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PRINCIPAL'S PREPARATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS: CASE STUDY IN HENAN PROVINCE, CHINA

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ABSTRACT

Principal preparation and professional development are generally viewed as the catalyst to school improvement. In China, the educational leadership practice is in the process of exploration and development. Therefore, this present article studies the challenges of school principal's preparation and professional development programs in facilitating the practise of educational leadership. With the intention to explore the scenario of the leadership practise, three regions in Henan province were chosen for their suitability to the study background. Qualitative study was started with open-ended questionnaires by 37 principals, followed up with semi-structured interviews to 17 principals. The data was then transcribed to allow the essence from the sharing of experience to be extracted. There are four major challenges discussed in the article: resistance to innovative reform, accountabilities and authorities, funding, and teacher management. This study seeks to identify the challenges arising from the leadership practise and constructive recommendations to be taken for attention for a better practise and principal quality in the future.

Keywords: Principal Preparation, Professional Development, Educational Leadership Practise

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INTRODUCTION

Educational leadership has attracted much attention since the last century. Recently, researchers throughout the world have agreed on the latent ability of leadership in influencing the student learning, school development, and educational reform (Bush, 2011; Hallinger, 2011; Harris & Chapman, 2002; Yukl, 2002). Studies indicated that the educational leadership practice in China is in the process of exploration and development (Chen, 2010; Sun, 2009; Zheng & Li, 2007). This modern concept of relating the social development and leadership style is closely linked to the needs of social reform and enhancing the professionalism of school leaders.

School principals play a pivotal role in school improvement and educational effectiveness and are a crucial factor in determining school success (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Peterson, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1991). School management and leadership is a complicated and special practical activity that blends a high sense of complexity and situational control. School principals' professional knowledge and skills more embodied as a practical knowledge and skills. Thus, integrating educational leadership into the leading ability and skills of school principals should be the right way in achieving educational reform and school excellence (Law, 2012).

Generally, education leaders over emphasize on management issues but lack sufficient emphasis on leadership skills at all levels of schooling in China (Chen, 2010). Hence, it is crucial to strengthen and enhance effective educational leadership capacities. Otherwise, the educational reform strategies cannot achieve its objectives. Therefore, this study intent to portray the challenges of the school principal's preparation and professional program in facilitating the practise of educational leadership. The challenges which seem to hinder the effort will be discussed and given recommendations to turn them into turning points that further enhance the leadership practise.

Educational Leadership

Educational leadership, a new integration of leadership which deal mainly with the educational work settings, community and the ultimate goals is to improve school management and students' achievement. Unlike the conventional leadership practise, it is more emphatically pointing to the specific leadership practice by the school leaders in order to achieve education goals, for instances guiding the energies and talents of teachers and students in achieving school education excellence. Rapid social and cultural changes require a deep understanding of educational leadership theories which are focusing on how the leadership differences influence the student achievement, teacher work satisfaction, and other components that are associated with school development (Bush, 2011; Leithwood, 1994). Nevertheless, there has been increasing importance given to training and developing school principals, as various studies claim that principal's leadership ability is directly proportional to the school effectiveness and enhancement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998).

Regarding the effort of integrating educational leadership in the school principals, Chen (2010) suggested that the leadership discipline must be based on the foundation of the Chinese context. Studies on the significance of the principal-teacher relationship in the implementation of successful education and shared visions have never ceased. Barnett and McCormick (2004) have concluded that this relationship is the key to encourage the educators to be engaged fully by contributing their skills and abilities in ensuring the achievement of common goals. Thus, principals are able to provide constructive guidance and support according to the teachers' individual ability and development (Barnett & McCormick, 2004). Besides, leadership is not just about the authority held by individuals in giving order to subordinates and peer colleagues but is the ability in guiding the masses in the correct direction: quality education and school excellence. Currently, the nation is undergoing educational transformation and the benefits from the leadership approach are the key to building and sustaining quality education system. All education leaders should, at all levels, develop leadership awareness and inculcate effective leadership practices. Thus, it is hope that this study reveals the challenges that the principals faced during their leadership practise after undergoing principal preparation and professional development program.



