principalship in China, as they expected the principals to be instructional, managerial, visionary and influential leaders in their schools. Further, as well as their impact at school, principals were also expected to extend their influence among their peers, and also to the local society.

The certificate training programme is largely constrained by the LEA through written policies, including the format, funding and evaluation approach. The quality and curricula of the course depended on the instructional skills and backgrounds of the individual lecturers. The requirements of the participants were largely ignored, as the whole training programme was more 'lecturer-centered' and reflected the understanding of principal training among government officials.

Among the three different types of programme providers, university professors from local universities or other educational faculties demonstrated the highest cost efficiency. However, the programme designers and coordinators had very limited impact on the quality and effectiveness of the training programme. As a result, the majority of funding was spent on hiring experts and professors from other provinces.

Finally, the selection and recruitment of new principals were strictly guided and constrained by national policies and local regulations, and implemented by the *Organization Department* of the LEA. These policies clarified the standards and requirements for leaders in educational organizations in detail. In practice, *Party intention* plays a significant role when recruiting a school principal, and local talents were preferred to external candidates by the LEA.

# CHAPTER EIGHT: MINI CASE STUDIES

This chapter comprises three mini case studies, and the sample schools were chosen from among the principals who participated in the interviews (see chapter 5), using volunteer sampling. These principals differed in terms of career experience, gender, age, and school backgrounds. The aim of this chapter is to explore how leadership was enacted by these new principals, how they adjusted to their new contexts and positions, and to investigate the difficulties experienced by for the new principals during their novice years.

Each mini case study included interviews with the school principal, one senior leader, and one middle leader, plus scrutiny of documentary resources in each school. Meanwhile, all the senior leaders and middle leaders also participated in the research by volunteers. Further, in order to ensure the quality and the balance of the research, the duration of interview for each senior leader and middle leader were around 15 to 20 minutes. And the interview data for principals were as same as that applied in Chapter 5. The interviewees are coded as P-A (short for Principal A), P-B, P-C, ML-A (Short for Middle Leader A), ML-B, ML-C, SL-A (short for Senior Leader A), SL-B and SL-C. further, the author compare and contrast these cases to each other, in order to witness how principals practice their leadership in different school contexts.

## Introduction to Mini Cases

Through mini case studies, the author found that factors, such as principals' age, gender, previous working experience, years of their being posted, school SES background and school performance, impact on their leadership practice, as well as the way people reacted to their leadership strategies. The following section illustrates the backgrounds of the principals, as well as the schools (See table 8.1).

	Gender	Age	Previous working experience	Years of being posted	School location	School performance
Principal-A (P-A)	Female	39	Vice principals	One year	Suburban area	Under-performing
Principal-B (P-B)	Female	58	Vice principal	Two years	Urban	Average performing
Principal-A (P-C)	Male	39	Vice principal (in same school)	Three years	Rural	Good performing in local district

*Table 8.1 Backgrounds of Three Mini Case Studies*

## **Defining the Principalship in China**

Most of the middle and senior leaders described the position of the principal as the definite ‘head’ or ‘general’ of the schools, as they take charge of everything in the school, and they usually make decisions by themselves, while other people in schools can only support or follow their decisions (ML-A, SL-A, SL-B, ML-C, and SL-C). For example, ML-A quoted a famous proverb in China: a weak soldier weakens himself, while a weak general deteriorates the military. He emphasized that an aspirant principal was vitally important for school development, and could provide a better environment for both students and teachers. However, principals were more humble when defining their roles, as they regard themselves as a ‘bridge’ (P-C), a ‘communicator’ (P-B), and a ‘practitioner’ (P-A), in schools, who welcome advice and suggestions, and are flexible in making changes. In general, they all stated that principals could have a huge impact on the development of the school in every aspect.

The interviewees also identified several criteria for defining a ‘good’ principal. First, some of them defined that the most important is the overall responsibility for the school. Instead of focusing on their own personal career development, the principal should put the school’s interest first (SL-A, ML-B, ML-C and P-C). The ML-B described a qualified principal as someone who could always put the school and students as the first priority, and had the ability and power to unite and lead the teachers to work

together to foster the development of the school (ML-B).

Principals are also expected to be excellent instructional leaders who can teach well and also construct teaching and learning in the school (PA, ML-A, SL-A, PB, ML-B and P-C). The principals are also required to be effective diplomats who are able to develop external relationships to obtain resources and opportunities for school development (ML-A, ML-B, PB, SL-C and P-C). Other requirements included being innovative, being approachable for advice, and being equipped with managerial skills and high levels of morality (ML-A, SL-A, SL-B, P-C, and SL-C).

Turning to the contrast between instructional and managerial leadership, the SL-A noted that it was hard to keep a balance between these two roles. He mentioned that, for a large school, a managerial leader is preferred. In small schools, such as School A, an instructional leader is more appropriate, as there are fewer external matters, and the principal should be more focused on school teaching and learning. He added that principal A is a skilful and expert instructional practitioner.

## **Leadership Practice**

### Socialization

The findings suggest that the gaps between the previous working environment and current working settings could have a significant impact on the duration and effectiveness of principals' socialization to the new context and to their new identity. The age and experience of the principals also impacted on the transition process.

Principal A, a young principal, who transferred from a high performing school to an under-performing school, took nearly ten months to adapt to her new position, and her communication with the teachers was regarded as insufficient from both sides. In

contrast, Principal B, an experienced and mature principal, who transferred to a similar context, took only two weeks to become familiar with the new school, and she also gained respect and support from her staff through effective interactions. Finally, Principal C, who stayed in the same school, described his transition as 'extremely short', and the senior and middle leaders report that all the teachers are supportive.

Overall, the more similar are the contexts, the shorter the duration for organizational socialization. Further, principals also suggested that adaptation to the new context was easy, while the role transition was challenging. For instance, P-A suggested that she kept a good balance between being a teacher and a vice principal before, while it was hard for her to accept the new identity as a 'full-time' principal. Hence, the older principals demonstrated more skills and patience in communicating and interacting with the new staffs, as they are more experienced, and also because that in Chinese society, people respects the elder generation.

#### Instructional strategy

All the school leaders and principals stated that student outcomes are the 'lifeline' for school development. All three principals have put instructional development as their first priority, but through different approaches. Principal A reinforced school instructional work through 'teaching and researching groups', and her participation in classroom teaching, while Principals B and C started their instructional leadership through more precise stratification of different class levels. Principal B also emphasized the importance of teaching and learning through the increased status for 'classroom teachers', who provided a 'bridge' between students and subject teachers, and also connected students' behaviour to their learning outcomes.

All three principals were high performing teachers before being posted as a principal, so they gained respect and trust from teachers due to their previous outstanding

teaching outcomes (ML-A, SL-A, ML-B and ML-C). Most middle and senior leaders in these schools claimed that the principals' conceptions, skills and experience in teaching had a positive impact on teaching and learning. As a result, the principals' instructional innovations gained success, and all three schools progressed steadily and continuously following their appointment.

### Teacher development

The participants mentioned that training and development opportunities are mostly dependent on the socio-economic status of local districts, and of school backgrounds (ML-A, P-A, and P-C). All three schools are normal to lower performing schools in the province, so high-quality training opportunities for teachers are quite limited (P-A, P-B, and P-C). However, the findings also suggest that principals could have a significant impact on teachers' professional development, and on their career paths.

First, principals' professional abilities and social networks could also influence teachers' professional learning chances. Principals A and C have both used their personal networks to invite some experts, peers, practitioners, and other social organizations, to participate in school-based learning and teachers' professional development. The three principals also trained the teachers in person. However, overall, the training opportunities for teachers are inadequate, as they lacked continued and specialized support from the government or other official organizations (such as universities and colleges) (P-A and P-B).

All three principals stressed the need for fair promotion opportunities and a healthy evaluation system for teachers, and encouraged the development of a younger generation, which was contradictory to Chinese traditional culture of 'humility' and 'respecting the old'. All of them acknowledged the power of the young generation for current and future development. Principal A created a fairer environment and

promotion system for young teachers, as she thought that the young generation needs more encouragement and opportunities for progress. Principal B distributed her leadership to the young middle leadership team to boost their decision-making and problem solving practices. Principal C admitted that the development and progress of the young teachers could make the school fresher and more vigorous.

### Social resources

Resources are the most important driving force for the development of a school. Before the appointment of the new principals, the three underperforming schools all lacked resources, including finance, professional assistance, and government support. These three new principals brought new social connections and networks for the schools, as well as support and trust from the government. Principal A brought her previous school to 'pair' with school A to help in the establishment and development of 'teaching and researching groups' and in other instructional work at the school. Principals B and C also secured significant funding and assistance from the local government to develop their schools. Most of the middle and senior leaders commented that these new principals have brought noticeable positive changes for school development, in terms of increased teacher training opportunities, better school construction, and a fairer working environment.

## **New Principal Difficulties**

### Limited authority and overwhelming responsibility

Principal C used a Chinese proverb to describe the imbalance between principals' obligations and their leadership power, as 'Want the horse runs faster, meanwhile, wants the horse eats less'. The principals stated that the school had to cope with inspection and evaluations from different departments of the government and the Party,

which created pressure for both principals and teachers (P-A, P-B and P-C). Their leadership practices were also constrained by the inadequate resources and limited authority, particularly financial shortages and limitations in human resources (P-A and P-B).

The situation was particularly difficult for new principals, as they are new to the position, and most are also new to the schools, and usually felt more cautious and careful when dealing with financial issues. They also felt less confident when allocating tasks and responsibilities to teachers (P-A, ML-C and SL-B). In order to address financial limitations, principals A and C described that they are 'playing the edge ball', which meant operating close to the legal and regulation 'boundary'. They also claimed that this made the principal's job dangerous.

As noted above, the schools face different inspections and investigations, most of which need principals and teachers to spend much time in preparing for them (P-A, P-B and P-C).

'Although, at high school level, students' outcomes might be the only factor when evaluating a school or a principal, we still have to face numerous inspections, and we are expected to do well on these inspections or, at least, a 'pass' level.' (SL-B)

#### Shortages of teachers

ML-A pointed out that the shortage of teachers was the most severe problem in the school, which added to the workload for teachers, and to the difficulties for the principal. For School A, the population of teachers should be 24, while there are only 22 in post (excluding three school leaders: principal, vice principal and Secretary of the Party). However, four teachers were on maternity leave, so there were only 18 teachers

working at the time of the research (ML-A and P-A).

Similarly, School B has been run without vice-principals from the new principal's appointment for three years, until 2016, when the LEA appointed and promoted three vice principals to complete the senior leadership team (PB, ML-B and SL-B). Further, P-C also stressed that teacher resource and quality was the raw force for school development and instructional progress.

'Teacher resource is the most severe problem that gave me a headache. No matter what kind of reform or change will be [introduced], the practitioners or action takers must be teachers. What I worry about the most is whether our teachers are capable and skilful enough to encounter these changes and challenges.' (P-C)

#### Student resources

Most the new principals, particularly young principals, are likely to be appointed to underperforming schools, with under-privileged SES backgrounds, and student resources are among their biggest concerns. Principal A mentioned that the shortage in hardware construction could be addressed through funding and policy support from government or other organizations, while the shortage in good students cannot be easily tackled. Particularly at high school level, the quality and performance of middle school graduates for each high school were quite stable, while under-performing high schools can only recruit from lower performing middle schools. Students' learning outcomes in middle schools will usually decide their high school learning outcomes, and then these outcomes (college entrance examination) are the most important factor when evaluating a school and a principal.

Although the performance of middle school graduates were not that positive, all three principals took active steps to attract better performing students, such as various instructional innovations (P-A, P-B and P-C), increased teacher training opportunities (P-A and P-C), and a great emphasis on teaching and learning in schools (P-A and P-B). At the same time, the principals found that attracting top performing students could be a fast way of improving the school's reputation and developing public support. A more stratified teaching system was applied in schools B and C, in order to gather the best educational resources into one class to create the best outcomes.

### **Setting School Development Plans**

The new principals demonstrated that , overall, there were no particular targets or goals for school development as, at high school level, it is hard to talk about change or innovation. The situations of the school were quite stable, in terms of school background, financial status, teacher resources and student resources. However, principal autonomy was constrained and limited in many different ways, so that it was hard for them to make big changes (P-A, P-B and P-C).Consequently, these new principals chose to begin with short-term instructional targets, while other aspects of school development were often and inadequate.

All three principals are targeting students' instructional outcomes or, more precisely, the school rankings of student performance in their districts, which are quite measurable and straightforward. All three schools witnessed positive progress after the new principals' appointments, so these principals have largely achieved their short-term goals for students' performance. However, despite improved school rankings, the principals produced few clear targets or goals for school development in other aspects, especially long-term development strategies.

One possible reason for the absence of long-term targets may be the principals' rotation system in China, meaning that a principal will not stay a long time in a particular school. Within twelve months of completing field work, all three principals had left the case study schools. Their tenures in these schools were all less than five years; two years for principal A, three and half years for Principal B, and four and half years for Principal C. Principal A has become a vice principal of a high performing large high school in the district, principal B has retired, and principal C has moved from his school to the local education authority.

Although the new principals demonstrated clear short-term, measurable targets to improve instructional outcomes, these were developed by the principals alone without any discussion or suggestions from the teachers and other school leaders (P-A and P-B). Further, the author also found that these development strategies were quite closely connected with principals' career stages, personalities and leadership styles, with weak links to school contexts, which made these strategies quite 'principal-oriented'.

'Sometimes, she will ask for our advice, but just asking.' (SL-A)

'We are always being informed by the principal about these decisions, and he will ask for our advice, and we are always very supportive, nine out of ten times, we will follow the principal's decisions.' (ML-C)

Principal C declared that, although the goal was refined by the principal only, these targets had a wide base, as everyone knows the school so well, so that they should hold the same perspectives. These targets have been inculcated to the teachers and students, on many different occasions, by the principal (P-C). As a result, teachers and students were quite familiar with the development plans of the school (P-C).

## Overview

The study found that leadership enactment and leadership practice varied from school to school, due to the diversity in school SES backgrounds, development stages and previous history, hence, school teachers and staff reacted differently towards principals' leadership practices. Correspondingly, principals with different personal and career backgrounds took various stages to situate themselves into the new environments, as well as their new roles.

For principalship definition, teachers and staff called for responsible leaders who always put school development as their first priorities, rather than principals' personal development. Hence, they also demonstrated that instructional leadership and managerial skills were equally important for their leadership enactment, which should be based on school circumstances. Further, they also stressed the central position of principals for school development and teachers' professionalisation.

Turning to principals' socialisation, the author found that the adaption process differed based on their familiarisations to the contexts, as well as their previous career experience and their personalities. Overall, due to the 'administrative' feature of Chinese principals, all of these three principals demonstrated fluent adaption to their new posts. Further, teachers and other school leaders pointed out that these new principals did bring something new to the school, such as advanced instructional approaches, constructive social networks and fairer environments.

However, principals also encountered with certain difficulties during their novice years, such as inadequacies in money, policy support and teacher resources, and the research also discovered their eagerness for high-performing students and teachers. For school development plans, principals usually started with short-term, instructional targets, and seldom principals set long-term developmental goals for their schools.

# CHAPTER NINE: DISCUSSION

## Introduction

This chapter provides a comparative analysis of the various data sets and a discussion of the findings related to previous international and Chinese research and literature. The author analyzed previous chapters, and developed four main themes related to principal preparation in China. These are conceptualising the principalship, leadership development, selection and recruitment, and leadership practice. These themes are explored through different perspectives and data sets, to provide an overall picture of each theme.

## Conceptualising the Principalship in China

This section discusses how principalship is defined and recognized in China, and also explores the roles and responsibilities of Chinese principals. The research identified six roles for principals. Some of these are general obligations that also apply for principals in other countries and districts, while others are specific 'Chinese features'. The latter include a requirement to be a qualified principal, as well as a supportive member of the Communist Party. In practice, it appeared to be difficult for principals to carry out all these roles in schools, particularly for new principals. As a consequence, principals may have different preferences and strategies when enacting leadership. The author discerned three hierarchies of principalship in China, which represent and define how principalship was enacted, based on the features of the school, and the specific characteristics of the principals.

## The role of principals

Several studies have identified that good principal leadership could impact on the

school, and that these effects on school success could be substantial (O'Donnell & White, 2005; Slater, Garcia Garduno, & Mentz, 2018). Leithwood and Riel (2003) show that the core leadership practices exercised by principals include building vision, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the curriculum. In the present research, principals are shown to shoulder certain similar obligations, such as building school vision, supporting teacher development, and managing teaching and learning in schools (Leithwood & C. Riehl, 2003).

However, the role of the principal is also increasingly complex, particularly in terms of accountability expectations for student achievement and school improvement (Harris, 2002; Harris et al., 2002; Lortie, 2009). In China, the Ministry of Education launched a set of National Standards and Qualifications for Professional Principalship in 2013 (the 'Standards'), which is based on the need to build a modern school system and to develop the professionalization of principals (MoE, 2013). The Standard defined six roles of principalship, and further explains these roles and obligations through three different aspects, cognition and recognition, knowledge and skills, and capacity and behaviour (MoE, 2013).

In the specific political environment of China, principals are expected to carry out many responsibilities for their schools, as well as for the wider society. Beyond the roles mentioned in the literature, and in government policies, principals are also expected to address specific Chinese responsibilities, such as realizing 'Party intentions' and constructing school culture. These roles may lead to different tasks and goals in the Chinese context. The present study also found that it is hard to carry out all these roles simultaneously, so that different roles may take on varied significance for current principals in China.

### *Achieving the Party's intentions*

The job of leading a school has become intertwined with expanding policy demands. School leaders have been entitled with the accountabilities for successful policy implementation and meeting external challenges and goals (Leithwood et al., 2008; Yuan, 2018). As one aspect of Party Organisation, 'Party intention' has been diffused into every corner of school leadership. Some policies state that the first and most important rule is that a principal should be loyal and faithful to the Community Party (P-PI and P-SP), and the government official also stressed that the principal's attitudes towards the Party are significant.

'Party intention' in China stresses planting the spirit and core values of the Party into culture construction, and developing and retaining a stable and harmonious school environment to support the Party. The research identifies several key expectations related to the Party and government administration:

1. Support and submit to the lead of the Community party, mentioned in the policies, recognized by the principals, and stressed by the government officials.
2. Construct the Party team and lead the Party members in schools. Principals are not only school leaders but, perhaps more importantly, they are the cadres of the Party, and the school is also a unit of the Party.
3. Guarantee the 'harmony' and stability of the school environment (mentioned by two principals). Harmony is also one of the core values recognized by the Party. For most leaders in Chinese societies, harmony is treasurable; they need to maintain harmonious internal relationships within organisations and avoid exposed conflicts (A Walker & Qian, 2012; Z. X. Zhang et al., 2008).

4. Create the school culture in accordance with socialist core values, including 'harmony'. The focus on 'Party' infused all aspects, including school leader development, principal selection, and leadership practice.
5. Cope with different levels of inspection from the administration and the Party.

#### *Setting school goals*

In a study for the OECD, Schleicher (2012) describes the fundamental role of school leaders as setting visions and goals and enriching the capacities of the school community to achieve them (Schleicher, 2012). Hallinger and Lu (2013) claim that it is hard to find a school without a vision statement, and a set of 'measurable' goals and objectives (Hallinger & Lu, 2013). The Chinese policy documents show that principals are expected to set developmental visions and practical goals based on their school contexts. However, the present research shows that only a few principals meet this requirement. Three of the nine interviewed principals were shown to have clear short-term goals for school development but only one had a longer-term development plan for his school. There are several reasons for the lack of vision:

1. All the participating principals are new, so it may be too difficult for them to establish school vision without full familiarization with the school context.
2. Due to the system of rotating principals, most do not work in a school for a long time, so that visionary leadership is not a priority. Six of the participating principals were promoted or rotated to the new school, without preparation or notification, and four of them indicated that they might not stay in their schools for a long time, as they may be redeployed by the government at any time.
3. Principals' authority is limited in many aspects, thus limiting the scope for creating, and implementing, school vision. For example, there are detailed

regulations on the use of school funding, which left the principals with very limited freedom to spend the money. Authority over human resources was largely held by the LEAs, rather than the principals, thus it was hard for school leaders to restructure the organization.

