Chinese Principal Perceptions on the American School Leadership Standards: The Disparity among Leadership Dimensions

Mingchu Luo
Assistant Professor
Emporia State University
Campus Box 37, 1 Kellogg Circle, Emporia, KS 66801
mluo@emporia.edu
620-341-5835

Paul Bland
Professor
Emporia State University
Campus Box 37, 1 Kellogg Circle, Emporia, KS 66801
pbland@emporia.edu
620-341-5078

Edwin Church
Professor
Emporia State University
Campus Box 37, 1 Kellogg Circle, Emporia, KS 66801
echurch@emporia.edu
620-341-5742

Caitlin Burk
Graduate Assistant
Emporia State University
Campus Box 37, 1 Kellogg Circle, Emporia, KS 66801
cburk@g.emporia.edu
620-341-5078

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of Chinese school principals on the importance of American Educational Leadership Program Standards. Seventy three principals from a county in Guangdong, China completed the Principal Leadership Standards Questionnaire. The results of the study revealed that the Chinese principals perceived the majority of American leadership standards to be either important or very important in school administration. Perception differences among the leadership dimensions were significant. The principal leadership standards in the management of school organization and school instruction were perceived to be significantly more important than the leadership dimensions of school vision and collaborative partnership. The results of the study contribute to the development of school leadership training programs in China. Recommendations were made in using the framework of American leadership standards in China for the development and re-development of university programs and professional trainings in school leadership.

Keywords: principal, importance, leadership program standards, leadership dimension

Introduction

Leadership in schools significantly impacts the quality and effectiveness of education. School leadership has important effects in promoting the learning and enhancing the achievement of students in the school setting (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Principal leadership in schools has the core functions of providing direction for school success and exercising influence on teachers and students for school improvement. Effective school leaders develop visions that embody the best thinking about teaching and learning, enable the school to function as a professional learning community to support and sustain the performance of teachers and students, and

respond productively to challenges and opportunities created by the accountability-oriented policy context (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Fullen (2014) advocates for a balance of the role of the principal, one that consists of the principal as the leading learner, a system player, and an agent of change. He systematically demonstrates that the principal's role should change in order to meet the needs of challenging the status quo and fulfilling the commitment of continuous improvement. In order to improve and maintain standards of excellence, school leadership programs that produce future school leaders must be continually reviewed and evaluated. Based upon the results of previous studies and research, the Education Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) in the United States has developed and re-developed school leadership program standards (2011), which are adopted by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). The CAEP (2011) school leadership standards encapsulate principal leadership into six paradigms: school vision, school instruction, school organization, collaborative partnerships, moral perspective, and larger-context politics. These dimensions are used in school leadership programs and also as the foundation for professional development in established administrators. The standards also work as guidelines for the CAEP, which accredits the advanced programs of educational leadership in the United States.

Similarly in China, the government has issued and revised qualifications and criteria for principals. Although these individuals must be first-class or senior teachers before entering an educational administrative role, they must also be willing and able to provide services in the realms of moral, political, and ideological education (Finnish Board of Education, 2012). While political party and experience heavily influence selection process for principals, there is a lack of emphasis or acknowledgement of school leadership skillsets. In many Chinese schools, other administrative positions take up educational leadership roles while the principal primarily maintains the status quo as an overseer rather than necessarily a leader (Lee & Pang, 2011). To counteract any lack of school leadership abilities of candidates, the Ministry of Education in China established the Chinese Education Revitalization Plan, emphasizing the importance of school leadership training and focusing on the integration of this training through continuing education (Li, 2007).

Despite the requirements of continual training, no comprehensive theory of educational leadership has been accepted in China. With this in mind, educational systems in their country are investigating the suggestion of a reform in the role of principal with emphasis on training and leadership programs similar to the educational system established in the United States. This exchange of ideology and practices could create a more universally accepted educational leadership theory, which emphasizes independent thought and embracing greater responsibilities in educational administration (Yang & Frick, 2007).

