

## INVESTIGATING LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

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### **Abstract**

Many principals in schools have faced difficulties in implementing leadership practices in the regular education programs. Day and Sammons (2010) stated that effective principal leadership practices can develop guidelines, direct to influence and motivate followers. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the leadership practices of school principals in basic education high schools. It was found that principals' leadership knowledge about psychological resources were related to their leadership practices. This finding showed that supporting and promoting the principals' leadership knowledge about psychological resources can progress the leadership practices of principals.

### **1 Introduction:-**

2 Principals create an environment that provides teachers to improve the strategies in which they  
3 can deliver optimal instruction, then, it can support students and help them to improve their  
4 academic performance. Therefore, principal leadership practices in schools play the major role of  
5 achieving the growth of the pedagogical system and focus on teachers' professional  
6 development, as teachers are mostly considered to be the most important element in the  
7 education process (Leithwood, 1994). Therefore, quality and qualification of principals are  
8 significant in the development of education.

### **9 Significance of the Study**

10 Today, many principals in schools have faced challenges in leading and managing school  
11 developing curriculum instruction, implementing school discipline and relating with teachers and  
12 other stakeholders. These significantly showed that principals need to have a strong theoretical  
13 knowledge and adequate experiences in their leadership practices. Moreover, they need to have a  
14 profile of possession of various trainings on school leadership so as to play active and effective  
15 leadership practices in school improvement programs. Day and Sammons (2010) stated that  
16 effective principal leadership practices can develop guidelines, direct to influence and motivate  
17 followers. For these reasons, principals need to understand how to provide the opportunities and  
18 chances to teachers, and to understand their role in performing the education process.

### **19 Objectives of the Study**

20 The objectives of the study are:

- 21 (1) to examine the levels of principals' leadership knowledge,
- 22 (2) to find out the levels of principal leadership practices, and
- 23 (3) to investigate the relationship between principals' leadership knowledge and their
- 24 leadership practices,

### 25 **Research Questions**

- 26 (1) What are the levels of principals' leadership knowledge?
- 27 (2) What are the levels of principal leadership practices?
- 28 (3) What is the relationship between principals' leadership knowledge and their leadership
- 29 practices?

### 30 **Limitations of the Study**

31 This study is geographically limited to Mandalay City Development Area (MCDA). The  
32 findings of this study are generalizable to Basic Education High Schools in MCDA. Participants  
33 of this study are principals from Basic Education High Schools in MCDA. In this study,  
34 principal leadership knowledge is examined by using three types of principal leadership  
35 knowledge about personal resources such as principal leadership knowledge about cognitive  
36 resources, principal leadership knowledge about social resources and principal leadership  
37 knowledge about psychological resources developed by Leithwood (2012). Principal leadership  
38 practices were analyzed by using five dimensions: setting directions, building relationships and  
39 developing people, developing the organization to support desired practices, improving the  
40 instructional programs, and securing accountability based on Belchetz and Leithwood (2007),  
41 Louis et al. (2010), and Leithwood (2012).

### 42 **Definition of Key Terms**

#### 43 ***Principal Leadership Practices***

44 Principal leadership practices are defined as the initiatives or actions utilized by  
45 principals with the aim of formulating and performing essential features of a school, that can  
46 consequently distribute to the positive results expected by schools (Hallinger & Heck, 1998).

#### 47 ***Principals' Leadership Knowledge***

48 Principal leadership knowledge is the quality to enact their leadership practices that  
49 provide instructional programs and the well development of schools (Thompson, 2020).

### 50 **Operational Definition**

51 Principals, principals' leadership knowledge, and principal leadership practices are  
52 measured by using the following operational definitions.

### 53 ***Principals***

54 Principals refer to legally assigned as the chief official in Basic Education High Schools  
55 who are responsible and accountable for managing resources and instructional activities, and for  
56 planning and improving the school.

### 57 ***Principals' Leadership Knowledge***

58 Principals' leadership knowledge refers to the knowledge resources of principals that  
59 they possess which can enact effective leadership practices.

### 60 ***Principals' Leadership Practices***

61 Principal leadership practices refer to the practices of principals in schools in order to  
62 promote the educational settings of the schools. Perceived principal leadership practices will be  
63 examined by the mean values. The higher the mean values, the greater the level of principals'  
64 leadership practices.

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## 68 **Review of Related Literature**

### 69 ***Leadership***

70 The study of leadership originated from the basic concept in which leadership is a  
71 characteristic ability of extraordinary individuals (McCleskey, 2014). Since leaders are more than  
72 normal persons, they can articulate a dream and motivate others. Additionally, their influence is  
73 indicating the behaviour that they are trying to institutionalize. They elicit trust in teachers and  
74 students by their openness to receive input from their followers (Begley, 2001).