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China Quality-oriented Education

Quality-oriented education is known as “*Su Zhi Jiao Yu* (素质教育)” in Chinese. According to the Ministry of Education website, “*Su Zhi Jiao Yu*” refers to the philosophy of putting people first and pursuing an overall harmonious, sustainable development and the strategy of revitalizing China through human resource development. It is the major guiding concept of education reform in China. Educators were urged to deliver a more progressive education that is focus on the shaping of a ‘Whole Child’ (Dello-Iacovo, 2009), which is referring to students’ well-rounded development in “morality (*de*,德), intelligence (*zhi*,智), physical health (*ti*,体), artistic attainment (*mei*,美), and labour (*lao*,劳)”. In China, “*Su Zhi Jiao Yu*” is perceived as the solution to change the situation of ‘*Ying Shi Jiao Yu* 应试教育’ or more common as examination-oriented education, for the purpose to meet the national needs, enhance the competitiveness of schools by promoting a school-based management, encourage school curriculum autonomy and increase pupils’ participation (Walker, Hu, & Qian, 2012).

The new curriculum reform is an important strategy to satisfy the needs of social development and achieve quality-oriented objectives. the ‘Central Committee Opinions on Further Strengthening and Reforming Moral Education in Schools’ (CPCC, 1994) and the ‘The Action Plan to Revitalize the Education Towards the 21st Century’ (MOE, 1989) were enacted to vigorously promote the curriculum reform in the education system, structure and content. The kernel of the curriculum reform is to transfer traditional knowledge delivery in order to satisfy the different learning needs of students based on their interests and talents. Apart from that, under the new curriculum reform, the teaching methodology has swift from examination oriented to student centred approach, where students have their own space to learn, develop and express their creativity and talents under the holistic education system (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). According Zhu (2007), the inquiry-based learning, practical exercises, and periodic community service were added to the curriculum context to tighten the connection between education, society and students’ needs. The complaints on overloaded homework, irrelevant syllabus and pressure on examination grade will be reduced and learning can be more flexible, enjoyable and promote students’ engagement (Huang, 2004).

Chinese School Principals

Originally, the role of the principal was to manage school related affairs. With the social changes in China, traditional leadership is no longer helpful in the current social context. School principals are not only educators and managers but are required to oversee school development and meet the requirements of educational reform. They are also needed to be problem solvers, resources finders and culture builders (Leithwood & Poplin, 1992; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). The roles and responsibilities of school principals are shifting with the continued social changes. Principals are expected to juggling well with management, education and socializing with related stakeholders. For these reasons, a growing number of researches pay attention to how school principals are prepared for their roles and their leadership ability.

Apart from that, school principals are accountable to the compliancy of their schools to the regulatory framework and national plans in accomplishing the education reform and development (CPCC, 2010). School principals are regarded as the public relationship officer of the school, and the one responsible for building and maintaining good relations with parents, other schools, community organizations, and be able to create a conducive social environment for school development (MOE, 2013). Zheng and Shi (2010) found that owning extensive teaching experience and mature perspectives in teaching and school management is known to have the most significant characteristics in improving principals’ leadership and authority in school. Hence, as school leaders, principals are required to keep up-to-date with matters regarding educational reforms, and be equipped with innovative educational ideas that can promote improved efficiency. This has given a room of improvement to strengthen their leadership, specifically to be affectionate to the education community and themselves able to perform their roles well and effectively. Chen (2011) pointed out that, the Chinese principals have been working out most of their time



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on organizing and reviewing the teaching quality at school levels also to evaluate the teachers' teaching efficiency and lesson quality. Thus, the school leaders are expected to have strong knowledge in teaching and school management as they are the director and goalkeeper for the education community. Liu's (2014) study found that the school principal professional development program in China has become more diversified and scientific but this enhancement was commented by Zhou (2015) to be restricted in its functionality and not compatible with each other. Training institutes have been striving to improvise their training methods but still no remarkable breakthrough yet (Tian, Meng, & Fu, 2012).

The School Principals Preparation and Professional Development in China

China has the largest education system in the world which is made up of 264,110 primary and secondary schools (China Statistical Yearbook, 2019). Although China has the largest education system, the quality of leadership practices is still having room for improvement (Chen, 2011). Therefore, the preparation of school principals and the professional development of school leaders is both a significant challenge and of great importance. The leadership preparation and professional development in China has been the given an increased attention due to the significance of the role of school principals in the educational and social reform in the pursuit of quality education (Walker & Qian, 2015). Educational leadership is claimed to be one of the significant factors in establishing a consistent school achievement and also teaching quality. There remarked the effort to integrate the western leadership practices into the Chinese context by the Chinese scholars and policy makers (Chen, 2010; Lee & Pang, 2011).

