THE LANDSCAPE OF PRINCIPALSHIP IN

YANGON, MYANMAR

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Educational Leadership and
Management

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DECLARATION

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This thesis entitled “The Landscape of Principalship in Yangon, Myanmar” is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Educational Leadership and Management at Unitec Institute of Technology.

Candidate’s Declaration

I confirm that:

• This thesis represents my own work;
• The research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

Research Ethics Committee Approval Number: 2017-1029

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ABSTRACT

Next to teachers, principals are the most important factor in improving student learning outcomes. Consequently, it is becoming essential to look at principalship in different national contexts. Very little evidence of credible research exists in relation to principalship in Myanmar (Burma). This study aims to close that gap by investigating what principalship looks like across primary, middle and high schools in one township in Yangon Division in Myanmar containing two primary, three middle and three high schools.

In this qualitative study, an interpretive approach was used to investigate the experiences, perceptions and practices of all eight school principals in the township of Yangon, Myanmar. Two qualitative methods were employed: semi-structured interviews, and documentary analysis. Firstly, semi-structured interviews were used to explore how Myanmar principals perceive and interpret their role and responsibilities. Secondly, documentary analysis was undertaken to examine what documents revealed about the role and responsibilities of Myanmar principals.

This study found that the principals work in a highly bureaucratic and centralised education system where their role and responsibilities are clearly defined in relation to routine administration of the schools. A key finding was that the principals are subjected to many rules and regulations and see themselves mainly as implementers of directives set by the Ministry of Education. The role of the principals does not place instructional leadership as a priority and the principals have little or no autonomy and involvement in teacher professional development, curriculum development and school quality improvement. It is recommended that principals would benefit from a concise position description that positions them as instructional leaders.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of South East Asian Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CESR</td>
<td>Comprehensive Education Sector Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDGs</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFSTED</td>
<td>Office for Standards in Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund</td>
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Next to teachers, principals are the most important factor in improving student learning outcomes. Consequently, it is becoming essential to look at principalship in different national contexts. Very little evidence of credible research exists in relation to principalship in Myanmar (Burma). My thesis topic - ‘Landscape of principalship in Yangon, Myanmar’ - sought to close that gap by investigating what principalship looks like across primary, middle and high schools within the local context of Myanmar.

The Myanmar Context

Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, is a country in South East Asia bordered by Thailand, Laos, China, Bangladesh and India. Myanmar was formed as a Pagan Dynasty in 1044 and its education started with traditional Buddhist monastic schools (Seekins, 1983; Ferguson, 1983). Under British colonial rule between 1885 and 1947, a Ministry of Education was established along with 7,000 basic education schools that were state-provided and state-controlled (Seekins, 1983; Lall, San, San, Myat & Khaing, 2013). At national independence in 1948, education was made free and Myanmar had a high literacy rate due to the availability of government as well as monastic schools (Lall et al., 2013). However, the Myanmar education system started deteriorating after General Ne Win’s military coup in 1962 which was the beginning of the downhill cascade of Myanmar infrastructure, economy, wealth and most importantly education (Zobrist & McCormick, 2013). Owing to the fact that the Myanmar student community had always been politically active, the military regime oppressed the student community not just through violence but also through altering the education system by decreasing the size of Rangoon and Mandalay universities, closing down various universities for up to 10 years, restricting student intake, relocating campuses away from urban centres, reducing specialised courses, and determining choice of study by matriculation exam results (Lall et al., 2013).
Presently, the administration of basic education is centralised at the level of the Ministry of Education (‘the Ministry’) in conjunction with the Ministry of Religious Affairs (monastic schools) and the Ministry of Border Affairs (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation UNESCO, 2011). The Ministry’s role is to implement educational programmes, set educational policies, plan and administer public education, regulate non-governmental educational institutions, and supervise all schools offering basic education (Tanaka, Spohr & D’Amico, 2015). There are seven departments under the Ministry, including the Department of Basic Education, the Department of Higher Education, the Department of Teacher Training, the Department of Human Resources and Education Project, the Myanmar Research Department of Education, the Myanmar Examiner Department, and the Department of Language Education (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2017). The Department of Basic Education has the most administrative responsibility and oversees administrative processes at the state or division, district and township levels. Currently, the Myanmar education system provides eleven years of schooling: five years of primary, four years of middle, and two years of high school. The curriculum for all schools providing basic education (government, monastic or private) is set by the Ministry of Education and the schools must use the textbooks prepared by the Ministry (Zobrist & McCormick, 2013).

To date, there has been very little emphasis placed on principalship by the Ministry and the Institutes of Education, both of which do not have any department or provide any preparation programme in the field of educational leadership and management. According to the National Education Strategic Plan 2016-2021, the Myanmar Ministry of Education (2016b) has acknowledged the issue of not providing leadership and management training to school principals and stating that “in Myanmar, most head teachers are promoted from the teaching force based on their years of experience as a teacher without any training in either school management or leadership” (p. 106). In contrast, a neighbouring country, Thailand, has placed a greater emphasis on school leadership by preparing and developing their principals at the Institute for the Development of Educational Administrators under their Ministry of Education (Hallinger, 1994). The need for principal leadership to be associated more clearly
with student achievement is an urgent issue because the quality of education in Myanmar is very poor and the education indicators lag behind other Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries (Tanaka et al., 2015). Moreover, the general public has little confidence in government schools because of the poor quality of teaching and learning (Young, 2014).

Presently, Myanmar is undergoing political, economic and educational reforms. The first wave of educational reform in 2012 has already brought about a Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) resulting in the National Education Strategic Plan 2016-2021 (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2016b). Nevertheless, more attention needs to be paid to the work of school leaders especially the role of the school principal in promoting student learning outcomes. For example, the National Education Law (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2014) only covers education principles, the role of the central authority, school finances, curriculum, teachers and educational rights but does not contain any definition of principalship or the area of school leadership and management.

The newly elected government is reviewing and redrafting the National Education Law and named the proposed new law the Basic Education Law Draft (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2016a). Although the Basic Education Law Draft (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2016a) still does not cover the role of the principal, it does highlight that professional standards and development training for principals is the responsibility of the Department of Basic Education. Moreover, the National Education Strategic Plan 2016-2021 (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2016b) highlights the reform process towards a decentralised education system and the expectation of the principals to act as instructional leaders. As their immediate target, the Myanmar Ministry of Education (2016b) states its intention that “50 per cent of basic education school head teachers to be trained on school management and instructional leadership” by the end of 2019 (p. 111). I believe that the climate for principal leadership in my country is going to become more buoyant and will receive more awareness and scrutiny from the government and the public.
Rationale

My research topic ‘The landscape of principalship in Yangon, Myanmar’ is premised on the problem that in Myanmar the role of the principal is not clearly defined. This gap is of crucial concern for the people in my country because we do not know what principals need to do in order to improve schools and student learning outcomes. When principals are appointed in Myanmar, they are given a letter of appointment without any contract that outlines their role and responsibilities, nor is specialised training in the field of educational leadership and management provided (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2016b; Young, 2014). Furthermore, the Ministry does not have a department for principal preparation and leadership training. Similarly, the Yangon Institute of Education does not have any qualification programme in the field of Education Leadership and Management. With our National Education Law (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2014) being too generic to underpin school leadership and management, the roles and responsibilities of principals in Myanmar continue to be unclear. Furthermore, it is concerning that there is little evidence of credible research done on educational leadership and management in Myanmar. The lack of literature is confirmed by Hallinger and Bryant (2013) who conducted a review of research on school leadership in East Asian countries and found that Myanmar did not contribute any publications. This finding led to my interest to explore principalship in Myanmar, because I am currently pursuing a postgraduate degree in educational leadership and management and have the theoretical knowledge that principals play a key role in student learning outcomes. In exploring the role of principalship in Myanmar, my research might shed some light on the roles and responsibilities of school principals in Myanmar and suggest further research on principalship. Additionally, as outlined in the National Education Strategic Plan 2016-2021, the Myanmar Ministry of Education (2016b) is planning to provide training for principals. My research may not only provide relevant information to the Ministry in developing a contextually appropriate training programme but also assist in achieving the overarching outcome of improving schools and student attainment.
Research Aims and Questions

Principal leadership does not exist in a vacuum but within different educational systems across various countries. Given the tremendous socio-cultural, political and economic diversity underpinning education in any nation, there is a need to study principalship in different national contexts (Oplatka, 2004). However, there is a limited literature available on the local view of principalship in Myanmar, which indicates an unexplored landscape. Thus my first aim is to establish an international view of principalship in the form of a literature review that will provide a framework for my field research. My overall purpose for this study is to investigate what principalship looks like across primary, middle and high schools in Yangon Division in Myanmar to create a snapshot of this landscape.

I have identified three aims:

1. To establish an international view of principalship,
2. To investigate the roles and responsibilities of principals in Yangon Division in Myanmar,
3. To identify the challenges experienced by Myanmar principals.

Based on my research aims, I have formulated four research questions:

1. What is an international view of principalship?
2. What do documents reveal about the roles and responsibilities of Myanmar principals?
3. How do Myanmar principals perceive and interpret their roles and responsibilities?
4. What challenges do Myanmar principals experience?

Thesis Organisation

This thesis is organised into five chapters, which together provide an understanding of a local view of principalship in Myanmar.

Chapter One presents a background to Myanmar education and the rationale for undertaking this research which is to explore the role and responsibilities of
principalship in Myanmar. It also outlines the aims and research questions that frame this thesis.

Chapter Two critically reviews the literature on principalship, school administration, instructional leadership, the principal’s work, and the challenges associated with the role. This chapter answers the first research question of what an international view of principalship looks like.

Chapter Three presents the rationale and justification for my interpretive epistemological position for using a qualitative research paradigm. It also describes two research methods which are semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis, including description of data sampling, data analysis, validity, and ethical concerns.

Chapter Four details the evidence gathered from the eight participating principals from two primary, three middle and three high schools. Findings are presented under three themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Chapter Five discusses the research findings in relation to the literature by using the research questions to frame the discussion. This chapter includes conclusions, recommendations, limitations of research and suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter critically examines and reviews the literature relevant to the nature and functions of a principal’s work, the contexts in which principalship occurs and the challenges associated within the role. Due to the limited quantity of research done on Myanmar principalship, I have drawn on literature from international settings, specifically from the Anglo-American and Asian countries. This review of international literature is essential in establishing a clear framework for this research project.

In this chapter, the literature review is presented under five themes which emerged from the literature. The themes include: principalship, school administration, instructional leadership – the concept, principal’s work – an international perspective and challenges for school principals.

Principalship

In the history of education, the creation of the principal’s office took place in the mid-nineteenth century in the United States and other colonial and early republic communities (Rousmaniere, 2009). In other words, principalship has existed for over 150 years, from the time when most nations started developing their education systems. Since those early days, the principals have been known by varying titles such as the head master, rector, preceptor, provost, head teacher and principal teacher (Mendels, 2012; Walter & Sharp, 2012). As suggested by names such as head teacher and principal teacher, early school principals were “teacher and school manager combined in one who symbolised and enacted the cultural authority of the school in the way that individual teacher could not” (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 9). Consequently, the introduction of principalship created a hierarchical position between the teachers and the higher administrative authorities external to the school.
Today, principalship is fully established as a hierarchical position and is regarded as the highest authority in the hierarchy of a school's administration in many countries (Jones, Adams, Joo, Muniandy, Perera & Harris, 2015; Mendels, 2012). It has a growing presence in the education policies and professional standards of many countries and is discussed extensively by many authors (Bush, 2011; Cardno, 2012; Leithwood, Anderson, Mascall & Strauss, 2010). To this day, various titles for principalship are still in use. For example, principals are still referred to as the head teachers in the United Kingdom (United Kingdom Department for Education, 2015) and the head master and head mistress in Singapore (Singapore Education Act 1987). All such titles are indicative of the identity of principalship as the person with great authority in the school (Ayob, 2012). According to Mendels (2012), “the principal teacher was a kind of first among equals, an instructor who assumed some administrative tasks as schools began to grow” (p. 54). Furthermore, the principal is regarded as the chief executive for the school who is in charge of the education of the students (Japanese Association for the Study of Educational Association, 2009; The Education Bureau of the Hong Kong, 2014). In other words, the principal is the key and the most important person who is responsible for the core business of the school which is teaching and learning (Lunenburg, 2010).

It is evident in the literature that principalship is a dynamic phenomenon, evolving since its institution (Kafka, 2009; Mendels, 2012; Rousmaniere, 2009, 2013). In countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, early principalship primarily involved clerical work and was not always linked to student achievement (Rousmaniere, 2009). These principals were engaged in mundane duties such as allocating and protecting resources, maintaining discipline and keeping attendance records (Kafka, 2009). Consequently, principals needed only to be concerned about how administrative things should be done. However, the role of the principal has evolved over time to reflect what schools and school leaders are expected to do such as bureaucratic, managerial, instructional and community responsibilities (Rousmaniere, 2009).

Leadership and management are two important concepts of principalship. In the international literature, the distinction between leadership and management is
conflicted and debated. On one hand, there are authors who emphasise the differences between these two functions. Owens (cited in Cardno, 2012) holds the view that managers manage things while leaders lead people. Moreover, Bush (2011) endorses the difference that leadership is related to values or purposes whereas management is about implementation or technical issues. According to Drysdale, Gurr and Goode (2016), leadership is about direction, vision, goals, objectives, effectiveness and purposes, while management is about day-to-day and short-term efficiency. In contrast, other scholars view leadership and management to be different sides of the same coin. For example, Cardno (2012) subscribes to the view that “leadership is subsumed within management in the context of educational settings where the formal work demands management” (p. 11).

