

AN INVESTIGATION INTO COMPETENCIES OF HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find out the generic ideas and concepts of high school principals' competencies. This paper specifically focused on the competence of school principals based on Ministry of Education Malaysia, Ministry of National Education Indonesia, Japanese association for the study of Educational Administration (JASEA) and Competency Framework for Southeast Asian School Heads. According to the purpose of this study, document analyzing was conducted by adapting method of Concept Mapping. It was found that competencies of school principals are divided into five sections, namely: (1) Strategic thinking and innovation: (a) Policy and direction, (b) Managing change and innovation, and (c) Building and realizing a shared vision of school; (2) Instructional Leadership: (a) Development of teaching, (b) Establishing collaborative structure and climate for quality improvement of education; (3) Managerial leadership: (a) Management, (b) Resources and operation, (c) Effective utilization of various resources and risk management; (4) Personal excellence: (a) Self-effectiveness, (b) Personality, (c) Ethical behaviour and leadership; (5) Stakeholder engagement: (a) Collaborative relationship with parents and community, (b) Social, (c) Human relationship. And then the researcher adapted a generic model for competency of high school principal by using the findings of Concept Mapping. Based on this model, the researcher also developed a set of questionnaire and interview questions to measure the perceptions of principals and teachers from selected Basic Education High Schools in Sagaing Township. The quantitative and qualitative findings indicated that all principals agreed and accepted the competencies mentioned in the generic model. Therefore, it can be said that the generic model provides guidelines to improve the competencies of high school principals.

Keywords: competency, instructional leadership, management

Introduction

The future life of the country and its people will be determined by the quality of education. In this knowledge age, almost all countries of the world are attempting to reform or to change their own existing education systems to face the challenges of the 21st century. The quality of education depends on many factors. One of the most important factors is competence of school leaders.

The role of the principal today is considerable whenever the effectiveness of the school and the achievement of the students are determined. Thus, all principals need to be the competent ones in performing their duties and responsibilities in their schools. It is Richard A. Gorton's strong conviction that the way to begin improving education is by improving the administrative and supervisory competence of the principals of the schools (Gorton, 1984).

As the school is the basic educational unit, competencies of schools principals are of paramount importance in the smooth running of the school and implementing the educational program. Professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes are likely to have a profound effect on the whole range of tasks undertaken by the head of a professional organization (Hughes, 1988, as cited in Thet Naing Oo, 2010). Hence, all principals need to know that knowledge, skills and abilities are essential for his position so that they can do their job competently. It is considerable body on what the whole tasks of a principal should be and what competencies make a good

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principal. The current job of the school principal, as with any management positions, is complex. Therefore, this study specifically focuses on the literature review of competencies of school principals and descriptive analysis for validation study of Concept Mapping.

Aims of the Study

The general purpose of the study is to find out the generic ideas and concepts of high school principals' competencies.

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To find out the dimensions of competency of high school principals by using Concept Mapping;
2. To investigate the levels of competency of high school principals as rated by principals themselves in selected high schools;
3. To examine the levels of competency of high school principals as perceived by teachers in selected high schools; and
4. To explore the differences in competency of high school principals between principals' self-rating and their teachers' perceptions.

Research Questions

This study explores to answer the following questions:

1. What are the dimensions of competency of high school principals by using Concept Mapping?
2. What are the levels of competency of high school principals as rated by principals themselves in selected high schools?
3. What are the levels of competency of high school principals as perceived by teachers in selected high schools?
4. Are there any differences in the competency of high school principals between principals' self-rating and their teachers' perceptions?

Review of Related Literature

This paper specifically focuses on the competence of school principals based on Competency Framework for Southeast Asian School Heads, Ministry of Education Malaysia, Ministry of National Education Indonesia, and Japanese association for the study of Educational Administration (JASEA).

