

Principals' Managerial Roles in Pontian District, Johor, Malaysia

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Abstract

The responsibilities of a principal include those of a manager and of an instructional leader. The ability to balance managerial and leadership roles significantly affects quality management practices. The following research examines the three main roles played by a principal in managing a school. The roles are based on Mintzberg's (1973) managerial role model and Mansor's (2006) principals' managerial role model. They are interpersonal, informational, and decisional. The research is quantitative and employs a survey method involving 66 principals in Pontian district, Johor, Malaysia. The findings show that the level of practice in all three managerial roles is very high. Inferential analysis reveals that there is no significant difference in roles played by the principals in terms of gender, school categories, or length of service. The findings raise important issues that warrant immediate action by educational policymakers, such as the need to develop more relevant standards that prioritize interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles over non-related tasks.

Keywords

Management, Principal Role, School

1. Introduction

Managerial practices make an important contribution to a school's organizational excellence. Zakaria (2013) defined school management as the process of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling. Discussion on school management practices is not complete without addressing the centrality of principals and the multiple roles they play. The notion of a multiplicity of roles was best described by Md Ali (2015), who defined a principal as a leader, an administrator, and a leader in a school. A study by Dhuey and Smith (2018) suggested that

a high-quality principal could influence student learning.

The advance of technology presented a new challenge to school principals in negotiating their managerial and leadership roles. This was in addition to the existing demand of having to fulfil their responsibilities in the face of societal expectations, as [Sani and Md Noor \(2001\)](#) stated. To fulfil these expectations, the principal's main role was to act as a driving force who initiated, produced, activated, and made necessary changes to the school ([Mansor, 2006](#)).

The framework that governs the practice of Malaysian school principals' managerial roles is the Malaysian School Principals' Competency Standards 2006 (MSPCS). The nine domains of competencies are: a) organizational management and leadership, b) curriculum and instructional leadership, c) co-curricular programmes leadership, d) management of student development, learning, and well-being, e) financial and asset management, f) administrative leadership, g) management of the learning environment and physical facilities, h) personnel and professional development, and i) external relations and partnership development ([Ayob, 2012](#)).

2. Literature Review

Role and Responsibilities of Principals

In discussing the managerial roles of school principals, the best guide is [Mintzberg's \(1973\)](#) managerial role theory. Mintzberg's study answered the central question of what managers did when managing their organizations. His model was based on three managerial roles: informational, interpersonal, and decisional. These were subdivided into ten sub-roles (see [Table 1](#)).

A number of studies have examined managerial roles based on Mintzberg's managerial role theory. [Muma, Smith, and Somers \(2006\)](#) evaluated the roles of physician assistant department chairpersons. [Kumar \(2015\)](#) categorized Mintzberg's managerial roles into five configurations: simple structure, machine

Table 1. Mintzberg's (1973) managerial role model.

INFORMATIONAL ROLE	INTERPERSONAL ROLE	DECISIONAL ROLE
Monitor - access information relevant to the running of the organization	Figurehead - undertake symbolic duties to represent the organization	Entrepreneur - look for opportunities and innovation
Disseminator - synthesize and integrate information to be shared with relevant members of the organization	Leader - inspire subordinates to do their best by acting as a role model	Disturbance handler - manage and solve crises and challenges
Spokesperson - transmit information to people outside the organization	Liaison - network and build relationships with outside agencies	Resource allocator - manage and optimize organizational resources
		Negotiator - negotiate business deals for the organization

bureaucracy, professional bureaucracy, divisionalized form, and adhocracy. [Altamony, Masa'deh, and Gharaibeh \(2015\)](#) examined the role of academic researchers, while [Gokce \(2013\)](#) evaluated school principal managerial behaviours.

Despite the popular acceptance of Mintzberg's theory, few studies have used it to examine school principals' roles in a Malaysian school setting. Most studies have analyzed principals' roles without the specific reference to Mintzberg's framework. For instance, [Yunus, Yunus, and Ishak \(2012\)](#) examined principals' role in teaching supervision in selected schools in the state of Perak, [Lee \(2007\)](#) studied Malaysian principals' role in developing innovative and creative environments in which to govern high-quality educational institutions, and [Veeriah, Chua, Siaw, and Hoque \(2017\)](#) studied principals' transformational leadership practices and school culture in primary cluster schools in the state of Selangor, Malaysia. [Ishak and Ghani \(2012\)](#) developed a list of best leadership practices as a guide for schools wishing to become learning organizations. In terms of gender differences, [Rahman and Lim \(2018\)](#) discovered that there were no distinctions between male and female principals' leadership styles.