The issuance of the 'Training Regulations for Primary and Secondary School Principals' by the Ministry of Education has founded the school principal professional development program. The school leaders under the equipment of professional development programs are being exposed to ideas and experience sharing which are intended to shape their leadership ability to practice them in their paternalistic leadership in the school, which is described in Walker et al. (2012) and Wang (2007). The school principal preparation training was first emerged with the paramount drive to shape a better leadership practise in Chinese schools (Xu, 2011; Zhang, 2013). In the early days of the People's Republic of China (1949-1956), the Chinese educational system tailed a simple yet potent pattern of a socialized institution under the influence of Soviet Union. The key aim, at that time, was to recover and develop a new educational system with school leaders and teachers as key contributors to the rebuilding of the national economy (Tang, Lu, & Hallinger, 2014).

Between the year of 1957 to 1976, political and social disruption brought major shifts and changes in China. The weakened foundation of the school system transformed the views of the State Government regarding the professionalism of school leaders, where the role of principals was viewed as the way forward to recover and re-establish quality within the educational system (Xu, 2011). The re-establishment of the Central Academy of Education Administration in 1980 marked the revitalisation of the principal preparation and training in China (Chu & Cravens, 2012). Training programmes were restructured based on the standards and guidelines specific to principalship, which aligned with the national consensus of 'Four Modernizations' (Di, 2014). These training programmes were administered to educational leaders under a top-down, centrally administered mandate (Tang et al., 2014). The first systematic and complete guide of 'Strengthening the Training for Principals of Primary and Secondary Schools Nationwide' was published by the State Education Commission to regulate the professional principal development to primary and secondary schools (Chen, 2011; Walker & Qian, 2015).

The Ministry of Education then officially issued the 'Training Regulations for School Principals' in 1999 to outline the content and form of national training, and new responsibilities for school principals (Wilson & Xue, 2013). These Principal Standards define the responsibilities of principals and provide the fundamental basis for school principals' selection, training, evaluation, performance management and other important school management issues. These standards, as in other countries, not only outline the expected requirements and behaviours for school principals' but also specify the professional development and training expectations (Chen, 2011). At



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present, there are four national training institutions, thirty-one provincial training institutions, over two hundred municipal training institutions and more than two thousand training institutions set up to prepare principals in China (Rao, 2015; Zheng, Chen, & Lu, 2012).

Present Study

This study aims to investigate and present the status quo of principals' leadership in the Chinese educational context. The goal is to explore a deep and clear understanding of the current issues, obstacles, challenges and paradoxes, gathered from current secondary school principals' perspectives and experiences in the principalship training and leadership practices. In particular, this research, through their experiences and understanding, will identify the extent to which preparation and professional development programmes impact school principals' leadership practices.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Participants

This article employed a qualitative research approach. Field observations were conducted in Shangqiu, Huojia, and Zhengzhou in Henan province, China. Open-ended questionnaires were administered to thirty-seven purposively chosen secondary school principals in those three regions to gather their perception and experience from the principal preparation and professional development program, in which the questions were tailored to achieve the study objectives. The demographic data is as shown in Table 1. Besides, there is a sub-sample of seventeen principals being interviewed to allow an in depth understanding to fulfil the central interests of this study. The seventeen respondents were randomly nominated from the thirty-seven respondents for semi-structured, in-depth interview.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of principals' demographics

| Demographics | Open ended questionnaire (N=37) | Semi structure interview (N=17) |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Gender | | |
| <i>Male</i> | 25 | 12 |
| <i>Female</i> | 12 | 5 |
| Age | | |
| <i>30 - 39 years</i> | 15 | 3 |
| <i>40 - 49 years</i> | 18 | 8 |
| <i>Over 50 years</i> | 4 | 6 |
| Highest Education | | |
| <i>Diploma</i> | 9 | 6 |
| <i>Undergraduate</i> | 26 | 9 |
| <i>Postgraduate</i> | 2 | 2 |
| Tenure as principal | | |
| <i>less than 5 years</i> | 10 | 1 |
| <i>6 - 10 years</i> | 16 | 4 |
| <i>11 - 15 years</i> | 7 | 7 |
| <i>More than 15 years</i> | 4 | 5 |
| Involvement in principal training preparation | | |
| <i>Yes</i> | 28 | |
| <i>No</i> | 9 | |