Although the CAEP (2011) standards work well with the American education system, the possibility of integrating these standards in other countries of the world may prove to be a challenge. Despite the global trend of education development, every country has its own educational philosophy, unique purposes and pedagogical goals impacted by its distinctive culture, which may not fall in line with the standards established by the United States. For example, in Asian-Pacific countries such as China, Japan, and Korea, the cultures find the Confucian model of education more applicable and effective (Marginson, 2011a). The Confucian model rests on the following interdependent elements in strong nation-state shaping of structures and funding, universal tertiary participation, focus on family commitments to education, and accelerated public investment. These elements enable the systems to move forward rapidly on education (Marginson, 2011b). Although over the past century, it has not been rare for China to learn and adopt educational models from the United States, the different regions or provinces of China have the power to resist the global universal forms of education models or standards by adopting what they need and/or changing the global flow of ideas about education within their local contexts (Spring, 2009). Therefore, if the CAEP standards are to be implemented in China, the Chinese education leaders must see that the CAEP standards meet the needs of the local contextual setting that they will be implemented in regard to school leadership education. Considerations would also have to be made to insure the Chinese were

provided evidence that the CAEP standards were supported by research that insured alignment with the priorities and focuses of China and its cultures.

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of Chinese school principals on the importance of American school leadership program standards and to determine if there are any differences in the importance of American school leadership standards as perceived by Chinese principals among the school leadership dimensions. The aim is to use the results to gauge the appropriateness in recommending the use of ELCC (2011) leadership program standards as a policy or design framework and also form an opinion on the development and re-development of university programs and professional trainings in school leadership.

Method

Design and Instrument

This study used a cross-sectional survey research to investigate the Chinese principals' perceptions on the importance of American school leadership program standards. The research is quantitative with the combination of descriptive and explanatory nature.

Principal Leadership Standards Questionnaire (PLSQ). PLSQ was developed to measure Chinese principals' perceptions on the importance of American leadership standards based on the framework of the Building Level Educational Leadership Program Standards by the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC, 2011). The ELCC standards are also adopted by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) standards. The PLSQ used a five-point Likert scale for principals to rate the importance of American leadership standards by indicating their level of assessment on each of the PLSQ items with 1 representing "no or little important", 2 representing "somewhat important", 3 representing "moderate important", 4 representing "important", and 5 representing "very important". The PLSQ was also composed of items designed to collect demographic information such as teachers' gender, age, and years of leadership experiences, principals' gender, age, and years of leadership experiences, and school location.

Content validity. The initial PLSQ items were created by the researchers using the framework of ELCC (2011) building level standards. The PLSQ included items of the six standards of leadership in school vision, school instruction, school organization, collaborative partnerships, moral perspective and larger-context politics. Items of the PLSQ were developed and translated into Chinese with emphasis placed on being suitable in the context of Chinese school administration. Therefore, the PLSQ items provide a representative sampling of the dispositions, skills and knowledge deemed necessary for Chinese principals from the lens of American standards.

In order to have the PLSQ better reflect the Chinese school administration context, a panel of two Chinese professors and two Chinese principals were asked to review all the items of the translated questionnaire. The professors worked at Guangzhou, the capital city of Guangdong Province, who had enriched expertise and experience in principal leadership. The two principals served in the county where the PLSQ was administered. Based on their inputs, items were reworded so that the items would be applicable to principals in a variety of backgrounds and locations. The revised PLSQ were distributed to 26 principals at different levels in April 2012 as a pilot test. Based on the results of the pilot test and the teachers' comments about the questionnaire, six items were reworded and three items were discarded, resulting in a 32-item questionnaire for principals to perceive the importance of the American leadership standards.

The validity of PLSQ was also assessed with factor analysis on the 83 completed surveys by using PASW (SPSS) Statistics 18. Principal components analysis was conducted utilizing a varimax rotation. The

initial factor analysis and the corresponding scree plot indicated that a four-construct solution fitted the data. The four constructs accounted for 60.45% of the variance in the PLSQ items.