(A) Competency Framework for Southeast Asian School Heads

There are five domains, sixteen general areas of competency and one hundred and six individual tasks/ competency statements. They are as follows:

Domain (1) Strategic Thinking and Innovation (STI)

- A. Charting the strategic direction of the school
- B. Making informed decisions
- C. Leading change and innovation

Domain (2) Instructional Leadership

- A. Leading curriculum implementation and improvement
- B. Creating a learner-centered environment
- C. Supervising and evaluating teachers' performance
- D. Delivering planned learning outcomes

Domain (3) Personal Excellence

- A. Managing personal effectiveness
- B. Acting on challenges and possibilities
- C. Pursuing continuous professional development

Domain (4) Stakeholder Engagement

- A. Promoting shared responsibility for school improvement
- B. Managing education alliances and networks
- C. Sustaining collaborative relationships with stakeholders

Domain (5) Managerial Leadership

- A. Managing school resources and systems
- B. Managing staff performance
- C. Managing sustainable school programs and projects (Taa, 2014)

(B) Indonesia Principal Competencies

Personality

1. Moral majesty
2. has integrity as a leader
3. has committed
4. be open
5. operation of self
6. has talent and interest as a leader

Management

1. Managing the school plan
2. Developing organization
3. Empower school resources
4. Managing change
5. Creating a conducive school climate
6. Managing teachers and staff
7. Operating facilities and infrastructure school
8. Operating human relationship
9. Managing students
10. Managing curriculum
11. Financial management
12. Operating administration

13. Managing unit specific service
14. Managing information systems school
15. Make use of ICT
16. Managing Monitoring and Evaluation advanced

Entrepreneurship

1. Creating innovation
2. Working hard to achieve goals
3. Has strong motivation never give up
4. Has entrepreneurship spirit

Supervision

1. Plan of academic program supervision
2. Doing academic program supervision
3. Doing follow up of results academic supervision

Social

1. Working with others
2. Active in community social activities
3. Has social sensitivity (Ministry of National Education Indonesia, 2007, as cited in Mustamin & Yasin (2012).

(C) Malaysia Principal Competencies

The competencies of Malaysian School Leaders are as follows (MOE Malaysia, 2010, as cited in Mustamin & Yasin, 2012).

Policy and Direction

1. Building a vision
2. Focus on quality
3. Strategic Thinking
4. Proactive

Development of Teaching

1. Achievement orientation
2. Development of teaching
3. Knowledge sharing
4. Focus on curriculum
5. Supervision

Managing Change and Innovation

1. Problem solving
2. Make a decision
3. Managing change
4. Making school improvement
5. Creativity and innovation

Resources and Operation

1. Financial management
2. Physical development and assets
3. Management of ICT
4. Management of performance

Human Relationship

1. Developing Capacity
2. Communication
3. Relationship with external parties
4. Work sharing with teamwork

Self-Effectiveness

1. Self-awareness
2. Social awareness
3. Self-management
4. Social management

(D) Professional Standards for Japan Principal

Standard 1- *Building and realizing a shared vision of school*

Principals create a vision that can be shared and supported by school staff, students, parents and community, and seek its realization.

- (1) Collect information on the situation of the school
- (2) Building shared school vision as the principal
- (3) Building shared school vision with school officials and others
- (4) Develop a shared vision and Implement
- (5) Validates and revises school vision

Standard 2-*Establishing collaborative structure and climate for quality improvement of education*

Principals propose and promote curriculum development to realize course instruction and student guidance, etc. that are appropriate for schools, and make structure and develop climate where school staff perform it collaboratively.

- (1) Responsibility for growth and the development of every student.
- (2) Curriculum development based on shared vision
- (3) School environment
- (4) Promotion of educational practice based on a school staff's motivation
- (5) Nurtures climate for quality education

Standard 3- *Establishing collaborative structure and climate to support professional development*

Principals create structure and nurture climate that support all school staff to reflect on practice and to continue professional development collaboratively.

- (1) Understanding of professional development

- (2) Understanding and support for school staff
- (3) Lead school staff to making shared vision
- (4) Organize school staff to promote collaboration and reflection
- (5) Nurture school staff climate

Standard 4- *Effective utilization of various resources*

Principals utilize and manage human/material/financial/informational resources effectively and efficiently to secure effective and safe learning environment based on school organization characteristics.

- (1) Analyze the realities in school situation
- (2) Necessary resources to achieve a shared vision
- (3) Create activities for organization based on management cycle
- (4) Lead the activities corresponding to crisis management

Standard 5- *Collaborative relationships with parents and community*

Principals understand diverse interests and needs of various stakeholders of parents and community, and promote collaboration responding to those interests and needs.