Despite the contention about principal leadership versus management, many scholars concur that principals need to do both (Bush, 2011; Cardno, 2012; Drysdale et al., 2016; Walter & Sharp, 2012). Although leading the instructional programme remains the central focus of principalship, principals cannot be effective leaders without performing management functions (Walter & Sharp, 2012). This dual role concept is captured in Drysdale et al.’s (2016) conceptual framework called the Total Role Concept, which combines both leadership and management in the principal’s role. Similarly, Bush (2011) gives a very apt summary of how the two concepts of principalship are inter-twined and states:

> Leadership and management need to be given equal prominence if schools and colleges are to operate effectively and achieve their objectives. While a clear vision may be essential to establish the nature and direction of change, it is equally important to ensure that innovations are implemented efficiently and that the school’s residual functions are carried out effectively while certain elements are undergoing change. (p. 9)

Principals are concerned not only with creating vision and goals for the school, but also with the day-to-day managerial activities that are essential for the schools to be running efficiently. In reality, leadership and managerial responsibilities cannot be separated and principals cannot delegate one and perform only the other (Drysdale et al., 2016). The dual leadership and
management role of principalship means that principals need to give both aspects equal prominence.

In order to establish a local view of principalship in Myanmar, it is important to first understand how principalship has evolved in international settings. According to the literature, there is a lack of consistency in the way principalship is viewed across the world. For example, in South East Asian countries such as Thailand and Vietnam, principalship is viewed as a bureaucratic position rather than a means of improving student outcomes (Hallinger & Lee, 2013; Hallinger & Thang, 2014). Moreover, the principals in Malaysia and China are viewed as government officers who prioritise their managerial and political roles (Hallinger & Bryant, 2013). On the other hand, in the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia and New Zealand, principals are viewed as collaborative professional leaders, change agents, strategic thinkers, school managers and instructional leaders (Court & O’Neill, 2011; Kafka, 2009; Kowalski, 2010; Lynch, 2012).

**School Administration**

When exploring the nature and function of a principal’s work, the notion of school administration needs to be considered because it provides one context in which principalship occurs. In the literature, school administration is defined as an arrangement to systematically utilise available human and material resources to achieve educational goals by implementing educational programmes in accordance with the educational policies (Effiong, 2015; Naji, 2017). As suggested by Lee and Hallinger (2012), school administration affects how principals perceive their role and structure their work activities. For example, a centralised education system provides a clear role and work structure for principals by employing a national curriculum. On the other hand, a decentralised education system permits principals greater autonomy for initiatives and innovation (Lee & Hallinger, 2012). Since the act of principalship can only function within an educational system that provides central steering, it is important to critically examine how schools are administered across diverse education systems (Chykodili, 2008).
Historically, as institutionalised education expanded throughout the world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, governments in many countries began centralising their education systems in order to standardise educational content and processes (McGinn & Welsh, 1999). In order to achieve standardisation, governments retained central authority and allowed only one decision-making body, such as a ministry of education. The centralised education systems favour a hierarchical structure characterised by explicit rule-making, supplemented by monitoring, auditing and reporting (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2011). However, standardisation through centralisation suffered in the long run because the number of teachers and students increased two- to three-fold which strained the capacity of the centralised bureaucracy to maintain quality.

During the 1990s, global education reforms were initiated by western democratic countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia which in many ways changed the administration and governance of schools (Eacott, 2015). Such reform is driven by the New Public Management mechanism and neo-liberal ideologies such as outcome-based accountability, school choice and merit-based pay schemes (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2011; Fusarelli & Johnson, 2004). The spread of this global phenomenon is further influenced by global priorities in education, such as ‘Millennium Development Goals’ (MDGs) and ‘Education for All’ (EFA) that are intended to have a strong emphasis on the quality of education (Tatto, 2012; UNESCO, 2013). This movement led to the restructuring and decentralisation of many education systems around the world (Brundrett & Rhodes, 2011). Legislative interventions for education decentralisation have been adopted by various countries and neo-liberal concepts such as efficiency, accountability, transparency, quality and excellence commonly regulate the field of education currently (Sifakakis, Tsatsaroni, Sarakinioti & Kourou, 2016).

The substantial reconfiguration of education policies and practices is evident in various education agendas in many countries around the world. For instance, New Zealand introduced ‘Tomorrow’s Schools’ which established a self-governing school system in 1989 (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2011). The Greek Ministry of Education presented its education reform programme in 1991 under
the title ‘New school: the student first’ to improve school performance and student learning outcomes (Sifakakis et al., 2016). Other examples include ‘No Child Left Behind Act’ in the United States (Catano & Stronge, 2007), the 1988 ‘Education Reform Act’ in England and Wales (Brundrett, Fitzgerald & Sommefeldt, 2006), and the 2010 ‘New Deal Initiative’ in Malaysia (Ayob, 2012). These policies established mechanisms such as school-based management, increased autonomy, accountability and standards-based education. Under these education policies, principals are given autonomy to self-manage their schools to provide value-added education and are accountable for student achievement outcomes (Perry & McWilliam, 2007).

An implication of decentralisation and the rise of self-managing schools is the impact of accountability on school principals. Accountability implies the notion of answerability (Perry & McWilliam, 2007), with “demands for a demonstration of performance claims” (Shipps & White, 2009, p. 352). The burden of accountability impacts most on principals who have become more accountable in ways that meet the requirements of central control (James, 2014). As principals become more risk-conscious and more performance-driven, opportunities for engagement with creativity, innovation, experimentation and risk-taking are diminished (Perry & McWilliam, 2007). According to Shipps and White (2009), an implication of the incentive-laden, outcomes-based accountability system in the United States is a shift of focus among principals from an internal instructional environment to external constituents and competitive forces. In New Zealand, the effect of ‘Tomorrow’s Schools’ included a heightened sense of hierarchical distinction between the principals and teachers, thus leading to professional isolation (Court & O'Neill, 2011).

The education systems in countries such as China, Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam, as well as Myanmar, are still highly centralised (Hallinger & Lee, 2013; Hallinger & Thang, 2014; Zobrist & McCormick, 2013). The principals in these systems have very limited decision-making authority, as most decisions over domains of education are made by a limited number of decision-making bodies in centralised education systems (McGinn & Welsh, 1999). Moreover, principals have a low level of autonomy in the chain of command in the hierarchy and are
required to obey their superiors unquestioningly (Oplatka, 2004). In these countries, principals spend less time on development of curriculum and instruction and more time on organisational and management roles (Hallinger & Lee, 2013).

In 2012, the Myanmar government identified decentralisation as a goal in the provision of basic education. The aim to decentralise education is also included in the Basic Education Law Draft (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2016a), which states that centralisation of basic education is to be reduced through collaboration with the state and regional administrative offices. A preliminary assessment of decentralisation in education in Myanmar done by Zobrist and McCormick (2013) found that there were very limited signs of decentralisation happening and the attempts at that time represented a form of ‘deconcentration’, which means that lower-level education officers such as principals had increased workloads and responsibilities without increased authority.

**Instructional Leadership – The Concept**

Teaching and learning are the core business of educational organisations and the central focus of educational leadership and management. Elmore (2004) defines educational leadership as “guidance and direction of instructional improvement” in a manner that improves teaching and learning (p. 66). On the other hand, Bush (2011) consistently emphasises that educational leadership is a process of influence, grounded in professional values, educational purpose and vision. Cardno (2012) agrees that educational leadership “indicates the scope of activity that influences and implements change in educational organisations” (p. 15). Despite defining educational leadership in different ways, theorists collectively recognise that at the heart of educational leadership is leading and managing the core work of teaching and learning.

Instructional leadership is one aspect of educational leadership that captures the essence of the principal as an educational leader (Cardno, 2012; Mendels, 2012). A very early model of instructional leadership developed by Weber (1987) centres on six interrelated functions: setting school goals, organising the
instructional programme, managing human resources, protecting instructional time, setting the tone for learning climate, and evaluating programmes (Blase & Blase, 2000; Weber, 1987). Although all functions affect one another variously in this model, the most important function of all is setting school academic goals, because it has a direct link to all other functions of the model. Additionally, this model enables principals to influence instruction in both direct and indirect forms by being a visionary leader as well as a pragmatic manager.

When comparing the early model of instructional leadership to more recent conceptual frameworks, it has been found that very little has changed in the theoretical concepts of instructional leadership. For example, the *Best Evidence Synthesis* paper by Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd et al. (2009) presents five dimensions of school leadership: (1) establishing goals, (2) resourcing strategically, (3) planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum, (4) promoting and participating in teacher learning and development, and (5) ensuring an orderly and supportive environment. It can be seen that the five dimensions have a lot of similarities with Weber’s (1987) model in the areas of setting school goals, organising the instructional programme by using resources strategically, setting the tone for learning environment, and evaluating teachers and the curriculum. The key variation between the two models is the role of the principal in promoting and participating in the professional development of the teachers which produced the highest effect size on student learning outcomes (Robinson et al., 2009).

The concept of instructional leadership can be divided into direct and indirect forms, which denote the pathways of influence leaders can take in implementing their educational vision and academic goals. Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom and Anderson (2010) imply that the indirect form of instructional leadership is setting a tone of instructional climate, whereas the direct form of leadership means manifesting such climate through instructional actions. Bendikson, Robinson and Hattie (2012) define direct instructional leadership as focusing on improving teaching, and indirect instructional leadership as focusing on creating the conditions for optimal teaching and learning. Cardno and Collett
give a clearer distinction between direct and indirect forms of instructional leadership, as follows:

Broad categorisation of the expectations of instructional leaders can be undertaken to identify those tasks that directly influence what happens in classrooms and those that influence learning and teaching from a greater distance – by indirectly shaping the environment in which the curriculum is delivered. (p. 18)

Direct instructional leadership is considered a crucial part of instructional leadership because of its direct influence on teaching and learning. When educational leaders engage in direct forms of instructional leadership in a positive and productive manner, it has a significant positive effect on teaching and learning (Cardno, 2012). According to Seashore Louis et al. (2010), effective principals are defined as providing hands-on direct instructional leadership such as observing lessons and providing feedback. However, the direct form of instructional leadership requires a considerable amount of personal involvement from the leader, and the degree of direct instructional leadership possible is inversely proportional to school size (Southworth, 2004). In other words, direct instructional leadership is only possible in small primary and secondary schools and in small departments or units in higher education settings (Cardno, 2012).

Although direct instructional leadership is crucial, another important form of instructional leadership that can have significant effects on teaching and learning is its indirect form. Cardno and Collett (2004) state that, in a large secondary school with a complex structure, it is more beneficial when the principal focuses on indirect instructional leadership and shares the tasks of direct instructional leadership with middle leaders. The importance of indirect instructional leadership springs from the fact that it is not realistic to expect school principals to provide direct instructional leadership, especially in larger primary, secondary or tertiary schools (Southworth, 2004). In such schools, the role of the principal can include overwhelming organisational and management responsibilities, so that there is little or no time for the principal to engage in effective direct instructional leadership (Cardno, 2012). It is essential to note that, unlike the direct approach, indirect instructional leadership is strategic in nature, involving
planning and setting direction to a great degree. Moreover, it ensures that leadership is distributed across schools in order to have an impact on practice realistically (Southworth, 2004).

In reality, although principals respond to administrative demands and managerial issues on a day-to-day basis to keep their schools afloat, principals’ engagement in instructional leadership varies widely across different contexts. Since the bulk of the literature on educational leadership is written by Anglo-American scholars, it gives an impression that ‘Western’ models of principalship are universal (Dimmock & Walker, 2000; Foskett & Lumby, 2003). In many developing countries where the education system is highly centralised, the principal’s autonomy to engage in instructional leadership is extremely limited (Oplatka, 2004). This is because the ministry of education in many developing countries, such as Myanmar, controls the national curriculum, syllabus, materials, exams, funding and staffing of schools.

Although a view of principalship cannot be generalised, several common features of principalship in these countries include restriction to managerial functions, lack of innovative and instructional leadership, and a tendency to employ autocratic leadership styles (Oplatka, 2004). In countries such as Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and Ghana, principalship has minor significance and is conceived as a public position rather than a means to improve student learning (Oplatka, 2004). This leads to overly emphasising administrative-managerial functions such as maintaining discipline, ordering equipment, scheduling activities, managing school finances and resources, and ensuring accurate records are kept. In most developing countries, such as Thailand, Papua New Guinea and Hong Kong, instructional leadership functions are relatively rare in schools (Oplatka, 2004). Some research done in northern Thailand shows that the secondary school principals did not exercise active instructional leadership and yielded consistently lower scores than principals in the United States, Malaysia and Canada (Hallinger, 1994). Similarly, Hallinger and Thang’s (2014) research in Vietnam concluded that “Vietnamese principals attach more importance in their daily practice to their managerial and political roles than to their instructional leadership role” (p. 55).
According to the National Education Strategic Plan 2016-2021, the Myanmar Ministry of Education (2016b) states that principals in Myanmar will be expected to become instructional leaders. However, very little research has been done on the existing principal instructional leadership behaviour in Myanmar or their other roles and responsibilities. That is why this study is important in exploring the reality of school leadership and management as perceived and interpreted by Myanmar principals.

The Principal’s Work – An International Perspective

Expectations surrounding what principals are required to do and achieve are captured in the professional standards of Anglo-American as well as Asian countries. In the United States, the ‘Professional Standards for Educational Leaders’ was developed in 2015 by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2015). This 2015 document was compiled primarily for principals to have a stronger and clearer focus on students and student learning. It is made up of ten professional standards, which are (1) mission, vision and core values, (2) ethics and professional norms, (3) equity and cultural responsiveness, (4) curriculum, instruction and assessment, (5) community of care and support for students, (6) professional capacity of school personnel, (7) professional community for teachers and staff, (8) meaningful engagement of families and community, (9) operations and management and (10) school improvement (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). These ten standards give more prominence to the instructional programme and culture as well as reflecting a clear vision of improvement-focused and future-oriented leadership. Also in 2015, the ‘National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers’ was developed by the United Kingdom Department for Education (2015) as a form of departmental advice for the principals and governing bodies. Under these national standards, there are four domains: (1) qualities and knowledge, (2) pupils and staff, (3) systems and process, and (4) the self-improving school system (United Kingdom Department for Education, 2015). Within each domain, there are six key characteristics expected of principals in the United Kingdom. The aggregated 24 characteristics mirror the United States
version of professional standards and capture the full scope of principalship at
the personal, organisational, community and systems levels.