[Mansor \(2006\)](#) carried out an exploratory qualitative study using Mintzberg's model. It featured six experienced and effective principals working at five different types of school. Mansor discovered that the principals played an additional interpersonal sub-role, which she named the guardian. She did suggest a twelfth sub-role, namely instructional, but it applied to only one principal. She concluded that principals played the interpersonal role to gather information from inside and outside the school organization. They then synthesized, shared, and disseminated the information in the informational role. Finally, they used the information in the decisional role to make decisions regarding their school's performance.

Mansor observed that principals played four sub-roles under the interpersonal role, namely figurehead, leader, liaison, and guardian. As figureheads, principals attended social and ceremonial activities, officiating at events inside and outside school. As leaders, they motivated, inspired, and shared their vision on how to make their schools successful. In the liaison sub-role, they developed networks and maintained relationships with people outside the school to gain their support in promoting the school's effectiveness. As guardians, they carried out their responsibilities in place of a parent, caring for their students' well-being once the students had entered the school compound. In Malaysia, principals are liable to be called to account if they were found to have been negligent in performing this role. The main purpose of the interpersonal role was to allow principals to gather and synthesize information from inside and outside the school organization and to use the information to formulate plans that were in accordance with the school's goals.

The importance of the principals' interpersonal role is best described by [Musah, Rahman, Tahir, Al-Hudawi, and Daud \(2018\)](#), who suggested that principals should always build good relationships with teachers to gain their trust in maintaining school effectiveness. [Achmad and Hamzah's study \(2017\)](#) found

that school principals used the interpersonal role in managing information and communications technology (ICT) integration in school. They concluded that the interpersonal role was used by school principals to build good rapport with other staff. [Chan and Sidhu \(2009\)](#), who studied leadership characteristics of an excellent principal identified a successful principal as “being reflective, caring and a highly principled person who emphasized the human dimension of the management enterprise” (p. 114).

Principals played three sub-roles under the informational role: monitor, disseminator, and spokesperson. As monitors, principals are responsible for gathering the most current information regarding the running of the school. They obtained this information from staff, students, and parents. Principals were also disseminators, synthesizing, integrating, and communicating information within the organization using memos, letters, and email. As spokespersons, they transmitted relevant information to parents, stakeholders, the Ministry of Education, and other relevant authorities.

Under the decisional role, principals played four sub-roles: entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator. As entrepreneurs, principals used their creativity and innovativeness, and surveyed opportunities to plan programmes or activities that would benefit the school. Principals were disturbance handlers when they managed problems relating to teaching and learning and day-to-day activities. As resource allocators, principals allocated school resources to ensure that all funds, assets, and supplies were used effectively and efficiently. Finally, as negotiators, principals acted as mediators in dealing with any issues involving the school.

[Mansor \(2006\)](#) concluded that the principals she studied played at least two of these roles simultaneously when carrying out their management activities. Their jobs were hectic and cyclical in nature, and they focused mostly on meetings (planned and unplanned), carrying out and checking paperwork, attending ceremonies, problem solving, walking around the school, and supervising teachers and students. Whilst, [Kairy \(2018\)](#) found that while men and women identified the same qualities required for senior management roles in vocational and educational training, men focused on task-orientated leadership skills and women focused on relationship development leadership skills.

3. Conceptual Framework

Two variables were used in this study (see [Figure 1](#)). The independent variable was the background information on the principals involved, which included gender, school category, and length of service. The dependent variable incorporated the three managerial roles.