- (1) Understanding the necessity for collaboration and cooperation with parents and community
- (2) Understanding the environment of parents and community
- (3) Organize the interest and expectations in the school
- (4) Send information on shared vision and obtain the trust
- (5) Maintain a proper relationship with school officials and neighbors

Standard 6- *Ethical behaviour and leadership*

Principals set an example of professional ethics as chief executives as well as show leadership with deep insight backed with rich experience of education.

- (1) Professional ethics as the chief executive of a school
- (2) Determine communication with a school officials and students
- (3) Senses of values and cultures
- (4) Self-reflection and professional growth and development
- (5) Legal compliance

Standard 7 *Understanding of social/cultural context of school*

Principals understand that school education and society mutually affect each other and grasp social/cultural context of public education and school in a wide perspective.

- (1) Understanding of domestic and international school of education
- (2) Understanding of the constitution and related law
- (3) Understanding of social, economic, political, and cultural conditions of the local government
- (4) Understanding of educational history and thought

(Japanese Association for the Study of Educational Administration (JASEA), 2009).

Methodology

Qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this study. To analyze the differences and similarities between the dimensions of competency of school principals, the researcher adapted Concept Mapping method (Jackson&Trochim,2002).According to Jackson and Trochim (2002), Concept Mapping is used to give the concept of groups or units of analysis the same meaning inclination. Adaptation method based on concept mapping, then the stages of analysis in this study: (1) analyzing unit analyzes each dimension descriptors competencies of each country according to the document, (2) a thorough mapping concepts from competency framework for Southeast Asian School Heads (2014, Edition), (3) to analyze the concept mapping, (4) selecting the final cluster solution each unit of analysis, and (5) make labeling each cluster into the dimensions of a more moderate pace.

Based on the findings of Concept Mapping, researcher developed two research instruments to explore the principals' and teachers' perceptions of competencies of high school principals. Questionnaire (1) and (2) consisted of 61 items. The participants were asked to respond to the questionnaire items through the use of Likert (five-point), (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Undecided, (4) Agree, and (5) Strongly Agree. Questionnaire was focused on five dimensions: the first 11 items are related to Strategic Thinking and Innovation, the second 12 items are associated with Instructional Leadership, The third 15 items are concerned with Managerial Leadership, the fourth 15 items are correlated with Personal excellence, and the last 8 items are related to Stakeholder Engagement.

This study focused on Basic Education High Schools in Sagaing Township. There are 5 Basic Education High Schools with Grade (A) and 8 Basic Education High Schools with Grade (B) in Sagaing Township. For this study, 5 Basic Education High Schools with Grade (A) were selected. Among them, one Basic Education High School was chosen for the pilot study that was conducted with one principal and 34 teachers from the selected high schools in Sagaing Township. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha value) was 0.86.The population of the main study was 4 principals and all teachers (135) from four selected high schools.

To collect more supplementary opinions about the competencies of high school principals, the researcher developed interview questions. There were seven interview questions for principal.

Findings

The results from qualitative and quantitative data will be presented.