4. As a cadre of the Party (principal), and an organization of the Party (school), principals cannot easily develop an individual school-based vision. Every public school is expected to follow the 'step and spirits' (government official) of the Party.

Several scholars have noted that the major task of school principals is to transform vision into actions (Huffman, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2008). In the present research, it is difficult for novice principals to transform their visions (if they have any) into reality without adequate support, experience, capacity and authorization. Barth (1990) noted that no vision of change in a school is meaningful before it has been put into actions. Without this, these visions are nothing but empty platitudes (Jick, 2001).

### *Managing the school*

The present research also established that the managerial role is one of the basic aspects for principals. A variety of managerial experiences were considered to be very important when selecting and recruiting a new leader. The survey findings show that a majority of the principals (62.2%) had experienced at least two different positions in school management teams before being posted to their principalship. Moreover, the average time spent in managerial positions was more than four years. The participants argued that principals' managerial capabilities should include:

1. Familiarization with the policies and regulations. Due to the high volume of policies, and the frequency of policy updating, principals should keep on learning and understanding these regulations.
2. Using school funding wisely and appropriately. The policies and legislation provided detailed and restrictive regulations on the usage of school funding. Principals need to be very familiar with these regulations, and use the money wisely, otherwise, they may put themselves 'in danger' (one official).
3. Communicating with teachers and staff actively and intelligently. The research data indicate that communication was the key to socialization and human resource management in the schools. Approachable leaders were more likely to gain trust and understanding from teachers, noted by three principals. In contrast, some principals found it hard to obtain the understanding of teachers and staff, as they were inactive communicators, or not always available to talk, noted by two principals.
4. Managing teaching and learning in schools, which included organizing three levels of school courses effectively (national curriculum, local-based curriculum and school-based curriculum), using different methods and tools to evaluate and monitor teaching and learning (Miller et al., 2016).
5. Dealing with different relationships inside and outside the school, in order to maintain a harmonious environment. Inside the school, the relationships include principal-teacher (five principals mentioned), principal-students (two principals), principal-parents (one principal), and teacher-students (two principals). External relationships include the LEAs (five principals), other departments of local government (one principal), shops around the school (two principals), the local community, and other schools (two principals).

Scholars argue that school leadership requires a balance between the autonomy of different groups, and control of the teaching and learning process (Carolyn & Seann, 2016; Cuban, 1988). In China, principals also described their job as a 'balance keeper,' a 'bridge to different resources,' and 'diplomacy,' which required them to handle different relationships appropriately and to allocate resources equitably.

#### *Leading teaching and learning activities*

The relevance of principal leadership for school improvement and improved student learning outcomes is widely accepted (K. Leithwood et al., 2006; V. Robinson, 2007). Some research also suggests that measures of leadership quality, in certain degrees, can predict student learning outcomes (Owings et al., 2005). Similarly, in this research, a qualified leader, who is recognized by teachers, peers and government officials, is someone who could promote instructional innovation in the school, leading to enhanced student learning outcomes.

Some meta-analytic studies have shown that principal leadership is statistically linked to student outcomes (Robinson et al., 2008; Zheng et al., 2017). Hence, instructional work may be regarded as the essence of school leadership, as principals should seek to support, stimulate and promote learning. In the present research, five interviewees described the instructional outcomes as the 'lifeline' for every school, while three indicated that instructional work should be a top priority.

Policy documents, and the research participants, both indicate that the basic criterion for being a principal is to be an effective instructional leader. First, a principal is expected or required to be a high performing teacher, to add to their credibility and prestige in schools, as noted by ten participants. Five of the nine interviewed principals continued teaching after being posted, and four of them are still teaching major subjects, such as Chinese, Mathematics and English.

Principals are also expected to be the initiator (seven participants), organizer (four), practitioner (six), and sponsor (three) of instructional activities in schools. Principals are expected to lead instructional innovation in their schools, which required the principals to develop practical and feasible strategies and targets for instructional development (seven participants).

Much of the literature (Leithwood et al., 2010; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Qian et al., 2016) indicates that principals are expected to be the evaluator and monitor of schools' instructional progress and student outcomes. The principals are required to apply high quality techniques and skills, and to evaluate the instructional progress and outcomes of the students. However, in this research, the principals seldom applied technology to monitor their schools' instructional progress. Instead, they mostly used the traditional method of supervision, namely listening to the class and monitoring students' marks. In order to ensure the credibility of the evaluation, most of the principals take students' performance as the most important factor, which means that student outcomes and instructional performance are directly connected to teachers' promotion, salary and rewards.

#### *Establishing a supportive school environment*

Day and Leithwood (2007), and Hallinger and Heck (1998), indicate that school leaders influence the conditions needed to create a supportive school culture (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Similarly, Qian, Walker and Yang's (2016) research on Chinese school culture shows that successful school leaders could build and nurture learning cultures among teachers. In this research, school environment refers to both the physical environment and the learning atmosphere in schools (Qian et al., 2016). The principals recognized the importance of creating a physical environment in which all staff and students felt inspired to work and learn. This included increasing visual displays in classrooms, corridors, and reception areas, and the creation of internal courtyards and entirely new buildings.

The study found that principals fought for funding and hardware support through different routes, such as communication and negotiation with LEAs, or gathering donations from alumni. However, the principals varied in their capacity to attract money, so that the development of school infrastructure also varied. For example, Principal 6 was previously an official, and he was able to obtain resources and funding from various sources, such as alumni and government. Principals 1 and 8 both built good relationships with the LEA, so it was easier for them to ask for resources or funding if the school was in need. In contrast, principal 5 seldom made contact with the LEA, and the officials were not familiar with her, so it was hard for her to ask for funding for school construction.

According to Leithwood et al. (2006), leadership affects student learning indirectly, through enhancing staff capacities, motivation and work conditions. In terms of school atmosphere, several principals and teachers suggested that communication is very important, as an accessible and interactive context could encourage teachers' participation in school development. By working with others in the school, successful principals shape the form, meaning and substance of the school environment, to produce a direct, positive influence on teacher learning (Bengtson, 2012).

School leaders affect how school members relate to one another, and positive relationships can lead to better personal health, growing job satisfaction and strong job commitment (Knapp, et al., 2010). Some teachers in the present research pointed out that the principal should be the moral model of the school, and lead a harmonious and friendly atmosphere in schools, and that teachers would also follow this approach. Without this model, teachers are unlikely to unite, or to work together. The research participants pointed out that principals' participation in learning and teaching activities could influence teachers' enthusiasm for their work. As noted by Bolman and Deal (2008), and Qian et al (2016), school leaders are the most important builders and nurturers of a positive culture (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Qian et al., 2016).

### *Developing teachers*

Chinese scholars further argue that the teacher resource is the core element for school development, and that competition among schools is really a competition for teacher quality. The Standard in China illuminates that 'principals should be responsible for teachers' professional development'. Leithwood and Azah (2016) also point out the developing people is one of the obligations for school leaders. This was also an important emphasis in the Chinese principal development programme, comprising two aspects, providing teachers with a fair environment to develop, and offering them professional support (Leithwood & Azah, 2016).

First, principals 'set the tone' of the school (Price, 2012: 42). It is also the principal's responsibility to provide teachers with a healthy, fair and encouraging environment for them to develop (Price, 2012). The teachers in the current research mentioned that it is important to guarantee justice and fairness in school, particularly in respect of rewards and promotion opportunities.

In the current research case studies, principal A was criticized by her colleagues for not being fair when promoting and selecting potential senior leaders, while teachers and middle leaders in cases B and C complimented their leaders as 'being principled'. Principal C was also credited with providing more chances for young leaders to practice their leadership.

Second, school leaders influence what teachers can learn and how they learn. Whether leaders support and participate in professional learning with teachers makes a difference to school outcomes (Robinson et al., 2008). This research revealed that teachers' in-service training and development opportunities are varied, depending on the principals' capacity for securing training opportunities for teachers.

The university professor in the present research pointed out that principals should help teachers, particularly young teachers, to set and define their career goals, and then support them to achieve these goals. It is the principals' obligation to organise internal learning activities, and to obtain external training opportunities.

### Definitions of principalship

International research and literature indicate that 'strong principal leadership' is a key factor in school effectiveness (Leithwood, et al. 2004). Hence, the role of the principal has been identified as an important aspect of school improvement (Barber et al., 2010). The achievement of school development goals is dependent on the capability of principals (Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Heck & Moriyama, 2010; Wang, 2019).

Day, Gu and Sammons's (2016) research has examined more complex relationships between, for example, values, behaviours, and strategies, used in effective and improving schools that serve different contexts (C. Day et al., 2016). As noted above, there are six main roles for principals in China. The author also discerned three levels of principalship in China, which might be regarded as a hierarchy. Within and across different phases of their school improvement journeys, the principals selected, assembled, integrated, and allocated different emphases on, within various combinations of their roles and strategies that were timely and fit for purpose. This hierarchy ranges from basic requirements to successful principalship; operating the school appropriately, building school culture and developing school vision.

### *Operating the school appropriately*

It is widely recognized that principals play an essential role in the effective management of schools (Branch et al., 2013; Huang et al., 2020; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). In the present research, most of the new and aspirant principals defined the role of the principal as a manager, who is in charge of operating the school, and making sure that every section of the school is functioning well (five principals and one senior leader). At the political level, the national qualification and standards also stressed the importance of the managerial ability of a principal, and expected the principals to apply educational management theory into their leadership practice appropriately, in order to lead the school's development and innovation. The relevant policies on principal selection and recruitment also indicate that a principal needs to 'acquire strong managerial ability' (MoE, 2013).

Instructional leadership is also required at this stage, as student outcomes are the priority for school development. However, in this phase of the hierarchy, there were no further expectations about an overall instructional strategy or the instructional progress of the whole school. Instead, according to three principals, it was important to create certain 'visible outcomes' for a small number of students. Thus, this aspect of leadership mainly comprises a managerial role, with some limited instructional engagement. Visionary leadership and teacher development were seldom required or mentioned.

Within this first level of the hierarchy of principalship in China, managerial ability is regarded as the basic requirement, particularly for newly appointed principals. The principal's prime task is 'to keep the school running appropriately, and make sure that everything is on the right track' (government official), and to 'make some movement on instructional outcomes if possible' (one principal). However, the intrinsic value of principalship cannot be fully demonstrated, as there is little consideration of schools' future development and cultural change.

### *Building school culture*

Successful school leaders are required to complete structural mechanisms (e.g., goal-setting and implementing, curricular establishment, student assessment and teacher evaluation) with cultural tools (e.g. values, vision, collaboration, modelling) in targeting school improvement (e.g. students performance and teachers' professional growth). This complementary approach increasingly combines structural and cultural strategies aimed at achieving greater alignment, as well as meaning and coherence between intentions (e.g., vision and goals) and actions (Locke & Latham, 2002).

This second layer of principalship is defined as 'building school culture', which stresses school-based strategies and requires principals to plan for school development as a whole, including instructional leadership, teacher development plans and construction of school culture. Unlike the first phase of the hierarchy, instructional leadership stresses 'qualitative strategies' instead of 'quantitative transformation', and 'long-term impact rather than 'instant effectiveness'. It sets higher standards for principals, which require them to be both an effective manager and an instructional leader. Two obvious features could be observed at this stage, one is commitment to instructional leadership for school development as a whole, and the other is to define school features, and then create a supportive environment for both teachers and students.

Scholars point out that principals are now considered 'instructional leaders' who champion and focus on the core activities of learning, teaching and student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2010; Teng, 2020). In the present research, principals who defined themselves as instructional leaders usually participated more in school learning and teaching activities, and spent more time with teachers to discuss curriculum and pedagogy. An instructional leader is not only familiar with the subject that he or she teaches, but is also able to contribute to other subjects, and can arrange teaching and learning activities as a whole.

As well as the instructional work, the creation of a 'signature' school culture is also a leadership role for principals. A rich body of literature suggests that school leaders influence the conditions needed to create such a culture (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Qian et al., 2016; Wang, Torrisi-Steele, & Reinsfield, 2020). In the present research, the policy documents and government officials both indicate that the establishment of school culture should be 'signature and unique', and in accordance with the school's background and current situation. One professor also mentioned that, 'instead of imitating the successful or model schools, creating a suitable and appropriate culture for the school demonstrates more significance'.

Principals' obligations, in this phase, could be described as locating the school's current position, defining school goals, and directing the school's pathway, leading to context-based leadership strategies, for both instructional activities and school culture development. As researchers indicate, a good principal makes explicit the values of the school, and makes these values the spiritual home of teachers (Kantabutra, 2010).

#### *Developing school vision*

In the third phase, the focus is on vision and achievements, for both school development and principals, although some participants claimed that it is too early for new and aspirant principals to develop visioning at the initial stage of their leadership careers. Unlike strategies or goals, which aim at short- and medium-term strategies and actions (Andrews, Boyne, & Walker, 2006; Locke & Latham, 2002), scholars assert that the power of a vision lies in its ability to inspire people to embrace more ambitious aspirations (Barth, 1990; Kantabutra, 2005). Chinese scholars define vision as a description of the school's future and a guideline for teachers' and students' activities, which should be in accordance with the specific school context and the wider trend of educational development.

Over the past 30 years, school principals have been exhorted to articulate a clear vision as a key tool for stimulating the improvement of teaching and learning in their schools (Dhuey & Smith, 2014; Hallinger & Lu, 2013). The author's interviews showed that most of the more experienced school leaders accentuated the importance of establishing school vision and culture and, at this stage, principals are also encouraged to 'think further, and dream bigger' (Official for Principal Training). However, they also pointed out that visionary principals are 'the feather of phoenix or the horn of the dragon'<sup>20</sup> in China, as only a few principals had those long-term visions for school development. This is particularly true for young and newly appointed principals.

Moreover, administrative leaders set higher expectations for principals, which refer to their accomplishments. Beyond their work contexts, principals are expected to exert their impact on more people, particularly principal peers and other people who work in the same sector. They are expected to be successful principals, who lead a high performing high school (Chu & Jia, 2013). They are also expected to be an excellent coach or mentor, who could transform their leadership experience into knowledge, and provide it to those principals who are new or ready for the position, or those who lead underperforming or normal performing schools. Principals are also expected to become role models who could impact on the wider society and in the district where they work, according to two participants.

In this phase, principalship could be regarded as a beneficial resource to promote the progress and innovation of schools, particularly those underperforming schools. Thus, the principal rotation system has become a normal and frequent approach in China. The ultimate goal of this system is to exchange high quality principals from school to school, in order to provide balanced education, according to one

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<sup>20</sup> Feather of the phoenix or the horns of the dragon: an old saying in China, which means that the quantity is too rare to be counted.

government official.

The author categorized the nine interviewed principals into three different hierarchies of principalship stages (see table 9.1). The principals' job descriptions, and the definition of principalship, are connected to each other, but their working emphasis and preferences are varied, based on different stages of their leadership careers, and on their working conditions.

<b>Hierarchy</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Operating the School</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Building School Culture</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Developing School Vision</b>
<b>Items</b>			
<b>Number of Principals</b>	6	3	0
<b>Working Emphasis</b>	Instructional Outcomes (quantitative progress); Managing school tasks;	Instructional outcomes (overall progress in quality); School culture establishment;	Well-being of students and teachers; Teacher Development;
<b>Setting Directions</b>	Some short-term goals	Short-term goals, and some middle-term goals;	Long-term development goals;
<b>How leadership practice is connected to school features</b>	Rarely connected to school features;	Connected to school features closely to current developing strategies;	Think further for schools' future development; Exploit the new features and characteristics of the school;
<b>Impact of principals</b>	Limited	Principals could impact his/her school teachers within the school contexts;	Principals could impact not only his/her teachers, but also other educators all around the country;

*Table 9.1 Hierarchies of Principalship in China*

Although principals demonstrated different strategies and skills, they also have certain similarities. 'Party intention' has been filtered into every corner of school leadership, as well as school activities. There is also no doubt that managerial and instructional roles are the fundamental aspects for principals in China, followed by their obligations for teacher development and school climate. Although visionary leadership is significant in the literature, and at the political level in China, it is limited in reality, due to the political context and principals' career stages.

## **Leadership Development**

International and Chinese research and literature show that principal preparation programmes are important, for two main reasons. First, the preparation programme could help to improve leaders' professional growth. Second, preparation programmes are important to inspire teachers and middle leaders to seek leadership positions (Bush, 2011). However, the author's research found several contradictions between the expectations of participants, and the programmes provided by the government and universities. The author also established certain continuities and discontinuities in the principal development systems in China, which also impact on the design and delivery of the programmes. These issues are further discussed in the thematic review below.

### Leadership development programmes make a difference

The growing emphasis on school leadership development comes from an affirmative interpretation, that principalship matters. Researchers show that the capabilities and management skills of school leaders are crucial factors to achieve the nation's vision and mission (Burk, 2012; Yirci & Kocabas, 2010). In China, at the political level, principals are also required to transmit the spirit of 'Party intentions', and the 'core value of community society', at schools. Both internationally, and in China, there is strong evidence that schools cannot be improved without good principals (Barber et al., 2010). The essential function of the principal has also been recognized in the present research, where participants define principals as the 'general' (SL-C), and 'director' (P-C), who can have a huge impact on school development and student outcomes.

There is also increasing Chinese evidence linking principal effectiveness to the quality of school performance (Hallinger & Liu, 2016), and that principalship is a professional

position which requires specialized training and development (Bush, 2008; MacBeath, 2011). There is also evidence that leadership development programmes make a difference, for both principals' personal career growth and school development (Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008). This confirms Chinese literature which indicates that enhanced leadership ability could contribute to improved student outcomes (Diya, Geert, & Valcke, 2017; Ping-Man & Alan, 2015). Similarly, in this research, several principals verified that their training programmes were beneficial for their career paths in many different aspects, and had a great impact on their leadership adaption and practice. The survey demonstrated that the programme is perceived to be beneficial for principals in respect of the growth of professional knowledge, school management skills, and instructional strategies. Further, during their interviews, four principals mentioned that the contextualized learning and peer learning opportunities were valuable for their subsequent leadership enactment and practice.

#### The purpose of leadership preparation

An increasing number of practitioners, researchers and policy makers realize that professional training and development could have a huge impact by 'improving leaders' knowledge, skills and dispositions' (Pont et al., 2008). The research shows that there are three main purposes of leadership preparation programmes in China. The first is to briefly introduce the roles of principals in China, the second is to help new and aspirant principals to prepare for their positions, and the third is to encourage more leaders and teachers to seek principal positions. These three purposes were achieved to different degrees, and suggests that the preparation programmes should be revised and improved in the future.

### *The aims of the qualification programme*

The previous literature, and the current research, revealed a similar aim for principal preparation programmes, to introduce the 'principal position' to new and aspirant practitioners (Bush and Jackson, 2002). This is important, as there has been a major shift in the demands, responsibilities and expectations of principals over the last 20 years (Black, Burrello, & Mann, 2017; Jia et al., 2012; Xu, 2010). The principal position has changed from a role in a stable and predictable context to a complex and changing environment (Knapp & Feldman, 2012; Leithwood, 2010). In China, the Party intentions and policy documents are changed and updated frequently, so that it is necessary for new and aspirant principals to follow these movements closely.

At the government level, the principal management official declared that the major task of the preparation programme was to introduce the principal position to the participants, which he described as 'something they should know and acquire'). The participant survey also indicated that the preparation programme had a positive impact on principals' preparation for the position, as it makes the principals more competitive, and makes them feel better prepared for the position (M=2.6129).