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Data Collection and Data Analysis

The primary data and secondary data were used to gather the information for data analysis. A transcription was conducted on the digitally recorded interviews. The raw data was then simplified into a more manageable arrangement by using inductive coding. The transcribed qualitative data from the open-ended survey and the semi-structured interviews with principals were then analysed using a constant comparative methodology to compare the common themes. During the interview, respondents were given freedom to express their experiences, review, and comment for researched to get the in-depth information related with the research objectives. The identity of the respondents was anonymized by using pseudonyms. The interviewees' opinions were coded as 'P', and 'Q' symbolizes the data come from open ended questionnaire. The secondary data was used to understand the special education system and to support the input from the interview.

FINDINGS

Challenges in Practising Educational Leadership

The quest for a quality-oriented education has placed significant demands on school principals in China. Another major educational reform initiative 'Professional Development for One Million Principals' in 1990 represented the government's effort to introduce training policies and programmes to benchmark the advancement of principal development in China. Even though schools are in pursuit of a quality-oriented education, the current education practice still remains very much exam-oriented, whereby school principals are challenged by the increasing expectations for quality education with improvements in learning processes and outcomes. As a result, the challenge is on how to support and develop principals' leadership practices that emphasizes principals' responsibilities for improving instructional quality in response to the new emphasis on quality-oriented education.

There are four key challenges in practising educational leadership found from the study: (1) resistance to innovative reform; (2) accountabilities and authorities; (3) funding and incentive system; and (4) school principals and teacher.

Constraints to Engage in Innovative Reform

Promoting and practicing a quality-oriented education has become a consensus and a dilemma to all school principals. The current education practice still remains as exam-oriented even though the schools are said to pursue a quality-oriented school. Studies have added supporting proof that majority of the schools have yet managed to transform the conventional way of delivering knowledge and the custom in the educational stage (Chen, 2009; Wang & Wang, 2015). Thus, the education reform has become a centre of gravity for the school principals to exercise their leadership skills.

Invulnerable to change. The finding has pointed to the major constraints that they are facing now is in exercising their leadership to implement the desired education orientation. The following school principals shared their views on exam-oriented education which they think that it is not vulnerable to change: "*Exam-oriented education has been rooted in our society for thousands of years. It is not easy to make changes within a short period of time.*" (P-13) and "*Quality-oriented education is like a health care product, while exam-oriented education is the medicine. In this situation, nothing can be changed through the reformation of the entire education system.*" (P-14)

Lack of innovative abilities. In the context of school reforms and the implementation of change, school principals of this study pointed out that Chinese principals generally lack innovative abilities needed to drive educational system reforms. They further pointed out that the Confucianism idealism is still a profound influence on the Chinese education system. The fear of change appears to be an obstacle for some school principals, as indicated by school principal: "*Fear of change, sometimes really want to apply the advanced theory and education concepts*



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into my practice, and also afraid of bad results. Sometimes, it is difficult to implement, teachers and parents do not support your ideas, they are also afraid of new decision and new changes that will influence their own interests or students' interests. This is why it is very difficult to change the status quo of school principals' leadership and restricts school principals' professional development." (P-3)

The lack of innovation could stem from their reluctance to try out innovative approaches. Various studies have showed evidence that Chinese principals are more willing to stick to their conventional habits and traditional practices and are rather hostile towards accepting innovation (Jiang & Li, 2011; Xu, 2008; Yang, 2000; Zhang, 2008).

Other studies also indicate that teachers, students and parents are not confident in implementing new changes mainly due to their concerns about whether the changes are viable and whether these could have an adverse effect on the core operations of school systems (Jiang & Li, 2011; Xu, 2008; Yang, 2000). Another important factor that suppresses educational innovation is the hesitation of some principals to present their innovative ideas, as they are afraid to be discredited or judged by their suggestions. These hesitations and uncertainties tend to stifle the execution of planned innovative changes.

Accountabilities and Authorities

School principals are responsible for the overall operation of their schools. In an era of increased accountabilities placed on school leaders, they are increasingly being held accountable to establish school-wide vision of academic success. While principals are facing accountability demands from the government and stakeholders for school-wide improvement, they are beleaguered with having to handle a plethora of administrative and management issues on a daily basis, to the point it can become overwhelming.