(A) Findings of Concept Mapping

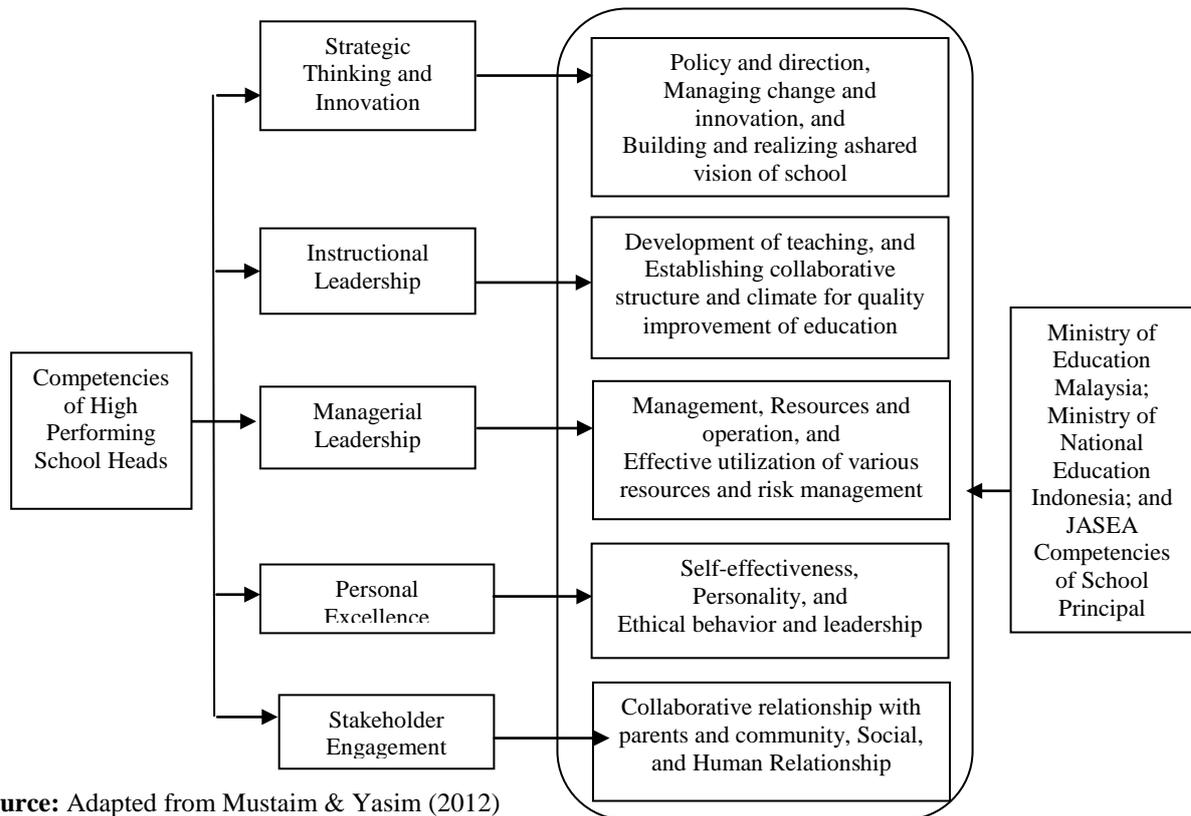
`In relation to the results of the Concept Mapping, the dimensions and indicators of competency of school principal are as follows:

Table 1 Dimensions and Indicators of Competency of School Principal

Dimension	Indicator
Policy and direction	(1) building a vision(2) strategic thinking (3)proactive
Managing change and innovation	(1)managing change (2)make a decision(3) making school improvement (4)creativity and innovation (5)problem solving
Building and realizing a shared vision of school	(1) Collect information on the situation of the school (2) Building shared school vision as the principal (3) Building shared school vision with school officials and others (4) Develop a shared vision and Implement (5) validates and revises school vision
Development of teaching	(1)focus on curriculum(2)knowledge sharing(3)supervision (4)managing curriculum
Establishing collaborative structure and climate for quality improvement of education	(1)creating a conducive school climate(2) Responsibility for growth and the development of every student(3) Curriculum development based on shared vision(4) Nurtures climate for quality education(5)creating a positive learning environment
Management	(1)managing school plan(2)empower school resources (3)managing teachers and staff
Resources and operation	(1)financial management (2)physical development and assets (3)management of ICT(4)management of performance
Effective utilization of various resources and risk management	(1) organize school staff to promote collaboration and reflection(2) understanding of professional development(3) lead school staff to making shared vision (4)understanding and support for school staff(5) nurture school staff climate(6) utilize and manage human/material/financial/ informational resources effectively and efficiently to secure effective and safe learning environment
Self-effectiveness	(1)self-awareness(2)social awareness(3)self-management (4)social management
Personality	(1)moral majesty(2) has integrity as a leader(3)operation of self(4)has talent and interest as a leader(5)has committed (6)be open
Ethical behavior and leadership	(1) professional ethics as the chief executive of a school(2) determine communication with a school officials and students(3) senses of values and cultures(4) self-reflection and professional growth and development(5) understanding of domestic and international school of education(6) understanding of educational history and thought
Collaborative relationship with parents and community	(1)understanding the necessity for collaboration and cooperation with parents and community(2) understanding the environment of parents and community(3) organize the interest and expectations in the school(4) send information on shared vision and obtain the trust(5) maintain a proper relationship with school officials and neighbors
Social	(1)working with others (2)active in community social activities (3) has a social sensitivity
Human relationship	(1)relationship with external parties (2)work sharing with teamwork (3)working with others