### *Significance of principal qualification programmes*

A number of scholars have demonstrated the significance of preparation programmes, in different respects, and also claimed that new and aspirant principals need to be trained for their leadership positions (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Bush & Jackson, 2002; Norman, 2004). Similarly, Chinese policy documents show that the qualification programme is important for principal development (Zheng et al., 2013, MoE, 2013). However, the perceived significance of the Chinese preparation programmes varied across the different groups of participants.

Most of the author's survey principals verified that the preparation programmes were beneficial for their career development, through developing the professional knowledge and skills required to be a principal. However, in the interviews and case studies, few principals could illustrate how this training programme directly contributed to their leadership enactment. Consequently, it appears that the preparation programme may benefit principals' knowledge construction as a professional principal, while hardly contributing to principals' leadership practice. Instead, some by-products of the programme could contribute to their leadership enactment, such as assistance from the experts or experienced principals, supportive connections to the high performing high schools, and the friendships and relationships with other peer principals.

The significance of the principals' preparation training programme was also disregarded by the government. The official responsible for principal training admitted that, of the three different principal training programmes, the qualification programme is the least important, and their current working focus was on the advanced programmes for backbone and famous principals. The official added that the preparation training programme provided what participants need to know about the principalship, at a very superficial level'. Thus, although the qualification training programme should be critical for the whole principal development system, it received only limited attention from the government and the principals themselves.

#### *Not yet an inspiration for aspirant and promising teachers*

Some scholars point out that professional training programmes are not only important to prepare principals, but also to inspire more teachers to become principals (Cuddihy, 2012; Ng, 2016). For many aspirant and potential leaders, the prospect of becoming a principal is a definitely a challenge (Kwan & Walker, 2009). Thus, teachers need appropriate training to perform well in a leadership position (MacBeath, 2011). In the researched programme, most of the participants (45/58)

are prospective principals. However, the survey demonstrated that the principals who are already in post benefited more from the training programmes than those who have not yet been appointed.

The interviews showed that the effectiveness of the training programme varied from one person to another. Two aspirant principals declared that principal position was too far away, and that the training programme did not provide knowledge and skills that could be applied to their current roles. However, one aspirant principal stated that this programme widened her horizon as a school leader, as vice-principals are usually involved in only part of school business, while the principalship is a comprehensive position which relates to all aspects of school management and leadership. Thus, the context-based learning, and lectures from successful practitioners, enabled them to understand the school operation as a whole.

The main reason for the perceived ineffectiveness of the preparation programme was the uncertainty about principal appointments. Most interviewees, including prospective and new principals, administrators and experts, claimed that the recruitment of a principal depends on the prerequisites of the Party Organization, rather than school requests, or principal willingness. These principal candidates found it hard to imagine themselves as principals, before formal appointment, as they cannot determine their future career.

The three purposes of preparation programme were achieved at different levels based on the understanding of programme providers, the perceived importance of the programme, and the effectiveness of delivery methods. New and aspirant principals demonstrated good understanding of the principal role, and of school management, through the programme, showing that the basic aim of the programme was accomplished at a satisfactory level. However, the contribution of principals' professional development to leadership enactment was very limited, due to the perceived ineffectiveness of much of the programme delivery. Finally, the

programme had little impact on inspiring leaders, and shaping the talent pool, as the Party leads principals' selection and development in China.

### Different ways of developing a school leader

The literature indicates several common themes, including a standard-aligned curriculum, context-based field time, knowledgeable faculty and practitioners, and social and professional support (Cosner et al., 2015; Orr & Orphanos, 2011). As a rapidly developing, and highly centralized, country, China has emphasised principal development, at both political and practical levels, and most of the principal training opportunities are formed through formal professional programmes, developed through cooperation between the government and universities. Darling-Hammond et al (2010) add that effective leadership training programmes are not widely available and that few training programmes have compelling research evidence to certify their effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2010). The discussion below explores how principal preparation programmes are developed and delivered to new and aspiring school leaders, and how these approaches are integrated to impact on the professionalization of these principals. A distinction can be made between programme content and delivery methods, and these are discussed separately below.

#### *Content*

Bush and Jackson (2002) pointed out that different countries prescribe a similar leadership curriculum, such as communication strategies, human resource management, technology, and instructional strategies. The main foci of the Chinese leadership preparation programme were instructional leadership strategy, school managerial skills, and legal and policy analysis. The research findings show that the perceived significance of these elements varied from person to person.

◆ *Instructional leadership*

There is broad international agreement about the need for school leaders to develop the capacity to improve teaching, learning, and pupils' development and achievement (Catano & Stronge, 2012; Day et al., 2016). This is also true in China, as most of the new and prospective principals were teachers, or are still teachers before and after being posted, thus they regarded instructional ability as the most important capability for a principal (Liu, 2019; Qiao et al., 2018; Jinsu Wang, 2020). The programme designer, new and aspirant principals, and professional experts, argued that the content of instructional knowledge in China should include: teacher management; setting reasonable instructional goals and strategies; teaching abilities of principals; creating a positive school learning culture; monitoring and evaluating students' learning progress; and leading the teaching and researching groups.

◆ *School management*

As noted above, the job of leading a school has become more difficult, with expanding policy demands, which provide challenges for principals' managerial skills. These flow into schools in the form of accountability policies and practices, emphasising standardised student achievement, and school-based management (Cheng, 2009; Owings et al., 2005), learning targets and data use, and a multitude of curriculum innovations (Louise & Elizabeth, 2019; Markus et al., 2019). The personal, relational and ethical dimensions of a principal's job also remain crucial to staff and student self-esteem, well-being, social growth and other non-academic outcomes (Qian et al., 2016; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010).

Compared with instructional knowledge, school management skills were perceived to have greater significance by the programme providers and government administrators. A large number of principal participants also recognized the importance of managerial skills. The programme design shows a huge emphasis on

managerial leadership, with more than a quarter each on school management skills (26.67%) and teacher management (26.67%), and almost half (40%) on curriculum content. Managerial skills were also seen as important, particularly for new principals. The participating principals pointed out that managerial knowledge should include: constructing school organization, communication skills, human resource management skills, financial ability, and diplomatic ability.

◆ *Legal and policy analysis*

Public policy, including education policy, exists in the context of its specific social environment, which is composed of a wide range of dimensions such as economic forces, ideological belief systems, the structure and traditions of the political system, and the culture of the wider society at large (Fowler, 2012). However, legal and policy analysis constituted the smallest proportion (only two lectures) of the curriculum, and also received the lowest ratings from participants. Data from the participants' diary show that legal and policy analysis was criticized as 'too boring', 'waste of time', and 'empty talking'. However, programme providers mentioned that the knowledge is necessary for every principal, if they wanted to 'play safe'.

◆ *Comparing instructional knowledge and managerial skills*

Some researchers pointed out that, within highly structured education systems that emphasize a managerial focus, there are principals who devote more time to instructional leadership (Lee & Hallinger, 2012). However, the perceived significance of different content areas varies among principals, programme providers and government administrators. Principals' backgrounds also impacted on their attitudes towards different aspects of the curriculum. The biggest controversy was the relative priority of instructional leadership knowledge and managerial skills. This varied according to the background and location of the schools. The principals of rural and small-population schools seemed to need instructional leadership knowledge. Two

principals from small schools said that it is easier to realize their educational visions and goals than in larger schools. Four principals from rural schools mentioned that they were eager to absorb more knowledge and skills on how to promote students' learning outcomes and teachers' instructional skills. However, one vice-principal, from a high-performing, large, urban school, noted that the school already has a comprehensive instructional system, and that all they need to do is to keep up with new policies, and make minor changes when necessary. Instead, due to the complicated relationships inside and outside the school, and the larger population of students and teachers, principals of larger schools are more in need of effective managerial skills.

Hallinger and Lee's (2014) study of Thailand confirms the difficulty of changing the principal's role orientation from a managerial to an instructional leader, within a highly centralised system that gives principals little space for initiating policy. The research also shows that, at the technical level, instructional ability was more significant while, at a practical level, managerial skills were stressed more. The research traced the data of three principals from the survey, through the interview to the case study, and the author found that their knowledge demands changed during and after the training programme. Figure 9.2 shows a flow from instructional leadership to different management skills and demonstrates a gap between what knowledge they think is important to the knowledge they really needed in practice.

	<b>Principal A</b>		<b>Principal B</b>	<b>Principal C</b>	
<b>Survey</b>	Instructional Strategy;	Leadership	Management Skills;	Instructional Strategy;	Leadership
<b>Interview</b>	Instructional Administrative Skills <sup>21</sup> ;	Strategy;	Diplomatic Skills;	Instructional Strategy;	Leadership
	Communication ability;		Developing different social networks;	Administrative Skills	
<b>Mini Case Study</b>	Communication ability;	Administrative skills;	Organizational Management;	Developing generation;	young

<sup>21</sup> Administrative skills: particularly refers to the interactive skills to deal with government and different levels of administrative department;

*Table 9.2 Perceived Content Knowledge Requirements of Three Principals at Different Phases of the Research*

Overall, these content areas are all important in helping principals' adaptation to the position, but it is not clear which aspect demonstrates greater significance. The research suggests that the perceived importance of each aspect of curriculum is contextual, and depends on the backgrounds, career stage and current situations of the principals.

#### *Delivery methods*

While, according to Bush and Jackson (2002), different countries prescribe a similar headship curriculum, the delivery approaches are quite dissimilar. Although it is widely agreed that schools require effective leaders for their development and success, there is often inadequate support for developing such leadership (Kala, 2015). In the author's research, the programme design includes different types of delivery, to provide a comprehensive training experience for new and prospective leaders, including content-based learning, context-based learning, mentoring, peer learning and online courses. However, these approaches were not accorded the same importance. Principals also expressed different views about each approach. As a result, the perceived effectiveness of these approaches varies.

#### ◆ *Lectures*

Chinese educational systems have traditionally implemented formal preparation for future principals, characterised by a strong emphasis on content-based programmes. These programmes introduce the participants to a common leadership curriculum, using theory, tutorials and reflective activities, allowing the development of similar capacities and identities within a community of school leaders (Xue et al., 2020). In

the author's research, content-based learning took up the largest proportion of training time but was not well received by participants.

The main criticism of this approach relates to the assumption that leadership happens in context, therefore it should be learned in respect of the particular setting and needs of each school (Kelly & Saunders, 2010; McDonald & Simpson, 2014; Mertkan, 2011). Four of the interviewed principals argued that it takes time to digest, absorb and transform the knowledge given through lectures.

However, principal views mainly depended on the quality of the lecturers and the content of their presentations. In particular, lectures by university professors were least favoured, as they were perceived to be repetitive, old fashioned, far removed from reality and irrelevant to leadership practice. There were also contradictory comments on the professional trainers, as some principals were inspired by their talented lecturing skills, while others commented that the content was too remote from school business. Practitioners were the most popular lecturers, because their experiences and stories were relatable to their own contexts.

◆ *Context-based learning*

Several scholars argue that attention has turned from formal leadership development to real-world leadership learning within schools (Gill, Barbour, & Dean, 2014; Gilliat-Ray, 2011; Roan & Rooney, 2006). This growing awareness of contextual learning is creating a greater knowledge of the requirement for the development of school leadership through organizational socialization (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Crow & Grogan, 2005). In the author's research, there are main two types of context-based learning, namely school visits (one day) and shadowing school (five days). These two approaches allow principals to understand, observe and explore a high performing school through different aspects, including the school management system, educational vision, student management, student activities, instructional

routine, classroom teaching, the lesson preparation process and the operation of different administrative departments.

Overall, context-based learning received the most positive comments from principals, as they received inspiration, useful tips and social networks through the process. However, school visits, and observations of limited duration, were seen as no substitute for the 'situated cognition' or 'legitimate peripheral participation' that would be possible through internships in successful schools (Wilson & Xue, 2013). The programme designer also doubted 'how much of these experiences or inspirations the principals could convert to their own practice when they go back to their schools'. Two urban high school principals felt inspired, but they did not know how to apply their learning in practice. Four principals from rural high schools felt discouraged, as they witnessed huge differences in basic facilities, material resources, teachers' attitudes, and student abilities, in these schools, compared to their own schools. Expressing a preference for one learning approach does not necessarily equate to effectiveness, which varied from person to person based on their level of understanding, and on their school contexts.

#### ◆ *Mentoring*

Mentors play an important role in leadership preparation, particularly in educational settings. Through mentoring, principals could increase their knowledge of leadership practice, reduce feelings of isolation (Aravena, 2018; Zentgraf, 2020), and develop wider networks among principals (Bloom et al., 2005). In the author's research, there were three different types of mentorship; apprenticeships, internships, and workshops. The research showed that the informal mentor relationship, between beginning principals and their previous leaders, demonstrated the largest positive and long lasting impact for principals' future leadership practice, as confirmed by four principals. In contrast, the formal mentor approaches provided by administrative programmes influenced participants only a little.

1. Apprenticeships: Bush (2008: 54–5) noted that ‘heads serve a long apprenticeship (on average 20 years) as teachers and deputies, before becoming head teachers. Most of the new and aspirant principals learnt how to lead from their previous leaders, particularly when these principals are selected as aspiring candidates for future principal positions. The previous principal often gave them more authority and space to practice and exercise their leadership ability, and also provided guidance if necessary. As Elmore (2004) states, successful leadership learning begins from the inside, with school staff, not through external mandates (Elmore, 2004).
  
2. Internships: Successful internships improve, expand, and deepen leadership capacity (W. G. Cunningham, 2007). The participating principals received opportunities for context-based learning, in or out of their provinces, usually through internships or shadowing experienced principals. Six principals mentioned that they had benefited from that experience, although the duration and location varied.
  
3. Workshops: According to a government official, a great deal of money is spent to establish ‘famous principal workshops’, which aims to develop promising teachers through the assistance and guidance of these successful and experienced principals. However, few principals had the opportunity to participate in the workshops, as the selection of the participants was decided by those famous principals, depending on personal relationships between principal candidates and those famous principals. In the author’s research, only one principal is being mentored through a ‘famous principal workshop’.

The selection of mentors must meet certain criteria, such as being knowledgeable, experienced, supportive, reliable, flexible, accessible and trustworthy (Grover, 1994). The key to the success of mentoring is not about the selection of the mentor, but more about mutual trust and a good rapport between mentors and their mentees

(Schechter & Firuz, 2015). In this research, participants, who had experienced internships and workshops, noted that mentors from high performing schools, or 'famous principal workshops', could not maintain sustainable and robust relationships with their mentees, thus their influence on new and prospective principals was minimal. Compared to that, some new principals mentioned that they learned how to lead and practice their leadership skills with the guidance of their previous school leaders. Six principals noted that some of these previous leaders continue to provide support after the new heads have been appointed, which bring them the most robust mentoring relationships.

◆ *Peer learning opportunities*

There is growing recognition that effective professional training requires the replacement of traditional power roles, such as teacher-student, superior-subordinate, by more collegial-peer relationships that rely on 'conditions of trust, openness, risk-taking, problem identification, problem solving, and goal setting' (Hansen & Matthews, 2002). The programme provider in the author's research also stressed that the main reason for on-campus training is to provide these new and aspirant principals with the chance to get to know each other, and build their relationships and networks, which will help them greatly after being posted. Thus, despite the formal courses and activities, there were also certain events led by participants, which required personal leadership and teamwork.

Simkins, Close and Smith (2009) suggest that, although leadership preparation experiences include formal courses and training programmes, it is the informal experiences, such as peer support, mentoring or the early acquisition of leadership responsibilities, that significantly influenced the trainees. Compared to the perceived inefficiency of lectures, and the absence of mentors, peer friendship and the social networks established through the programme, have become the most inspiring by-products of the programme. These 'after-programme' peer activities

include:

1. Visits to other principals' schools;
2. Discussing new policies, documents and regulations together;
3. Asking for help when encountering problems;
4. Having lunch or dinner together to sustain the relationships.

### *Programme evaluation*

Although the programme offered several contributions to principals' professional growth and leadership enactment, the author noticed that there were numerous disconnections and discontinuities in the principals' development programme. First, the implementation of the programme depended on negotiations between different programme providers, which ignored the needs and demands of new principals. The research also indicates that, in this centralized system, the government showed little interest in supporting, evaluating and supervising the delivery of the programme, or in the professional development of the principals.

#### ◆ *Disparities between supply and demand*

Bush (2011) explains that, while there is wide agreement about the significance of preparation programmes, there is not a clear sense about how to apply them in practice (T Bush, 2011). Elmore (2004) also found a disconnection between what we know from research about what a successful leader looks like and does, and how to scale this up through leader development programmes. The programme designer in the author's research claimed that the design and delivery of the programme 'hit the point of leadership preparation' but six participants claimed that these hits were

‘perfunctory’. Table 9.3 compares what the programmes provide, what the principals expected from the programme, and the provider’s view about what principals really need in practice, linked to insights from the literature:

	Delivery approaches	Programme content	Programme providers
What does the programme provide	On-campus training programme, delivered mainly through content-based lectures; Context-based learning	Comprehensive system of knowledge, which focuses on school organization and management skills	Mainly professors from local universities; Professors or professional trainers from other provinces (high cost)
What do the principals want	Long-term internship opportunities in other cities or provinces	Instructional leadership skills; managerial skills	Successful practitioners
What do the principals need in practice (based on mini case studies)	Context-based learning in their own schools; Sustainable mentoring	Managerial skills; Communication skills;	Peer learning experience is preferred and most beneficial
What does the literature say	Context-based learning; (Kelly and Saunders 2010; Mertkan 2011) Sustainable mentoring	Communication strategies, human resource management, instructional strategies (Bush and Jackson, 2002)	Experienced school leaders (Crow, 2005, Bush, 2008);

*Table 9.3 Comparisons of Programme Content, Participant Preferences, and Normative Views about that is Required*

The programme designer and coordinator claim that programme delivery is a complicated process, which may be negotiable, and also depends on the policies, funding, availability of programme providers and venues, and other circumstances. The programme providers claim that what they have done is to keep the balance among different approaches, and to deliver the programme smoothly. However, this process may disregard the expectations and needs of programme participants.

Despite hearing complaints and comments from participants, for many years, about the content and delivery of the programme, the programme designer persisted with his judgment about the training programmes. In response to these negative comments, the programme designer stated that there are gaps between what the

participants want or like, and what they really need for the position of principal. Hence, the research demonstrated large gaps between principals' expectations and programme provision.

◆ *Cost, preference, and effectiveness*

Considering the political and social climate, with high accountability for student learning at the school level, leadership preparation programmes have come under intense scrutiny (Hackmann & Wanat, 2007; LaMagdeleine, Maxcy, Pounder, & Reed, 2009). As noted above, the author found it difficult to find a balance among principals' preferences, programme availability and practical requirements. Leadership happens in specific contexts; thus, principals may request more autonomy and space during the programme. However, a formal programme in a centralized system is unlikely to allow more freedom and choice. Figure 9.1 illustrates the relationship between principals' autonomy, programme cost and satisfaction, and programme delivery.