School principals' responsibilities. The school principals were bothered a lot due to their busy schedule where: *"all kinds of meetings are never-ending"* (P-2) and *"If you don't finish it, they will criticize you, and reveal your name during the meeting"* (P-13). The overwhelming stress has made one of the principals: *"suffered from neurasthenia due to work exhaustion"* (P-15). Coping with added accountabilities as a school leader, increased paperwork was found to increase higher levels of stress, leaving principals feeling mentally and physically exhausted. It may be the case where the majority of school principals do not know how to efficiently manage their time. This could be one of the factors that affect the efficiency of their leadership practices when: *"too much pressure"* (P-6) and *"hardly have private time"* (P-13). As the accountability drive gained momentum in the Henan province, the emphases of their leadership roles were associated with duties and responsibilities mandated by state policies. In this study, the majority of school principals were uncertain about their functional rights, with regards to their leadership practices and school development.

Lack of authority regulatory system. According to Lu (2003), there isn't a *'principal in-charge'* system that has been put in place within the Chinese education system to regulate principal leadership practices. Remarkable responses of *"the system is not decentralized, so we tend to be over cautious"* (P-3) and *"a lot of things are controlled by the education departments but the accountability and responsibility of school outcomes are placed on the school principals"* (P-2) displayed a scenario where school principals are working under the authority of education department but without being assigned with authority but to bear any outcomes, whether positive or discouraging, since the accountability is on their shoulder.

In addition, principals felt a lack of authority in exercising their managerial powers among their teachers. The reason for this could be associated with the absence of authority that empowers school principals, for example to have the right to recruit and dismiss staff. *"school principals in rural areas do not have rights"* (P-15) which is due to the fact that *"the government has not issued any laws or regulations that govern teachers' appointments"* (P-2). Furthermore, the *'People's Republic of China Compulsory Education Law Article 28'* stipulates that principals have



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the autonomy to appoint teachers and other staff, as well as have a say in the implementation of rewards and punishment. However, according to Xiong (2010), principals' autonomy cannot be truly exercised and that it is limited to the internal management of school affairs.

Lack of authority. Principals are not authorized to determine any of the schools running expenditure like teachers' salaries, infrastructure renovation costs and purchase of equipment, as these are controlled costs that require approval from higher authorities in the educational administrative departments. Likewise, in this study, there is evidence to suggest the bureaucracy involved when the "*principals have to report everything to the education bureau and relevant departments*" (P-2) in order to obtain their consent and approval before executing any school-based projects.

Funding

The shortage of funds and resources appears to be a big constraint faced by most of the school principals. Some of the schools are also heavy in debt due to loans taken to establish new campuses. Studies like Lv (2004) alongside Liang and Zhang (2010) highlighted that the school principals are facing the challenge of securing adequate funds for maintaining their school operations, provisioned in both underdeveloped and developed areas.

Shortage of funds. The responding school principals complained about his "*school condition is quite poor*" (P-13), and added with newly constructed campus where "*a new campus has been set up and our financial debt is more than 7,291,075.00 usd*" (P-1). Limited fund resources are definitely a limiting factor that discourages the leadership exercise as "*the fund needed for running a school is not small*" (P-2). It is hard to practise what we preached when they need fund to execute improvement projects to drive the school on the right track of creating quality education but have to pull a stop when there is no fund to support the promised initiatives.

School debt. One school principal shared that "*the biggest challenge schools that the school principals facing in Henan province, especially Shangqiu, is the economic-related problem-the school debt*" (P-11). Financial debt is one of the most difficult problems faced by most of the school principals. They have expressed that they require money to improve their school's infrastructure, for supporting teaching activities as well as for school management purposes. However, in the present study, the finding also demonstrated that school principals throughout the Henan province are highly dependent on government financial provisions. Moreover, it is a case where most of the Henan province school principals are in a passive position and do not have the political connection with government officials to be able to secure funds more easily.

Teacher Management

In China's long educational history, teachers are the fundamental educators highly respected by society. With teaching being viewed as a highly respectable profession, 10th September has been designated as the 'Teachers' Day' in China, as a day when people show their appreciation and respect to teachers for their valuable contributions to society. In terms of achieving excellent school outcomes and preparing the nation for international competition, China has been recognized for having undergone reform efforts to improve on its curriculum and teacher education needed for realizing their goals for globalization. However, there have been reports of teachers facing major challenges regarding their roles and expectations in exercising their influence together with principal leadership practices for promoting school effectiveness.