Construct 1 included six items with positive loadings, which covered the items in the leadership dimension of school vision (ELCC Standard 1, 2011). Construct 2 included eight items with positive loadings, which covered the items in the leadership dimension of school instruction (ELCC Standard 2). Construct 3 included seven items in positive loadings, which covered the items in the leadership dimensions of school organizational operation and moral perspective (ELCC Standard 3 and 4). Construct 4 included seven items with positive loadings, which covered the items in the leadership dimension of community collaborative partnerships (ELCC Standard 5). Four items with negative loadings were eliminated from the PLSQ. Therefore, the final PLSQ version for analyses was a 28-item instrument (see Table 2).

Reliability. Reliability analyses were conducted by using Cronbach's alphas on each of the four constructs of the PLSQ. The reliability coefficients of Cronbach alphas for the PLSQ's four dimensions in (a) school vision, (b) school instruction, (c) school organizational operation and moral perspective, and (d) community collaborative partnerships were .74, .81, .70, and .77, respectively. The results of Cronbach's alphas confirm the high reliability of all the constructs.

Participants and Data Collection Procedure

Participants of this survey study were the principals in a rural-based county from Guangdong Province. Guangdong is one of the densely populated provinces and one of the leading provinces in economic development in China. They were serving as principals at different levels of schools including elementary, middle and high schools in the whole county. Therefore, the participants provided a good sample of principals representing different school grade levels.

The PLSQ was administered to the 83 principals from the same county who participated in a curriculum professional training program at the county-level Educational Administration Bureau in June 2012. The surveys were distributed to different groups of principals by their group leaders at the end of the training. A cover letter was attached to each survey. It briefly explained the purpose of the survey and indicated that participants would take the survey voluntarily and anonymously. Individual survey results would not be disclosed. The principals from different levels of schools were asked to assess their perceptions on the American school leadership program standards. The surveys were returned to the group leaders after the principals completed them. Of the 75 returned surveys, 73 (97%) contained the necessary information to be used in the study (i.e., valid responses, missing no more than 3 survey items), providing a return rate of 84% of all the principal population of the county.

Table 1 presents the description of the 73 principals and their high schools' demographic and other information (due to the missing data, the totals in some of the demographic items did not add up to 73). The majority of the high school principal respondents were male (92.1%), reflecting the fact that the principals population in the county is predominantly male. There were more principals in the age group of 40 to 50 (52.1%). Respondents with associate degrees were 42.9%, with bachelor's degrees were 47.1%, whereas only 4.3% of the respondents received master's degrees. More than half of the respondents had been holding the principal position for the range of five to fifteen years while 30.6% of the respondents were novice principals (less than 5 years). A majority (73.3%) of the schools that the principals worked for were large-sized (more than 1000 students).

Table 1

Demographic Information of the Survey Respondents and their Schools

		Frequency	*Percent of Total*
Gender (n =73)			
	Male	67	92.1%
	Female	6	7.9%
Age (n =71)			
	Under 30	4	5.6%
	30-40	13	18.3%
	40-50	37	52.1%
	More than 50	17	23.9%
Educational Attainment (n = 70)			
	Vocational Degree	4	5.7%
	Associate Degree	30	42.9%
	Bachelor Degree	33	47.1%
	Master's degree	3	4.3%
Length of Total School Administrative Experience (*n* = 60)			
	Less than 1 to 5 years	22	36.7%
	More than 5 to 10 years	21	35.0%
	More than 10 to 15 years	11	18.3%
	More than 15 years	6	10.0%
Length of Holding the Principal Position at Current School (n = 62)			
	Less than 5 years	19	30.6%
	More than 5 to 10 years	21	33.9%
	More than 10-15 years	16	25.8%
	More than 15 years	6	9.7%
School Size (Enrollment) (*n* = 71)			
	500 or less	6	8.5%
	More than 500 to 1000	13	18.3%
	More than 1000 to 2000	34	47.9%
	More than 2000 to 3000	18	25.4%

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the PASW 18 software. Mean scores and standard deviations for each of the 28 PLSQ items and the four subscales were calculated to investigate the Chinese principals' perceptions on the importance

of the ELCC (2011) Building Level Standards. One-way repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was utilized to determine if there are significant differences in Chinese principals' perceptions on the importance across the four leadership dimensions. The alpha level of .05 was used for the ANOVA test for the determination of significant differences. For the follow-up tests of ANOVA, the alpha level of .008 (.05/6) was applied in order to decrease the Type I errors.