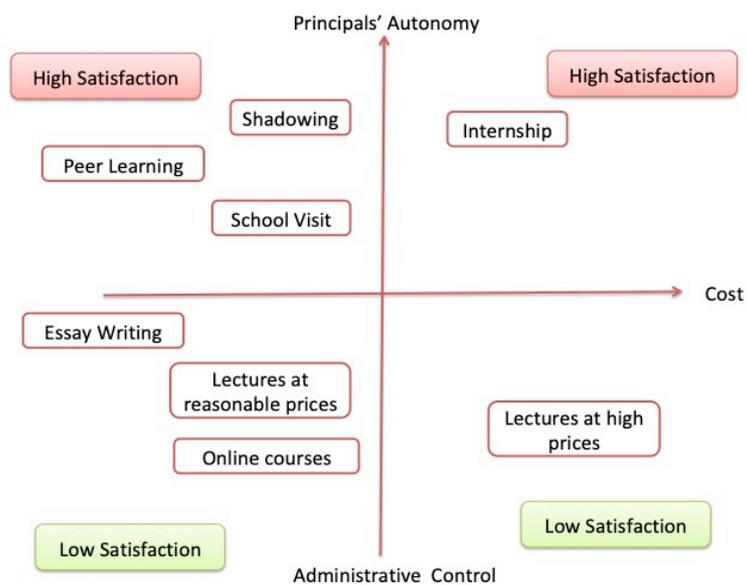


Figure 9.1: Relationships between Principals' Autonomy, Cost and Satisfaction

Figure 9.1 shows that higher levels of principal autonomy usually link to higher levels of programme satisfaction, while a higher cost approach does not necessarily produce higher levels of satisfaction. However, the author found that high levels of programme satisfaction did not result in high levels of principal effectiveness. There was significant divergence among expectations, availability, and 'reality', which led the author to consider what really makes a programme effective.

The biggest concern about the training programme is whether principals could digest the knowledge and skills from the programme, and apply them in their daily practice. The author's data suggests that the answer is negative. Even the approaches with a high degree of preference among principals did not lead to enhanced leadership practice. Few principals could make the transition without help or guidance 'in-context'. The literature stresses that educational leadership happens in real-world contexts, while current Chinese leadership development provision offers limited in-context support for principals to practice their leadership.

◆ *Programme disconnections*

The widespread criticism of leadership training programmes focuses mainly on their inadequacy in preparing participants for the demands of principalship (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015; Barnett et al., 2010). They may also fail to provide prospective principals with the capacities required to generate school change in order to have a positive impact on every child. In scrutinizing the overall design and implementation of the programme, the author found that, within the highly centralized Chinese system, there are multiple disconnections and missing links which may impede the professionalization of new and prospective principals.

● *The missing links of programme implementation*

Policy-makers, professional associations, universities and school leaders themselves

have a shared interest in preparing school leaders. According to Walker (2015), this shared interest should lead to substantial discussions to support the preparation and growth of successful school leaders (Walker, 2015). However, in the author's research, the government does not provide supervision and evaluation of the programme, and does not provide extra support when the programme begins.

Ehrich and Hansford (1999), and Daresh (2004), reported that the low level of support provided by government officials, particularly in respect of resources, and the perceived benefits of mentoring (Daresh, 2004; Ehrich & Hansford, 1999), affected the training and professional development of school administrators. In the author's research, education officials and the Ministry also demonstrated very limited responsibility for the implementation of the programme. According to the programme designer, the Ministry selects the programme organizer from the applicants, and then releases the funding to the selected organization. After that, the programme is under the control of the programme organizer. As a result, there were no follow-up inspections or evaluations of the quality of the programme.

- *Disconnected principal development system*

Principal preparation programmes, and in-service professional development training opportunities, often lack consensus on the range of skills and knowledge principals need to be successful leaders (Bush, 2013; Cowie & Crawford, 2007). The author found that the three different Chinese preparation programmes are developed and delivered separately. The three types of training programme have few connections and continuities. Even for the same programme, there was no continuity from year to year, due to changing organizers, designers and providers, as noted by the programme designer and lecture. Two participants also reflected that some curriculum content repeated lectures they had heard before.

Kelley and Peterson (2000, p.20) argue that 'ongoing evaluation, supervision and coaching', and 'continuous career-long professional development', should be given more emphasis (Kelley & Peterson, 2000). Some Chinese authors also stress that the principal development system only provides professional knowledge for principals, rather than transforming them into a real professional principal for the long term (Wilson & Xue, 2013; Xue et al., 2020). For this research, the author found that both government and professional organizations (universities and other organizations) provided little assistance for new principals after the programme, or after they have been appointed. In contrast, five principals signalled that what they need most during their novice years, is on-campus support, based on their unique school contexts.

## **Selection and Recruitment**

This theme addresses how principals are selected in China, and how new principals situate themselves in their new contexts. The findings show that the principals, and professional organizations, have little authority in respect of the selection and appointment of principals. Instead, the Party Organisation, and the Organisation Department of the LEA, made the final decision when recruiting principals. They also indicate that the current selection and recruitment system does not provide principals with a fair, robust and continuous environment for teachers and principals to realise their professional growth. Hence, the research shows that both the external environment, and internal factors, could have an influence on principals' progress and the quality of their socialisation.

### Unwilling to lead

The research indicates that only a few principals are willing to take leadership roles, as most of them are unwilling, or passive, when they were selected. Three principals were negative and declared that they 'do not want to be in that position at all'.

International literature also identifies a global tendency for fewer applicants for principalships, for example in the US, England and Scotland (Boerema, 2011; D'Arbon, Duignan, & Duncan, 2002; Gaus, 2011). The study uncovered three main explanations for principals' passive attitudes towards leadership positions in China.

#### *Overwhelming workload and responsibilities*

School leaders face a complicated array of tasks associated with managing highly complex situations (Carter, 2012). It has become an international trend that educational leaders are expected to acquire a wide range of skills such as understanding data analysis, modeling instructional leadership, and developing effective staff communication (Seashore-Louis et al., 2010; Soehner & Ryan, 2011). Principals have to shoulder the tasks, pressure, evaluation, and supervision, not only from the government, but also the whole society, including teachers, parents, students, communities and other schools, as noted by three principals. Five principals mentioned that the busy school schedule, and complicated personal relationships, made them feel exhausted. Chinese principals are also required to be good representatives of the Party Organisation, and to deal with Party issues. This led two principals, in particular, to feel that this position is not only about education, but also includes many other aspects.

The accentuation of the accountability agenda in many educational systems has added new tasks and responsibilities for school leaders (Ford et al., 2020; Knapp & Feldman, 2012; LeChasseur et al., 2019). In recent years, Chinese legislation on school management has added more responsibilities for schools and their principals, particularly in terms of students' wellbeing and safety (noted by six participants), usage of funding (five), and student performance (six). Moreover, five participants feel that principals have little authority, or support from the government. Five principals mentioned that current legislation and regulations banned them from using school funding, and managing teachers, in their own way.

### *Declining rewards*

In contrast to the increase in responsibilities and pressures, there is a perceived decline in principals' incomes and rewards, mentioned by five principals. International literature also suggests that the principalship is becoming more complex, difficult and less rewarding, in comparison with the classroom teacher's role (Ferrandino, 2001; Myers, 2006). Five principals in this research claimed that they are better teachers than principals, and six mentioned that they would prefer to be a teacher rather than a principal. Chinese principals may receive fewer rewards than teachers. Teachers and staff may take principals' 'sacrifices' for granted, because they think that the 'title of principal' provides reputation, honour and rewards.

Chinese principals sometimes earn less than high performing teachers, as noted by four principals. As the bonus or reward is usually based on students' performance, this can make a significant difference, particularly at high school level, and especially when teaching the 'graduate class' (grade three), or 'major subjects', where teachers may receive an extra bonus at the end of each academic year. In this research, none of the principals taught the 'graduate classes', and only three of them taught major subjects.

### *Expectations and authority*

One of the many leadership responsibilities of the superintendent is to evaluate principals who lead school-improvement efforts to support student achievement (Honig et al., 2010; Normore, 2005, 2010). The Wallace Foundation (2013b: 17) offered specific 'key actions' to, 'develop fair, reliable performance evaluations to help principals improve their work and [to] hold them accountable for their students' progress'. As mentioned above, the biggest challenge for new Chinese principals arises from the imbalance between government and social expectations and the

principals' authority. The selection of new principals, to an extent, comes with 'certain expectation and tasks', as noted by two government officials. Some principals are selected to address weak personal relationships in school, noted by one principal, while some are selected to 'reboot' lower performing schools (two principals). Most principals are selected to promote instructional innovation in schools, as they are previous high-performing teachers or instructional leaders at their original schools, noted by five principals. However, as discussed above, their leadership practices are constrained and influenced by different factors, which may impede their effectiveness. Although, the macro context (national and provincial) is quite similar for both new and experienced principals, the conditions are more challenging for novice principals. First, they lack experience, social networks and communication skills. Second, new principals are more cautious and timider when making decisions, and most of them choose to 'play safe' during their novice years, as noted by six principals. Juggling inadequate resources and high expectations makes their novice years a difficult period.

Overall, the major reason for principals' unwillingness to lead in China was the huge imbalance that exists between what they have to do and what they can gain from this position. This highly demanding job does not result in reasonable payment. That is why many principals would rather be a teacher than a principal or school leader.

#### Principals' selection and recruitment

Despite the personal factors mentioned above, principals cannot control their leadership progression. Their willingness to become a principal has limited impact on the final decision. Two principals and one middle leader pointed out that this 'passive selection system' was the main reason for their passive attitudes towards becoming a principal. In exploring the selection and recruitment system for high school principals, the researcher found that 'organisational intentions' played the

most vital role during the whole process.

### *Preparation programmes for principals*

The 'making of a principal' does not occur simply because an individual participates in a formal preparation programme (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015). Indeed, after the programme, nearly half (41.9%) of the principals claimed that they were not well prepared for the position. With the growing interest in preparing school leaders, in some countries and districts, leadership preparation has become a political priority, with mandatory preparation and specific selection criteria, for example in Singapore, North America and Hong Kong. The Chinese government has also invested a large proportion of its educational budget, and its professional resources, in preparing its leaders.

Bush (2009: 377) calls these compulsory preparation programmes an 'entitlement', addressing the moral obligation of the educational system to prepare their school leaders. The 'entitlement' in the Chinese preparation training programme was to obtain a 'Certificate for Headship', which should be regarded as a 'stepping stone' for principalship. However, according to the Programme Provider, the pass rate for the programme was nearly 100%. In reality, principals could be appointed without the certificate, as 13 out of 31 survey participants were appointed without one. The government also disregards the certificates as a criterion when selecting and recruiting principals, as noted by two officials and the programme designer. As a consequence, the significance of preparation training was limited in practice.

### *Party selection*

Instead of principals' personal motivation, and professional ability, the Party Organisation played the major role in selecting and recruiting principals, confirmed by almost all research participants. According to the government officials, there is no

clear standard or criteria when selecting the principals, although there was a mention of the need for 'balance'. According to the government official, 'the balance' comprised gender, the subjects they teach, their political background, their age, and their previous working experience. Usually, the selection involves a three-stage procedure. First, once there is a position becoming available in the next six months, the Organisation Department will select between four and eight candidates. Second, these candidates will be evaluated by the government in respect of different aspects, including previous working experience, social relationships, and performance at their schools, a process which usually lasts from two to four months. Both these steps are implemented covertly. Finally, after this evaluation, principals will be informed about their new positions.

The international research evidence suggests that some teachers do not trust the selection processes, identifying biases such as age, religion and gender (Ford et al., 2020; Gaus, 2011). For example, female teachers may face disadvantages when applying, because of a general assumption in different school systems that leadership requires 'masculine' attributes (Smith, 2011). In the present research, there is no explicit bias by gender, but the author also found that there was an invisible preference for male principals. The great majority (85%) of the 61 participants involved in the research are male. Nine of the female participants in this programme are now vice-principals, while 22 participants who have already been appointed as principals are male. There is also bias in respect of age, as older candidates (51-60) have fewer opportunities than the younger generation (31-50). There was also a tendency towards core-subject teachers, and high-performing teachers, as instructional ability is a vital factor when shaping the talent pool.

#### *Principals' ranking system*

Several Chinese sources point out that it is urgent to establish a clear system to select, recruit, develop, dismiss, evaluate and promote principals (Zheng & Xue, 2018).

Currently, there is no formal or widely applied principal development system in the case-study province. As a result, principals are evaluated and rewarded through the teachers' development and evaluation system, and the appointment of new principals depends mainly on the requirements of the Party Organisation with very blurred standards. Three principals and two experts stated that this situation was quite unfair for principals, and it is also very discouraging for principals' professional development, which may further decrease the principals' talent pool.

#### The discontinuity of principals' career paths

##### *From teaching to leadership*

As the principal's job is demanding, and may have low satisfaction, this may explain teachers' reluctance to pursue a principal's position. Studies in England (Simkins et al., 2009), Scotland (MacBeath, 2011), and Australia (Barty, et al., 2005), show that some teachers, with capacity, preparation and experience in leadership, have limited interest in becoming principals. In the current research, there is a significant gender difference in teachers' interest in becoming a principal. All the female interviewees in subordinate positions, including vice principals, senior leaders and middle leaders, showed little interest in pursuing principalship, while the majority (83%) of male interviewees showed a lot of interest in securing a higher position.

Leadership preparation is based on the assumption that principals, who are mainly selected from teachers, were originally trained for a different role and they require specific preparation (Schleicher, 2012). Some other studies suggest that teachers sometimes do not have the resources to prepare themselves, due to economic, practical and geographic barriers (McLay, 2008; Moorosi, 2010; Shen, et al, 2004). Similarly, several participants in the current research pointed out that the current system does not provide aspirant teachers with a professional and fair environment for development, as there are no clear regulations, policies or systems to lead and

support teachers from pedagogy to leadership. Considering the importance of principals for school improvement, and the effects on student learning, a shortage of candidates could deeply affect the performance of schools.

### *Principal turnover system*

In China, a principal turnover system has been widely applied, and the government stresses that the turnover of principals should be regarded as normal. Some Chinese sources also suggest that the turnover system is a way of realising principals' professionalization (Zheng & Xue, 2018). Indeed, the research witnessed a high turnover, for both principals and schools. However, the international literature indicates that established and experienced leadership matters to school development and performance (Bryk et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2010).

Following the research, the author followed up on the career paths of the three principals in the mini case- studies. After just two years, none of these principals remained in their original schools. Principal A moved from the original school to a larger school as a vice principal (2017-2018), and was then appointed as a principal in another larger and high performing school in September 2018. Principal B moved from the original school to become a LEA official in 2016, and now has been appointed as a principal of another high school. Principal C retired in the middle of 2017. Such a rapid turnover of principals might result in inconsistent school goals, policies and culture, a decline in teacher commitment, increased teacher turnover, and potential disruption to the school's collective effectiveness (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000; Goddard & Salloum, 2011).

## **Principal Socialisation**

Socialisation is a staged process (Earley & Weindling, 2004). Northern American research studies (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003b; Crow, 2007) also demonstrate that the development of principals often focuses on socialization processes, which may be divided into personal, professional and organizational socialization. The first phase involves personal socialisation, for beginning principals, which highlights the need to understand the central role of socialization processes as teachers move into and through their principalship (Bush, 2011; Weindling, 1999). Then, professional socialisation takes place before appointment, through programmes of preparation, first-hand experience derived from current and previous posts, and through processes such as observation and modeling (Heck, 2003). The third phase, organisational socialisation, occurs after appointment and it is during this period that personal and professional values, abilities and interpersonal skills are of crucial importance (Crow, 2007; Stevenson, 2006).

### Personal socialisation

Personal socialization is how we perceive ourselves in relation to specific context and roles in life and work (Jenkins, 2004). Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2007) point out that it is not easy for an educational practitioner to change career, as they struggle to leave the familiarity and comfort of a known role, such as being a teacher, and experience challenges and uncertainty in the new, unknown, position of principal (T. Browne-Ferrigno, 2007). Personal socialization involves the change of self-identity that occurs as individuals learn new roles (Matthews & Crow, 2003). Daresh and Male (2000) use 'culture shock' to describe the transition from instructional positions to principalship (Daresh & Male, 2000a).

In the current research, principals demonstrated that they experienced these ‘shocks’ in respect of their daily work and their mindset about principal identity. Principals discussed the challenges they encountered every day, and also described what ‘gigantic’ problems faced them as a newcomer. The biggest problem arises from the changes in their daily work, which transfer from single-direction to multi-dimensions, from simple relationships to complex relationships, from instructional-based to managerial based, from within the school to outside the school, from action taker to decision maker (Sebastian et al., 2018). Three new principals in this research described their daily work as ‘trivial but significant’, while two said that their work is ‘repetitive but inevitable’. This fits the findings reported by Hobson et al. (2002), that much of each day of a principal is taken up with a variety of relatively minor but nevertheless important, and sometimes quite complex, tasks and activities (Hobson et al., 2002).

Earley et al. (2002) reported a decline in the confidence levels of principals on taking up their posts, while Earley and Evans (2004) found that new principals did not feel well prepared for principalship despite participating in preparation programmes (Earley & Evans, 2004). Similarly, the current research shows a similar picture, with almost half (42%) of new principals feeling that they were not ready to lead at all, while only one principal felt fully ready for the position. Various researchers and theorists contend that role conception plays an important part in the way individuals enact their role. Day (2003) suggests that enthusiasm, uncertainty and adjustment are characteristics of the initiation phase of principalship (Earley & Bubb, 2013).

#### Professional socialisation

Professional socialisation, which involves learning what it is to be a headteacher, prior to taking up the role, from personal experience of schooling and teaching and from formal courses (Merton, 1963; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). The term

'professionalisation of the principalship' is a 'new concept' for Chinese principals and schools, included in policy from 2009, and further developed since 2013. In the sample province, the government has not created a fair system to guide, support, and evaluate, the professionalization of principals, according to two government officials and one expert. Chinese scholars stress that the biggest challenge for principals' socialisation is professionalisation, which requires the principals to transform from 'academic/subject professional' to 'instructional professional', and also requires them to transform from 'skilful teaching strategies' to 'effective management strategies' (Chu, 2007; Zhang & Ge, 2016).

Shortcomings may be addressed by preparation programmes' focus on developing managerial skills, rather than on developing leaders who can facilitate transition and change (Browne-Ferrigno, 2007; Drago-Severson, Maslin-Ostrowski, & Hoffman, 2008). The Chinese programme leaders hired successful practitioners, from within and beyond the province, and spent more than one third of preparation time on school shadowing to learn organisational leadership. However, most of the principals reflected that they could hardly apply this knowledge to their daily practice. Hence, professional socialisation generally begins in the pre-appointment phase of a school leader's education career and continues into early post-appointment growth and development. The author's research found that the pathway to the professionalisation of Chinese principals was discontinuous, random and unbalanced, which could hardly support the strategic career development and improvement of principals.

#### Organisational socialisation

Socialisation processes involve interaction with others and new principals do more than passively slide into an existing context (Miklos, 2009). Organisational socialization involves learning the knowledge, values, and behaviours required to

perform a specific role within a particular organisation after appointment (Schein, 1968). Male (2006) further contends that organisational socialisation is a process in which new head teachers try to prepare or integrate themselves into the existing school context before they implement any actions (Male, 2006). The biggest challenges for the Chinese new principals were how to situate themselves in school contexts, particularly when facing their previous colleagues (one principal), dealing with older teachers (three principals), and with high performing teachers (six principals). Appropriate communication is a 'must-have' skill for these new principals, although this remains a problem for most of them. This research discerned certain effective communication strategies, for example:

1. Talk to teachers and staff one by one immediately after being posted, to understand their demands and strains, and try to help them to address these issues;
2. Use different skills and strategies when interacting with different groups of people;
3. Be genuine, and fair to everyone.

The transition from a being a teacher to becoming an administrator is an intricate process of reflection and learning that requires socialization into a new community of practice and role identity (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). The results of a NFER study shows that the heads acquired their views of headship before they started, during the formative early years, and from their subsequent experiences (Norman, 2004). In this research, the author observed that most of the new principals demonstrated a quick adaption to 'personal socialisation' on the role or identity of principals, experienced incoherence and discontinuity in their professional socialisation throughout their careers, and finally applied various strategies and tips when socialising themselves into the new contexts.

## **Leadership Practice**

This section focuses on the leadership practice of new principals after being posted. The author applied Leithwood and Sun's (2012) transformational leadership model to explore new principals' leadership practice, through setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, and improving the instructional programme, in order to investigate how, and to what extent, new principals could enact their leadership practices in a new context (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). The section also explores how different contextual factors, including national and societal context, district and school backgrounds, and personal factors, shaped and influenced principals' leadership practices and goal selection. The author also describes the tasks and challenges facing new principals, and notes that there are huge distinctions between urban and rural districts.