In Australia, the ‘Australian Professional Standard for Principals’ (‘the Standard’) was developed in 2011 by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, which is funded by the Australian Government (Education Services Australia, 2011). The Standard reflects the integrated and complex nature of the principal’s role and is based on three leadership requirements: (1) vision and values, (2) knowledge and understanding, and (3) personal qualities and social and interpersonal skills. These leadership requirements are enacted through five key professional practices of (1) leading teaching and learning, (2) developing self and others, (3) leading improvement, innovation and change, (4) leading the management of the school and (5) engaging and working with the community (Education Services Australia, 2011).

It can be seen that, the professional standards in these three countries place a high emphasis on instructional leadership by incorporating professional practices such as leading and managing instruction, curriculum, staff development and learning climate. Apart from influencing what happens in the classroom, the professional standards in these Western countries also highlight managing strategically through mission and vision, managing school operations and processes, improving schools through creativity and innovation, and engaging with families and communities as well as embodying professional knowledge and norms. There is a great deal of similarity in content and intention among these professional standards.

On the other hand, a review of professional standards for principals in Japan (Japanese Association for the Study of Educational Administration, 2009), Hong Kong (The Education Bureau of Hong Kong, 2014) and Malaysia (Ayob, 2012; Jones et al., 2015) show that those standards are less holistic than their Anglo-American equivalents. Japanese Professional Standards for Principals outlines seven standards: (1) building and realising a shared vision of school, (2) establishing collaborative structure and climate for quality improvement of education, (3) establishing collaborative structure and climate to support
professional development, (4) effective utilisation of various resources and risk management, (5) collaborative relationship with parents and community, (6) ethical behaviour and leadership, and (7) understanding of social/cultural context of the school (Japanese Association for the Study of Educational Administration, 2009). It is interesting to note that the element of heading and managing teaching and learning is not stated explicitly in the Japanese professional standards.

The Malaysia Ministry of Education has identified 26 competencies that are grouped under nine major standards: (1) organisational management and leadership, (2) curriculum and instructional leadership, (3) co-curricular programs leadership, (4) management of students’ development, learning and wellbeing, (5) financial and asset management, (6) administrative leadership, (7) management of learning environment and physical facilities, (8) personnel and professional development, and (9) external relations and partnership development (Ayob, 2012). The Malaysian professional standards do not include the strategic element of formulating school vision and goals, which may indicate that the directives have come from higher up in the education administration.

In Hong Kong, quality school leadership is listed under six core areas of leadership. These are: (1) strategic direction and policy environment, (2) learning, teaching and curriculum, (3) teacher professional growth and development, (4) staff and resources management, (5) quality assurance and accountability, and (6) external communication and connection with the outside world (The Education Bureau of the Hong Kong, 2014). However, the Hong Kong professional standards do not capture the role of principalship at a personal level as the elements of personal quality, knowledge and professional norms are not included in the standards. Additionally, it does not include an element of building a learning climate which is important for optimal learning to take place.

When viewed collectively, one aspect of principalship that is common in the professional standards of all six countries is the role of principals in establishing external relationships with parents and the community. It could be an indicator of decentralisation that aims to provide higher parental control in school
Another similarity among these professional standards is that the principal’s work encompasses both instructional and non-instructional activities that are essential for improving student learning outcomes.

In the Myanmar context, the Ministry has partnered with UNICEF to develop national head teacher competencies for principals in Myanmar (UNICEF, 2014). However, the national head teacher competencies are still in the draft stage and have not been endorsed by the Ministry for official circulation and implementation. Since professional standards for Myanmar principals have yet to be authorised, the literature reviewed in this section is important for this study, because it provides an up-to-date understanding of the principal’s work within an international context and a baseline for the research findings of the present study.

**Challenges for School Principals**

During the 1990s, global education reform concerned with decentralisation occurred in almost all education systems in western democratic countries such as the United Kingdom, United States, Australia and New Zealand (Eacott, 2015). This global reform in school governance and management led to the broadening of the principal’s role and intensification of workload (Cardno, 2012; Ng, 2015). Today, principalship is intense, diverse and complex due to an accumulation of expectations that have increased over time (Walter & Sharp, 2012). Furthermore, the principals face new and complex challenges on a daily basis. A common set of challenges for principals includes increases in accountability, levels of self-management, marketisation of education, change, and together with higher expectations of improved student performance (Drysdale, 2011).

Accountability pressure is perhaps the most demanding challenge for the principals in both Western and other contexts. One critical comment given by English head teachers is that financial autonomy is mostly an illusion and some head teachers feel powerless in the face of current legislation (Bottery, Ngai, Wong & Wong, 2008). English head teachers also display frustration towards the
Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), which was created to inspect schools. Although, principals generally believed that there was a need for such a governing agency, they felt strongly that OFSTED had adopted threatening and defensive approaches (Bottery et al., 2008). In the Malaysian context, recent policy shifts have reinforced the accountability of the principals so that the role of the principal in Malaysia has become more challenging (Jones et al., 2015). Since the ‘Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025’ has been introduced, principals in Malaysia are now viewed as transformational leaders who are expected to lead change and improve performance in line with national expectations (Jones et al., 2015). At the same time, these principals have a heavy management responsibility in their schools, including classroom observation and improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Increased working hours due to role overload, role ambiguity and role conflict now characterise the job of the principal in many countries. For example, in 2003 principals’ working hours in a week amounted to 62 hours in the United States, 60 hours in New Zealand, 59 hours in Australia and 55 hours in the United Kingdom (Phillips, Raham & Renihan, 2003). The increased workload can be attributed to a wide range of factors, including accountability and reporting requirements, the necessity to share authority, the responsibility to stay abreast of emerging education research, the need to interact with a broad range of internal and external stakeholders, unpredictable conflicts on a daily basis, and social and political pressures. One of the major challenges Singaporean principals face is role clarification and navigating who they are in the changing socio-political environment surrounding the role (Ng, 2015). Moreover, principals in Singapore experience challenges such as feelings of stress and exhaustion which are amplified by the conflicting expectations of different stakeholders, together with external pressures. Principals in both the United Kingdom and Hong Kong also expressed their frustration at the accumulation of pressures and the excessive amount of time and energy needed to deal with the sheer quantity of tasks (Bottery et al., 2008). As argued by Phillips et al. (2003), layering new responsibilities on top of traditional duties is causing a tremendous amount of emotional, cognitive and physical stress for principals.
With increased accountability, principals are also expected to self-manage their schools and raise standards. This shift to self-managing schools poses a new challenge for the principals as new skills and knowledge are required to lead and manage schools autonomously. A study done in South Africa showed that principals were not adequately prepared or supported to carry out strategic management such as financial planning and budgeting tasks (Bush & Heystek, 2006). Moreover, South African principals also needed skills and training in various aspects of human resource management in order to manage relationships. Similarly in Namibia, the most crucial challenge faced by the school principals is leading and managing people (Mushaandja, 2013). Another study done in Singapore also highlights that working with staff members and other stakeholders is a major challenge, because principals have to deal with many relationship issues (Ng, 2015). Principals’ autonomy and the imposition of new responsibilities without adequate support and preparation put tremendous personal stress on principals. Furthermore, shared or distributed leadership becomes a necessity for principals and skills such as managing shared decision-making processes, managing teamwork, creating a collaborative work culture, and empowering middle leaders, need to be cultivated in principals (Hoy & Miskel, 2008).

When borrowing policies from Western culture, principals in diverse national contexts experience additional challenges. For example, the principals in China are caught between interacting contradictory forces due to the influence of global trends in education reform and importation of recent leadership theories (Walker, Hu & Qian, 2012). They have to struggle between implementing reforms and being bounded by existing structures and cultures. Furthermore, according to Walker et al. (2012), these principals are caught between change-oriented policy initiatives and long-standing traditions and norms in China. In developing countries, policy reform is even more problematic as it imposes new and impossible challenges on the principals. For instance, principals in Indonesia have to face the challenge of improving school performance without adequate resources or funding to do so (Sumintono, Sheyoputri, Jiang, Misbach & Jumintono, 2015). Furthermore, like Myanmar, principals in Indonesia are no longer permitted to collect donations from parents to supplement their school
budgets causing additional strain on school improvement plans. The education systems in most developing countries, such as Indonesia, Thailand and Pakistan, are highly centralised, and the principals’ autonomy is still highly restricted even after the introduction of decentralisation reforms (Oplatka, 2004). Similarly, in Myanmar, the recent attempt to decentralise only increased workloads and responsibilities for principals while providing little or no increase in decision-making authority (Zobrist & McCormick, 2013).

This section has highlighted several issues pertinent to understanding the work of Myanmar principals and their perceptions of the role. The application of theories developed from Western and other cultures will be important, since Myanmar is undertaking education reform which involves importing global policies relevant to the role of principals. Even though the underlying reasons may differ, the challenges related to intensification of workload and pressure are pertinent to the role of the principals in different national contexts, including Myanmar.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter examines the rationale and justification for the qualitative methods and methodology I have adopted for this research project. Firstly, I have explained my subjectivist epistemological position in order to justify my qualitative methodological approach relevant to my research questions. Then, I have examined two research methods: semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis. Next, I have identified strategies for data analysis with considerations for validity of this research. Lastly, I have discussed ethical issues related to my study and how these issues will be addressed.

Methodology

Ontology and epistemology are philosophical positions central to all social research (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Since the notion of education research has borrowed largely from the social sciences, it is important to develop awareness of those ontological and epistemological perspectives because our own understandings of the world and knowledge will shape how we frame the research within which social phenomenon can be understood and the research findings can be interpreted (Bryman, 2012; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

On the most fundamental level, there are assumptions of an ontological kind which are concerned with the very nature or essence of the social reality being investigated (Cohen et al., 2011) and “claims about what exists” (Lochmiller & Lester, 2016, p. 8). Ontological positions include objectivism which leans towards the objective view of social reality external to the social actors, and constructionism which orientates towards construction of social reality from the perceptions and actions of social actors (Bryman, 2012). Since the nature of principalship is a social construction of reality, my ontological stance is that of the constructivist view which assumes that social reality is subjective, internal and the product of the individual consciousness (Cohen et al., 2011).
The second set of assumptions are of an epistemological kind concerned with the nature of knowledge, how it can be acquired and how it is communicated to other human beings (Cohen et al., 2011; Lochmiller & Lester, 2016). On the one hand, a positivist epistemological tradition takes an objectivist ontological position and studies the social world according to the principles, procedures and ethos of the natural sciences (Bryman, 2012). On the other hand, following constructivist ontological assumptions, my epistemological stance is interpretivist or anti-positivist that is the knowledge I am seeking is personal, subjective and unique (Cohen et al., 2011). Interpretivism employs systematic analysis of socially meaningful actions in order to understand and interpret knowledge that lies in the experience, feelings, perceptions, beliefs and values of the social actors (Bryman, 2012).

Both the ontological and epistemological anchors have a fundamental influence on the methodological considerations of the researcher because the contrasting assumptions at each level will call for different approaches for collecting data (Cohen et al., 2011). Hughes (cited in Davidson & Tolich, 2003) states that “research tools operate only within a given set of assumptions about the nature of society, the nature of human beings, the relationships between the two and how they may be known” (p. 25). Thus, methodology is about the logical and philosophical commitment that particular methods assume (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Consequently, an objectivist-positivist tradition aligns with the quantitative research paradigm whereas the constructivist-interpretivist position favours qualitative approaches (Bryman, 2012). Drawing on my own ontological and epistemological positions and my research focus and questions, the most appropriate approach for my study is a qualitative research methodology.

A qualitative approach “embodies the exploratory nature of research and places emphasis on describing and clarifying the experiences of individuals within localised settings” (Lochmiller & Lester, 2016, p. 11). Based on my own research topic and questions, it is essential to capture principals’ perceptions about their role in leading and managing primary, middle and high schools and their interactions with teachers, students and other stakeholders. As described by Knapp (2016), educational leadership “entails a cluster of subtle, relational
phenomena especially appropriate for qualitative inquiry” (p. 3). Since the aim of qualitative research is to study participants in their natural environments and how they make sense of and experience the world around them (Lochmiller & Lester, 2016), principalship was best explored by allowing principals to express their lived experience, constraints of daily reality and role enactment. It provided rich and comprehensive narrative data which has been used to understand the social reality as experienced by the principals (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010).

**Sampling**

I employed convenience, purposive and cluster sampling strategies as appropriate to the qualitative research paradigm. Convenience sampling involves selecting respondents who meet the criteria for inclusion in the research and to whom the researcher has ready access (Ary et al., 2010). Purposive sampling is defined as handpicking participants on the basis of their possession of the particular knowledge being sought (Cohen et al., 2011). Considering the amount of time required to transcribe and analyse the interviews in Burmese and English translations, a pragmatic decision was made to interview a total of eight school principals in a particular township in Yangon Division in Myanmar which contains two primary, three middle and three high schools. The rationale for using cluster sampling and interviewing all eight principals who were grouped within a township was to support analytical generalisation to this context. The decision was also purposive, because the participants were selected due to their role as principals and convenience-based because of their willingness to participate through the approval of the Township Education Officer.