Results

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of overall mean scores and standard deviations for each of the four leadership constructs in (a) school vision, (b) school instruction, (c) school organizational operation and moral perspective, and (d) community collaborative partnerships. Means and standard deviations of the 28 individual items are provided in Table 2. The items of each construct were ranked in an order from the highest to the lowest mean for the purpose of understanding the extent of differences of principals' perceptions of the importance on American leadership standards among the individual items.

The overall mean scores revealed that school principals perceived the American leadership standards to be either moderately important or important among the four leadership constructs. The highest overall mean score among these four constructs was the leadership dimension of school organizational operation and moral perspective (M = 3.81, SD = 0.65). The importance level of principals' perception in the leadership dimension of school instruction was also relatively high (M = 3.69, SD = 0.67). The overall mean scores of the principals' importance perception in the leadership dimension of community collaborative partnerships were in third place (M = 3.45, SD = 0.64). In comparison to the above three dimensions, the importance of the American leadership standards in school vision (M = 3.38, SD = 0.73) was perceived to be the lowest level.

Mauchly's test in the one-way repeated-measures ANOVA indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been met ($\chi^2(5) = 4.812$, $p = .439$), therefore statistics related to the sphericity assumed were used for analyses. ANOVA yielded results of significant difference among the mean scores on the four leadership constructs ($F(3, 216) = 25.163$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .22$). Follow-up paired t-tests for the six pairs of differences in the four leadership constructs evaluated at the p-value of 0.05/6 or 0.008 level using Bonferroni procedure indicated that only two pairs, school vision versus community collaborative partnerships ($p = .923$) and school instruction versus school organizational operation and moral perspective ($p = .101$) were non-significant. Chinese principals perceived the school vision leadership standards to be significantly less important than school instruction standards ($t(72) = -5.411$, $p < .001$, $r = .54$), and school organizational operation and moral perspective ($t(72) = -7.552$, $p < .001$, $r = .66$). Similarly, Chinese principals rated the leadership standards of community collaborative partnerships to be significantly less important than school instruction standards ($t(72) = 4.216$, $p < .001$, $r = .45$), and school organizational operation and moral perspective standards ($t(72) = 6.070$, $p < .001$, $r = .58$). The effect sizes (r) of the differences in these paired comparisons are all at the medium and large levels, which indicates the actual existence of the practical differences between these different dimensions.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of the P3DMI Constructs and Individual Items

Item No.	*Item*	*Cronbach's*	*M*	*SD*
School Vision	*Leadership*	*.74*	*3.38*	*0.73*
1.	To collaboratively develop a shared vision of learning for school;	4.18	1.03	
2.	To identify organizational practices that promote sustainable school improvement;		3.58	1.18
3.	To involve school stakeholders in the visioning process;		3.23	1.14
4.	To evaluate school progress for implementing the vision;	3.34	1.04	
5.	To identify possible problems in vision implementation.		3.21	1.09
6.	To create evidence-centered strategies (plans) to achieve school goals;		2.70	1.11
School Instructional Leadership		*.81*	*3.69*	*0.67*
7.	To use multiple measures in assessing student outcomes for school improvement;		4.02	1.01
8.	To evaluate the instructional capacity of the school staff;		3.92	0.92
9.	To sustain a culture conducive to student success of learning;		3.85	0.94
10.	To collaborate with faculty to improve a coordinated curriculum;		3.65	1.07
11.	To design professional growth plans to increase the capacity of school staff;		3.60	1.06
12.	To work collaboratively with school staff to improve teaching and learning;		3.56	1.01
13.	To use research-based evidences in making instructional decisions.		3.55	0.97
14.	To use evaluation evidences to monitor learning programs;		3.35	1.21
School Organizational Leadership		*.70*	*3.81*	*0.65*
15.	To develop strategies supporting safe and secure learning environments;	4.33	0.94	
16.	To ensure effective management to achieve high quality instruction.		4.30	0.72
17.	To promote an environment for improved student achievement;		3.89	1.03
18.	To insure that staff members are treated fairly;		3.66	1.31
19.	To assign human resources in ways that promote student achievement;	3.53	1.18	
20.	To develop school operational policies that promote success for all students;		3.50	1.12
21.	To monitor school organizational processes and operations;		3.44	1.20