### Setting directions

School goals describe something specific that a school wishes to achieve within a certain timeframe, most often within the given school year, in relation to student learning, attendance, graduation rates, or community satisfaction (Hallinger & Heck, 2002). Most of the principals' goals were focused on student progress, particularly targeting College Entrance Examinations. Five of the six interviewed principals set instructional goals as the priority for school development. This finding is similar to research in other contexts. For example, a study on goal setting that included 460 novice principals in New Zealand demonstrated that most (74%) principals' goals focused on the improvement of teaching and learning (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002).

The author also observed certain distinctions among these instructional goals, mostly attributable to the varied SES backgrounds of schools. Rural schools are more

likely to target higher marks for a small group of students, while urban schools are more focused on the overall improvement of instructional quality, and care about the well being and conditions of a wider range of students. Urban principals are more likely to consider future challenges when listing school goals, while rural schools care more about addressing current demands.

Goals act as an important mechanism to coordinate teachers' work and decide on resource allocation (Goldring & Pasternak, 1994). It is perceived to be important to involve staff and others in the process to gain clarity and consensus about goals (Robinson et al., 2008). However, four principals chose to 'fight alone' by seldom telling colleagues about their school goals. This was because they were unsure about the achievability of these goals, and could hardly explain them clearly to their staff. One principal received huge opposition and disapproval when she tried to explain her goals during school conferences. Another principal seldom talked about school goals during the conference, as he claimed that there was consensus and understanding among his colleagues. However, there are contradictions among the teachers, with some eager to take part in schoolwork, including establishing school developmental goals and targets, while others are more used to taking orders from the leaders, reducing their influence on school goals and decisions

#### Redesigning school organization

Redesigning the organization consists of practices that are focused on strengthening school culture, and building structures that allow collaboration and engagement of parents and the wider community (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). In China, redesigning school organization is focused on the establishment of school culture, and the external environment. Principals do not have the authority to make appointments, especially of middle leaders. Instead, they could only make recommendations, and the LEA has the final decision on shaping school organization.

School leaders are builders and nurturers of positive teacher learning cultures (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Peterson, 2002). In positive learning cultures, the school community, as a collective, pursues what is most important for the school (Walker, 2010). For this study, the new principals focused on both the internal and external environment. For the external environment, principals emphasized the renewal of school buildings. For the internal environment, principals aimed at creating harmonious relationships among teachers, staff, students, parents and the wider community, and also developing a positive learning atmosphere for teachers and students.

#### Leading teaching and learning

Improving the instructional programme refers to staffing the programme, providing instructional support to teachers, monitoring school activities, and buffering staff from distractions to their work (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). As mentioned above, most of the novice principals set instructional goals as their priority targets. One possible explanation is that novice principals tend to have less experience of their organisational role (Daresh & Male, 2000b) and hence set goals in more familiar areas of school life – classroom teaching and learning.

In China, instructional ability is also regarded as the most important criterion when selecting and recruiting a principal (Wang, 2019). Government officials and teachers both stated that excellent instructional skills could add to the principal's credibility and competitiveness. The author discerned three types of instructional leadership enacted by the novice principals.

The first group comprise 'DIY' (do-it-yourself) principals. These principals choose to influence and improve others' practical skills through their own activities and spend a lot of time participating in teaching and learning activities. Three female principals

are in this group, as they usually:

- a). spend large amount of time in classroom teaching;
- b). still teach a core subject in the school;
- c). participate in 'teaching and researching groups' often;
- d). monitor and evaluate teaching;
- e). are high-performing teachers.

There is also evidence that instructional leadership practices, and the professional development of principals, enhance teaching in schools (Graczewski et al., 2009). Two of the participating principals have improved student outcomes and the learning atmosphere noticeably since they were posted to their schools.

The second types are 'conductor' principals, as they set directions, targets and strategies for instructional work, and also evaluate and monitor the instructional performance of the students. There are four principals in this group (two male and two female), and they usually:

- a). still participate in teaching, but not a core subject;
- b). spend less time in teaching, usually no more than three lessons per week;
- c). participate in some 'teaching and researching groups' if they were available;
- d). monitor and evaluate students' performance mainly through marks and ranks;

e). used to be high-performing teachers before becoming principals.

The third group are 'outsiders', as they know little about knowledge content, instructional strategies and monitoring approaches. Previous research indicates that the effects of new principals, in their first three years, on value-added student achievement were weak to non-significant (Chaing, Lipscomb, & Gill, 2012; Dhuey & Smith, 2014). There are three principals are in this group, and they:

a). spend little time in school;

b). do not teach at all;

c). have not taught any core subject before;

d). have not been worked in schools recently (two principals were selected from LEA officials);

e). monitor and evaluate students' performance through marks and ranks only.

### Developing people

Developing people means providing individualized support and intellectual stimulation, as well as modeling behaviours, beliefs and values (K Leithwood & Sun, 2012). However, developing people is disregarded by most of the new principals, as only one principal clearly mentioned his intention to develop young teachers and middle leaders. The research suggests two possible explanations. First, most principals are new to the context, so it is hard for them to provide individualized support. Second, principals are also new to their position, and other school business, such as instructional innovation, goal setting and culture construction, are perceived

to be more important than developing people.

Although the study principals seldom put 'developing people' on their leadership agenda, some of their actions are developing 'middle-level leaders'. These include providing a fair environment to develop and promote teachers and staff, noted by four principals, observing teachers' classroom teaching, and providing certain advice (three), and providing opportunities for younger teachers to enact leadership (one principal).

#### How multiple layers of context shape leadership practice

The principals selected different strategies to enact their leadership at new schools and gave them differential emphasis. Different contextual factors shaped new leaders in designing their leadership strategies (K Leithwood, 2018). Numerous international studies have shown that there is no 'one size fits all' formula for school leadership, and that no single leadership model could be considered to be universal (Moral, Martin-Romera, Martinez-Valdivia, & Olmo-Extremera, 2018). A range of contextual factors affect schools within a country, including geographic location, background history, stage of school development, leadership structure, instructional programmes, staff competences and professional disposition, available resources and school culture.

In this study, all the schools are centralized under the management and supervision of the Ministry of Education and LEAs, but they have different contexts, in terms of geographic location, students' backgrounds and the availabilities of resources. These contextual factors shaped the leadership strategies and actions of each principal. The following sub-sections discuss how national context, local district background, and principals' personalities, shaped the leadership approaches of new principals.

### *National and societal context*

Although both Chinese and international literature show a strong trend towards the professionalization of principals' work (S. Liu et al., 2017), the deeply embedded traditional belief of loyalty and conformity with the hierarchical order of the political authorities retains profound implications for how Chinese school leaders think and function (Cravens, 2008). Thus, the macro context of Chinese society greatly impacts on the practice of Chinese principals.

Traditional culture was predominantly framed by Confucianism. Certain widely cited Confucian values constitute ethical guidelines across Chinese social and personal life. These include respect for authority, patriarchy, seniority and age, conflict avoidance and obeying superiors, "face (mianzi)", interpersonal relations "guanxi (relationship/network)", collectivism, harmony, and order (Farh & Cheng, 2000; Pittinsky & Zhu, 2005), and these values influenced principals' perceptions of their leadership role (Ma, Niu, & Tang, 2020). The study principals take the lead in school business, and usually make decisions alone without asking advice from other teachers. Accordingly, most of the teachers are used to taking orders from the principals without independent thinking about their school's development.

### *District and school background*

LEAs, along with local government policies and regulations, have a strong influence on Chinese new principals' leadership practices. First, there are regulations, which detail every aspect of school management, including standards for school construction, principals' behaviour, funding, and teacher development.

However, the researcher found that, in practice, the LEA had little impact on students' performance and school development. Instead, the heavy administrative work and very tedious regulations constrained principals' authority and leadership practice.

The Wallace Foundation (2013b: 17) pointed out that the specific 'key actions' for district government are to 'develop fair, reliable performance evaluations to help principals improve their work and [to] hold them accountable for their students' progress'. In China, due to the divergent geographic backgrounds, urban principals and rural principals could hardly share a 'fair and reliable' environment to work and develop. The author's findings indicate that:

1. Generally, principals from rural or lower SES schools faced more severe and tougher challenges than those in urban or better SES schools;
2. Teacher and student quality in urban schools are much better than those of rural schools.
3. Lower SES background schools had less authority in making any changes. In contrast, principals of better SES schools enjoyed more self-determination in managing the school.

Despite these differences and gaps between rural and urban schools, the provincial government used the same standards to evaluate the principals' leadership ability and schools' progress, namely student performance, particularly the outcomes for College Entrance Examinations.

#### *Personal factors*

Evidences show that leadership practice results from an interaction between the individual and the broader context (Cheung & Walker, 2006; Leithwood & Azah, 2016). In the current research, the principals' personal background also impacts on their leadership actions; notably in respect of gender and previous work experience.

*Gender:* Women principals appear to be less ambitious about their personal career development, than male principals, and are more likely to be distracted by their family life. Male principals also seemed to have more courage and passion to make changes and develop plans at their schools.

*Previous work experience:* The nature of their previous experience impacts on principals' leadership strategies and enactment. For example, instructional leaders are more likely to start their leadership actions through instructional improvement or innovation. A previous government official is more likely to begin school development through building relationships with other organizations and gathering funds for school construction.

The present research also found that leadership practice is shaped and influenced by multiple layers of widely shared contexts, such as institutional, community, social-cultural, and political background, as well as the personal resources of the leader. This suggests that thinking about school leadership should turn away from describing 'what successful school leaders do' and towards 'how they do it' (Robinson et al., 2008; Schechter & Firuz, 2015).

#### New principal tasks and challenges

Previous researchers have commented that the community context relates partly to schools located in urban and rural communities (Hallinger & Liu, 2016; Pashiardis, Savvides, Lytra, & Angelidou, 2014; Zhang & Pang, 2016). As noted above, district factors had a significant impact on principals' leadership practices. Although the novice principals may encounter similar situations or tasks when they first lead the school, the nature of these difficulties varied according to school backgrounds. As also noted by Hallinger and Liu (2016), and Othman and Mujis (2013), there is a growing gap in the achievement of urban and rural schools, especially in developing nations (Hallinger & Liu, 2016; Othman & Muijs, 2013).

In order to broaden the scope and representativeness of the study, the author interviewed nine principals from different SES backgrounds, including urban districts (three principals), suburban districts (one principal) and rural districts (five principals). Five challenges were most frequently mentioned by novice principals, but they applied differently in urban and rural schools (see table 9.3).

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Similarities</b>
<b>Funding</b>	Less public funding; Poor school construction.	More access to funding; Restricted supervision.	Limited funding; restricted supervision; little authority.
<b>Safety</b>	Attendance of students; Violent behaviour of students; Moral education.	Mental health of students; Harsh expectations from parents and society.	Overwhelming responsibility for the school.
<b>Student outcomes</b>	Worse	Better	Striving for better students.
<b>Human capital development</b>	Teacher burnout; Inadequate teachers.	Hard to manage; Stubborn teachers.	Teacher burnout; Lack of authority in teacher management.
<b>Training opportunities</b>	Fewer opportunities: Quality and frequency cannot be guaranteed.	More and better opportunities; Frequency: once or twice a year per person.	Lack of choice.

*Table 9.3 Differences in School Tasks between Urban and Rural Principals*

### *School funding*

Several Chinese sources indicate that, particularly at high school level, the financial support from the government could be described as inadequate and unbalanced, when compared with western countries (Yang & Si, 2012; Zheng & Wu, 2018). In the present research, six principals described the financial issue as the most ‘dangerous’ and ‘sensitive’ part of the principals’ job, and the government officials also stated that some principals might have financial problems. The impact was different in urban and rural districts.

Urban schools enjoy more funding. In China, schools are funded by the Board of Education Commission, which provides both capital finances, for new buildings and maintenance, and recurrent funding allocated on a per capita basis. District factors can have a significant impact on school funding, because a higher SES background results in more funding and resources. Funding shortages are more severe in rural areas. Five out of six rural principals mentioned that 'money' is their biggest concern while three urban school principals noted that money is not a serious issue for their schools.

Urban schools were able to use more money for human capital development. Their basic facilities and school environment were well established, while three of the rural high schools still had to invest more in basic school construction. The urban principals indicate that school funding could be applied more in improving the teaching and learning environment, and in human capital development.

However, the urban schools faced more supervision and detailed regulation on the use of funding. Three principals listed the 'money issue' as the most sensitive and dangerous part of their job, which is too 'hot' for new principals to handle. Consequently, the school may be affluent, but the principals dare not use the money freely.

### *Safety*

Bryk et al (2010: 58) argue that parent and community ties are a 'significant resource for diverse school improvement initiatives, [including] enhancing safety in and around schools' (Bryk et al., 2010). Sebastian and Allenworth (2012) found that principal leadership had direct and significant links to school safety. Generally, the overall environment of the participating Chinese schools could be described as safe and secure. However, the hidden or potential problems for schools were different, particularly due to the different SES backgrounds of schools. Due to the insufficiency

of family supervision, and a worse macro social environment, attendance rate and moral problems were more severe in the rural and lower SES schools, which also affected school safety and security for students.

### *The quality of human capital resources*

Leithwood et al (2010) suggest that teacher quality is the most important school-based factor for student achievement, with principal leadership as the second most important factor. As noted above, differences in student outcomes have been linked to the allocation of physical and financial resources, and previous research shows that many rural schools are disadvantaged in terms of human resources (Othman & Muijs, 2013; Starr & White, 2008). Lower quality human resources carry over into organizational conditions (e.g. leadership, school climate) that also impact on the quality of education (Hallinger & Liu, 2016). In the present research, three rural principals claim that the biggest distinction between rural and urban schools is the distinction between human resources.

First, urban schools are able to attract better teachers. For example, two principals from higher SES schools were able to employ good teachers from normal universities, and some of their recently hired teachers were from high performing normal universities, and/or hold a master's degree. Three rural principals' comment that it is hard to attract excellent teachers to work in their schools, and their teachers leave for other job opportunities every year.

Second, teachers tend to move from rural schools to urban schools, and also from under performing schools to higher performing school. As a result, rural schools lack high-performing teachers, and may have an overall shortage of teachers. Teachers in high performing schools enjoy extra income, more training programmes, better promotion opportunities, and better student.

As a result, urban schools are able to invest more money and attract better programmes for teacher development. One urban principal mentioned that, as well as government-led programmes, the school is able to send their teachers to suitable training programmes in other provinces each summer, and they also provide on-campus training during each semester. In contrast, some schools could only send their teachers to the compulsory government programmes, and provided little on-campus training during the semester. One rural principal added that, due to the limitations of traffic and time, not all of their teachers could take the compulsory training programme each year.

#### *Better student resources*

The lack of internal capacity to improve students' learning may add to principals' work pressures, particularly given the market mechanism of parental choice and accountability to consumers (Hamilton, 2018). As noted above, the rural schools were not attractive to higher performing students, as these schools have limited teacher resources, school facilities and financial support compared to the famous or higher SES schools.

In addition, the current instructional targets for urban schools and rural schools are quite different. For rural schools, the priority targets were to develop their reputation for student performance as soon as possible, thus 'seed plans', targeting a small number of excellent students, were very popular in these school. The urban principals cared more about the quality, justice and balance of education; thus, both principals and LEAs focused more on the overall growth of students' performance and the overall development of each student. Hence, the instructional strategies emphasized overall instructional innovation and development in these schools.

Above all, it could be noticed that leadership practice varied from one leader to another, and that the current preparation and development system could hardly

assist principals with their leadership enactment after being posted. Thus, there is an urgent requirement for more context-based support, related to the principal's own school context. Newly appointed principals have encountered severe problems in school management, due to their constraints in human resources, courage in making changes, charisma of affecting others, and familiarization to the policies, leading one principal to describe them as a 'vulnerable group' in the whole system. There were also significant distinctions between urban schools and rural schools, in terms of leadership practice, SES backgrounds and leadership challenges. Consequently, rural principals faced more difficulties than urban principals, leading to the need for more financial, political and professional support.

## **Overview**

The author's research data, and the existing literature, demonstrate that the principalship is an increasingly demanding and complicated position that requires talent and preparation. The evidence indicates that the current principal preparation system in China does not select and deliver the professional principals to meet the requirements of school development. The research also revealed that the principals' understanding and recognition of principalship and leadership require time and space to grow and develop. It is the government's responsibility to support principals with sustainable and professional training and development opportunities, before and after appointment, in and outside the campus.

New principals' leadership challenges and strategies varied according to personal and contextual variables, particularly in respect of the huge distinction between urban and rural schools. A robust and constructive principal development system requires concerted effort from government, universities and schools, to provide a sustainable and fair environment for principals to develop and improve. The next and final chapter is the conclusion, which shows how the research questions have been answered and discusses the significance of the study.

# CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSION

## Introduction

This concluding chapter comprises three sections, namely answering the six research questions, discussing the significance of the study, and raising certain implications for further research and practice. Throughout the chapter, the research model, developed at the beginning of the study, is frequently applied, to interpret the findings. The design of the research model shows strong potential for research application and practical use. The chapter concludes with three implications for professional practice:

1. Professionalisation of principals;
2. Re-defining the role of government (LEA);
3. A more comprehensive training and development system for principals.

These implications lead to recommendations for reform to develop better prepared and more capable principals.

# Answering the Research Questions

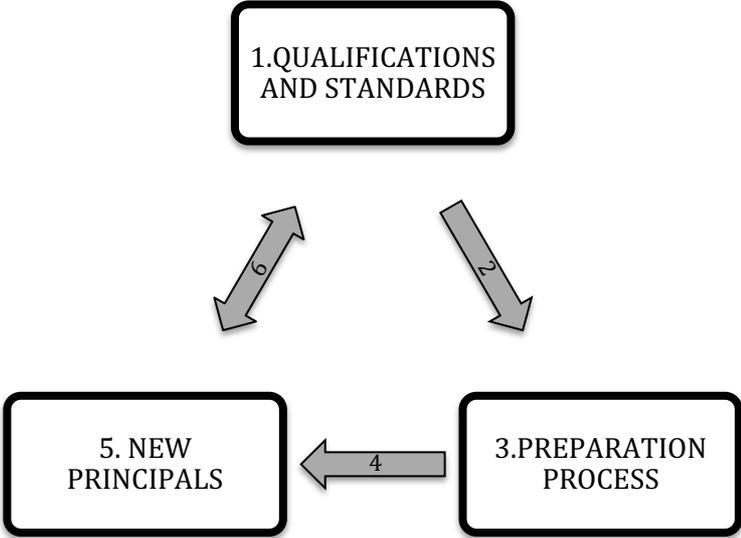


Figure 10.1 The research model

Figure 10.1 shows part of the author’s model, showing three vital aspects of the preparation process, namely professional qualifications and standards, the preparation process and new principals. As well as the three aspects of the principal preparation process, the model also demonstrates the tight linkages among these three facets. Arrow 2 shows how preparation may be guided, or shaped, by the policies and documents. Arrow 4 explores how the preparation process could contribute to the professional growth of principal leadership. Finally, arrow 6 examines the extent to which new leaders meet the requirements of these professional qualifications. It also considers the role of professional qualifications and standards in the process of evaluation.

**1. What are the expected qualifications and standards for new principals in Chinese high schools? (linked to box 1).**

Research question 1 raises questions about how principalship is defined and conceptualized in China, and also about what is the intended nature, audience and purpose of standards and qualifications.