Before the principals could be recruited for participation, I approached the Township Education Officer to seek approved access to carry out my research in the township. An official confirmation of access was obtained from the Township Education Office after providing adequate information about the research, size of sampling and confidentiality protections. With the approval of the Township Education Office, I personally visited each school principal to establish initial rapport and to obtain their permission to participate in my project voluntarily. In order to secure their participation, I explained my research project and the part
they would play as the participants. I also provided an information sheet (see Appendix 1) with information about my role as the researcher, my contact details, my research aims, how the data would be collected, participants’ voluntarily contribution, their right to withdraw within a specific time period, interview recording and verification of transcripts, assurance of anonymity, and sharing the final report with them. I made it clear during the recruitment process that there would be audio recording during the interview and their agreement would be included in consent form (see Appendix 2).

Methods

According to Cresswell (2007), the backbone of qualitative research is collection of extensive data from multiple sources of information. In reflecting on this, I employed semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis as complementary data collection methods in order to triangulate my research findings and strengthen the validity and credibility of my research.

Semi-structured interviews

Consistent with the qualitative methodology adopted, semi-structured interviewing was chosen for its flexibility and its multi-sensory and exploratory approach to complex and deep issues (Cohen et al., 2011). The interviews allowed me to connect professionally with the principals and I was able to listen to their accounts of what it means to be a principal in Myanmar. As Wellington (2015) asserts, “interviews can reach the parts which other methods cannot reach” (p. 137). That is, interviewing allows the researcher to not only probe unobservable phenomena such as thoughts, values, prejudices, perceptions, views and feelings, but also to elicit deep meaningful interpretations of a social phenomenon (Wellington, 2015).

Interview styles relevant to qualitative research include structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, exploratory interviews and focus group interviews (Cohen et al., 2011; Lichtman, 2013; Wellington, 2015). With a semi-structured interview, interview topics and issues are determined by the researcher, but with the flexibility to alter the range and order of questions during the course of the
Interview (Lichtman, 2013; Wellington, 2015). Semi-structured interviewing allowed me to not only stay within the focus of my research but also question principals for clarification, elaboration and deeper meanings.

An interview schedule was prepared (see Appendix 3) comprising specific questions based on the research objectives and informed by the literature review (Cohen et al., 2011). Interview questions were formulated based on five broad categories: principalship, school administration, instructional leadership, principal’s work, and challenges for the principals. Using open-ended interview questions provided me an opportunity to be flexible, probe into greater depth, clear up potential misinterpretations, test the limits of participant’s knowledge and encourage participation (Ary et al., 2010). The kind of questions asked included their personal views on principalship, their job scope, the guiding policies, the different aspects of instructional leadership and other duties they perform, and the challenges they face and how they deal with them.

Setting up and conducting the interview involved getting informed consent, recording and establishing rapport with participants, with careful consideration to probing and active listening (Wellington, 2015). The interviews were conducted in the principals’ offices on school premises and were done at a time convenient to each participant. Prior to the interviews, the recording device was checked and principals were reminded that the interview would be recorded (Cohen et al., 2011). During the interview, careful attention was paid to maintaining cultural norms by displaying deference, politeness and courteousness. Since the role of the interviewer is to construct and interpret the reality of the interviewee with a critical lens, while accepting their version of reality (Lichtman, 2013), I had to be aware not to make judgements or assume bias. At the end of each interview, the principal was reminded that an interview transcript would be provided to them with an opportunity to edit, withdraw or modify their answers within two weeks.

The interviews were undertaken in Burmese language and transcribed. Then, the Burmese transcripts were translated into English and the translations were checked by a professional who signed a confidentiality agreement to protect the privacy of the participants. Transcribing takes a considerable amount of time and
has the potential for data loss, distortion, translation error and erosion of data complexity (Lichtman, 2013). That is why, interview transcripts and translations were verified for accuracy and validity.

**Documentary analysis**

The study also used documentary analysis because of the following values it provides. Documentation of material relevant to research topic provide a rich source of data while being time and expense convenient (Cohen et al., 2011). In education and other research, documentary analysis is widely used a stand-alone method or combined with other data collection methods (Wellington, 2015). In addition to being an excellent source of data for triangulation, documents make visible the language and world of the participants (Cresswell, 2014). Furthermore, Ary et al. (2010) highlight that documentary analysis is unobtrusive, so that there is very little influence of the researcher on what is being observed and little need to seek cooperation of subjects or get permission to do the analysis. It can be seen clearly that documents make an attractive tool useful for qualitative analytic work. For this research, documentary analysis provided a tangible data source with precise accounts of principals’ prescribed roles without the concern of missing any details.

Various types of documents can be used for documentary analysis. According to Cohen et al. (2011), documents are social products located in specific contexts. They exist in written, physical and visual forms that may be personal, official or public (Ary et al., 2010). Documents are multilayered in nature and have to be contextualised for interpretation at multiple levels (Cohen et al., 2011). Documents relevant to the present study included policy documents, bulletins to staff, annual reports, strategies and plans, minutes of meetings, technical documents, government papers, web pages, prospectuses, syllabuses, appointment letters, announcements, and photographs (Wellington, 2015). For the documentary analysis for this research, I chose three internal documents that are officially provided to the principals by the Ministry of Education. The three official handbooks are colour coded as ‘Yellow’, ‘Green’ and ‘Red’ books and are entitled ‘Supplementary Training on Basic Education School Headship’

When selecting the documents, careful attention was given to the criteria of authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning (Ahmed, 2010). Documents used in documentary analysis need to be authentic which means that they must come from authentic sources with genuine evidence for the phenomenon under study (Ary et al., 2010). Secondly, the researcher has the responsibility to ensure that documents are credible and not forged or manipulated (Ahmed, 2010). The internal documents selected for this research are the official handbooks published by the Ministry of Education in 2012 and circulated to the school principals and township education officers, thus a genuine and credible source of data for my research. Lastly, the documents selected must be based on the parameters of data and sampling that represent the population under study (Cohen et al., 2011). Since the official documents are considered the principal handbooks that are utilised by all the participating principals, they captured the role and responsibilities of the principals.

Content analysis is a type of analysis tool that was chosen for the selected documentation. Cohen et al., (2011) defines content analysis as “the process of summarising and reporting written data – the main contents of data and their messages” (p. 475). Wellington (2015) provides a framework for exploring and analysing documents of any kind that includes an examination of the document’s context, authorship, intended audiences, purposes, genre, style, tone, presentation and content. Content analysis focuses identifying themes and their meaning as reflected in the documents (Ary et al., 2010). Undertaking of content analysis involves dividing the data into manageable portions without losing significant information and analysing the data by interpreting, summarising and drawing conclusions (Ahmed, 2010). Data reduction can also be done through the process of coding and memoing in order to identify themes, categories and patterns (Loftland, Snow, Anderson & Loftland, 2006). For this research, content analysis was carried out to elicit what the documents revealed about the context.
of principal leadership, role description, the weekly and yearly schedule of what the principals are expected to achieve and instructional leadership activities.

Data Analysis

According to Ary et al. (2010), data analysis involves “reducing and organising the data, synthesising, searching for significant patterns, and discovering what is important” (p. 481). Focusing on qualitative research, Cohen et al. (2011) describe data analysis as “making sense of data in terms of the participants’ definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities” (p. 461). In other words, data analysis deals with questions of what needs to be done with the data, and how the data will be processed and analysed (Loftland et al., 2006). When analysing the interview data, I was looking for the strength of agreement across participants which inevitably led to reduction and loss of some aspects of the data that were not directly relevant to my research goals.

‘Fitness for purpose’ is an important consideration for data analysis because different purposes will determine different analyses to be undertaken with the data. Such purposes include analysing the data to explore, describe, summarise, interpret, discover patterns, raise issues, prove theories and investigate causality (Cohen et al., 2011). Different purposes will also call for different assembling of groups of data to make a coherent whole. Consequently, the analysis of qualitative data will ultimately shape the argument and interpretation of the research (Lichtman, 2013). For this study, I analysed the data with the purpose of exploring the world of principalship from a local standpoint and at the same time discovering patterns that emerged.

Regardless of the purpose of the research, data analysis can be made manageable when broken down into three key stages: (1) organising and familiarising, (2) coding and reducing, and (3) interpreting and representing (Ary et al., 2010). The purpose of organising and familiarising the data is to improve the ease with which data can be retrieved (Lichtman, 2013; Loftland et al., 2006). It was achieved by reading the interview translations each a few times and sorting their content according to the main topics in the interview schedule.
The next step was coding and reducing to identify categories and themes from the raw data (Loftland et al., 2006). Data is reduced by organising thematic codes into categories and then into a few concepts (Lichtman, 2013). Predetermined codes can be used to sort the data by “looking for units of meaning such as words, phrases, sentences, subjects’ ways of thinking, behaviour patterns, and events that seem to appear regularly and that seem important” (Ary et al., 2010, p. 483). For the present study, initial coding was done by combing through the interview translations and allocating codes to each response in relation to my interview questions. As the next step, initial codes were modified by integrating some, as appropriate, renaming them, and removing redundant codes. The codes were then organised into a list of categories, guided by the main interview topics. Finally, concepts were derived from the categories that reflected the information I sought with my research questions.

Additionally, ‘memoing’ was used while coding and reducing the raw data. According to Loftland et al. (2006), memoing is fundamental to making sense of the data and it involves writing down the analyst’s own ideas about the various coding categories and their interconnections. It assisted me in keeping track of my thoughts and reflections with regard to making sense of the interconnectedness between coding, categories and concepts. Finally, once data was coded and reduced, the descriptive data was interpreted by extracting meanings and insights from the data and developing plausible explanations (Lichtman, 2013).

**Validity and Triangulation**

Careful attention must be paid to the issue of validity during data collection and data analysis (Cresswell, 2014). Writing on qualitative research, Cohen et al. (2011) define validity as “the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher” (p. 133). My research rigour was achieved by adhering faithfully to the interpretive epistemological position and principles of the qualitative research paradigm. I set out to immerse myself
into the participants’ world of being a principal and presenting their version of the reality in a socially, culturally and contextually appropriate manner. Moreover, obtaining official permission letters from the Township Education Office, getting informed consent from the principals, recording interviews and verifying the transcripts have enhanced the research validity (Lichtman, 2013; Wellington, 2015).

Reliability relates to the trustworthiness of data (Ary et al., 2010). Reliability and validity are two distinct aspects of effective research where validity is more relevant to a qualitative approach than reliability (Davidson & Tolich, 2003), because reliability aims for generalisability and is not always applicable to qualitative research. However, reliability should not be dismissed completely because the qualitative researcher still needs to ensure that the data collection is as controlled as possible (Cresswell, 2014). Although semi-structured interviews provided flexibility, I ensured that all interviews were conducted under the same conditions within consistent timing and the wording and sequence of the questions consistent across interviews.

I utilised a number of measures to maximise the validity of this research. Strategies to increase the strength of validity in qualitative research methods include triangulation, control of bias and transferability (Cresswell, 2014; Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Triangulation can be defined as “the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 141). It is based on the assumption that combining different sources of data produces more representative, and therefore reliable, evidence (Ary et al., 2010). The type of triangulation that was employed in this research was methodological triangulation, which uses different methods for the same object of study to explain more fully the richness and complexity of the social phenomena from diverse standpoints (Cohen et al., 2011). Using both semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis in order to triangulate my data provided a richer representation of the landscape of principalship in Myanmar than using only one method.
In order to counter the bias and subjectivity of the researcher, self-reflection must be actively sought out to recognise one’s own biases (Cresswell, 2014). According to Ary et al. (2010), bias occurs when the researcher’s beliefs, values and attitude influence the way the social phenomenon is observed and interpreted. During the interviews, I made certain that questions were phrased to avoid any bias that might predetermine a participant’s answers or influence the participant in a certain direction. Moreover, triangulating data by using two research methods assisted me with my interpretation of the social realities without biasing or distorting my own understanding of the local view of principalship (Cohen et al., 2011).

Lastly, although generalisability is not the goal of qualitative research, the researcher needs to provide “sufficiently rich, detailed, thick descriptions of the context so that potential users can make necessary comparisons and judgements about similarity and hence transferability” (Ary et al., 2010, p. 501). Although the small sample of my study limited the transferability of the study, I have provided in the following chapters a detailed and rich account of how eight Myanmar principals perceived and interpreted their role within the context of a standardised education system. Moreover, since the official documents are provided to all the school principals by the Ministry of Education, potential users can make their own judgements about the applicability of my findings and relevance to their own school contexts.

**Ethical Issues**

Ethical issues in educational and social research are an important aspect of effective research and are discussed extensively in the literature (Ary et al, 2010; Brooks, Riele and Maguire, 2014; Bryman, 2012; Cohen et al., 2011). They may arise from the nature of the research project itself, the context of the research, methods of data collection, the nature of the participants, the type of data collected and what is to be done with the data (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 51). In essence, ethics governs every step of the research process. Ary et al. (2010) assert that adherence to ethical standards is paramount because the researcher has obligations to both their participants and their profession. Similarly, Brooks et
al. (2014) contend that the two concerns of ethical research include the relationships researchers build with the participants, and the quality of the knowledge produced from the research.

Bryman (2012) proposes four main ethical principles which are harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy and deception. Careful consideration needs to be given to anticipate and guard against harmful consequences for the research participants, including physical, developmental, psychological, mental or emotional harm (Brooks et al., 2014; Bryman, 2012). One way to protect participants is by maintaining anonymity and confidentiality of identities and records of individual participants so that they are not identified or identifiable (Ary et al., 2010). Confidentiality of the participants was maintained throughout the research process by being diligent in not disclosing the name of the township, the names of the schools or the identities of the principals in my thesis. Moreover, harm was minimised by being diligent about the wording and the focus of questions asked during the interviews, as well as giving the principals a chance to review and verify their own transcript.