75 According to Lashway (1999), leadership is the set of behaviours used for the ways of  
76 decisions are made through the use of power and interaction with followers. Naiker and Waddy  
77 (2002) defined leadership as the process of influencing group activities, setting goals and  
78 achieving these goals. They expressed leadership as a design of persuasion, a process of  
79 influencing power, a way of inducing compliance, a way of performing, and a negotiation of  
80 community relations.

### 81 ***Historical Overview of Principal Leadership***

82           The position of principal began in the 1890s when school improvement plan was  
83 proposed incorporating in professional leadership (Le Clear, 2005). Until the early 1920s, the  
84 official recognition of the position of principals did not take place in education association.  
85 However, principals were viewed as being held accountable to society because of the public  
86 acknowledgment. During this time, principals were heavily influenced by religious beliefs and  
87 scientific management and thus they were also considered as being central leaders of the  
88 community (Beck & Murphy, 1993).

89           In the 1930s, leadership preparation programs began to depict principals as being middle-  
90 level managers within the organization. Principals became more involved in managing the day-  
91 to-day operations of the school in the 1950s. In addition, they were expected to be advocates for  
92 their teachers. In the 1960s, principals were no longer allowed to lead schools based on their  
93 spiritual beliefs. They were expected to adhere to the directives of their superiors. In the 1970s,  
94 principals were required to focus on more humanistic issues and be able to deal with the  
95 disruptions from the community (Beck & Murphy, 1993).

96           In the 1980s, the principal's role transformed from hierarchical manager to instructional  
97 leader (Schein, 1992). A key emphasis was placed on accountability for student achievement as a  
98 result of the research on effective schools, as well as the publication of a nation at risk in 1983  
99 (Seyfarth, 1999).

100           Since the 1980s, several of the responsibilities of principals associated with being an  
101 instructional leader have continued to be a critical aspect of the principal's job, especially with  
102 the development and implementation of the state and national standards, as well as the  
103 requirement of high-stakes testing. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, principals as transactional  
104 leaders focus on the role of supervision, organization, and group performance of reward and  
105 punishment was developed (Waters et al., 2003). However, in today's rapidly changing and  
106 highly competitive society, the principal's role as being the transformational leader of the school  
107 appears to be adequate in order to ensure the success of today's schools. Principals who serve as  
108 transformation leaders promote interpersonal relations through creating visions, encouraging  
109 commitment from all involved and institutionalizing change (Lewandowski, 2005). They have an  
110 indirect effect on school effectiveness through actions that shape the school improvement  
111 (Hallinger et al., 1996).

### 112 ***Importance of Principal Leadership***

113 Principals lead an important role in determining the direction for successful schools.  
114 Moreover, the quality of the principal's leadership is essential to the positive outcomes of the  
115 school (Lipham, 1981). Peters and Austin (1985) described that principal leadership practices are  
116 a crucial component in improving the organization effectiveness. Principals are leaders who are  
117 able to create a shared vision and build a sense of commitment among staff, students, and parents  
118 (Peterson, 2002). These deep-rooted values and beliefs are reflected through the school's  
119 traditions. Northouse (2004) stated that principal leadership practices are determined by deep  
120 understanding values and beliefs about how people learn.

121 Principals are regarded as main actors to the task of overall school improvement with  
122 significant roles to play in promoting student learning, improving quality in education, and  
123 building and sustaining successful, welcoming, productive schools. Therefore, much of the  
124 literature on school leadership indicates that principals play an important role by exerting their  
125 influence over several factors(Louis et al., 2004).

## 126 **Research Methodology**

### 127 *Research Method*

128 Quantative method research was employed to collect the required data.

### 129 *Population and Sample*

130 By using purposive sampling, 33 principals who were above five years of adminidtrative  
131 servicewere selected as samplefrom Basic Education High Schools in Mandalay City  
132 Development Area. The respondent rate was 100%.

### 133 *Instrumentataion*

134 Questionnaire survey was used in this study. These questionnaires were composed with  
135 three parts: part (A)demographic information of participants, Part (B) investigating principals'  
136 leadership knowledge and part (C)the survey for principal leadership practices. Four-point Likert  
137 scale (1= do not practice at all, 2= practice to some extent, 3= practice to a moderate extent and  
138 4= practice to a great extent) was employed.

139 For the part (B), Leithwood's (2012) three types of principals' leadership knowledge–  
140 cognitive, social and psychological resources were analysed with true-false items.