Teacher attrition. Challenges that teachers are facing with vary from teacher management issues to teacher attrition. The findings of this study show that these following challenges are attributable to the out of order of several performances: teacher management issues, poor school environments, teacher transfer from low performing rural schools to high-performing urban schools, an upsurge of retirements among senior teachers and the increase in medical and maternity leave which coincides with the government's two-child policy (Yang, 2015).



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These are among the current constraints and challenges faced by the teachers in Henan province that have had an impact on school management and leadership practices.

Teacher exhaustion is another issue of concern revealed in this study. According to the findings, some teachers are signed up for part-time jobs to get additional income. By overworking and having multiple responsibilities, teachers tend to be distracted from their routine teaching jobs and this can seriously compromise on the standard and quality of their teaching. Any negative impact on their teaching profession can cause teachers to eventually feel less motivated and enthusiastic about their teaching job. This can further cause teachers to be disinterested in backing up their school principal in actualizing their school goals.

Teacher-School principal relationship. The importance of maintaining a professional interpersonal relationship between principals' and teachers is echoed in Heather (2012). There is also evidence to suggest that the shortage of teachers can have a serious effect on the discourse of education. In the present study, principals have also pointed out that they are facing the challenge of developing and mobilizing teacher teams under the drive of new curriculum reform. Under the call of the government, the new curriculum reform has placed high demands on teachers who are expected to be the executors of the new curriculum operation. However, the findings of this study have indicated that the majority of teachers are deficient in knowledge and are unable to accomplish the requirements of developing a school-based curriculum. *"The new curriculum reform has both requirements on software and hardware facilities"* (P-13), however, their schools are unable to equip with their educators with the equipment due to insufficient funding.

Teacher quality. There is also a prevailing situation documented in various studies that compare the teaching quality of teachers from urban and rural areas. It was made known that those who live in the city and county demonstrate higher and better competence in teaching, compared to the teachers living in rural areas (An, 2013; Ma, 2015; Wang, 2007; Zhang, 2005). Similarly, there were the testimonies from the school principals in this study, who also shared common views about the quality of teaching being a concern in the more under-developed areas of Henan province compared to the county. *"Schools in rural areas with poor conditions, find it hard to retain our teachers. Teachers who have connections try to find a way to transfer to county schools"* (P-9). Added with remark sounded *"If other schools can offer higher salary or better working conditions, teachers will usually transfer out to these schools."* (P-6).

Teachers who are more capable, are not willing to stay in poor performing schools, especially when they have a better offer. From the above information provided by the school principals, we can see that salary is an important factor that affects the working enthusiasm of teachers. It is therefore a challenging task for school principals to retain their teachers, especially when they are offered better salary packages.

DISCUSSION

The significance of innovative talents and mind-sets is recognized by the majority principals participated in this study. Innovative changes are intended to allow schools to undergo a series of changes and reform for a better growth and produce highly educated generation as they are the pillars of the society and the future of the country. Among many reasons, school principals pointed out that, Chinese principals are generally lacking innovative abilities in catering the effort in the education reform. Findings of Jiang and Li (2011), Xu (2008), Yang (2000) and Zhang (2008) discovered that the educational innovation is facing a great resistance and challenges for several reasons. From the perspectives of the stakeholders, human beings like us, are reluctant to try new things, and more willing to stick to the conventional habits and traditional models, hostile and offensive to the innovative changes. However, teachers, students and parents have no psychologically confident in implementing constructive changes in the conventional system. This is due mainly to the viability of the changes to interfere the core of the school system and their interests (Jiang & Li, 2011; Xu, 2008; Yang, 2000). Therefore, hesitation, uncertainty and anxiety about the influence of the changes to the organizations and individuals have ceased the evolution upheld by the



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government. Apart from that, expectations and innovative evaluation criteria will then affect and stifle the execution of the planned innovation changes.

In this study, principals generally expressed themselves for bearing heterogeneous responsibility, for instances, political, security, education and administrative responsibility. Particularly, the security responsibility has put them under a lot of burden, but they were not granted with the parallel rights. The majority of school principals complained that the uncertain responsibilities and functional rights that restrict their leadership practice and the school development. This is ally with Lu (2003) that principal in-charge system has not been put in place in the Chinese education system. School principals' leadership practice with excessive government intervention, which yields school principals' responsibilities, rights and interests are peeled. Principals also indicated that they dare not to bold the reform due to too much of confusion and conflict originated from the exam-oriented education, still plays a dominate role and deeply rooted in the China's education system.