Another important ethical consideration is the concept of informed consent which is underpinned by three important principles: information, voluntariness and competency (Brooks et al., 2014). Firstly, informed consent needs to be advocated by giving prospective participants information about the research project (Bryman, 2012). Brooks et al. (2014) suggest that the information should include (1) the identity and contact details of the researchers and their institutions, (2) the aims and objectives of the research, (3) explanation of how the data collection will be conducted, (4) how data will be reported, (5) confirmation of confidentiality and anonymity and (6) options for reciprocity. The information sheet (see Appendix 1) provided to the principals contained key information about my research such as my identity, institution and contact details, my research topic and aims, explanation of how the data collection would be conducted, and confirmation of participant confidentiality and anonymity. Furthermore, in order to avoid deception, I presented the intent and research process to the principals truthfully without withholding any information deliberately (Ary et al., 2010; Bryman, 2012; Cohen et al., 2011). I checked the
principals’ understanding of the study and their participation by going through the consent form (see Appendix 2). The consent form outlined that the participant had understood my research project, the confidentiality assurance, the recording of the interview, the opportunity to edit the transcription and to withdraw within a certain timeframe, and their consent to take part in the project voluntarily. Voluntary participation is a key aspect of informed consent grounded in the subject’s right to freedom and self-determination (Cohen et al., 2011). Moreover, it complies with the ethical principle of respecting others by acknowledging autonomy (Brooks et al., 2014). Voluntary participation means that participants have the right to refuse to take part and to withdraw at any point during the research process without the fear of any adverse consequences. During the recruitment conversation, I made clear to the principals that their participation was voluntary and they had a right to refuse or withdraw from the research. The participant’s voluntary involvement and their right to withdraw was also included in both the information sheet and the consent form (see Appendix 1 and 2). Lastly, to avoid invasion of privacy, I made the participants aware of their right to decline answering any questions that delve into private realms (Bryman, 2012).

An ethical consideration relevant to informed consent is that of access and acceptance from the institution or organisation where the research is to be conducted (Cohen et al., 2011). As a first step, the researcher needs to gain official permission from the authorised individual to undertake one’s research. By doing so, the researcher is respecting the authority of the host institution as well as putting the participants’ minds at ease to participate fully in the research. It is especially true for Myanmar culture where “ties of patronage between superiors and inferiors are far more important than official procedures”, which means that subordinates take no action unless their immediate supervisor approves or directs it (Zobrist & McCormick, 2013, p. 5). That is why, a formal permission letter from the Township Education Office was obtained before approaching the principals to ensure that participants were not reluctant or pressured to participate in the research.

Other ethical considerations include being sensitive to any locally established institutional policies, being mindful of cultural, religious, gender and other
significant differences within the research population and communicating significant research findings to the participants (Ary et al., 2010). During the interaction with the principals and the Township Education Officer, I was particularly vigilant to adhere to my national culture which required me to show a great deal of respect to seniority and positional authority. When interacting with the principals, I ensured that my language and manner was respectful and courteous. Moreover, when visiting the schools, I wore Myanmar traditional attire, which was an important ethical concern for my culture because wearing any other form of clothing no matter how professional would be considered offensive.

Summary

This chapter has described the interpretive approach I have taken for my research. I have justified the suitability of qualitative research in exploring the nature of principalship in a local context. I have also described two research methods which were semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis with a description of sampling for both methods. Lastly, I have presented how data was analysed with considerations for validity, triangulation and ethical concerns. The next chapter presents the findings from data collected through the semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, I have reported the findings from my two qualitative research methods. This chapter is organised in four sections: how schools work, the principals’ work, positive dispositions and the issues in the role. In the first section, I have presented findings about how schools in Myanmar are administered as well as how the schools are structured internally. In the second section, I have provided a description of the principals’ work related to instructional leadership as well as other duties. The third and fourth sections cover the positive dispositions of the principals and the issues they experience in their role. This chapter concludes with a summary that consolidates the findings from the perspectives of the principals.

The Research Participants

To protect the identities of the schools and the principals, I have used a code for each principal. For my research, eight principals were interviewed. Seven of the principals have been at their schools from two to five years and only one principal has been at her school for over 18 years. All the principals were school teachers before they were promoted to become the principals. The usual practice is that primary school teachers are promoted to become primary school principals. Primary school principals are then promoted to become middle school and high school teachers first before being promoted further to middle school and high school principals. For example, one of the high school principals said he was a primary school teacher for three years, a primary school principal for six months, a middle school teacher for two years, a high school teacher for 12 years, a middle school principal for two years and finally a high school principal for three years. It can be seen from Table 4.1 that most of the principals had been promoted quickly in their career ladder and only one principal decided to remain as a primary school head.
Table 4.1: Participant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>No of Years in Current School</th>
<th>Type of School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Primary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Primary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How Schools Work

In this section, I have consolidated data from the interviews and documentary analysis to create two sub-headings: administration of schools and school organisational structure. In the administration of schools section, the focus is on the external influences on the schools from the local authorities and national government. In the second part of this section, the focus is on the organisational practices within the schools which are influenced by the principals themselves.

Administration of schools

During my interviews with the principals, when they were asked to explain how their schools are administered, all eight principals were able to describe a clear hierarchical structure of school administration comprising six levels in the school administration structure. From the lowest to the highest position, the administrative levels are Principals, the Township Education Offices, the District Education Offices, the State and Regional Education Offices, the Department of Basic Education, and at the top, the Ministry. As one of the principals said:

The Ministry of Education does not directly manage each individual school. The administration is done through the hierarchical order. We are managed through the Township Education Office, the District, the States and Regional and the Department of Basic Education. (P8)
In their explanations, the principals described how the higher administrative offices administer their schools mainly through inspection. Five principals also stated that they are expected to send monthly, mid-year and annual reports to the Township Education Officer who then submits the reports up the administrative hierarchy. After the reports are sent, the principals are then subjected to inspections from the Township, District and State and Regional Education Offices. The process of inspection was illustrated by one principal as:

The Township Education Officer sends out written notice first and then she will come around to inspect. After the Township level, the District and State level education officers also come around and inspect. So we are administered through the hierarchy. (P4)

When asked if there were any policies that guide the work of the principal, four of the eight principals referred to the three principal handbooks – the ‘Yellow’, ‘Green’ and ‘Red’ books. The principals reported that each book has a specific theme – respectively, (1) teaching and learning, (2) finance and (3) management. One principal commented that the promotion from middle to high school principal is done through an examination which tests the principal’s knowledge on these three books. Another principal talked about how the books contain detailed instructions about what they need to do and what kind of rules they need to follow, noting:

There are education policies which guide the work of the principal. The Ministry has given us handbooks for that. There are a total of three books and they cover teaching and learning, finance and management. For example, the book covers procedures such as what do we need to do before the school opens and how we should accept student enrolments. (P1)

According to the content analysis of the three ‘Yellow’, ‘Green’ and ‘Red’ books, they have the generic title of ‘Supplementary Training on Basic Education School Headship’ (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). The books have a combined total of 933 pages and contain a huge volume of information on the minute details of school operations and procedures. The Yellow book for ‘Teaching and Learning’ illustrates information on education policy, the school curriculum, co-curricular and vocational subjects, the education calendar,
facilities and their uses, management of teachers, and the instructional programme (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2012a). The Green ‘Finance’ book provides procedures on how to use, record and report the use of school finances and school physical resources as well as rules and regulations for salaries and pensions (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2012b). The Red ‘Management’ book contains a detailed guideline for school operations, school annual plans, preparation before school commencement, school records and paperwork, staff rules and regulations, the principal’s weekly schedule and procedures and preparation for school inspection (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2012c). A common theme that emerged from the content analysis of these three handbooks was the lack of emphasis on student learning outcomes. They revealed that the role of the principals is highly management focused with little or no emphasis on the instructional leadership role of principals.

During the interviews, the principals gave examples of the Ministry giving out written orders. The written orders are additional directives and instructions determined at the highest administrative level and are disseminated down the hierarchical chain. The principals collect these written orders from the Township Education Office and are accountable for implementing the orders successfully. As one principal stated:

They give out orders. For example, before school starts each year, they give out instructions on how to accept student enrolment, what to give out to the students during enrolment and what not to do such as collecting fees. So we have to follow these kinds of instructions given from above. (P3)

The interview responses suggested that the principals have very limited decision-making authority for their schools and are not allowed to change, innovate or modify any aspect of the school and the instructional programme unless they have received an explicit order to do so. When asked about how much control they have, one of the principals responded that they have only about 10% of personal authority, commenting:

We usually are implementing what has been instructed to us. But... I think I have control over assigning the students and teachers into classrooms,
allocating subjects and selecting homeroom teachers. Otherwise, if there are no instructions given, we are not able to do anything on our own accord. (P7)

During the interviews, all of the principals mentioned the term ‘education calendar’ which is an outline of what principals are expected to do for the school on a monthly basis. Due to the frequent mention of this term by all the principals, it might be concluded that the education calendar is perhaps the most important document that guides the work of the principal. According to the principals, the education calendar is the same for every school and it must be displayed in a visible area in every school. One of the principals commented that:

The first job of the principal is to do things according to each month in the education calendar. All our work has been scheduled for all 12 months. We have to successfully implement all the work laid out in the education calendar. (P5)

According to the documentary analysis of the Yellow ‘Teaching and Learning’ book, the importance of the educational calendar can be inferred from the fact that a whole chapter is devoted to it (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2012a, pp. 162-166). However, even though the calendar is presented in the Yellow ‘Teaching and Learning’ book, the only tasks related to the instructional programme are the monthly tests and remedial teaching. The rest of the activities are non-teaching and learning related activities such as school health and cleanliness, school green week, special national and religious holidays, meeting dates for the Parent Teacher Association, and dates for sports, arts and music competitions, ceremonies and excursions. Nevertheless, the principals are expected to accomplish all the tasks set out in the education calendar by the Ministry of Education.

**School organisation structures**

When asked to describe how teachers are managed, the principals explained that the school organisation structure is made up of multiple teams. Examples of teams mentioned during the interviews were the subject teams, the school disciplinary team, the teacher evaluation team, the examination team, the school finance team, and the Parent Teacher Association. Based on the frequent
mention of these teams by the principals, it can be assumed that the schools are structured the same way across all school levels. The following quote exemplifies how the principals positioned themselves as the manager of teams.

As the principal, I have to be the director of all the board teams in my school. For example, I’m the director of the subject teams and internal exam board. The principals are all required to be the director of these teams. (P6)

All eight principals brought up ‘subject teams’ when asked about how they manage their instructional programme. One of the principals compared the organisational structure of their school to that of a University. This principal described how universities have departments and deans, and similarly Myanmar schools have subject teams and subject heads. Under the principal, teachers are grouped into subject teams and the number of teams depends on the number of subjects taught in the school. The responsibility of the principals in assigning subjects to the suitable teachers, creating subject teams and appointing team leaders as ‘subject heads’, was illustrated by one principal as follows:

I have the responsibility to ensure that the teachers are given the subjects that match their degree. Those with BA degree get Burmese, English and social subjects whereas those with BSc degree get maths and science. That is how I divide the subject teams and appoint team leaders. The team leaders need to know the curriculum of every grade. (P6)

The principals described the ‘subject heads’ as having a middle management role in managing the teachers within their teams. The principals directly supervise the subject heads and the subject heads are expected to ensure that the teachers are performing according to the expectations of the subject heads. Moreover, since the subject heads are highly experienced in their subjects, they are also expected to provide guidance to teachers who are having difficulties. As one interviewee stated:

Subject head is a leadership position. All subject heads need to manage their teachers. They need to check whether the teachers are teaching according to the curriculum and whether the lessons are according to the schedule. (P3)
According to the content analysis of the Yellow ‘Teaching and Learning’ book, the subject teams are termed ‘Board of Studies’ (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2012a, p. 284). It is stated in this document that the principal must appoint the ‘subject head’ based on three criteria - experience, seniority and rank. Rank means whether the teacher is teaching the highest grade in that school. The rest of the team members are the teachers who are teaching the same subject in lower grades. However, the document does not clarify the role of these middle leaders or how the principal should manage the teams. The number of subject teams in a school depends on the number of subjects the school delivers. Primary and middle schools have six main curricular subjects whereas the high schools have up to ten curricular subjects (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2012a, pp. 60-65).

**Key findings**

- Myanmar principals work in a bureaucratic, highly centralised education system and consequently find themselves subjected to many rules and regulations.
- Within their respective schools, principals work in an organisational structure made up of multiple teams and team leaders. Within this internal hierarchy of teams, the principal is the manager of the team leaders and thus becomes the indirect instructional leader.
- Principals are given very clear guidance through the policy handbooks and written orders and see themselves mainly as implementers of rules and regulations.

**The Principals’ Work**

In this section, the following headings have been used to present the findings: role descriptions, instructional leadership, and other tasks. The first set of findings relates to role descriptions and is based on ‘The Basic Education Law Draft 2016’ and the three ‘Yellow’, ‘Green’ and ‘Red’ books. The next heading focuses on the instructional leadership work of the principals. Under this heading, the data from the documentary analysis of the Yellow ‘Teaching and
Learning’ book is presented first and supplemented by data from the interviews. The last set of findings relates to the other aspects of the principal’s work as described in the interviews.

**Role descriptions**

According to the content analysis, there are no internal or external documents defining what principalship is in Myanmar. The Basic Education Law Draft (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2016a) refers to the principal in only two places with regards to organising professional development and developing professional standards. Although this draft law contains interpretations for the terms ‘student’ and ‘teacher’, there is no interpretation of principalship. Similarly, the ‘Yellow’, ‘Green’ and ‘Red’ books do not outline the working definition of principalship either.

The role of the principal is described in the Yellow ‘Teaching and Learning’ book in the chapter on ‘Instructional Management’ (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2012a, pp. 272-302), which contains a detailed account of what the principals are expected to do or not do in regards to the instructional programme. According to the chapter, there are nine elements the principals are responsible for. They are (1) allocating subjects, (2) timetabling, (3) scheduling monthly lesson for each subject of each grade, (4) supervising daily diaries of teachers, (5) supervising notes of lessons of teachers, (6) managing board of studies, (7) managing remedial teaching, (8) observing instructions and (9) checking students' exercise books. While some elements of instructional leadership are included, the ‘Instructional Management’ chapter mainly lists routine administration tasks.