(Table 2 continued)
Means and Standard Deviations of the P3DMI Constructs and Individual Items

Item No.	*Item*	*Cronbach's*	*M*	*SD*
School Community Collaborative Partnership Leadership		*.77*	*3.45*	*0.64*
22.	To gauge the effectiveness of collaborative relationships with the community;		3.80	0.99
23.	To generate approaches with school stakeholders that reflect their concern;		3.62	1.00
24.	To develop effective communication plans with the community;	3.55	0.94	
25.	To measure the effectiveness of outreach to the community.		3.52	0.88
26.	To involve community partners in the decision-making processes at the school;		3.47	1.11
27.	To develop effective relationships with a variety of community Partners;	3.31	1.17	
28.	To use diverse community resources to improve school programs;		3.11	1.08

Discussions

The self-reported responses reveal an overall picture of the Chinese principals' perception on the American school leadership standards. The results of this study indicate that the Chinese school principals generally perceive the American school leadership program standards for building level (ELCC, 2011) to be important in their position as the key school administrator. The level of importance of (a) school instruction, and (b) school organizational operation and moral perspective perceived by school administrators transcended the following two constructs of school leadership in (a) school vision, and (b) community collaborative partnerships from "very important" or "important" to "moderately important". These results seem to be consistent with the assumptions imbedded with the ELCC building-level leadership preparation standards. The findings reflect that the shared central responsibility of school leadership between China and USA is to improve student achievement through effective instruction while importance of managing the "business" of school is also very well understood and accepted (ELCC). The findings tend to support the notion that Chinese school leaders perceive a coexistence of Chinese and American leadership and management values. Chinese school leaders can be affected by both Chinese and Western values and practices in school leadership and management. The differences between Chinese and Western school management practices should not be over-stressed (Law, 2010).

National standards for leadership preparation program provide a framework for the important knowledge and skills building the foundations of professional identities. The ELCC (2011) standards are research-based, widely used standards for advanced programs in educational leadership. They are designed to serve as broad national policy for any leadership preparation programs intended to train school administrators including principals, assistant principals, supervisors, curriculum and instruction leaders, teacher leaders, school business officials and special education directors in the US (The National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2012). Based upon the results of the importance of the ELCC standards perceived by the Chinese principals in this study, it is recommended that the ELCC standards be used as the policy framework to guide the various preparation and training programs for school leaders in China.

This study found the relatively low level of perceived importance in the leadership dimensions of school vision and community collaborative partnerships, which also are perceived significantly less important than the leadership dimensions of school instruction and school organizational operation. These might suggest the impact of national cultures and political systems on school leadership and management that is different from that in the western countries (Law, 2012). Governance systems differ considerably in terms of centralization and decentralization of school administration between China and the United States. Strictly centralized systems in school administration can be found in China and while the Anglo-American system is fundamentally decentralized (Finnish National Board of Education, 2012). The hierarchical and strictly regulated leadership structure in Chinese schools can possibly impact the relatively low perceived importance in principals' development of school visions. The overemphasis on the principal's role of instructional leader and accountability of student learning outcomes in China can possibly lead the principals' low perception in the importance of community collaborative partnerships.

The importance of shared school vision, mission and goals has been demonstrated in numerous studies in school effectiveness and improvement (e.g., Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Kurland, Peretz, & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2010; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Building level leaders must have knowledge of strategies to collaborate with faculty and community members and understand the diverse community interests and needs (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009; Epstein & Sanders, 2006, Halverson, 2010).