Factors that distract the balance the principals' responsibilities, rights and interests are many. According to Xiong (2010), lack of rule and law in education causes principals' responsibilities, rights and interests are not clear, which also restricted the effective implementation of the Principal Accountability System. Moreover, unclear function of educational administration is also one of the main reasons caused principals with limited power. Thus, the government and the educational administrative departments should do the following. Primarily, they have to strengthen the study on principals' responsibilities, rights and interests as theory is able to guide practice. Secondly, according to the principle of 'unity of responsibilities', rights and interests in establishing the principal in-charge system by law, it clearly defines the principals' responsibilities, rights and interests in order to change the status of principals' unknown rights and restriction of rights, as well as fully reflect the consistency of their needs. Thirdly, education administrative mechanism should be set in accordance with the streamlined and efficient principle and also clarify its responsibilities, authority, and content, which makes the education administrative departments are well regulated and ensure the smooth exercising of principals' power. Besides, the educational administrative departments can carry out macro guidance and comprehensive coordination through planning, guidance, supervision and other means. At meanwhile, the internal management mechanism of schools needs to be perfected to be more specific and a commensurate restriction mechanism regarding principals' decision-making powers and responsibilities should be established and guaranteed.

In order to ensure the stable quantity and quality of teachers in rural areas, the government should put more efforts to train more potential educators whom have just walk their convocations, offer appropriate compensation to the introduction of the required talent and resolve the problem of staffing in government and institutions. By improving school conditions and school environment in rural schools, establishing teacher incentive mechanism, implementing performance pay and other methods to solve the issue of imbalanced educational resources. Thirdly, the flow of teachers is unreasonable, which is one of the reasons that contribute to the scarcity of teachers in rural areas; therefore, the government should integrate the material and spiritual incentives to maintain a practical flow of teachers in rural areas. More specifically, by increasing the salary and welfare of teachers, it is able to reduce the turnover rate of teachers. Furthermore, the local government should introduce appropriate policies and regulations to establish an incentive mechanism for city teachers who are willing to work in backward areas. It is suggestive to initiate the strategy of "backward areas teachers go out to study, advanced areas teachers come in to teach" to establish an educational resource sharing platform for human resource mobility and exchange. Regarding the conflicts of interests of the teachers, school principals should according to teachers' work performance, establish an open and just distribution and reward system in the school. In addition, principals must strengthen their self-cultivation, by improving personal charisma in uniting the school community.

In summary, secondary school principals' professional development requires the stakeholders to give it plays their subjectivity. Specifically, principals should correctly understand the connotation of principal leadership, and their roles and missions, through a variety of ways to promote professional development. Education administrators and



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policy makers should give priority to the construction of education leadership discipline, followed by related policy support to fully play the leading role of the government and education sectors.

CONCLUSION

School principal has always been the model to school leadership and the pushing hands in ensuring the school community to move towards the shared vision and mission. Educational leadership is then the key to ease the effort in constructing the road to success. However, in this current scenario, the deteriorating quality of the leadership of school leaders is needed of a shoot in the arm to further strengthen their capability to bear the expectation and duty as the leading role in the school. School principal preparation and professional development program can never be at its most efficient role when there are still shortcomings from other factors that may affect their leadership exercise in the school.

Since the founding of People's Republic of China, the implementation of secondary school principals' leadership training has gone from scratch and shifted from weak to strong. After years of exploration and practice, secondary school principal training effectively improved school principals' leadership practice level and made certain contribution to education reform and school principals' professional development. With the increasing complexity and accountability of school principals' work, the demand for training is also unprecedented increased. Therefore, Henan province needs to establish scientific and standardized school principals' preparation and professional system to promote education continually, steadily and rapidly moving forward.

In this study, the challenges that are outlined and discussed should be further investigated and remedial action should be taken to ensure challenges to be a catalyst in strengthening the leadership practise but not a stumbling block in emerging the modern leadership function to achieve the desired quality education. It is hope that the voices of principals can be constantly heard and be noted for any policymaking procedure so that the policy is actually tailor-made to the one being under its enforcement and authority.

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