Source: Adapted from Mustaim & Yasim (2012)

Based on findings of the study and analysis of each dimension of adaption Concept Mapping, competencies of school principal Malaysia, Indonesia and JASEA documents, and then it can be concluded that the results of dimensional documents in terms of Competency Framework for Southeast Asian School Heads were shown in Figure 4.1.



Source: Adapted from Mustaim & Yasim (2012)

Figure 1 A Generic Model for Competency of High School Principal

(B) Findings of Quantitative Study

Table 2 Mean Scores for Principals' Competency as Perceived by Principals

Schools	Dimensions					Overall
	STI	IL	ML	PE	SE	
School 1	4.00	3.83	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.97
School 2	4.82	5.00	4.73	4.87	5.00	4.88
School 3	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
School 4	3.91	4.00	3.93	4.20	4.13	4.03

Note: 1- 2.33= Low Level 2.34- 3.67= Moderate Level 3.68 – 5.00 = High Level
 STI= Strategic Thinking and Innovation IL= Instructional Leadership
 ML= Managerial Leadership PE=Personal Excellence
 SE= Stakeholder Engagement

According to the principals' rating in Table 2, among the four selected schools, School 2 showed the highest mean scores of 4.82 in Strategic Thinking and Innovation, 5.00 in Instructional Leadership, 4.73 in Managerial Leadership, 4.87 in Personal Excellence, and 5.00 in Stakeholder Engagement. Descriptive analysis revealed that the overall mean score of School 2 was the highest among the selected schools, followed in descending order by School 4, School 3,

and finally, School 1. Therefore, the mean scores of all selected schools indicated that principals from those schools perceived their competencies to high level.

Table 3 Mean Scores for Principals' Competency as Perceived by Teachers

Schools	Dimensions					Overall
	STI	IL	ML	PE	SE	
School 1	4.13	4.11	4.09	4.25	4.24	4.16
School 2	4.08	4.20	4.07	4.18	4.13	4.13
School 3	4.05	3.95	4.03	4.04	4.03	4.02
School 4	3.98	4.16	4.26	4.22	4.23	4.17

Note: 1- 2.33= Low Level 2.34- 3.67= Moderate Level 3.68 – 5.00 = High Level
 STI= Strategic Thinking and Innovation, IL= Instructional Leadership,
 ML= Managerial Leadership, PE=Personal Excellence,
 SE= Stakeholder Engagement

According to the teachers' rating in Table 3, among the four selected schools, School 1 showed the highest mean scores of 4.13 in Strategic Thinking and Innovation, 4.25 in Personal Excellence, and 4.24 in Stakeholder Engagement. Similarly, School 2 revealed the highest mean score of 4.20 in Instructional Leadership and School 4 had the highest score of 4.26 in Managerial Leadership. The overall mean score of School 4 was the highest among the selected schools, followed in descending order by School 1, School 2, and finally, School 3. Therefore, the mean scores of all selected schools indicated that teachers from those schools perceived their principals' competencies to high level.

Table 4 Comparison of Mean Values for Each Dimension of Principals' Competency as Perceived by Principals and Teachers

Dimensions of High School Principals' Competency	Principal	Teacher	Mean Difference
Strategic Thinking and Innovation	4.18	4.06	0.12
Instructional Leadership	4.21	4.10	0.11
Managerial Leadership	4.17	4.11	0.06
Personal Excellence	4.27	4.17	0.10
Stakeholder Engagement	4.28	4.15	0.13
Overall	4.22	4.12	0.10

Note: 1- 2.33= Low Level 2.34- 3.67= Moderate Level 3.68 – 5.00 = High Level

When studying the mean scores for dimensions of high school principals' competency rated by principals and teachers, principals' mean scores were more than teachers' in all dimensions. The scores illustrated that principals had better perception on high school principals' competency than the teachers. However, the mean scores of all selected schools indicated that all principals and teachers from those schools perceived their competencies and their principals' competencies at high level.