141 For the part (C), ased on Belchetz and Leithwood (2007), Louis et al (2010) and Leithwood  
142 (2012), the domains of principal leadership practices are summarized as follows(see Table 1).

## 143 **Table 1 Domains of Principal Leadership Practices**

No.	Belchetzand Leithwood (2007)	Louis et al. (2010)	Leithwood (2012)
1	Setting Directions	Setting Directions	Setting Directions
2	Helping People	Developing People	Building Relationships and Developing People
3	Redesigning the Organization	Redesigning the Organization	Developing Organization to Support Desired Practices
4	Managing the Instructional Program	Managing the Instructional Program	Improving the Instructional Program
5			Securing Accountability

Table 1 reveals that principal leadership practices comprise the common domain such as Setting Directions, Building Relationships and Developing People, Developing Organization to Support Desired Practices, Improving the Instructional Program, and Securing Accountability.

#### **Data Analysis**

The collected data were investigated by employing the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 27. In scoring the true-false items, 1 mark was given for one true answer and 0 mark was given for one false answer. The percentage was calculated based on how many marks a participant could obtain out of the total marks. The descriptive analysis, and Pearson product moment correlation were utilized to analyze the data. The mean value from 1.00 to 1.49 was identified as do not practice at all, the mean value from 1.50 to 2.49 was noted as practice to some extent, the mean value from 2.50 to 3.49 was identified as practice to a moderate extent and the mean value from 3.50 to 4.00 was noted as practice to a great extent.

#### **Findings**

##### ***Examining the Levels of Principals' Leadership Knowledge***

Leadership knowledge of principals from selected Basic Education High Schools (N=33) was investigated with 28 true-false items.

**Principals' Leadership Knowledge about Cognitive Resources.** Principals' leadership knowledge about cognitive resources was measured by IPC value. The IPC refers to the percentage of principals who could give the correct answer for each item. The IPC values of principals' leadership knowledge about cognitive resources in true-false items were shown in Table 2.

165 **Table 2IPC Values forPrincipals’ Leadership Knowledge about Cognitive Resources**

No.	Knowledge about Cognitive Resources	No. of Correct Principals	IPC
1	The principal should spend time analyzing the nature of a problem, before seeking a solution. *	32	97.0%
2	The principal prioritizes problem-solving efforts based on impact on student learning only.	22	66.7%
3	The principal should respond to problems according to his/her own values and principles.	21	63.6%
4	The principals should remain calm and confident during the problem-solving process. *	31	93.9%
5	The principal should have knowledge about learning conditions in classroom only.	20	60.6%
6	The principal should be aware of his/her colleagues’ emotions from their behaviour. *	27	81.8%
7	The principal should optimize the organizational conditions (teachers’ working conditions) in determining school structures. *	26	78.8%
8	The principal should understand the influence of family conditions on student learning and implement policies to improve parental involvement. *	29	87.9%
9	The principal confuses with the dense, complex, and reciprocal connections among different elements of the organization.	25	75.8%
10	The principal should foresight to engage the organization in likely futures and consequences for action. *	28	84.8%

166 **Note(\*)= True Item**

167 According to the Table2, the item with thehighest IPC value was the item (1)“*The*  
 168 *principal should spend time analyzing the nature of a problem, before seeking a solution*”and it  
 169 was found that 32 (97.0%) principals could give the correct answer. The item with thelowest IPC  
 170 value was the item (5) “*The principal should have knowledge about learning conditions in the*  
 171 *classroom only*” and it could be noted that 20 (60.6%) principals could give the correct answer.

172 The numbers and percentages of principals according to the principals’ leadership  
 173 knowledge about cognitive resources were revealed in Table 3.

174 **Table 3 Number and Percentages of Principals Showing the Levels of their Leadership**  
 175 **Knowledge about Cognitive Resources**

Variable	No. of Principals	Remark
Principals’ Leadership Knowledge about Cognitive Resources	3 (9.09%)	below satisfactory level
	17 (51.52%)	satisfactory level
	13 (39.39%)	above satisfactory level

176 **Scoring Range: <50% = below satisfactory 50%-74% = satisfactory ≥75% = above satisfactory**

177 In the Table 3, it could be found that 3 (9.09%) principals were below satisfactory level,  
 178 17 (51.52%) principals were satisfactory level, and 13 (39.39%) principals were above  
 179 satisfactory level.

180 **Principals’ Leadership Knowledge about Social Resources.** The IPC values for  
 181 principals’ leadership knowledge about social resources were shown in Table 4.