*What are the standards for headship in China?*

In 2013, the Ministry of Education of China (MOE) published the Professional Standards for Chinese Headship (the Standard), the first national document describing the standards and qualifications of Chinese headship. This Standard explains the job description of Chinese school principals, including basic cognition for headship, the role definition of principals and the application of the Standard. The basic cognition stresses that principals should be loyal to the Party, and should also be supportive to the establishment of the Communist society. The principals should also make students' wellbeing and development a top priority, and produce a positive learning and development environment for both teachers and students. According to the document, there are six roles of principals in China:

1. Setting school vision;
2. Establishing school culture;
3. Leading teaching and learning
4. Developing people;
5. Optimizing the school organisation;

## 6. Developing social connections.

Overall, the Standards emphasized and heightened the professionalisation of high school principals, and also stressed the significance of the Standards in terms of the management and development of principals. However, the research found that the Standard had little practical or administrative impact. It is neither the basis for selecting, training, recruiting or evaluating principals, nor a clear indication for principals when practicing their leadership, or developing their schools.

### *The role of principals in China*

The roles of principals are becoming increasingly complex and challenging worldwide, including in China. The traditional Chinese way of leading a school, and the definition of 'a leader', requires the principals to shoulder most of the responsibility for school development and student performance. Correspondingly, the role descriptions of Chinese principals are demanding and complicated, assigning responsibility for every aspect of school development to them. Although, the application of the Standards demonstrated little practical or administrative impact, certain connections and parallels could be noticed when compared with the written policies and practical demands. The data, from teachers, school leaders, principals, programme providers, programme designers and administrative officials, show that there are six main roles of Chinese principals:

1. Achieving the Party's intentions;
2. Setting school goals;
3. Managing the school;
4. Leading teaching and leading;

5. Building school culture;

6. Developing teachers.

There were certain dissimilarities, and some connections, between the policy requirements (see pp. 2-3) and the expectations of the research participants. Achieving the Party's intentions has been put at the heart of principals' obligations, while optimizing school organisation and developing social connections were marginalized in practice. Instructional leadership, managerial leadership, visionary leadership and teacher development were stressed in both the policy documents and participants' expectations. The data also show that it was hard for new principals to carry out all these roles simultaneously. In practice, then, due to different school contexts, principals' backgrounds and abilities, and local administrative guidance, these roles are enacted in different ways by the study principals.

**2. What is the relationship, if any, between qualifications and standards and the leadership preparation process? (linked to arrow 2).**

Question 2 is designed to investigate whether and how formal qualifications and standards are integrated into the principalship preparation process in the Chinese primary school context. It examines whether, how, and to what extent, they are linked. This connects to how the preparation process is constructed, implemented and evaluated, with or without such a foundation.

*Impact of the Standards*

The last section of the Standards policy shows that they should be applied to:

1. All the principals and vice principals in public high schools. Local government can interpret and transfer the Standards to meet the needs of the local educational context;
2. Management of principals' teams for different levels of educational administration, including selection and recruitment, management, and evaluation;
3. The implementation of principal training and developing programmes, which indicates that the Standards should be applied as the guideline for principal development and to enhance the professionalisation of principals;
4. Self-development of principals.

According to the policy, the Standard should be applied as an indicator for every process of principal preparation and principal development, and guide people who are involved in this process, including programme providers, local administrators and principals. However, the author's research found that the Standards had little impact.

First, new principals disregarded the Standard. According to the survey, nearly half of the principals are not familiar with the Standards, and only two principals demonstrated a good understanding of them. Also, programme providers overlooked the function of the Standard and both the programme designer, and a number of programme providers (lecturers), did not adjust their curricula to the requirements of the Standards. Moreover, the provincial administrators, who are in charge of principal management, disregarded the requirements of the Standard, choosing to manage principals in a more political way, rather than professionally.

What policies impact on the selection of the principals?

Similarly, according to the research, the government administrators demonstrated that the management of principals is strictly under the guidance of the policies. And there were two main policies tightly connected to the appointment of the new principals, which were published by the Organisation Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee. These policies are: *Regulations on Management of Leader of Public Institutions (Provisional)* and *Regulations on Management for Leaders of Primary and Secondary School Principals (Provisional)*. It could be noticed that although the Ministry of Education set the professional standards for principals, the authorities of principal management are under the control of the Organisation Department. Thus, the selection of principals seems to be more about choosing an appropriate leader for the Party Organisation, rather than a professional leader for school contexts.

**3. What are the content and delivery modes of Chinese leadership preparation programmes? (linked to box 3).**

This question explores how different content and delivery approaches are applied to satisfy the various objectives of principal preparation and to improve the professional growth of aspiring and new leaders, and the effectiveness of these approaches.

*Knowledge content*

Formal lectures, which took up the largest proportion of training time, were delivered by different lecturers, and with varied content. The main focus was on school organisation, followed by teacher management, school management skills, and legal and policy analysis. New principals and principal candidates assessed these domains as vital. School management skills and instructional leadership capacity

were seen as the most essential components of the preparation programmes, followed by legal and legislative regulations, while the lowest ranked was basic educational theory. However, no domain was rated less than 3.5 in the survey, indicating that all these courses were regarded as important in preparing for their leadership practice.

Most of the lectures followed the traditional Chinese way of teaching, with the lecturer teaching, while other participants are listening. The lectures were provided by professors, government officials, practitioners and trainers from professional organizations. Practitioners from successful or 'famous' high schools were overwhelmingly preferred, with government officials not supported at all. The university professors, who constituted the largest proportion of lecturing time, also received little support from new principals. The trainers from professional training organisations or companies were expensive, but received very limited support from participants.

#### *Delivery methods*

The formal preparation training programmes for new principals, provided by the provincial government, lasts nearly half a year, and includes three weeks on-campus training, 60 hours online course, and a 3000-word essay. The on-campus study included formal lectures, shadowing schools, school visits, and mentoring. After the programme, there was a compulsory online course for principals to finish. Outside the formal preparation programme, a number of principals were also invited to internship projects or other training programmes, within and outside the province, but the opportunities to take part in these programmes varied from principal to principal.

These methods are quite dissimilar but, collectively, they comprise a comprehensive system of new principal training in the sample province, which includes theory-based

learning, context-based learning, campus-based learning, and online learning. However, the different methods demonstrated quite divergent outcomes in terms of their training effectiveness, due to the principals' preferences for different learning methods. The context-based learning and internships received more compliments from the principals, as these methods allow them to understand how to operate a school, and also enable them to become familiar with those high-performing schools and successful principals. The traditional Chinese way of teaching, formal lectures, was criticized by a number of principals, as some lecturers were not impressive, and the knowledge content could hardly be applied to school practice. The online course was least preferred by the principals, as it was very time-consuming, and its perceived value was low. The research also established that, due to differentiated social and economic status, and school contexts, principals enjoyed varied training opportunities, and the quality of these programmes also differed. Urban school principals typically enjoyed better training experiences, and had more autonomy in choosing the training programmes they wanted.

### *Evaluation*

According to the survey, the overall comments on preparation programme were positive, as new and aspiring principals felt more comfortable and prepared for their position, and they stated that the preparation programme was beneficial for their professional growth as a principal. The interviews also confirmed that the preparation programme was regarded as inspiring, influential and impressive, particularly the 'shadowing school', which provided them with a chance to observe those high performing and famous high schools. However, some principals also noted that the design of the programme, to a certain degree, was unsatisfactory, as some courses were repeated, some were low quality, and some were weakly connected to their leadership practice. The research also showed that certain approaches, such as mentoring and online courses, had little impact on principals' leadership practice, and received little support from these participants.

The programme providers admitted that the current preparation system is imperfect, describing it as 'sale in bulk', and 'assorted cold dishes', as the programmes seldom take principals' requirements and preferences into consideration. It is also implemented without careful design and appropriate customisation, just an accumulation of lectures and courses without careful thought. As a result, the programme could hardly meet the most important demands of principals, and they could not readily transform their learning into leadership practice.

**4. What is the relationship between the leadership preparation process and the recruitment and selection of principals? (linked to arrow 4).**

The purpose of research question 4 is to establish if there is any relationship between leadership preparation and new principal selection and, if so, to what extent? However, the research shows that the preparation programme had very limited impact on principals' recruitment and their leadership enactment.

*Impact on principal selection and recruitment*

According to both national policy and local regulations, principals should not be appointed until they have received the 'Certificate for Principals', which is the final endorsement for completing the preparation programmes. However, a number of participants (21%) had already been appointed before they received the Certificate, and one of them has been a principal for more than three years. For the aspiring principals, whether or when they will be appointed remains uncertain.

*Principals' selection and recruitment*

The Organisational Department of the Provincial Educational Authority is responsible for selecting and recruiting high school principals and, according to the government officials, the 'Certificates for Headship' barely had any impact when

selecting or hiring a new principal. The programme providers agreed that there is no direct link between the preparation programme and principal selection. As a result, most of the principals did not value this training programme.

The author found that the 'intentions of the Party Organisation' were more important than principals' willingness or professional abilities. Despite that, the needs of schools were also taken into consideration, as a number of principals were sent to new schools to solve particular problems or troubles. There were no clear standards or criteria when selecting a principal, according to the government officials, but they are searching for a balance in respect of gender, subjects, age and other aspects which suit the requirements of the Party or the school organisation.

Although principals' professional abilities were not stressed by the government, the sample principals still demonstrated high levels of professional competence, as most of them were high-performing main course teachers, with varied managerial experience. The data also showed that the morality and behaviour of principals were important, as Chinese traditional culture emphasizes 'win people by virtue' (*yi de fu ren*).

#### **5. How is leadership enacted by the newly appointed qualified principals?**

**(linked to box 5).**

This question goes beyond preparation to examine how new principals in China enact their roles. This is influenced by their socialization.

##### *Socialisation*

Duke (1987: 261) points out that 'becoming a school leader is an ongoing process of socialization', since school principals do not emerge solely from training programmes. Most of the new principals in this study demonstrated very quick adaption to their

new roles and new environment, although the periods varied from one to another. Some principals took only two weeks to become familiar with their new school context, while the longest adaptation took half a year. Due to the principals' rotation system, most of the principals were appointed to a new context, and only a few of them remained in their previous school. The majority adapted to their new position within two or three months after being posted. The principals mentioned that 'communication' and 'fairness' were their secrets for quick and comfortable adaptation, particularly for a totally new environment. A number of principals also advised that they observed carefully before making any decisions, which helped them to become familiar with the school, and also to build their reputations among the teachers.

The role transformation also required principals' role transition from an academic or managerial role to a leadership position. For role transition, most of the principals regarded themselves as a qualified school leader, and also felt well prepared for the position. However, professionalisation is quite a new term for Chinese principalship, included in policy from 2009, and further developed since 2013. As noted earlier, the Standards and other policies had little impact on principals' professionalisation or leadership practice. The study also found that instructional leadership ability and school managerial skills were core elements for principals' leadership practice, and there were also vital criteria when selecting or evaluating a principal. However, the author also identified other leadership practices that related to principals' professionalisation, which were applied differently in various school contexts.

### *Leadership practice*

Leithwood and Sun's model (2012) defined four categories of core leadership practices; setting directions; developing people; redesigning the organisation; and improving the instructional programme (K Leithwood & Sun, 2012). In Chinese contexts, there were two actions, namely establishing school culture and achieving

the Party's intentions. However, due to the traditional understanding of principalship, as well as the evaluation system for schools and principals in China, these leadership practices were displayed in various ways in Chinese schools.

First, leading teaching and learning was the priority task and challenge for most school leaders, as student performance was the most important criterion when evaluating a school or a principal. Second, establishing school culture was important, including the internal atmosphere, and these principals believed that a supportive environment could have a positive and direct impact on student outcomes. However, setting direction received little attention by both programme providers and principals, with only a few principals developing just short-term goals. Few principals were willing to make organisational changes at schools, and most of them chose to be cautious in introducing change. Developing people was disregarded by most of the new principals, as only one clearly mentioned his intention to develop young teachers and middle leaders. Although the study principals seldom put 'developing people' on their leadership agenda, some of their actions are actually developing these 'middle-level leaders'.

These novice principals encountered similar situations when they first take over their schools. These tasks and challenges included limited school funding, overwhelming safety responsibilities, enhancing student outcomes, teacher development issues, and unbalanced training opportunities for teacher development and self-development. The nature of these difficulties varied according to school context. Usually, rural schools faced more severe situations, and encountered more challenges, when compared with urban schools.

The research also found that leadership practice is shaped and influenced by multiple layers of widely shared contexts, such as institutional, community, socio-cultural, and political background, as well as the personal resources of the leader. Within and across different phases of their school improvement journeys, the principals selected,

clustered, integrated, and placed different emphases on, different combinations of their roles and strategies that were timely and fit for purpose.

**6. What is the relationship between the expected performance of newly qualified principals and their leadership practice? (linked to arrow 6).**

In China, the expected performance relates to the qualifications for principals derived from policies and documents. This sub-section explores whether, and to what extent, the newly qualified leaders meet the professional standards for new Chinese principals. It also examines the extent to which the qualifications and standards define the leadership requirements and professional practice of effective principals.

*The Standards connect to leadership practice*

As noted earlier, the Standards had little impact on principals’ training, development and recruitment. However, there were still many connections between the Standards and the preparation process. For example, the core status of Party intentions, the emphasis on principals’ instructional leadership ability, and the high demands on principals’ managerial skills, are consistent themes in the training programme. Table 10.1 traces the Standards, how these obligations are delivered and imparted through training programmes, and to what extent these principals’ responsibilities are evident through leadership practice.

The Standards	Programme Content (Available/ Not Available)	Leadership Practice	
		Principals’ priorities	Perceived significance
Achieving Party Intentions	N/A		Filtered into every aspect of school work
Setting School Vision	N/A	5 <sup>th</sup>	Limited Practice
Managing the School	A	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Important but challenging

Leading Teaching and Learning	A	1 <sup>st</sup>	Vitally important and evaluation index
Building School Culture	N/A	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Very important
Developing Teachers	N/A	4 <sup>th</sup>	Least mentioned
Organisational Construction	A	7 <sup>th</sup>	Retain the previous organisational system
Human Resource Management	A	6 <sup>th</sup>	Few changes

*Table 10.1 Comparisons among the Standards, the Delivery and the Practice*

Table 10.1 shows that instructional strategies and managerial actions received the most attention at political, programme and practical levels. Many new principals were recruited for their excellent instructional outcomes in their previous schools. Most of them started their school leadership with instructional innovations or adaptations. The LEA also evaluates a principal or a school through their instructional practices. School management was also essential, as most of the new and aspiring principals demonstrated good experience in managing the school through different leadership positions during their previous career. However, organisational construction and human resource management was a tough challenge for most new principals. Most of the novice principals chose to retain the original organisational system and only make small adaptations during their novice years.

Programme design covered four aspects of the job description, while disregarding the importance of building school vision and school culture. Further, although leadership enactment includes almost every aspect of the principal's job obligation, the establishment of school culture and vision was given less attention and priority, when compared with instructional actions and managerial changes. In particular, only a few principals established short-term targets for school development, while only one claimed to have long-term plans for the school's further development.

Many principals in this research demonstrated that the quality of 'human capital' greatly impacts the effectiveness of school development, and most of the principals

were dissatisfied with their current teacher team. Surprisingly, fewer principals claimed that they had clear strategies for developing teachers, and teacher development was one of the last aspects to appear on principals' agendas. As a result, most teachers and middle leaders were also dissatisfied with their current career stage, and felt unclear about their further development.

The research suggests that it takes a long time for a novice principal to transit from a single instructional leader or managerial position to a comprehensive role as a school principal, which requires the principals to think about the bigger picture of school development. It also requires the principals to not only consider the development and progress of their students, but also to care about the professional development of every teacher and staff member as well.

## **Significance of the Study**

This research is significant in several respects. First, it provides new evidence about leadership preparation and new headship in the Chinese context. Second, it offers insights on this topic in centralised systems, as well as in underdeveloped contexts. Third, it provides a comprehensive and sequential picture of leadership preparation. Finally, it emphasizes the active role of principals in the whole process, taking principals' needs into consideration when shaping and delivering training programmes.

### Contextual significance

International literature demonstrates the great interest in leadership preparation and principal development (Klein & Schanenberg, 2020; Okoko, 2020; Orphanos & Orr, 2013; Xue et al., 2020). However, research in Mainland Chinese contexts is very limited, particularly in respect of English language publications. The current research

is very significant, as it extends the limited knowledge about how new principals are prepared in this centralised system.

Previous Chinese research on principal training or development either offer an overall national picture or are situated in developed areas of the country. For example, Zheng, Walker and Chen's (2013) policy analysis of principal training in China was based on national policies published from 1989 to 2011. Similarly, Jia et al's (2012) work on new principal qualifications also provided a national perspective (Jia et al., 2012). These nationwide overviews do not show how contextual distinctions impact on leadership preparation in China, while my research discovered that national context, provincial background, municipal background, and district background, could impact differentially on principals' leadership preparation, appointment, development and later actions.

#### *Stressing the importance of contextual variables*

As the largest developing country, new headship preparation in China has been poorly reported, with very few empirical studies. There are some publications focused on Hong Kong, but this has a very different system from that in Mainland China (Ho & Lee, 2016). In the latter, most studies were conducted in well-developed coastal cities. For example, Zou's (2007) research on new principal training and development was based in Shanghai (ranked No. 1 in GDP in 2018 among all Chinese cities), and Qian, Walker and Yang's (2017)'s article on leadership impact on school culture was also based in Shanghai (Zou, 2007). Similarly, Wilson and Xue's research on principal preparation and continuing professional development was located in Fujian province (ranked No. 10 among 32 provinces in China).

The author's research was located in one of the least developed provinces, and also stressed the distinctions between rural and urban contexts, recognized as one of the most serious issues in China, in terms of the equity, justice and quality of education

(Bolam, 2004; A. Walker et al., 2012). This research shows how these contextual factors impact on principals' training opportunities, in terms of quality frequency, and choice.

### Methodological significance

The research was a sequential mixed-methods case study, with differentiated emphasis and weight, depending on how they could contribute to answering the research questions. The findings chapters were presented by data set, which allowed the author to explore the same issue through different methods and make comparisons between them. This research made a significant methodological contribution to Chinese literature on leadership preparation, in four respects:

1. Empirical
2. Mixed methods
3. Sampling
4. Sequential design.

### *Empirical*

First, this is empirical research, generated from a field study with mixed methods, including questionnaire, interviews, documentary analysis and observation. Some scholars show that educational research in China relies overwhelmingly on the traditional Chinese form of argumentation (A. Walker et al., 2012). Many falsely labeled research papers are merely simplified explanations of some policies (Gao, 2015), or personal reflections (Ma et al., 2020), lacking theoretical contribution and

being short of rigorous logical reasoning. The literature review (see chapter two) shows that this applies to many papers in the field of principal training and leader development in Mainland China. In contrast, the present author's research produced substantial triangulated empirical data, arising from a survey, interviews, observations and documentary analysis.

### *Mixed-methods*

As noted above, the author's research is a mixed-methods study, which involved a variety of research tools; questionnaires, interviews, observation, and documentary analysis. The interpretation of different data sets allows the researcher to establish the 'bigger picture' of the issue and construct meta-inferences (Hibberts & Johnson, 2012). This contrasts with previous research on leadership preparation and development, which relied on fewer methods. For example, Crawford and Cowie's (2012) study of newly appointed principals in Scotland applied only interviews and reflective logs and included only five participants (Crawford & Cowie, 2012). Ng's (2013) research in Hong Kong explored aspiring principals' training demands through a survey, with no qualitative dimension (Ng, 2013). The present author's use of multiple methods adds credibility to the findings and increases confidence about the validity of the data.

### *Sampling*

Moreover, this research also mixed different sample groups to describe the issue through various aspects, to provide a holistic perspective on principal preparation in China. In contrast, Ng and Szeto's (2016) research on professional training for new heads in HongKong focused on principals' understanding of headship and their professional development requirements (Ng & Szeto, 2016). The present research collected the voices from senior administrators while much Chinese literature gathered government intentions solely from political policies and documents,

without any direct inputs from administrators. These researchers were also unable to establish how policies and regulations were understood and enacted by local administrators and principals, in contrast to the present author's study.