On the other hand, the Red ‘Management’ book contains one chapter on ‘The Principal’s Weekly Work Schedule’ (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2012c, pp. 206-209). The purpose of the chapter is to outline the weekly schedule of the principal to manage the school effectively, improve the instructional programme and improve students’ personal abilities. The weekly schedule is divided into eight major sections. The first task of the principal is to hold the school assembly
every Monday to inform the students and the teachers about school discipline, weekly team activities and competitions for special commemorative days. The second task is related to instructional leadership activities such as supervising teacher attendance, reviewing notes of lesson and diaries, monitoring student homework, observing lessons and holding meetings with the board of studies. As the third task, the principals are expected to monitor student attendance, manage weekly team activities, and meet with the teachers to promote student discipline and provide remedial teaching and additional support. The fourth task of the principal is maintaining discipline among the students and the teachers together with the help of the school disciplinary team. The next task is related to working collaboratively with the Parent Teacher Association to present, discuss, plan and implement school development activities. As the sixth task, the principals need to assign duties to the student council teams in order to keep the school compound clean and presentable. The seventh task is about fulfilling the office duties and completing paperwork such as reporting, filing and maintaining records. Lastly, the principal is in charge of the remaining aspects of the school such as the school canteen, library, media room, science laboratories and school furniture. It can be seen that instructional leadership is just one aspect of the role of the principal making up only a fraction of the total role. What emerges is that the role and responsibilities of the principals are not always underpinned by a strong focus on student learning outcomes. Furthermore, the documents revealed that the emphasis and the amount of non-instruction related duties far outweigh the instruction related responsibilities.

**Instructional leadership**

The interview data confirms that the principals follow the work outlined in the ‘Instructional Management’ chapter, with frequent examples provided by the principals to illustrate the nine elements. When asked about how they manage the teachers, the principals talked about reviewing daily diaries and notes of lessons, going around the school and entering classes to observe teaching, checking teachers’ corrections of students’ work and holding regular meetings with the board of studies. As one principal stated:

> Within the school, we have board of studies meetings whenever necessary. As for the teachers, they have to plan their lessons and write in their diary
and notes of lessons in advance. Then, they need to submit everything to the principal and then I will check and determine the requirements and weaknesses of the teachers. (P1)

Five principals commented that the classroom visits and observations are done without prior notice and the teachers are told that their class will be observed on any day and at any time. However, only two principals mentioned providing feedback and guidance after the observations. The other principals talked about the post observation discussions as a form of notifying the teachers to change their teaching strategies if they are below the performance standards. One principal noted that, if the teacher has not improved, they have a discussion with the board of studies and allow the teacher to switch to an easier subject. This direct instructional leadership practice was described by one principal in the following way:

When I go around the school and observe, I will check how the subjects are being taught. If I feel that a discussion is necessary, I will talk to them privately. We try to discuss and see if the teacher tries different approaches. (P2)

According to the interviews, it was a common practice for the principals to have teaching responsibilities and also act as the head teacher in their school. The interview data confirms that six out of eight principals had at least one subject to teach in their school. Furthermore, the principals were always in touch with students, not only through the classes they taught, but also by taking relieving classes and doing random class visits. This role of the principal was described by one principal as:

I also have teaching duties. The Ministry has instructed that every principal must take some teaching duties. I'm teaching History subject for the middle school classes such as Grade 5, 6 and 7. And sometimes, when the teacher takes sick leave, I cover for their classes as well. So, I have taught in every class. (P7)

The interview data indicates that principals were not involved in curriculum development. All principals commented that the curriculum was developed by the
Department of Basic Education which is directly under the supervision of the Ministry. The principals are expected to follow the national curriculum to the letter and are not allowed to modify or innovate. However, what principals are expected to do with the curriculum is to draw timetables, set monthly schedules and determine when the curriculum should be completed. As one principal stated:

We do not develop the curriculum at the school level. We are only following the curriculum set by the Ministry of Education. We are not allowed to change, modify or add anything. We can only determine how we are going to deliver in implementing the curriculum. (P8)

According to the interviews, five out of eight principals talked about how developmental training for the teachers is provided at Township and District levels of the school administration. In other words, the principals neither participate in nor have authority over deciding the developmental needs of their teachers. According to the principals, the developmental training was organised during the summer and categorised by subject, which could imply that the training sessions were aimed at refreshing teachers’ subject knowledge. This aspect was illustrated by a principal as:

The Township Education Office also organises the trainings for the teachers according to subjects on the weekends. Also during the summer holiday, all the teachers need to attend the subject related trainings. The District Education Office organises the summer trainings, and I just have to send the teachers. (P5)

**Other tasks**

According to the interviews, all the principals emphasised the role of the Parent Teacher Association as supporting the school mainly financially. The Parent Teacher Association is made up of parents, teachers and the School Welfare Committee members. The principals usually present the needs of the school to the Parent Teacher Association at the beginning of the school year. The needs of the school may be basic necessities such as fixing classroom furniture or other important needs such as installing air conditioners in the classrooms or fixing the lighting around the school. With the financial and physical support of
the Parent Teacher Association, principals are able to provide essential supports to the schools and the students. Moreover, the principals indicated that requesting help from the Ministry involves a lot of procedures and takes a long time. Accordingly, they tend to develop good relations with the parents and the School Welfare Committee members as the principals have to rely heavily on them. One principal commented:

We work with the Parent Teacher Association for school development processes. We have meetings with the Parent Teacher Association and School Welfare Committee and discuss what is needed for the school’s physical aspects. Sometimes, they will hire professional, so we get great support from them. They also give us suggestions and they provide connections as well. (P1)

When asked about school finances, all the principals explained that their role in managing the finances is extremely restricted. According to the principals, the schools receive a ‘School Improvement Fund’ from the government and the amount of funding each school receives depends on the number of students each school has. Moreover, the principals are expected to follow a list of budget categories and the expenditure is limited to a pre-determined amount under each category. In other words, the principals are not expected to plan their finances strategically. As a result, the planning with the school’s internal finance committee involves only decisions on how the fund should be divided among the budget categories. The role of the principal in managing school finances was demonstrated by one principal as follows:

We receive funding from the Ministry for the development of the school. It’s called the School Improvement Fund which is given to the schools according to student numbers. I have to lead a committee which decides on how the funding should be spent as we need to spend according to the budget heading. (P8)

Five principals felt that maintaining staff and student discipline was an important aspect of their job. The principals handled both staff and student discipline with the help of the disciplinary team and spent a considerable amount of time enforcing it. They enforced it through talking about maintaining discipline during
the weekly school assembly, going around the campus at least a few times on a daily basis, and adhering to the strict disciplinary procedures if someone broke those rules. One principal commented that school discipline is the key to having an orderly environment conducive to teaching and learning and said,

I like maintaining discipline because it is the key to having a good orderly environment in the school for good teaching and learning. If the students are well mannered and the teachers are well disciplined, most aspects of the school will improve. (P5)

According to the interviews, almost all the principals focused mainly on the physical aspects of the school when they answered questions related to their personal authority, school culture and collaboration with the teachers, parents and students. The majority of the examples the principals gave related to the school’s physical image, cleanliness, gardening, repair work around the school, and other physical aspects. Only one principal gave an example related to aspects of school culture and relational problems. Moreover, when asked about their personal authority, all the principals gave examples of doing minor repair work around the school whereas instructional related activities were not mentioned. One principal described his personal authority as follows:

In order to improve the school, I planted many trees around the school. But there is no place for the students to sit during break time. As we are under budget, I called my friends and asked their help to create sitting areas under the trees. (P2)

**Key findings**

- The role and responsibilities of the principal are clearly established and well documented in the three ‘Yellow’, ‘Green’ and ‘Red’ books which capture the role of the principal mainly as a school manager.
- The instructional leadership of the principal is only a small part of their role and their duties are outlined as fragmented lists without a central focus on student learning to link the activities together.
• The principal’s instructional leadership does not involve goal setting, hiring and firing teachers, or participation in teacher professional development due to the restraints of the system.

• As a school manager, the principals manage the school finances, develop relationships with the parents and the community, maintain school discipline and deal with physical aspects of the school.

• The principals have very limited authority in financial planning as it is centrally controlled by pre-determined restrictions.

Myanmar Principal Dispositions towards Their Role

In this section, I have consolidated findings from the interviews to present principals’ localised, unique views on their role and their positive dispositions towards their role, in particular their willingness to accept every aspect of their prescribed role and their level of satisfaction with that role.

The interview data showed that the principals willingly accept every aspect of their role, including the hardships. One principal revealed that they had been sleeping at school for the past few months because things were very busy. The principal voiced pride in the hard work they were putting in, not complaining about any hardship. Similar examples were given by other principals in illustrating that they put their heart and soul into their work, such as sleeping at school or working till late. In a way, the principals in Myanmar felt that being a principal was not just a job but their lifestyle. Indeed, the principals put a lot of time, effort and energy into the life of being a principal. As one principal commented:

Since before the school opens, it has been about one or two months since I haven’t slept at my own home. Even when I go back home, I only stayed for a while to do some tidying up, and later I have to come back to school. So I am mentally and physically invested in the school. Every night, I would work till 10 to 11 pm. (P4)

According to the interviews, all the principals had a general sense of satisfaction with their role. When asked about the most enjoyable aspect of their work, four
principals replied that they enjoyed teaching and being in the classroom. They often visited classrooms or took regular classes because they enjoyed being around the students. One principal mentioned that they were happiest when teaching which released stress. Another principal commented that they always went into two classrooms a day because they enjoyed teaching and doing activities with the students. Their sense of satisfaction in teaching and being in direct contact with the students in the classroom was illustrated by one of the high school principals:

For me, I feel very happy when I hear stuff like, “the principal himself taught us in our classroom.” I don’t get this sense of satisfaction from improving just the physical aspects. (P8)

The interview data revealed that these Myanmar principals viewed themselves as the person to solve every problem in the school. The principals commented on solving problems related to the instructional programme, the teachers, the students and parents, school finances, and the school’s physical resources. Four of the eight principals also commented on solving such problems collaboratively with the teachers. However, they ultimately viewed themselves as the person to be in charge of solving various issues at their schools and making things work. This following quote illustrates the principals as problem solvers.

The principal and the assistant teachers are like a family now. When they present their problems, I will try to solve them as much as I can. For example, what we need to teach, how we are going to teach, is there any difficulties and if there are, we will discuss together to solve the problems. (P6)

When analysing how the principals solved problems, a pattern emerged that the principals had a strong motivation to face any problems within the school. It meant that they did not shy away from the challenges they faced and they solved the problems by any means necessary. For example, one principal donated a few computers to his school when there were none in the school computer laboratory. The principals had a strong sense of conviction that they were responsible for everything that went on in their school, from a very minor matter to major problems. One principal expressed these commitments as follows:
I’m always ready and have provided physical as well as financial support to my school. I’m always thinking about what I can do to improve the school and I will try my best to make it happen. (P3)

Remarkably, when asked about what kind of challenges they faced in their daily work, five principals reported not experiencing any challenges. Even though there was consistent evidence throughout the interviews that the principals did experience challenges in their daily work, the principals were disposed to a unique way of viewing challenges as problems that they rejected the notion of anything being a challenge when they were able to solve it. They just saw the challenges as something that required them to resolve and move on. This view of challenges was illustrated by one interviewee as:

Sometimes there are problems but I don’t see them as difficulties or challenges. As long as I can resolve them, I don’t see them as challenges. (P1)

**Key findings**

- The principals were positively disposed to solving school problems head-on and consequently blocking out the notion of anything being a challenge.
- The principals were highly devoted and passionate about their role to the extent that they were willing to provide any form of support to their schools, including personal time, energy, finance and labour.
- The principals appeared satisfied with their job and achievement of success.

**Issues Related to the Myanmar Principal’s Role**

While over half the participating principals perceived experiencing no ‘challenges’ as such, their interview responses suggested that they do face real challenges in their daily work. This section relates to the issues raised by Myanmar principals during the interviews.