The extent to which the practice of Malaysian principals reflected the three managerial roles encapsulated in [Mansor’s \(2006\)](#) managerial role model remained unclear, and there was a question as to whether they played their roles differently within the three categories of gender, school category (grade A schools

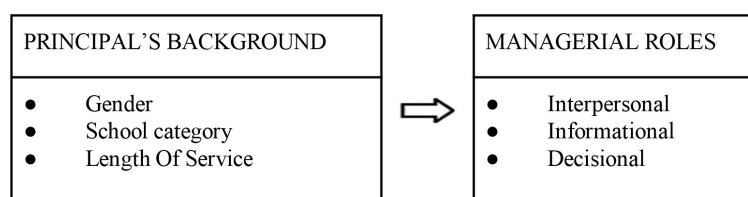


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

with enrolments bigger than grade B schools), and experience (represented as length of service). The goals of this study were therefore to identify a) the level of managerial roles (interpersonal, informational, and decisional) as practised among principals and b) the difference level in the roles played by the principals based on gender, school category, and length of service.

4. Methods

This study employed a quantitative approach using a survey design. The questionnaire consisted of 30 items based on the principals' three roles outlined by Mintzberg (1973) and Mansor (2006). The respondents were asked to respond according to a five-point Likert scale: 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, and 5 = always.

A simple random sample technique was used and 66 principals were selected among the total population of 82 principals in Pontian district, Johor. The sample size was based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970). **Table 2** shows the interpretation of mean scores used in the research.

Mean Score	Interpretation
1.00 - 1.80	Very low
1.81 - 2.60	Low
2.61 - 3.40	Moderate
3.41 - 4.20	High
4.21 - 5.00	Very high

Source: Educational planning and research division, ministry of education malaysia, (2006).

A Cronbach's alpha test was used to measure instrument reliability. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was above 0.65. This was in keeping with the view of scholars such as Konteng (2005), Pallant (2001), Sekaran (1992), and Siti Rahayah (2003), who have stated that a value above 0.80 was considered good but that a value between 0.60 and 0.80 was also acceptable. The coefficient value for all items was found to be very high (0.946). **Table 2** shows the coefficient value for each construct.

5. Results

The respondents were 66 primary school principals from the district of Pontian, Johor, Malaysia. The sample size was based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970). **Table 3** presents the respondents' demographic backgrounds.

Table 2. Coefficient value of instrument.

Constructs	Number of Items	Coefficient value <i>Alpha Cronbach</i>
Interpersonal Role	11	0.679
Informational Role	7	0.780
Coefficient value of instrument	30	0.922

Table 3. Demographic distribution of respondents.

Respondents Background	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Gender		
Male	31	47
Female	35	53
Total	66	100
School Grade		
Grade A	27	40.9
Grade B	39	59.1
Total	66	100
Length of service as principal		
0 - 3 years	43	65.2
4 - 6 years	15	22.7
7 - 9 years	5	7.6
Above 10 years	3	4.5
Total	66	100

5.1. Principals' Managerial Roles

Table 4 shows the average mean score for the principals' managerial roles based on the three roles. The results show that the level of practice in Pontian district is very high, with an average mean score of 4.67. Interpersonal roles score the highest (4.73), followed by informational (4.67), and decisional (4.60) roles.

5.2. Principals' Managerial Roles Based on Gender and School Categories

This section presents results for the three categories of managerial roles (interpersonal, informational, and decisional) based on respondents' gender and school categories (grades A and B).

5.2.1. Interpersonal Roles

Table 5 shows the results of an independent t-test on the difference in principals' interpersonal roles practices based on gender and school grades. In terms of gender, the analyzed data, $t(64) = 0.392$, sig. = 0.696 ($p > 0.05$), show that there is no significant difference in principals' interpersonal roles practices. Whereas

Table 4. Overall mean for level of practices of principals' managerial roles.

Dimensions	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Interpersonal Role	4.73	0.303	Very High
Informational Role	4.67	0.328	
Decisional Role	4.60	0.366	
Average Means Score	4.67	0.332	

Table 5. Principals' interpersonal roles based on gender and school categories.

Dimensions	Group	Means	Means difference	t value	Sig (p)
Interpersonal Roles	Male	4.75	0.03	0.392	0.696
	Female	4.72			
	Grade A	4.74	0.01	0.201	0.842
	Grade B	4.73			

Significant at $p < 0.05$ level.

in terms of school grades, t-test results indicate that again there is no significant difference: $t(64) = 0.201$, sig. = 0.842 ($p > 0.05$).