### *Sequential design*

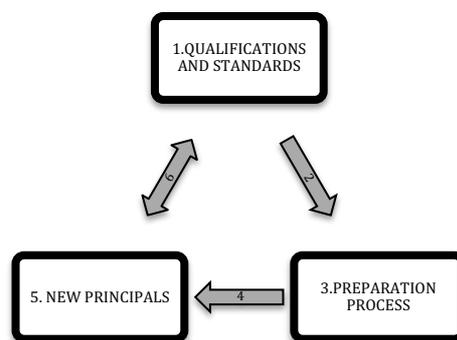
The present research is a sequential study, which largely follows the stages of new principal development. This began with analysis of policy documents, moving to observation of, and provider and participant perspectives on, preparation programmes and processes, then an overview of principal selection, leading to a study of the leadership enactment of new principals. This sequence enabled the author to develop a completed picture of how new headship was developed in the Chinese system, with a clear timeline and administrative hierarchies. Much previous research on leadership preparation focused on one aspect of the process, with few connections or interrelationships between and among these elements. For example, some research focused on programme patterns and content only (Black, K, 2007; Grissom et al., 2019; Peterson, 2002). Hallinger and Lu's (2013) work on university-based preparation programmes focused on patterns of programme structure, curriculum content, and learning approaches, without consideration of how these programmes impacted on principals' leadership practice after being posted. In contrast, the present author's research provides a comprehensive picture of the preparation process, from several different approaches and perspectives (Hallinger & Lu, 2013).

### Theoretical significance

#### *The model*

At the beginning of the research, the author developed a model (see Figure 10.2), to

explain the research design, as well as to illustrate the relationships among the different phases of the preparation process. This model was generated through examination of literature and Chinese policy documents on principal preparation and recruitment. The design of the study was based on this model, focusing on the links between stages. Following the research, the author found that the model remains helpful in interpreting the findings of the field study, covering the different elements of the preparation process.



*Figure 10.2: The research model*

This model is helpful for three reasons. First, it shows three aspects of leadership preparation in this centralised system; standards and qualifications, the preparation process, and the selection of new principals. Second, the model demonstrates the relationships between and among these different aspects, and how they influence each other. Third, this model indicates that leadership preparation is a dynamic and comprehensive process influenced by different variables.

#### *Leadership preparation as a comprehensive process*

Most current research focuses on ‘one-way’ relationships between two or more issues (Cliffe et al., 2018; Drago-Severson et al., 2008; Wilson & Xue, 2013), while few explored multiple relationships, or regarded principal preparation as a dynamic cycle. For example, Xue and Wilson’s work (2013), on Chinese new principal

preparation in Fujian province, explored the post-hoc relationship between two issues, namely leadership learning and leadership practice, and also investigated the linkages between them. Liu et al's (2017) work focused only on the Standards for principalship, and made comparisons with the ISLLC (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Standards 2008) without linking these policy documents to preparation practice. These authors also ignored how government intentions and social expectations shaped the process of leadership development and leadership enactment in schools, a significant feature of centralised systems.

The present author's research model guided the study, with a complete cycle, and also included many people who were heavily involved in the process, as administrative power and the centralised system brought them together. This timeline also illustrates the post-hoc relationship among these processes, enabling the author to build an overall picture of principal preparation in China, in terms of selection, preparation, implementation, evaluation, supervision and further development.

#### *Localisation of leadership development*

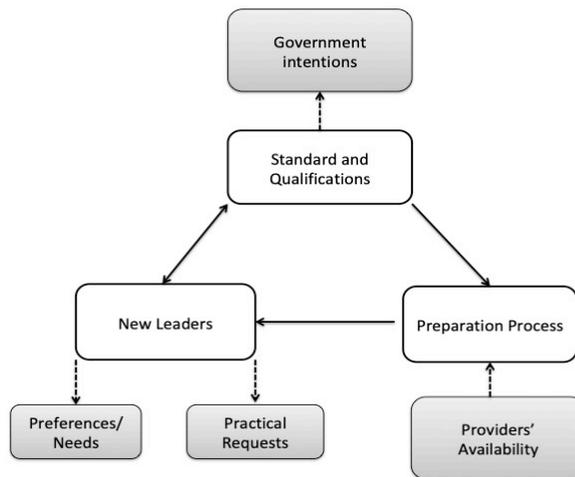
Much Chinese literature on principal leadership is prescriptive, focused on telling principals how to be successful, especially in the present reform environment (Yang, 2007; Yuan, 2002). For example, R. Zhou (2015) listed 13 leadership qualities principals needed to implement curriculum reform (Zhou, 2015). Other research promotes 'ideal' leadership styles or models, most of which were imported from the West (Tu, 2014). They were generally presented without contextualisation and were mostly normative sterile lists of things principals 'should do', without any localisation. Much of this research also indicates that leadership preparation and development should follow the essence of Western definitions for successful principalship, and refer to the Western way of principals' professional training (Zhang & Hu, 2018; Zhang et al., 2008). In contrast, the present study discusses the active role of

principals, and the localisation of the Standards, during the whole process, as illustrated in the research model (see figure 10.2).

The double-sided arrows demonstrated that both the preparation programmes and the evaluation standards should be established based on the practical circumstances of the principals. The principals also wanted the authorities to evaluate the effectiveness of the programmes, as well as the practical value of the Standards and government policies. Instead of the inactive roles of ‘accepting everything’, shown by local government and universities, this research encourages the principals to express their positions and requests in when developing themselves as a professional school leader, and advocates that principals’ perspectives are significant for quality principal development, as well as school education innovation.

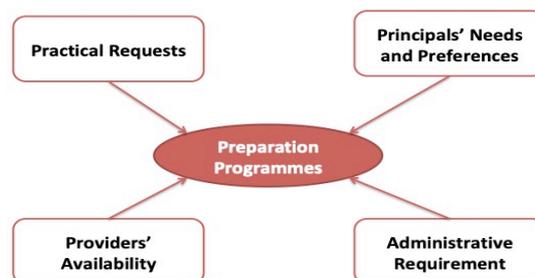
*A dynamic process: expectations, requirements and reality*

Unlike Chinese literature, a number of western studies on principal training programmes focus on the demands or preferences of principals themselves (Ng & Szeto, 2016; Zhang & Brundrett, 2010). Some researchers connect the expected outcomes of the development programmes to the growth of principals’ leadership skills and knowledge (Bush & Jackson, 2002). While Walker and Dimmock are concerned, leadership learning refers to ‘the processes, contexts and mechanisms within particular courses or programmes’ (p.126). In previous chapters, the author pointed out that, in centralised systems, leadership preparation is impacted by different levels of administrative organisations, as well as the qualities and availabilities of local professionals. Figure 10.3 shows how the research model could be modified by the contextual factors that impact on the design and delivery of leadership preparation.



*Figure 10.3 Factors that impact on leadership preparation*

The present research shows that the leadership preparation process comprises four important components: administrative requirements, principals’ preferences and needs, providers’ capacities, and practical demands (see figure 10.3). These four components work together to explain how they shape new leadership preparation and development in China (see figure 10.4).



*Figure 10.4: Four components of leadership preparation*

Although these four components impact together on the leadership preparation process, they have differential significance. First, principals’ needs and practical requirements should be considered as the priorities, as the role of the principal is crucial to school improvement (Hart & Weindling, 1996; Qian et al., 2016). It is also

important to define the position and function of the government during the preparation process, to explore how to adapt the high-quality training resources to local educational needs. More importantly, programme providers should provide more accesses to training resources and opportunities, and help the principals to select suitable opportunities to fulfill their professional preparation and to contextualize the early stage of their principalship. Overall, leadership preparation is seen to be a comprehensive and complicated process shaped by different variables, which should take into account principals' needs and demands, and customise the preparation programmes.

### **Limitation of the study**

Although the study demonstrated a broad and comprehensive picture on leadership preparation in China, from administrative perspectives, providers' perspectives, participants' perspectives and teachers' perspectives, the author still found its limitation in terms of geographic settings, selection of schools and the longtivy of the study. First of all, as China is one of the largest countries in the world which consistute of 32 province and two special administrative districts, this study was located in a Southwest province in China, which is one of the least developed area in China. So that its geographic, economic and social background could hardly represent the average or overall condition nationwide, as the quality of preparation process is closely connected to local financial status and the professional support that provided by local universities, faculties and organisations.

Henceforward, the author only focused on the preparation process of high school principals in China, while high school leadership was largely different from that of primary schools and middle schools in China in many different aspects, including its educational goals, working focuses, and administrative responsibilities. Thus, this study cannot provide a broad spectrum on leadership preparation in China throughout all the stages in fundenmetal educational stages. And also, this study

only focused on how high school leaders are prepared in public educational system, which fails to further investigate on how new leaders are selected and prepared in private schools.

Finally, some international literature indicated that leadership preparation was an 'ongoing process' (Duke,1987:261), which started from teacher leadership and throughout the novice years of the new principals (one to three years). For this particular study, due to the limitation in duration and numbers of researchers, the author could only focus on the administrative process of preparation, which was consisted of preparation programme, selection and recruitment, and the socialisation of some new principals. The study could hardly draw a broad picture on how to raise a qualified principal in China through such a a long duration.

### **Implications of the Study**

Leadership preparation and management in China can be regarded as quite 'centralised', as conceptions such as compulsory, obligation, Party intentions and 'performance-oriented' evaluation, are filtered into every corner of the process. It is also implemented in a typical Chinese way, influenced by Confucious's ideas profoundly, such as top-down management, 'official standards', harmony, humanity, and humble leadership. The author found that it is necessity for the principal training market to be more open and professional to support the development of principals through different career stages. The government should welcome more professional organizations and people into this market, including public faculties or private institutions. Principals should also be allowed more freedom in choosing the programmes they really need. The following implications are based on the data, and on analysis of current Chinese studies, as well as experience from other countries and areas:

1. Professionalisation of principals;
2. Re-defining the role of government;
3. A more comprehensive training and development system for principals;

### Professionalisation of principals

#### *Selecting professional principals*

The role of principal is also increasingly complex, particularly in terms of accountability expectations for student achievement and school improvement (Catano & Stronge, 2012). It can be regarded as a specialist vocation, as well as a professional position, which needs trained people to adapt to its roles and requirements. However, the priority for principals in China is to be a member of the Party, or more precisely, a leader of a Party unit. This is particularly true at high school level, as every public high school is an important Party unit. Thus, the selection of principals is strongly influenced by 'Party' considerations. This leads to principals' surprise and reluctance after being posted, and also makes principals feel passive about their personal career development.

One implication of the author's research is that the selection of principals and principal candidates should alter from being 'the cadre for the Party' to 'the leaders for the school', based on the professional capacities of the principals, as well as how these principals could meet the requirements of particular school contexts. The procedure should also be more professional and formal, with full consideration of principals' willingness, competence and adaptability to the new environments.

### *Establishing specific standards for the evaluation of principals*

In the sample province, principals are evaluated and promoted through the teachers' development and promotion system, and most of the principals have already reached the highest levels as a teacher. In their words, they already stood 'at the end of the road' (P-C). As a result, most of the principals were uncertain about their future career development and connected their personal development tightly to their current school's future improvement, and to some specific school targets. Few principals had clear and strategic plans for their career development, even though most of them were still very young -- in their thirties or forties.

However, the evaluation of principals cannot easily fit the teachers' ranking system. The job of a principal is professional, specialist, complex and demanding, and very different from teachers' work, so it would be sensible for the sample province to develop a comprehensive system to select, supervise, evaluate and promote principals. Like the teachers' development system, this should also provide guidelines and standards, to help in professionalizing Chinese principals.

### Re-define the role of government (LEA)

#### *Supervision, rather than control*

In centralized systems, the government is able to act as 'the powerful hand' to guarantee the stability and coherence of the preparation system. The author found strong government control in programme format and budget, but little impact on the supervision and evaluation of the preparation programmes. These regulations on funding and lecturers made programme implementers unable to hire the lecturers based on their willingness or on principals' needs. This meant that programmes were 'lecturer-based' rather than 'participant-based'. Instead of learning what the

participants need, they learned what the lecturers could offer.

The government appeared to disregard the purpose of principal preparation. They allocated programmes to different providers (public organisations), with no evaluation, supervision or follow-up support, after the bidding or application process, and no monitoring, or feedback, about these programmes. The government maintained tight control of the choices of programme delivery organisations (with very limited choices), the allocation of funding, and the outline curriculum. However, they did not monitor, supervise or evaluate the programme, or examine feedback from programme participants. The implication is that bureaucratic control of educational training should be reduced, and that the needs of schools and principals should be central to programme development.

#### *Setting 'the tone', rather than setting rules*

The government should set the 'tone' of preparation programmes, and this 'tone' includes standardisation, which could be the guideline for principal preparation. It is the government's obligation to supervise and assess the quality of these programmes. However, these judgments should be based on a set of stable and fair evaluation standards, generated from the literature, policy requirements and practical demands.

The programme provider in this study has been offering preparation programmes for new principals over the last four years (from 2014 to 2018) and delivered more than ten training programmes for new high school leaders during this period, as a monopoly provider in this market. However, the training lacks flexibility, and has been shown to be ineffective. The LEA should establish an evaluation system to investigate feedback from participants, to inform further development of principal preparation programmes.

The evaluation and feedback might also help to filter out ineffective lecturers, courses and providers. It could also allow the LEA to moderate development strategies for new principals; training and development programmes. In order to promote the vitality of the training market, the government should invite more organisations to apply for the delivery of the programmes, to enhance programme quality.

#### *Providing personal choices, rather than uniform action*

As noted above, the current principals' training system is largely a monopoly, with limited supervision. In this circumstance, the government should act like an effective 'middleman', to optimize the efficiency of the programme. Instead of providing uniform programmes, the government should also invite principals to select their programme, within the limits of budgets, time duration and frequency. Finally, through feedback from the principals, the government could further evaluate and supervise the quality of these providing organisations, and make decisions about their future participation.

This approach could change the passive roles of the government and principals, provide supervision and assessment of those programme-providing organisations, and eliminate monopolies. This could also enhance justice, opportunity, quality and efficiency for principals' professional development. The ultimate goal of such changes is to provide high quality training to assist the professional development of principals, and the sustainable development of their schools.

#### A more comprehensive training and development system for principals

Luckcock (2007) argues that secondary principals are expected to engage in continuous, targeted and formalised professional development because they require

an increasingly diverse range of knowledge and skills (Luckcock, 2007). In this study, the author observed that both principals' demands and leadership reality require substantial and coherent professional support for new principals before and after being posted.

### *Continuity and coherence*

The author's model indicates that the Standard could have a direct impact on both the preparation process and leadership practice, and also suggests that the preparation process could have a direct impact on principal selection and leadership practice, as in a centralized system, these policies, regulations, certificates and processes should be compulsory for every principal. However, the results show that there were no direct or obvious linkages between or among these three issues, the Standard, the preparation process and leadership practice. This lack of connection may have contributed to the preparation process being such a partial and unsystematic process, with limited impact on principals' leadership practice.

First, the preparation programme should be designed and implemented in an integral manner. Instead of 'assorting' courses or approaches together, the programme should be designed with certain key principles, in order to ensure quality and stability. Developing coherent alternatives should improve the quality of preparation programmes.

Second, the principal development system should be integrated as a whole, which means that different training programmes for principals should keep that coherence for all career stages. In current study, these programmes, including certificate training (for new and aspiring principals), advanced training programmes (for principals who had been on the position for over three years), and successful principal projects (for successful and 'famous' principals), were operated separately, with no connections between them. As a result, there was no linkage or upgrade in

terms of principals' knowledge construction and managerial skills during different career stages, and some lectures and courses were repeated.

Third, the principal management system should be incorporated and connected with the principals' development department, to ensure that training, selection, development, and evaluation, of principals operate to the same standards. This is the way to provide a fair, healthy and robust environment for principals to develop. According to this research, principal management, principal training and principal selection were controlled by three different organizations, which do not co-operate to boost principal development. There was also no communication between them during the preparation process.

#### *From workshops to workplaces*

Although the three-week preparation programme included a variety of delivery approaches, a number of participants claimed that these skills and knowledge could hardly be applied in their school contexts. They called for more context-based learning, based on their own school contexts, rather than studying in high performing or 'famous schools'. This relates to the assumption that leadership happens in context, therefore it should be learned considering the particular setting and needs of each school and the characteristics of each school leader (Kelly & Saunders, 2010; Mertkan, 2011).

First, some principals suggested that, instead of learning what happened in those successful and high performing schools, they should like to address issues in their own schools. They hope that the professional experts and successful practitioners could come to their schools to help them 'diagnose' school problems, and to assist them to set the direction and strategic plans for school development. In contrast to professional preparation training programmes, which are focused on inculcating a conception of the role for newcomers, context-based learning has a focus on making

these newcomers effective organisational members.

Second, the principals suggested that principal training programmes could be provided for the school management team (SMT), which would broaden provision beyond the principal. This implication relates to transformational leadership and distributed leadership, which suggests that school leadership should be shared with other members of the school. This is particularly important for new headship in China as, in this research, a large number of principals stated that they were eager for assistance from their staff in the new context, and were reluctant to ask for help, even though they were principals. Through team training opportunities, the new leaders could have a chance to become familiar with the SMT, as well as to engage and energize these members in pursuit of achieving the school vision together.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

The present study shows that the professionalisation of principals in China is a dynamic and comprehensive system, which requires continuous support and individual design for each principal. However, the current principals' developmental system in China does not support the professional improvement of principals throughout their career life. Future research should focus on professional training and development for principals throughout their whole career, including:

#### *1. Career stages of principals*

Weindling (1999) shows the importance of 'stages of headship' (Weindling, 1999), while scholars further stress the significance of socialization (T Browne-Ferrigno, 2003a), and Daresh (2006) discusses 'culture shock', to express the experiences of principals after they have been posted. In the present research, principals were regarded as school administrators and representatives of the Party Organisation,

which influenced how principalship was conceptualized. Defining the career stages of principals could help new principals to better prepare for their upcoming positions, and also provided a rationale for more specific and effective training opportunities for principals at various stages.

## *2. Professionalisation of principals through professional standards*

The present research examined current Chinese policies and standards to assess whether these principles apply to the reality of school leadership in China. The findings indicate that these standards should be reviewed and modified to facilitate the professionalisation of principals after being posted. International literature shows that principal is a 'professional' position which requires special knowledge and skills to lead school improvement and student growth (Dinham et al., 2013; Kruger & Johnson, 2011). It is worth exploring how to define 'professional' or 'high-performing' principals in the Chinese context in future studies, as well as to examine how principals become 'professional' and 'high-performing' through training and development throughout their careers.

Linked to this, the author also found that there is no explicit evaluation and promotion system for principals in China. Consequently, the absence of principal's evaluation and promotion system demonstrated a negative impact on principals and teachers' willingness and passion towards the leadership position. Hence, the author also discovered that this absence further impacts on principals' continued development after being posted. A principal development system should relate to standards, with substantial support and feasible evaluations. Thus, future research should address how to estimate, reward and promote principals according to their job characteristics and workload, and provide advice to government and programme implementers, in order to deliver a fair, encouraging and healthy environment for principals to develop.

### *3. Research outside the province*

The present research, and international literature (Cheung & Walker, 2006; Hallinger, 2018), shows the importance of contextual factors, at various stages of leadership preparation, while principal management also varies across provinces, in terms of culture, financial status, administrative intentions, access for training, and the principal selection process. The present study focused on one province, one of the least developed areas in China. It would be valuable to extend the research into other provinces and cities in China, including both developed and developing areas, to build a more complete picture of this issue, as well as to make cross-province comparisons, to further explore how contextual factors impact at provincial level. This could assist both local government and professional organisations to localise 'Standards and Qualifications for Headship in China', as well as other national documents, to facilitate the growth of principals.