Lee and Pang (2011) insist that principals managing and leading a school in China need to focus on establishing and maintaining appropriate relationships with external authorities and internal staff. The findings of this study in the low level of importance perceived by the Chinese principals in school vision and community collaborative partnerships do not seem to be consistent with the results of the previous research. These might suggest that there could be principals unaware of the importance and benefits of school vision and collaborative partnerships in school leadership. Fullen (2014) challenges the current focus on instructional leadership by stating that "the principal as direct instructional leader is not the solution" (p.6) and "a narrow focus on instructional leadership and student achievement can shut out other dimensions of leading for learning" (p. 41). From this perspective, the disparity in perceived importance across the leadership dimensions suggest the need of Chinese school leadership programs to enhance leadership knowledge and skills in developing context-based visions and collaborating with communities in school leadership preparation and training programs.

References

Barnyak, N. C., & McNelly, T. A. (2009). An urban school district's parent involvement: A study of teachers' and administrators' beliefs and practices. *The School Community Journal,19*(1), 33-58.

Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) (2011). *Standards for advanced programs in educational leadership for principals, superintendents, curriculum directors, and supervisors*. Washington, DC: National Policy Board for Educational Administration.

Elmore, R. (1999). *Leadership of large-scale improvement in American education*. Cambridge, MA: Graduate School of Education, Harvard University.

Epstein, J. L., & Sanders, M. G. (2006). Prospects for change: Preparing educators for school, family, and community partnerships. *Peabody Journal of Education, 81*(2), 81-120.

Finnish National Board of Education, & Taipale, A. (2012). International survey on educational leadership: A survey on school leader's work and continuing education. Retrieved from http://www.oph.fi/download/143319_International_survey_on_educational_leadership.PDF

Fullen, M. (2014). *The principal: Three keys to maximizing impact.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Hallinger, P. H. & Murphy, J. (1986). Instructional leadership in effective schools. Retrieved from ERIC database (ED 309505)

Halverson, R. (2010). School formative feedback systems. *Peabody Journal of Education, 85*(2), 130-146.

Kurland, H., Peretz, H. & Hertz-Larowitz, R. (2010). Leadership style and organizational learning: the mediate effect of school vision. *Journal of Educational Administration, 48*(1), 7-30.

Law, W. (2010). Culture and school leadership in China: Exploring school leaders' views of relationship- and rule-based governance. In A. Wiseman (Ed.), *Educational leadership: Global contexts and international comparisons* (pp. 303-341). Bingley: Emerald Publishing.

Law, W. (2012). Educational leadership and culture in China: Dichotomies between Chinese and Anglo-American leadership traditions? *International Journal of Educational Development, 32*(2), 273–282.

Lee, J. C. K., & Pang, N. S. K. (2011). Educational leadership in China: Contexts and issues. *Frontiers of Education in China, 6*(3), 331-341. doi: 10.1007/s11516-011-0135-1

Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2000). Transformational school leadership effects: A replication. *School Effectiveness & School Improvement, 10*(4), 451-479.

Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2008). *Linking leadership to student learning: The contributions of leader efficacy*. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *44*, 496–528.

Leithwood, K. A., & Riehl, C. (2003). *What we know about successful school leadership*. Philadelphia, PA: Laboratory for Student Success, Temple University. Reports accessed from: http://cepm.uoregon.edu/pdf/whatweknow103.pdf

Li, F. (2007). *School leadership training in China: A cultural perspective.* (Unpublished master thesis). Universitetet i Oslo, Norway.

Marginson, S. (2011a). Higher education in East Asia and Singapore: Rise of the Confucian model. *Higher Education, 61*(5), 587-611. doi: 10.1007/s10734-010-9384-9

Marginson, S. (2011b). The Confucian model of higher education in East Asia and Singapore. *Higher Education Dynamics, 36*, 53-75.

National Policy Board for Educational Administration. (2012). ELCC 2011 Program Standards Now In Effect for CAEP (formally NCATE) Accreditation! *National Policy Board for Educational Administration* Retrieved from http://npbea.org/2012/06/new-elcc-2011-standards-approved-by-ncate/

Spring, J. (2009). *Globalization* of *education: An introduction*. NY: Routledge.

Yang, J., & Frick, W. C. (2007, November). Will the leadership of Chinese education follow the footsteps of American education? A social-political analysis. *Fostering compassion and understanding across borders: An international dialogue on the future of educational leadership.* Symposium presented at the University Council of Education Administration (UCEA) Convention, Alexandria, VA.