182 **Table 4 IPC Values for Principals’ Leadership Knowledge about Social Resources**

No.	Knowledge about Social Resources	No. of Correct Principals	IPC
1	The principal should be able to recognize his/her teachers’ emotional responses and how those emotional responses influence actions. *	24	72.7%
2	The principal should be aware the emotions of individual teachers.*	29	87.9%
3	The principal should be able to understand his/her own emotional responses and reflect on the potential consequences of emotional responses. *	29	87.9%
4	The principal should be able to help others to be more reflective about their own emotional responses and to reflect on the potential consequences of the responses. *	26	78.8%
5	The principal is usually angering the school colleagues when he/she is feeling agitated.	23	69.7%
6	The principal should be able to control his/her temper and handle difficulties rationally. *	27	81.8%
7	The principal should persuade the school colleagues to act freely in the school.	21	63.6%
8	The principal should help his/her colleagues to calm down when they get upset. *	25	75.8%

183 **Note(\*)= True Item**

184 According to Table 4, the items with the highest IPC value were the item (2) “*The*  
 185 *principal should neglect the emotions of others*” and the item (3) “*The principal should be able*  
 186 *to understand his/her own emotional responses and reflect on the potential consequences of*  
 187 *those responses*”. These results could be interpreted that 29 (87.9%) principals could give the  
 188 correct answer. The item with the lowest IPC value was the item (7) “*The principal should*  
 189 *persuade the school colleagues to act freely in the school*” and it could be found that 21 (63.6%)  
 190 principals could give the correct answer.

191 The number and percentages of principals according to the knowledge levels of their  
 192 social resources were described in Table 5.

193 **Table 5 Number and Percentages of Principals Showing the Levels of their Leadership**  
 194 **Knowledge about Social Resources**

Variable	No. of Principals	Remark
Principals' Leadership Knowledge about Social Resources	5 (15.15%)	below satisfactory level
	13 (39.39%)	satisfactory level
	15 (45.46%)	above satisfactory level

Scoring Range: <50% = below satisfactory 50%-74% = satisfactory ≥75% = above satisfactory

According to Table 5, it could be seen that 5 (15.15%) principals were below satisfactory level, 13 (39.39%) principals were satisfactory level, and 15 (45.46%) principals were above satisfactory level. Therefore, most of the principals were above satisfactory level in the principals' leadership knowledge about social resources.

**Knowledge about Psychological Resources.** The IPC values for principals' leadership knowledge about psychological resources were shown in Table 6.

**Table 6 IPC Values for Principals' Knowledge about Psychological Resources**

No.	Knowledge about Psychological Resources	No. of Correct Principals	IPC
1	The principal should see positively in some situations.	19	57.6%
2	The principal should approach school leadership with an optimistic point of view. *	32	97.0%
3	The principal feels less confident analyzing long-term problems to find solutions for the school.	25	75.8%
4	The principal should have confidence in the ability to achieve the goals set in his/her job. *	30	90.9%
5	The principal should persist in a task regardless of the obstacles. *	29	87.9%
6	The principal takes stressful things at work in stride. *	32	97.0%
7	The principal should thrive in challenging situations and raises it to the occasion. *	31	93.9%
8	When things are uncertain at work, principal should expect the less.	23	69.7%
9	The principal should be able to stimulate and manage change on a small scale under complex circumstances. *	27	81.8%
10	The principal should demonstrate initiative and perseverance in bringing about meaningful change. *	28	84.8%

Note(\*)= True Item

According to the Table 6, the items with the highest IPC value were the item (2) "The principal should approach school leadership with an optimistic point of view" and the item (6) "The principal should take stressful things at work in stride". These results showed that 32 (97.0%) principals could give the correct answer. The item with the lowest IPC value was the item (1) "The principal should see positively in few situations" and it was found that 19 (57.6%) principals could give the correct answer.

The number and percentages of principals according to the knowledge levels of their psychological resources were described in Table 7.

212 **Table 7 Number and Percentages of Principals Showing the Levels of their Leadership**  
 213 **Knowledge about Psychological Resources**

Scoring Range	No. of Principals	Remark
Principals' Leadership Knowledge about Psychological Resources	1 (3.03%)	below satisfactory level
	17 (51.51%)	satisfactory level
	15 (45.46%)	above satisfactory level

214 **Scoring Range:** <50% = below satisfactory 50%-74% = satisfactory ≥75% = above satisfactory

215 According to Table 7, it could be seen that 3 (9.1%) principals was below satisfactory level,  
 216 21 (63.6%) principals were satisfactory level, and 9 (27.3%) principals were above satisfactory  
 217 level. Therefore, most of the principals were satisfactory level in the principals' leadership  
 218 knowledge about psychological resources.