## **Overview**

The author's model has been applied throughout the final chapter. It guides the creation of research questions, informs the presentation of findings, and forms part of the analysis and implications. The author addressed the six research questions linked to the model, including the qualifications and standards for Chinese headship, the preparation process for new heads, and the leadership enactment of the new principals, as well as the linkages between and among them. These answers were gathered from the five finding chapters which, collectively, provide rich methodological and respondent triangulation about how new principals are prepared in China.

The author also explained the contribution of the research in respect of context, methods and theory. First, this research has great contextual significance, as there has been little empirical research on leadership preparation in China. It also

contributes to the limited research on principal preparation in centralised systems, and in developing contexts. Second, the sequential design of the research illustrates the causal relationships and linkages between each stage of the process. Third, the application of the model provides a holistic perspective on leadership preparation, and the originality of the model also offers a new approach to conceptualizing and researching principal preparation.

There are three main implications from the study for principal preparation and principal training; the importance of standardisation, professionalization, and the coherence of the preparation process. Standardisation refers to having a fair, effective and open system for every principal to develop at different career stages. Professionalisation requires prioritizing educational needs and student performance, when selecting, training and recruiting principals, to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills required to lead the school effectively. It also requires the government or LEA to supervise and evaluate principals or schools using professional criteria. Preparation programmes also require coherence, so that principal development is a comprehensive and dynamic process, requiring cooperation and interaction between and among the different responsible organisations.

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## **APPENDIX ONE: QUESTIONNAIRE**

### **Background Information**

**Gender** : Male/Female

**Age**

A. 30 and below; B. 31-40; C. 41-50; D. 51-60 ; E. 61 and above<sup>22</sup>.

**Highest Educational Background**

A. High School; B. College; C. Bachelor; D. Postgraduate and above

**Job title<sup>23</sup>:**

A. Superior Primary Teacher; B. Advanced Primary Teacher;

C. Level-One Primary Teacher; D. Level- Two Primary Teacher;

E. Level-Three Primary Teacher.

**Previous Experience (Please fill in the blank that applied):**

Position	Duration
Course Leader	
Grade Team Leader	
Pioneer Deputy	
Moral Manager	
Principal Assistant	
Deputy Principal	

**Are you a Party member?**

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<sup>22</sup> I add another choice here. In China, the legal retirement age for women is 55, and for men is 60, it may be quite strict in public schools. However, in private schools, the committee MAY like to hire some excellent principals or experts who have already retired.

<sup>23</sup> In China, there exists this kind of job title/positional title for teachers. It does not link to their positions in schools, but it demonstrates their professional capacity, and influences the salary. It is quite similar to professor/associated professor/lecturer. In primary schools, there are five levels, namely (from higher to lower), superior/advanced/level one/level two/level three.



B. Professors from universities and other organizations.

C. Experienced practitioners.

D. Others; please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

4. What kind of lecturers do you prefer the most? (Tick one)

A. Officials from government.

B. Professors from universities and other organizations.

C. Experienced practitioners.

D. Others; please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

5. What kind of knowledge content is most beneficial for your current work?  
(Tick one)

A. Legal and policy analysis;

B. Basic educational theories;

C. School management skills;

D. Instructional leadership ability.

6. What kind of career experience benefits your current leadership practice  
the most? (Tick one)

A. Teacher;

B. Instructional leader (Course leader);

C. Management role (Grade leader, Moral leader)

D. Principal assistant/deputy principal

### **Leadership Enactment**

7. I am clear about the qualifications and standards for principals.

A. Strongly Disagree; B. Disagree; C. Agree; D. Strongly agree

8. I regard myself as a qualified principal.

A. Strongly Disagree; B. Disagree; C. Agree; D. Strongly agree

9. Preparation programmes make me more competitive when competing for principal roles.

A. Strongly Disagree; B. Disagree; C. Agree; D. Strongly agree

10. Preparation programmes are beneficial for my leadership enactment in school .

A. Strongly Disagree; B. Disagree; C. Agree; D. Strongly agree

11. I feel that I am ready for the principal position.

A. Strongly Disagree; B. Disagree; C. Agree; D. Strongly agree

12. I know how to tackle any potential issues or problems in my school.

A. Strongly Disagree; B. Disagree; C. Agree; D. Strongly agree

13. I am familiar with the school context.

A. Strongly Disagree; B. Disagree; C. Agree; D. Strongly agree

### **Open-Ended Questions**

14. What are the most beneficial aspects of the preparation programmes?

15. What are the least beneficial aspects of the preparation programmes?

## APPENDIX TWO: INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

### Interview for Principals

#### **Understanding of principalship**

How do you define a successful principal in China?

What are the most important parts of your role as principal?

#### **Preparation Process**

Do you think that principal preparation programmes are necessary for principals before they take up the position? Why?

- As well as the preparation programmes, are there any other approaches that may help principals to prepare for their leadership positions?

Which delivery approach during the programmes you think is the most beneficial for your fieldwork?

- Why?

Which delivery approach during the programmes you think is the least beneficial for your fieldwork?

- Why?

Was the frequency and duration of the training courses is sufficient to prepare you to become a principal?

- How many training programmes you have participated after you have been chosen to be principal candidates?

- What about previous years?
- Who are the providers?

What kind of training programmes (methods) you would like to participate for ongoing professional development in the future?

- Why?

### **Leadership Recruitment and Selection**

What was your career path before becoming a principal?

What procedures were required before you became a principal?

- How long do they take?
- Which of these procedures are most important?

### **Leadership Enactment**

To what extent, do you feel that you are ready for the principal role when you first appointed?

Which aspects of the principal role is most rewarding?

- Why?

What kind of difficulties you are experiencing (have experienced) as a new leader?

- How you are going to tackle these difficulties?
- Who you could (would like to) turn for help?

## Interview for Provincial-level Supervisor

### **Understanding of Principalship**

How you define the principalship in China?

- What attributes are most important for Chinese principals?
- What kind of contribution you are expecting from current principals, in terms of school effectiveness and student performance?

Do you think that current principalship qualifications and standards meet the requirements for school development and improved student outcomes?

- If yes, how do they address current school challenges?
- If not, what is from the qualifications and standards?

How are local regulations connected to the national policies?

- How do contextual factors influence regulation making?
- Based on the local context, are there any specific regulations that have been made?
- Once the local regulations have been made, how the focus and targets of these documents are transferred to the city and district level administrations? And, after this transportation, how the provincial administration supervises the procedure and practice of these documents?

## **Preparation Process**

What is your role when preparing new school leaders?

- How do you communicate and collaborate with other levels of administrations, particularly the municipal and district levels?
- How does the provincial administration evaluate and monitor the progress and outcomes of the preparation process?

## **Selection and Recruitment**

How principal candidates are selected?

- How is the selection procedure?
- What are the qualification and standards when selecting principal candidates?
- Are there any difficulties when shaping the talent pool?
- Do you think that current talent pool is well enough to bring potential and qualified principals for the future? Why?

What factors impact on the selection and recruitment of principals?

- Which of these is most important and why? Are there any difficulties when selecting and recruiting principals?
- If so, what are they?

How do the districts assess the principals for 'principal certificates'?

- How effective are these approaches?

How important are 'principal certificates' when selecting a principal?

### **Leadership Enactment**

Do you think that current principals meet the standards and qualifications for headship?

- If they cannot, what parts are missing?

How would you define a successful principal in China?

## Interview for Programme Designer and Coordinators

### **Understanding of Principalship**

How you define the principalship in China?

- What attributes are most important for Chinese principals?
- What kind of contribution you are expecting from current principals to their school development, in terms of school effectiveness and student performance?

### **Preparation Process**

What is your role when preparing new school leaders?

- How do you communicate and collaborate with other levels of administrations?

How are principal preparation programmes designed, delivered and evaluated under the umbrella of the *'National Standards and Qualifications for Headship'*?

- Which aspects are emphasized (underestimated) in the design of these programmes?
- Which aspects are underestimated in the design of these programmes?
- How you allocate time and resources on each aspect of the programmes?

What criteria are used when you choose a programme provider?

- What are the biggest challenges when organizing a programme?

- How do you tackle these difficulties?

Are the local universities and other organizations sufficiently qualified to provide the preparation for principals?

- If yes, what are their strengths?
- If not, what alternatives are available?

What are the differences between the urban programmes and the rural programmes?

- What factors cause these differences? How?

### **Selection and Recruitment**

How do programme providers assess the principals for 'principal certificates'?

- How effective are these approaches?

### **Continuing Support**

How, if at all, do you evaluate the effectiveness of the preparation programmes?

- Is professional support offered to the new heads after they take up their positions?
- If so, explain what this is?

Are there any relationships between 'induction training' and 'principal certificate' training?

- If so, how they are connected?
- If not, how do these programmes differ?
- Are there any connections between 'induction training' and 'improving training'?
- If so, how they are connected?

## Interview for Lecturers

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Understanding for principalship in China**

How you define the principalship in China?

- What attributes are most important for Chinese principals?
- What are your expectations of current principals, in terms of school effectiveness and student performance?

### **Pre-session**

When you have been informed to participate in this programme before it starts?

- Whether this duration is long enough for you to prepare for the session?
- Generally, what length of period you think is appropriate for you to prepare for a session in advance?

What kind of information/background you have been provided about this programme?

- Who gave you the information?
- Whether these information are helpful for you to prepare for the session?  
Why?
- How you have prepared for this programme based on these information?
- Usually, what kind of information you may be provided for the principal

training programmes?

- What kind of information/background you think is necessary for the lecturers?

### **Content & delivery**

Will the programme designer/organizer provide some guidance/advices on the content and delivery of your session?

- If so, what are they?
- What about other programme you have participated?
- Do you think, whether these kinds of guidance/advices are beneficial for your preparation for the session? Why?

Will the district administration provide some guidance/advices on the content and delivery of your session?

- If so, what are they?
- What about other programme you have participated?
- Do you think, whether these kinds of guidance/advices are beneficial for your preparation for the session? Why?

For this programme, did you communicate or/and cooperate with other lecturers together? If so,

- Who led the conversation?
- Who you have been communicated to?

- Have you prepared the sessions together?
- How have you cooperated with each other?
- Do you think, whether these kinds of conversations and communications are beneficial for your preparation for the session? Why?

For the design and content of your lecture, is it more theory-based or practice-oriented?

- What are the targets of your session?
- How these targets could be beneficial for these potential and new principals in their professional growth<sup>25</sup>?

#### **After-session**

Will you be informed about the feedbacks of the participants about your session?

If so,

- How is the feedback of your session?
- Usually, they will reflect to you in what kind of approach?
- Which approach do you prefer?
- Do you think, is it necessary to know the feedbacks of the participants? Why?

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<sup>25</sup> For the last version, I used 'field work' instead of 'professional growth'. I agree that 'field work' may be too unclear and blur for the lecturers to answer, and some of the participants are potential principals, who have not get their position.

## **Interview outline for senior and middle leaders in mini-case schools**

How long have you been working at the school?

- How many different principals have there been in the schools during this period?
- Who is the most impressive/influential one? Why?
- What are the main differences between the new head and the previous one?

Can you describe the leadership style of the new principal?

- Can you give an example to explain that?

What changes, if any, have occurred since the new principal took up the role?

- Organization structure
- School culture
- Management approaches
- Instructional leadership
- Other

What do you understand as the vision of the school?

- How does your principal communicate these visions with the staff?

- What kind of decisions about school development the principal would like to discuss with the staff, and make the decisions together?
- How were these decisions made?

How the principal communicates with the teacher?

- In what kind of circumstances, you will communicate with him/her?
- Generally, does the communication work? How? Why?

What is the role of your principal in teaching and learning at the school?

- Which part of teaching and learning (before/during/after) the principal will participate in?

How the principal get involved? In what kind of approaches?

- How the principal monitor/supervise the progress and quality of teaching?
- How the principal monitor the student's outcomes?

How, if at all, has the principal helped you to become a better teacher?

## APPENDIX THREE: CONSENT AGREEMENT

Dear Principals (participants):

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Doctoral degree in the Faculty of Arts and Social Science at the University of Nottingham. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

There is a widespread belief that the quality of leadership makes a significant difference to school and student performance, which emphasizes the role of principals in raising the quality of general education. Moreover, empirical evidence also demonstrates that leadership preparation could make a difference to leadership enactment and leadership practice of new school leaders. This is reflected in a growing interest in, and emphasis on, training for the nation's new principals. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore how new principals are prepared in China.

In order to provide a comprehensive picture of the issue, this study will involve different groups of people who relate to the issue, namely, new and aspiring principals, programme providers and district supervisors. Therefore, I would like to include your case as one of several samples to be involved in my study. I believe that, because of your particular role and career stage, you are best suited to speak about the various issues, such as the preparation process, leadership enactment and principal socialization.

Participation in this study is voluntary. It involves a questionnaire of 3 pages, which may take you approximately 10 to 15 minutes to finish. You can answer the questions by following the guidance on the form.

Thanks for your cooperation and your contribution to the study will be very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Xue Shan

## APPENDIX FOUR: ETHICAL APPROVAL



### Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Research Ethics Policy

All research conducted by staff and PGR students must have ethical approval. This requires the submission of one of four types of application listed below.

#### **Level A Non-participant contact studies.**

Any studies which do not involve contact with any participants, such as surveys of published information or analysis of information in the public domain require level A approval. These applications will be reviewed by one member of the research ethics committee and approval will be given by e-mail.

#### **Level B Participant contact studies**

Any studies which involve contact between the researcher and participants will require level B (or above) approval. Level B studies include the use of surveys, questionnaires, interviews, collation of personal data and on-line data collection. Applicants should fill in the checklist below and all applications must be signed before submission. The submission should also include:

- Study protocol. This should provide sufficient information for the reviewer to understand the purpose of the study and what will be done (between 500-1000 words).
- Information given to participants or organisations e.g. information sheet, invitation letter, advertisements (on headed paper with date and version number). These must include contact details for participants to ask for further information or to raise questions about the conduct of the research. For student projects, both the student and supervisor's contact details should be included. This should be retained by the participant or organisation.
- Consent form (with date and version number). This should be on a separate page from the information sheet, so that it can be retained by the participant.
- Data collection details e.g. copies of interview schedules, questionnaires, survey forms.

FASS Ethics version 14/08/13

Any research involving visiting participants in their own homes should follow the University of Nottingham Health and Safety Arrangements for Lone Working <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/safety/docs/lone-working.doc>

Applications will be reviewed and approved by two members of the Ethics Committee.

### **Level C High Risk Studies**

Any studies that pose a high risk of producing distress, or that present a high risk, including health and safety, to either participants or researchers, will be subject to review by thorough review by 3 reviewers. These include research including vulnerable populations, research of a medical or clinical nature, intervention research which may pose a high risk to participants.

### **Research Codes of Conduct and Ethical Principles for reference:**

University of Nottingham Research Code of Conduct:  
[http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/ris/local/research-strategy-and-policy/code\\_of\\_conduct.pdf](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/ris/local/research-strategy-and-policy/code_of_conduct.pdf)

British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct:  
[http://www.bps.org.uk/the-society/code-of-conduct/code-of-conduct\\_home.cfm](http://www.bps.org.uk/the-society/code-of-conduct/code-of-conduct_home.cfm).

ESRC Research Ethics Framework  
[http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/ESRC\\_Re\\_Ethics\\_Frame\\_tcm6-11291.pdf](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/ESRC_Re_Ethics_Frame_tcm6-11291.pdf)

Any medical research should comply with the Helsinki declaration:  
<http://www.wma.net/e/policy/pdf/17c.pdf>

Any research using the Internet, should adhere to the BPS guidelines on conducting Internet research:  
[http://www.bps.org.uk/downloadfile.cfm?file\\_uuid=2B3429B3-1143-DFD0-7E5A-4BE3FDD763CC&ext=pdf](http://www.bps.org.uk/downloadfile.cfm?file_uuid=2B3429B3-1143-DFD0-7E5A-4BE3FDD763CC&ext=pdf)

All data must be retained for a period of not less than seven years. Any significant change in the question, design or conduct over the course of the research should be notified to the FASS Research Ethics Committee, who may require a new application for ethics approval.

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All submissions should be submitted electronically in ONE complete word or pdf file (which includes the checklist, protocol and any supplementary material) to the [FASSResearchEthics@nottingham.edu.my](mailto:FASSResearchEthics@nottingham.edu.my).

Once approved, you should keep a copy of the form and your approval letter.

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## Research Ethics Checklist

### Section I: Project details

1. Project title:	PhD thesis on how new principals are prepared in China
Level of approval required	B

### Section II: Applicant details

2. Name:	Xue Shan
3. Status: (delete as appropriate)	PGR student
4. Email address:	kabx4xsn@nottingham.edu.my

### Section III: For PGR students only

5. Supervisor's name:	Prof. Tony Bush Dr. Maria Kaparou
4. Email address:	Tony.Bush@nottingham.ac.uk Maria. Kaparou@nottingham.edu.my

**Supervisor: Please tick the appropriate boxes below.**

The topic merits further research	<input type="checkbox"/>
The student has the skills to carry out the research	<input type="checkbox"/>
The participant information sheet or leaflet is appropriate (where available)	<input type="checkbox"/>
The procedures for recruiting and obtaining informed consent are appropriate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health and safety procedures are acceptable and all reasonable care has been taken to put procedures in place to protect the participants and the researcher	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Comments from supervisor:**

#### Section IV: Research Checklist

Please answer each question by ringing the appropriate response (please note Y & N are reversed on occasion).

	1	2
1. Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent (eg children, people with learning disabilities, prisoners, your own students)?		N
2. Will the study require the cooperation of a gatekeeper for the initial access to the groups of individuals to be recruited (eg pupils at school, members of a self-help group)?	Y	
3. For research conducted in public, non-governmental and private organisations and institutions (such as schools, charities, companies), will approval be gained in advance from appropriate authorities?	Y	
4. Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time? (eg covert observation of people in non-public places)		N
5. Will the study involve the discussion of sensitive topics (eg sexual activity, drugs)?		N
6. Will participants be asked to discuss anything or take part in any activity that they may find embarrassing or traumatic?		N
7. Is it likely that the study will cause offence to participants for reasons of ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation or culture?		N
8. Are drugs, placebos or other substances (eg food, vitamins) to be administered to study participants or will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures of any kind?		N
9. Will blood or tissue samples be obtained from participants?		N
10. Could the study induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life?		N
11. Will the study involve prolonged or repetitive testing?		N
12. Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?		N
13. Will data be audio or video recorded?	Y	
14. Will written informed consent be obtained?	Y	
15. Will participants be asked permission for quotations from data to be used?	Y	
16. Will participants be informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving explanation?	Y	
17. Will data be anonymised?	Y	
18. Will participants be assured of the confidentiality of the data?	Y	
19. Will the data be stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998)?*	Y	
20. Does the proposed study present any risk to the researcher(s)		N

If you answered in Column 1 to any of the questions in Section IV, you will need to ensure that any ethical issues raised are covered in your research protocol and that additional information in relation to the question is provided. Please ensure that any health and safety issues are covered by risk assessment and written protocol.

\* <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1998/19980029.htm>

### Section V: Agreement

<b>Staff - Principal Investigator</b>	
I confirm that I have read this document and will comply with the Research Codes of Conduct and ethical principles listed above	
I confirm that I will ensure that the research is carried out as described in this submission:	
Signed:	
Date:	

<b>PGR Student</b>	Xue Shan
I confirm that I have read this document and will comply with the Research Codes of Conduct and ethical principles listed above	
I confirm that I will ensure that the research is carried out as described in this submission	
Signed (student):	
Name : (please print)	Xue Shan
Date:	25 September 2015
I confirm that I have read this submission and that I will ensure as far as is reasonably practicable that the student carries out this research as described in this submission and complies with ethical principles and good health and safety practice.	
Signed (Supervisor)	
Date:	