(C) Findings of Qualitative Study

A qualitative study was conducted through interviewing 5 high school principals from selected Basic Education High Schools in Sagaing Township. Principals were asked 7 items to express their competencies.

The first question was to describe their school vision and school objectives. All principals responded that their school vision is “Our Vision- To create an education system that can generate a learning society capable of facing the challenges of the knowledge age” and their school objectives are to produce all round developed students and to create a green and clean school environment.

The second question asked to the principals was to explain how to set their school objectives and school programmes. All principals responded that they collaborate with their teachers, students, parents and community members whenever they set their school objectives and school programmes.

The third question was to ask principals how to supervise their teachers for improving teaching-learning situations. All principals answered this question that they are accessible to teachers, visit the classrooms regularly and give advice and suggestions to their teachers if necessary and provide opportunities for them to have in depth knowledge for their professional development. In addition, they support teachers and students in creating effective learning environment which meets the needs of all students. Moreover, they always review and evaluate students’ learning outcomes as well as provide timely feedback to them.

The fourth question was to ask principals how to use the resources to improve their schools. All principals proposed that they try to integrate and align the school’s manpower and financial resources with the priorities identified in School Improvement Plan. Similarly, they use financial resources in line with their accountability, responsibility and transparency. Some principals monitor and evaluate all resources to support for the improvement of teaching-learning situation. Some principals try to provide adequate resources such as teaching-learning materials and school furniture.

The fifth question asked to the principals was to express management functions which are not common to other schools. The four principals answered that they manage their schools in a traditional approach. Only one principal responded that she uses different kinds of managerial functions. For example, she always makes Chapter End Tests (CETs) like a final examination. She also plans and organizes examination duties and rooms systematically. In checking the answer papers, the teachers do not correct their children’s papers concerning their subjects while other teachers correct those papers.

The sixth question was to express the principal’s opinions on community involvement in education. All principals accepted the importance of community involvement in education. They also try to develop effective and interactive two-way communication strategy between parents and teachers for better learning outcomes of students. Some principals create opportunities for the involvement of parents and community in school activities. They all try to promote community involvement in school functions and in student learning outcomes.

The seventh question was to ask principals how to develop their professional competencies continuously. All principals answered this question that they always seek their knowledge, ideas and skills as they are life-long learners. Sometimes, they share their knowledge with their colleagues, teachers, students and parents and they learn from them. At the same time, they learn from their superiors and experts.

Conclusion and Discussion

When analysing the findings of Concept Mapping, it was found that (1) Strategic Thinking and Innovation (2) Instructional Leadership (3) Managerial Leadership (4) Personal Excellence (5) Stakeholder Engagement are essential for high school principals .

Analysis of quantitative data collected from the study attempted to answer the three research questions. Research question one evaluated principals' competency rated by principals themselves in selected high schools. It was found that principals from all selected schools perceived that they have high levels of principals' competency in all dimensions: "Strategic Thinking and Innovation", "Instructional Leadership" , "Managerial Leadership", "Personal Excellence" and "Stakeholder Engagement".

Similarly, research question two investigated the perceptions of teachers on the competency of their principal in selected high schools. It was found that teachers from all selected schools perceived that their principals possessed and applied high levels of competency in all dimensions: "Strategic Thinking and Innovation", "Instructional Leadership", "Managerial Leadership", "Personal Excellence" and "Stakeholder Engagement".

Accordingly, research question three explored whether there were any differences in principals' competency between principals' self- rating and teachers' perceptions in selected high school. Although there were some differences between the perceptions of principals and teachers, all principals and teachers perceived that their competencies and their principals' competencies were high.

According to the findings from interview questions, it was indicated that principals from all selected high schools agreed and accepted the competencies mentioned in a Generic Model for Competency of High School Principal. All in all, according to their answers mentioned above, it can be concluded that all principals from selected Basic Education High Schools try to use their competencies in implementing the goals and objectives for improving their schools as much as they can.

In conclusion, it can be said that the generic model provides guidelines to improve the competencies of high school principals.

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