219 Table 8 described the the mean values and standard deviations of principals' leadership  
 220 knowledge.

221 **Table 8 Mean Values and Standard Deviations for the Knowledge of Principals Leadership**  
 222 **Practices**

Principal Leadership Practices	Mean	SD
Principals' Leadership Knowledge about Cognitive Resources	7.91	1.508
Principals' Leadership Knowledge about Social Resources	6.91	1.331
Principals' Knowledge about Psychological Resources	8.36	1.454

223  
 224 According to the Table 8, principals' leadership knowledge about cognitive resources had  
 225 mean value 7.91, the mean value for Principals' Leadership Knowledge about Social Resources  
 226 was 6.91 and principals' knowledge about psychological resources had the mean value of 8.36.

227 The mean values and standard deviations for the level of principal leadership practices  
 228 were revealed in Table 9.

229 **Table 9 Mean Values and Standard Deviations for the Level of Principals Leadership**  
 230 **Practices**

Principal Leadership Practices	Mean	SD	Remark
Setting Direction	3.25	.54	practice to a moderate extent
Building Relationships and Developing People	3.15	.59	practice to a moderate extent
Developing Organization to Support Desired Practices	3.09	.49	practice to a moderate extent
Improving the Instructional Program	3.17	.33	practice to a moderate extent
Securing Accountability	3.37	.53	practice to a moderate extent
<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>3.20</b>	<b>.39</b>	<b>practice to a moderate extent</b>

231 **Scoring Direction:** 1.00-1.49=do not practice at all 1.50-2.49= practice to some extent  
 232 2.50-3.49= practice to a moderate extent 3.50-4.00= practice to a great extent

233 According to the Table 9, principals *practice to a moderate extent* in their leadership  
234 practices because grand mean value was 3.19.

235 The relationship between their leadership knowledge such as principals' leadership  
236 knowledge about cognitive resources, principals' leadership knowledge about social resources  
237 and principals' leadership knowledge about psychological resources and their leadership  
238 practices were also calculated and the results were shown in Table 10.

239 **Table 10 Correlations between Principal Leadership Knowledge and Their Leadership**  
240 **Practices**

Variable	Principal Leadership Practices
Principals' Leadership Knowledge about Cognitive Resources	.276
Principals' Leadership Knowledge about Social Resources	.224
Principals' Knowledge about Psychological Resources	.472**

241 **Note:** \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

242 According to the Table 9, principal leadership knowledge about psychological resources  
243 was highly related with their leadership practices ( $r = .472, p < .01$ ).

#### 244 **Discussion and Conclusion**

245 Today's principals are accountable for the oversight of teaching, curriculum, and  
246 assessment cycles, evaluation of teachers, fostering relationships with teachers and other  
247 stakeholders, evaluating and implementing discipline plans, developing a multi-year plan for  
248 needed resources (Michigan Department of Education, 2012).

249 This study showed that most of the principals were also satisfactory levels in the three  
250 principals' leadership knowledge resources: principals' leadership knowledge about cognitive  
251 resources, principals' leadership knowledge about social resources and principals' leadership  
252 knowledge about psychological resources. Concerning with principal leadership practices, they  
253 *practice to a moderate extent* in their leadership practices. Moreover, principal leadership  
254 knowledge about psychological resources related moderately with principal leadership practices.  
255 It can be seen that the more leadership knowledge about psychological resources the principals  
256 possess, the higher the level of their practices. Hoogsteen (2020) found that a well-defined set of  
257 personal leadership knowledge shows promise of explaining a high proportion of variation on  
258 principal leadership practices. Therefore, this finding was consistent with the finding of  
259 Brunderman (2006) that possessing leadership knowledge allows for the enactment of principal  
260 leadership practices that positively impact teacher collegiality.

261 Based on the findings of the study, some suggestions for policy makers, and principals,  
262 were made. Policy makers should elaborate the training programs for principal leadership  
263 preparation and development programs to become effective leaders in the basic education  
264 sector, consider personal factors of principals such as administrative service and academic  
265 qualification for promotion to administrative positions in the education sectors, and organize  
266 informal meetings, workshops, and trainings with principals and teachers in order to develop  
267 principals' and teachers' competencies and abilities. Principals should enhance their personal  
268 leadership knowledge and promote the professional development for themselves and teachers,  
269 and develop positive and warmly working relationships with teachers, students and other  
270 stakeholders.

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