Three principals brought up issues related to the lack of time when fulfilling the orders given by the Ministry. According to the principals, written orders are usually given out at the last minute so that they have to drop everything to fulfil
these new instructions. For example, they may be ordered to submit a particular report the next morning or they are called to the Township Education Office immediately. However, the principals recognise that the reason for the lack of time is because of the multiple levels of hierarchy. According to one principal, a lot of time is required for the instruction to be passed down from the Ministry to the school level and the reports to be submitted up the chain of command. Consequently, only a small amount of time is actually allowed for principals to fulfil all demands. This challenge and its underlying reason was described by one principal as follows:

Sometimes it’s frustrating when we have been ordered to send reports immediately or be summoned at once. But from their part, they have to do that because they don’t have a lot of time as the order comes through the hierarchical chain of command. They have to push for the deadline, and by the time it reaches us, we have to give what they instructed immediately. Only when these reports are collected at the township, then it will go to the district, and from the district to the state and region and finally to Nay Pyi Daw. So, in order for them to give out these reports in time, the timeline they set for us is extremely limited. (P5)

The principals spoke of having to carry out an intense workload related to both internal and external aspects to their schools. Aside from being responsible for virtually everything that goes on in a school, the principals commented that they are often required to attend training, workshops and meetings, collect census data and organise voting centres during election time. One principal explained that they managed their time by fulfilling instructional work during school hours and completing most of the paperwork after school. Another principal commented that their classes were sometimes interrupted due to being summoned to go for meetings without much prior notice. Moreover, some principals commented that they often sleep at the school to finish their work. One said:

In my school there are over 1200 students. Moreover, I have to carry out tasks that are outside the school, tasks assigned from the Township Education Office. So there is just so much work. Since before the school
opens, it has been about 1 or 2 months since I haven’t slept at my own home. (P4)

Although not explicitly acknowledged by the principal as a challenge, the interviews indicated that the principals have very limited authority. For example, they have no authority in recruiting and dismissing the teachers. According to four principals, hiring teachers is done by the Department of Basic Education and assigning teachers is done at the District level. The principals do not have the right to selecting suitable teachers for their schools. Likewise, since they are not allowed to terminate the employment of any teachers, they have the challenge of supporting the teachers who are not performing well or those who are not the right ‘fit’ for the school. Without the decision-making authority to let go of teachers, dealing with the difficult teachers can become highly challenging as well. One principal commented that she dealt with a difficult teacher by taking a soft approach, making peace with the teacher and giving in to her demands. Another principal talked about how they deal with poor performing teachers, as follows:

The private schools can hire and fire teachers as they like. But for us, we can’t act like that. If the teacher is weak, we have no choice but to keep them and guide them as much as possible. It can be quite tough on the teaching team sometimes. (P2)

According to the interviews, all the principals acknowledged that the funding they receive from the government is insufficient. Spending is restricted to budget headings and the principals are not officially allowed to move funds from one budget heading to another. The principals disclosed that most of the time the allocated budget cannot even cover the basic necessities of the school such as drinking water, electricity and paper supplies. The lack of sufficient funding was illustrated by one principal as follows:

During the exams, we have to spend a lot of money since we also do not collect fees from the students. This expenditure is quite high. Now we have exams every month so it costs quite a lot. And when we send out for typing services (computer), each page costs 500 kyat. So if you calculate the number of students, let’s say 600, each answer booklet has four papers for
each subject and so for six subjects, each student spends 24 papers excluding extra papers. And the school has to buy a lot of these supplies throughout the year. The expenditure is huge. But the budget we receive for each student is only 5000 kyat. But it’s not possible to spend within that. (P2)

When asked about how they deal with the lack of sufficient funding, some principals explained that they get help from the parents and the School Welfare Committee. Since 2013, the schools are not allowed to seek further income by collecting fees or asking for donations. This has resulted in a significant reduction in the school budget and principals are forced to find other means. One principal described how she solved this issue:

For electricity bills, we are only allowed to spend 1000 kyat but in reality, the bill comes to about 20,000 kyat because we have electric fans in the classroom. So, we have to use the rent from the two Township Education Office clerks who live in the school. (P6)

**Key finding**

• The principals experienced challenges such as intense workloads, bureaucratic pressures, lack of time, limited authority and insufficient funding as part of their role.

**Consolidated Key Findings**

In this section, I will be connecting the key findings to my research questions which were to investigate:

1. What is an international view of principalship?
2. What do documents reveal about the roles and responsibilities of Myanmar principals?
3. How do Myanmar principals perceive and interpret their roles and responsibilities?
4. What challenges do Myanmar principals experience?
For my first research question, I was able to answer that by reviewing the literature discussed in Chapter Two. The next three questions required connection with the data collected through the interviews and the documentary analysis. Table 4.2 on the following page presents the key findings in answer to the three research questions and provides a link to the headings that have been used in the discussion of findings in the following chapter.
### Table 4.2 Selection of Headings for Discussion of Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Headings</th>
<th>Key Findings</th>
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| 2. What do documents reveal about the roles and responsibilities of Myanmar principals? | The documented role           | • Principal’s role and responsibilities are clearly established and well documented in the principal handbooks.  
• The scope of the role is mainly as a school manager and instructional leadership is just a part of the role.  
• The principal’s weekly work schedule lacks a strong emphasis on student learning outcomes.  
• The documented instructional leadership role does not include goal-setting, hiring and firing teachers or participation in the professional development of teachers. |
| 3. How do Myanmar principals perceive and interpret their roles and responsibilities? | The perceived role            | • The principals mainly viewed themselves as implementers of rules and regulations.  
• They had a high priority on dealing with the school façades.  
• They willingly accepted every aspect of their role including hardships, problems and challenges.  
• Their positive dispositions lead them to the perception that they do not experience challenges.                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 4. What challenges do Myanmar principals experience?                               | The challenges of the role    | • The principals had limited authority in a highly centralised system.  
• They experienced intense workloads from both internal and external demands on the school.  
• They experienced bureaucratic pressure from the hierarchical order to meet deadlines and complained about time constraints.  
• They received insufficient funding and struggled to make ends meet for the school.                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter, I have presented a discussion of the data and overall findings presented in Chapter Four in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. A key finding is that Myanmar principals work in a bureaucratic, highly centralised system where their role and responsibilities are clearly laid out in the principal handbooks. Within this system, the principals are subjected to many rules and regulations and saw themselves mainly as implementers of directives given from the Ministry. Although the positive dispositions lead the principals to the perception that they did not experience challenges, there was consistent evidence that the principals did experience challenges in their daily work.

This chapter is divided into three sections: discussion, conclusions and recommendations. The discussion section is presented under three headings which directly correspond to my research questions: the documented role (what do documents reveal about the roles and responsibilities of Myanmar principals?), the perceived role (how do Myanmar principals perceive their roles and responsibilities?), and the challenges of the role (what challenges do Myanmar principals experience?). This chapter concludes with sections on conclusions and recommendations.

Discussion

In this section, the first heading – the documented role – discusses the role and responsibilities of the principals based on the content analysis of the three official handbooks. The next heading – the perceived role – relates to the discussion of the perceptions, experiences and role interpretations of the principals. The last heading – the challenges of the role – focuses on the discussion of challenges experienced by the principals such as lack of authority, time and sufficient funding.
The documented role

The content analysis of the three official handbooks provided to the principals by the Ministry revealed that Myanmar principals work in a bureaucratic, highly centralised education system and consequently find themselves subjected to many rules and regulations. There are several layers in the hierarchy of school administration and the principals are at the lowest level in the chain of command. This structure resembles the vertical coordination structure described by Bolman and Deal (2013) which is characterised by top-down command and control where the higher levels retain the authority to make rules, policies, planning and control systems. In other words, the role and responsibilities of the principals are bound by rules and regulations presented in the documents such as the three principal handbooks and written orders. Moreover, as a distinct feature of a hierarchical structure, the work of the principal is routine, predictable and stable (Anderson & Brown, 2010). Furthermore, Anderson and Brown (2010) argue that hierarchical structures give disproportionate control to the higher levels so that lower ranked individuals such as the principals are expected to show deference and keep their opinions to themselves. This arrangement means the principals cannot question higher authority and they cannot undertake actions without directives from their superiors.

The role and responsibilities of the principals are clearly established and well documented in the three principal handbooks. An advantage of a clearly defined role is that there is no role ambiguity and the expectations of what the principals are required to do are clear. Moreover, the detailed account of rules and regulations stipulated in the principal handbooks may have been designed in a way that anyone with teaching experience can become a school principal. However, Bush (2010) strongly argues against the assumption that teaching qualifications and teaching experience are adequate to progress to principalship, commenting that “leadership must grow by design not by default” (p. 127). Given the fact that the principals in Myanmar are not given school leadership and management training (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2016b), the underlying assumption is that the imposed rules, regulations and uniformity of system comprise a legitimate way of promoting teachers as principals.
Another key finding is that the intended nature of the principal’s role is that of a bureaucratic manager as the three principal handbooks contain a disproportionate number of various mundane and management activities. For example, seven out of eight responsibilities outlined in the Principal’s Weekly Work Schedule (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2012c) relate to tasks such as coordinating school activities, organising paperwork, maintaining discipline and managing physical resources. This current scope of the Myanmar principal’s role is comparable to the earlier principalship in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom which primarily involved clerical work (Rousmaniere, 2009). These principals were engaged in mundane duties such as allocating and protecting resources, maintaining discipline and keeping attendance records (Kafka, 2009). Because Myanmar principals work in a centralised education system, their primary role is to manage existing activities such as tasks and behaviours which makes the principalship more managerial. Consequently, principals are more concerned with ‘how’ things should be done. As argued by Bush and Glover (2014), “by focusing on functions, tasks and behaviours, there is the possibility that the aims of education will be subordinated to the managerial aim of greater efficiency.” (p. 557).

When comparing the role of the principals outlined in the Red book for Management to the professional standards of Anglo-American and Asian countries, there are many apparent differences. The role and responsibilities of Myanmar principals outlined in the Principal’s Weekly Work Schedule (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2012c) cover the eight elements of coordinating school activities, instructional management, student management, disciplinary management, building relations with parents, school cleanliness, administrative management and physical resource management. It can be seen that the Myanmar principal role is task-oriented with low prominence accorded to the instructional programme. In contrast, the professional standards of principals in the United States focus on improvement and are future-oriented with a strong focus on student learning (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Moreover, the documented role of Myanmar principals lacks a focus on personal qualities, knowledge and leading change and improvement which are
found in principals’ professional standards in Australia and the United Kingdom (Education Services Australia, 2011; United Kingdom Department for Education, 2015). Moreover, the role of Myanmar principals lacks a component of establishing school vision and goals which is emphasised as the first task of the principals in Japan and Hong Kong (Japanese Association for the Study of Educational Administration, 2009; The Education Bureau of the Hong Kong, 2014). By comparison, the Myanmar principal’s role has a lot in common with the Malaysian professional standards which do not include a strategic element of formulating school vision and goals but contain elements such as administrative leadership, management of physical facilities and external relations and partnership development (Ayob, 2012). In short, the documented role of the Myanmar principals falls short of various important elements found in the principal professional standards used in many Anglo-American and Asian countries.

The documented instructional management role outlined in the Yellow ‘Teaching and Learning’ book is significantly different from the notion of instructional leadership established in the literature (Robinson et al., 2009; Cardno, 2012; Weber, 1987). The instructional management tasks prescribed for Myanmar principals focus on allocating teachers, timetabling, supervising lesson plans, observing lessons, checking students’ work and managing subject teams (Myanmar Ministry of Education, 2012a). An important element of instructional leadership apparently missing from the list is setting academic goals which is the most important function of instructional leadership because it has a direct influence on all other instructional leadership functions (Cardno & Collett, 2004; Cardno, 2012; Weber, 1987). Another crucial aspect that is absent from the Yellow book is the role of the principal in teacher professional development. Information about teachers’ skills, abilities and developmental needs are best obtained at the school-level as the principals have the most interaction with their teachers and thus are better informed. Since current teacher development scheme in Myanmar is organised by the higher levels in the school administration, it may have been built on an abstract concept rather than the real developmental needs of the teachers. This is of major concern because according to the report on best evidence synthesis of school leadership
(Robinson et al., 2009), professional development has the biggest effect size on student outcomes especially when educational leaders such as the principals actively participate in the professional development themselves. In other words, the instructional leadership role of the principals should include leadership of professional development together with performance management of the teachers. Other aspects of instructional leadership by the principal absent in the documents include setting tone for the learning climate, hiring teachers, evaluating the instructional programme and leading strategic activities. It can be seen that the working model of the instructional leadership role of the principals in Myanmar may be inadequate in improving the quality of teaching and learning.

**The perceived role**

A key finding from the interview data is that the principals view themselves as implementers of externally created rules and regulations. This represents the managerial model of school leadership where “the principal’s role is limited to managing the implementation of externally devised initiatives” (Bush & Glover, 2014, p. 565). The principals did not have a voice in challenging what is imposed on them but were simply following orders. In other words, the principals prioritised “the efficient implementation of external imperatives, notably those prescribed by higher levels within the bureaucratic hierarchy” (Bush, 2007, p. 395). Moreover, the principals felt that they could not act without receiving explicit orders from their superiors. An explanation of this phenomenon is provided by Zobrist and McCormick (2013) who state that ‘ties of patronage’ between superiors and inferiors are central to how power is exercised which means that “underlings take no action unless their immediate supervisor approves or directs it” (p. 5). Although there are certain advantages for Myanmar principals, as their role as implementers is unambiguous, predictable and stable, there are also some weaknesses because the principals are not motivated towards innovation, capacity-building and change management.

The principals placed a high emphasis on dealing with the school façade, such as gardening, cleanliness, repairing and maintenance work, and hosting competitions and ceremonies. When asked about their personal authority, school
culture and collaboration with parents and teachers, the principals instead reported many different examples of their role in dealing with the physical aspects of the school. This finding mirrors the study done by Oplatka (2004) on principals in developing countries which found that “principals from poor developing countries (mainly from Africa) are preoccupied with the satisfaction of basic needs and functions that most principals in Western countries, presumably, have never included in their role definition” (p. 432). In the Myanmar context, an explanation for the principals prioritising attention to the school façade is the externally imposed school inspections which mainly check whether schools have undertaken the activities laid out in the education calendar (90 per cent of which are non-instructional activities). In a way, how principals prioritise their job is strongly influenced by pressures from the external environment such as policy imperatives, inspection criteria and expectations of the government (Bush, 2007). Apart from the school inspections, another underlying reasons for the participating principals to place a high emphasis on the school façade was because it is the aspect where they have some personal authority. When the principals talked about their personal authority, they mainly provided examples of beautifying their school campus or making a small repair around the school. According to Kowalski (2010), activities such as sustaining the physical environment, managing student activities, health and safety, custodial services and food services take up considerable time of the principals in developing countries but are usually dismissed from the role definition of the principals in Western countries. An implication of this phenomenon is that the valuable time of the principals is spent on carrying out the mundane tasks rather than focusing on improving teaching and learning. This finding aligns with the previous studies done by Hallinger and Thang (2014) who concluded that Vietnamese principals were likely to adopt a stance in favour of management and administration rather than instructional leadership. Similar trends have been found in other developing countries such as Papua New Guinea, Thailand, Maltese and Kuwait (Oplatka, 2004).