5.2.2. Informational Roles

Table 6 indicates that there is no significant difference in terms of gender, $t(64) = 0.603$, sig. = 0.548 ($p > 0.05$), and school categories, $t(64) = 0.017$, sig. = 0.986 ($p > 0.05$) in informational roles.

5.2.3. Decisional Roles

Table 7 indicates that there is no significant difference in terms of decisional roles practices based on gender, $t(64) = 0.158$, sig. = 0.875 ($p > 0.05$) and school categories, $t(64) = 0.481$, sig. = 0.632 ($p > 0.05$).

5.2.4. Principals' Managerial Roles Based on Length of Service

A one-way ANOVA test was used to determine differences in the principals' managerial roles based on their length of service. As **Table 8** shows, there is no significant difference: $F = 1.617$, sig. = 0.194 ($p > 0.05$).

6. Discussion

The objectives of this study was to identify a) the level of managerial roles (interpersonal, informational, and decisional) as practised among principals and b) the difference level in the roles played by the principals based on gender, school category, and length of service.

Regarding the level of managerial roles, this study found that the level of practices was very high. This means that the managerial roles practised by school principals in Pontian district conform to Mintzberg's (1973) model. The findings support those of previous research by Mansor (2006), Mace (2013) and Achmad and Hamzah (2017). There is a high level of involvement in interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles.

Table 6. Principals' informational roles based on gender and school categories.

Dimensions	Group	Means	Means difference	t value	Sig (p)
Informational Roles	Male	4.69	0.05	0.603	0.548
	Female	4.64			
	Grade A	4.67	0.00	0.017	0.986
	Grade B	4.67			

Significant at $p < 0.05$ level.

Table 7. Principals' decisional roles based on gender and school categories.

Dimensions	Group	Means	Means difference	t value	Sig (p)
Decisional Roles	Male	4.60	0.01	0.158	0.875
	Female	4.59			
	Grade A	4.57	0.05	0.481	0.632
	Grade B	4.62			

Significant at $p < 0.05$ level.

Table 8. One-way ANOVA analyses for principals' managerial roles based on length of service.

Length of service	N	Means	Standard deviation
0 - 3 years	43	4.609	0.346
4 - 6 years	15	4.795	0.207
7 - 9 years	5	4.681	0.132
Above 10 years	3	4.804	0.170
Total	66	4.665	0.309

One Way Anova					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	0.451	3	0.150	1.617	0.194
Within groups	5.761	62	0.093		
Total	6.212	65			

Significant at $p < 0.05$ level.

That the interpersonal role is the most highly practised shows the preference of the principals. This is in keeping with [Chan and Sidhu \(2009\)](#), who identified a successful principal as “being reflective, caring and a highly principled person who emphasized the human dimension of the management enterprise” (p. 114). Their preference in interpersonal roles was understandable and as highlighted by previous studies, in managing their schools, they need to build relationships with teachers in order to gain their trust in maintaining school effectiveness ([Musah et al., 2018](#)) and to manage ICT integration ([Achmad & Hamzah, 2017](#)).

There is no significant correlation between managerial roles and the three demographic factors of gender, school grades, and length of service. This is in line with findings by [Rahman and Lim \(2018\)](#) and [Kairys \(2018\)](#). In Kairys's study, although there is no difference between gender in terms of skills required

for managerial roles, women managers ranked interpersonal skills as the most important. Thus, in terms of gender, Malaysian women principals are as effective as their male counterparts in carrying out their managerial roles.

7. Conclusion

This research shows that principals in Pontian, Johor practise their managerial roles in conformance with Mintzberg's theory. There is no relationship between these roles and demographic factors such as gender, school grades, and length of service. This research underscores the centrality of principals' roles in ensuring the effectiveness of school organization. Principals need to develop their professional expertise continually to enhance their roles. It is recommended that policymakers assist in this task through the more focused development of principals' professional and context-relevant leadership qualities. Further research involving bigger samples from other states in Malaysia is necessary to give more concrete empirical information on principals' managerial roles. Also recommended would be a qualitative study line of inquiry to explore instructional roles practiced by selected successful school principals.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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