A key finding that relates to instructional leadership is that the principals are indirect instructional leaders as they delegate direct instructional leadership work to the subject heads. When asked about how the instructional programme is
managed, all eight principals brought up subject teams and they positioned themselves as the manager of the subject teams. A similar finding was demonstrated by Oplakta (2004) who concluded that principals in Hong Kong performed at a low level of direct instructional leadership but they adopted higher levels of indirect involvement. In Myanmar, the principals provided indirect instructional leadership by delegating instructional leadership, supervising the middle leaders, scheduling, budgeting and shaping the environment where teaching and learning occurs. Those responsibilities of the principals correspond to the description of indirect instructional leadership provided by Cardno and Collett (2004). However, a number of important functions were missing from the indirect instructional practices of Myanmar principals, such as setting academic goals, leading strategic activities, leading and developing middle leaders, establishing and monitoring systems and processes and managing curriculum. In other words, the indirect instructional tasks of Myanmar principals were not strategic in nature but restricted to keeping the school running so that teaching and learning occurred smoothly.

Although the principals undertook a more indirect instructional leadership role, over half the principals reported carrying out ‘round checks’ or classroom observations which are a form of direct instructional leadership. The principals commented on checking whether teachers entered and left the class on time, the teachers’ teaching style and what students had learned. However, only two principals reported following up with guidance and feedback which means that most of the observations were undertaken with accountability goals or as a system requirement. Seashore Louis et al. (2010) note that teacher observations need to be done in a manner that focuses on improving teaching and learning. Although accountability and evaluation needs to be present to ensure targeted student outcomes are met, the softer edge of a developmental and supportive approach needs to be maintained in order to improve teaching and learning (Cardno, 2012; Oldroyd, 2005).

A unique finding is that the Myanmar principals were positively disposed to willingly accept every aspect of their role including the hardships, problems and challenges. These principals were highly motivated and passionate about their
role and felt a sense of satisfaction related to the time, effort and energy they put into their role. This finding contradicts many of the studies done on principalship in centralised education systems that characterise the ‘impersonal orientation’ that dominates a spirit of “formalistic impersonality, devoid of affection or enthusiasm” (Dimopoulos, Dalkavouki & Koulaidis, 2015, p. 199). Furthermore, the Myanmar principals’ positive dispositions lead them to the perception that they did not experience challenges, due to their ‘just do it’ mentality towards challenges. Moreover, the positive dispositions of Myanmar principals disputes the claims made by Bush (2007) who states that when principals are simply taking the role of the passive implementing agents of externally imposed changes, they are not likely to show enthusiasm or commitment. The fact that Myanmar principals are committed to the prescribed principal role means that they have absolute faith in the central directives and their role in providing education to the students to become good members of the society. In other words, the highly centralised nature of the administration system does not seem to be challenged in any way by the principals who reported high levels of commitment and satisfaction in relation to being a principal. This compliant attitude of Myanmar principals aligns with a previous study reporting that Hong Kong principals are well in tune with the direction of educational reforms, and are less disposed to critique or challenge the central authority (Bottery et al., 2008).

The challenges of the role
In an education system that continues to be highly centralised, the principals have little or no authority in curriculum development, budgeting, teacher selection and recruitment, and staff development. The traditional hierarchy means there is high power distance and since the principals are at the lowest rank in the hierarchy, they ultimately have the least formal power and authority (Lee & Hallinger, 2012). The principals expressed they had only about 10% of personal authority which meant that the 90% of their work including the school processes and activities was perceived as centrally controlled by the Ministry. Oplatka (2004) argues that principals’ autonomy is constrained in highly centralised education systems and that situation “has not changed dramatically subsequent to decentralisation reforms introduced in some developing countries”
The Myanmar principals highlighted lacking authority in dismissing any teachers who were not the right fit for the school or who consistently performed below the expectations of the principals. Consequently, the lack of authority among principals to dismiss teachers nor direct teacher professional development could have an adverse effect on teaching and learning. This was viewed as a negative impact of the top-down institutional and organisational culture in the Ministry propagating a lack of autonomy at the lower levels of administration (Zobrist & McCormick, 2013).

Moreover, the principals experienced intense workloads from both internal and external demands of the schools. Over half the principals reported working extra hours to keep up with the workload and three principals commented even sleeping at the school occasionally. According to Zobrist and McCormick (2013), the recent attempts to decentralise school leadership in Myanmar has only increased workload and responsibilities for the principals while providing little or no decision-making authority. Similarly, the intensification of workload for Myanmar principals corresponds to the experiences of principals in both the United Kingdom and Hong Kong who expressed their frustration at the accumulation of pressure and the excessive amount of time and energy needed to deal with the sheer quantity of duties (Bottery et al., 2008). The positive dispositions of Myanmar principals towards their jobs may condition them to willingly accept the workload as part of their role and not be inclined to complain or feel frustrated about the amount of work. The principals did acknowledge that their role comes with a large number of responsibilities. However, they were prepared to invest mentally and physically in the life of being a principal. In other words, the principals know what the landscape of principalship looks like and they are happy to be in it.

**Conclusions**

This study explored the lived experiences, constraints of daily reality and role enactment of school principals in Yangon, Myanmar, focusing on the documented and perceived role and responsibilities of the principals. Eight principals participated in semi-structured interviews which provided a rich source
of data. During the study, I had identified what constitutes principalship in my country with various examples of role interpretation, leadership context and challenges. Nonetheless, I am most inspired by the principals’ resilience and positive dispositions to overcome difficulties in their current role.

The present picture of principalship in Myanmar depicts that the principals are positive, willing and satisfied with their role and responsibilities, which are clearly defined as primarily routine administration of the schools. There was a sense of feeling among the principals that they were doing a great job within the boundaries of their limited authority in their local settings. They performed their role ‘by the book’ and had a good faith that they were doing what they were supposed to be doing. Consequently, the principals overestimated the validity of the central directives and they did not challenge the legitimacy and relevance of the rules and regulations established by the central authority. On the surface, everything appeared to be working seamlessly and systematically according to the Ministry’s design.

However, just because the system is functional does not mean it is effective. Hiding behind the turning wheel of the bureaucratic system is the failing state of Myanmar’s current education. According to a report by the Asian Development Bank, education indicators in Myanmar are lagging behind other ASEAN countries (Tanaka et al., 2015). The quality of education in public schools is poor and parents send their children to either private or international schools if they can afford to. As indicated in an in-depth analysis of the Myanmar Comprehensive Education Sector Review (Young, 2014), students from private schools are more likely to pass the Matriculation Examination than students attending government schools. This mediocre standard of Myanmar government education is contributed to by the current arrangements of the centralised system and the focus of the official principal handbooks and school inspection criteria on demonstration of compliance with rules and regulations (Young, 2014). Consequently, the principals may not place an emphasis on the quality of learning, actual student achievement and teacher performance.
The current landscape of principalship must be transformed in order to achieve a desirable future for education in Myanmar. In order to improve the standard of education, principals must become instructional leaders who prioritise the quality of teaching and learning in their schools. They need to establish school goals and have the authority to make decisions in areas such as the curriculum, teachers’ professional development, actual learning outcomes based on skills and knowledge rather than test scores, and budgeting.

**Recommendations**

These conclusions lead to the proposal of two recommendations. Firstly, Myanmar principals would benefit from a new principal handbook with a stronger focus on instructional leadership coupled with appropriate leadership development training to implement new practices. The policy makers need to critically explore the concept of instructional leadership and work in consultation with their international partners such as UNICEF, when developing a new instructional leadership handbook that includes appropriate inspection criteria for the principals. Only when the principal handbooks have a clearer link to student learning outcomes and a less inspectorial focus on the school façade will principals be able to prioritise instructional leadership among other responsibilities.

Secondly, the Ministry needs to acknowledge that school improvement cannot happen in an abstract form but only within the context of individual schools. It means that higher decision-making authority coupled with school leadership and management training should be given to school principals so that they have the autonomy to set their school goals, carry out strategic plans for human resources, curriculum and budget, and evaluate their own achievements. It is important that the decentralisation attempt by the Ministry is accompanied by granting genuine decision-making power to principals.
Limitations of Research and Suggestions for Further Research

Some limitations in this study need to be taken into consideration. Firstly, due to the restricted scope of the study, I was not able to explore the role of the principal from the perceptions of the teachers and the township education officers, who might offer a valuable insight into what the principals are perceived by others as doing. Secondly, owing to time constraints, the sample size was limited with only eight principals participating in this study. Therefore, the study cannot be used to generalise the reality of the role and challenges of the principals in Myanmar as a whole. However, readers may make valuable comparisons and judgements about similarity and transferability to their local settings (Ary et al., 2010). Moreover, this research closes a gap in the available literature related to school leadership and management in the Myanmar context and paves the way for further research.

Areas for further research into school leadership in the Myanmar context could be:

- Identifying the developmental needs of the principals
- Evaluating the impact of national culture on the role of the principals
- Investigating effective leadership practices of principals in high performing schools
- Exploring the role of the middle leaders (e.g. subject heads).

This study has documented and presented a culturally and contextually appropriate landscape of principalship in Myanmar. With very limited research available in the field of school leadership and management in the Myanmar context, this thesis may provide some insight into the perceived role and responsibilities of school principals in Myanmar. My hope is that this study will pave the way for deeper investigation of educational leadership and management from systems, cultural, political and organisational perspectives in Myanmar and build an evidence-based research platform to inform the practices of the principals as well as other educational leaders and managers. I enjoyed learning to become a researcher and found it very satisfying to have contributed something important to my own country.
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Information Sheet

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Title of Thesis: The Landscape of Principalship in Yangon, Myanmar

My name is Pwint Nee Aung. I am currently studying Master of Educational Leadership and Management at Unitec Institute of Technology in Auckland, New Zealand. I am seeking your help in meeting the requirements of research for my Master Thesis.

The aim of my project is to find out what principalship looks like in Yangon Division in Myanmar. I am particularly interested in how Myanmar principals perceive and interpret their roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, I would like to find out what kind of challenges Myanmar principals experience while carrying out their day-to-day activities.

I would like to request your participation in the following ways. I will be collecting data using a 60-minute interview and would appreciate being able to interview you at a time that is convenient for you at your office. Participation is completely voluntary and you will be able to withdraw up to two weeks after the return/confirmation of my verified transcript. I will be asking you to sign a consent form regarding this event. I will also be collecting a few internal documents related to principalship such as position description, appointment letter or policy documents.

The identity of you, your school and your township will be kept confidential and will not be identified in my thesis. Your contribution will be recorded and you will be provided a copy of the interview transcript to verify and check for accuracy.
You will have 10 days from receiving the transcript to edit and/or withdraw any of your data.

I would be happy to share a summary of the final report with schools that participate. I do hope that you will agree to take part and that you will find this participation of interest. If you have any queries about the project, you may contact my supervisor at Unitec Institute of Technology.

My supervisor is Professor Carol Cardno and may be contacted by email ccardno@unitec.ac.nz (ph: +649 815-4321 ext 8406).

Yours sincerely,
Pwint Nee Aung

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2017-1029

This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 25 May 2017 to 24 May 2018. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: +649 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 2: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM – ADULT PARTICIPANTS

Research Event: Semi-structured Interview
Project Researcher: Pwint Nee Aung
Programme: Master of Educational Leadership and Management
Thesis Title: The Landscape of Principalship in Yangon, Myanmar

Participant’s consent

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research and I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered. I understand that neither my name nor the name of my school will be used in any public reports.

I understand that everything I say will be kept confidential and none of the information I give will identify me and the only persons who have access will be the researcher and his supervisor. I also understand that all the information I give will be stored securely on the personal computer of the researcher for a period of five years.

I understand that my interview with the researcher will be taped and transcribed with the opportunity to verify the transcription.

I also understand that I will be provided with a transcript of the interview for verification and that I may withdraw myself or any information that has been provided for this project up to two weeks after the return/confirmation of my verified transcript.

I agree to take part in this project.

Signed: _________________________________
Name: _________________________________
Date: _________________________________

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2017-1029
This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 25 May 2017 to 24 May 2018. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: +649 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 3: Interview Schedule

Outline of questions for the semi-structured interviews

1. Why do you think you are given this title called the principal?
2. Please describe the whole scope of your role as a principal.
3. What is your job scope based on?
4. Are there any policies that guide your job as a principal?
5. How is the school administered? How much control do you have?
6. How do you think you are affecting teaching and learning in school?
   a. How much focus do you put on appraising teachers?
   b. Do you involve in developing teachers?
   c. How do you manage curriculum? How do you evaluate programs?
   d. How much time is spent on developing instructional climate? maintaining student discipline? monitoring student achievement?
   e. How do you work collaboratively with teachers? Do you do collaborative decision-making in meetings?
   f. How do you formulate school vision and goals?
7. What else do you do?
   a. What do you do financially?
   b. What do you do strategically?
   c. How do you manage physical resources?
   d. How do you work with the ministry? How do you work with the community?
   e. What do you like about being a principal?
8. What are the difficulties or challenges that you face while carrying out your day-to-day activities?
9. Why do you think these challenges occur?
10. How have you dealt with these challenges?
Full name of author: Pwint Nek Aung

ORCID number (Optional): ....................................................

Full title of thesis/dissertation/research project ('the work'):

The Landscape of Principalship in Yangon, Myanmar

Practice Pathway: ...........................................................................

Degree: Master of Educational Leadership and Management

Year of presentation: ............................................

Principal Supervisor: Professor Carol Cardna

Associate Supervisor: Dr. Jo House

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Date: 10/11/2019
Declaration

Name of candidate: Pwint Nee Aung

This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project entitled: The Landscape of Principals'hip in Yangon, Myanmar

is submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of

Principal Supervisor: Prof. Carol Cardno

Associate Supervisor/s: Dr. Jo House

CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I confirm that:

- This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project represents my own work;
- The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.
- Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

Research Ethics Committee Approval Number: 2017-1029

Candidate Signature: .............................. Date: 10/11/2017

Student number: 1460415