A SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON THE LEADERSHIP OF PRINCIPALS IN RURAL SMALL-SCALE SCHOOLS

Xiaocong Wang
Panyapiwat Institute of Management, Nonthaburi, Thailand

This study uses the literature analysis method to conduct a review. Enter the keywords "small rural schools" and "principal leadership" on China HowNet and Baidu Academics to obtain literature. The perspectives of the literature review on small rural schools are time dimension, value dimension, and element dimension; the perspective of principal leadership literature collation is the individual level and the organizational level; finally, it clarifies the literature context of top leadership in rural small-scale schools from three aspects.

Comments on this research: First, most of the studies did not highlight the impact of "distance from the city" and "size" of rural small-scale schools on principal leadership; second, in small-scale rural schools, principals' "multi-role" seriously dilutes They are just "practices" of school leaders; third, they have not analyzed the leadership of small-scale rural school principals from the perspective of leadership theory.

Keywords: small rural schools; principal leadership; teaching technologies

Introduction

A survey of research on small rural schools
Helping rural revitalization not only focuses on promoting the social and economic development of rural areas but also promotes the modern transformation of rural small-scale schools and promotes the balanced development of urban and rural education so that the sense of gain and happiness of the rural population will be enriched and guaranteed.

To grasp the current status of research on the leadership of principals in rural small-scale schools, this study uses the literature analysis method to clarify the relevant literature on the leadership of principals in rural small-scale schools.

This paper analyzes the relevant literature on rural small-scale schools from three dimensions: time, value, and elements.

Xiaocong Wang
Ph.D. Student, Chinese Graduate School, Panyapiwat Institute of Management, Nonthaburi, Thailand
Research interests: education management, education marketing, pedagogy

E-mail: wxc5310@163.com
The time dimension of research on small rural schools

Enter the keywords "small-scale rural schools" or "small-scale schools" in the "Title" column of CNKI's advanced search, and the period is not limited. A total of 904 documents (including academic journals, dissertations, newspapers, and conferences) were collected and the result distribution is shown in Fig.1.

![Figure 1 - Annual quantity trend chart of research results of small-scale rural schools in China (Source: CNKI)](image)

Research on Small-Scale Rural Schools Started from "Removing Sites and Consolidating Schools" (2008-2012)

In the history of education, small-scale schools are an objective school form, but Chinese academic circles pay attention to and study. However, it started when Yao (2008), director of the Education Bureau of Quzhou City, Zhejiang Province, wrote an article "Where is the Way for Rural Small-Scale Schools" in "China Education News", suggesting re-examining the abolition and merger of rural small-scale schools with the concept of fairness.

Scholars began to think about whether small-scale schools in rural areas are bad because of their "remoteness" or "small-scale". Do the advantages of "withdrawing points and merging schools" outweigh the disadvantages?

So, we turned my research attention to foreign countries, and found that small-scale rural schools are more valuable because they are "small".

Du & Tao (2008) studied the merger and reorganization of small-scale rural schools in the United States for more than a century and concluded that the states that retained small-scale rural schools in the United States were significantly better than those that merged small-scale rural schools in many educational development indicators.

Du & Zhao (2010) pointed out that the United States realized the value of rural small-scale schools and gradually adjusted the policy of small-scale rural schools in the United States.
In addition, Lei & Zhang (2011) classified small-scale rural schools. After the classification, they believed that "merging" schools could not be retained, and "transitional" schools could be temporarily retained. "Necessary" rural small-scale schools further promote the development of such schools towards specialization, that is, "small and beautiful". Why can't one size fits all for rural small-scale schools?

Zhang (2012) found through investigation that the existing resource allocation cannot meet the needs of small-scale rural schools one by one, and the contradiction between nationally unified standards and the individual needs of schools appears. The standard is used as the benchmark, and a flexible configuration strategy is implemented.

However, during this period, some scholars also pointed out the problems of small-scale rural schools.

For example, Qin (2010) believed that many quality difficulties faced by rural education were related to the “smallness” of small-scale rural schools.

Liu & Shi (2011) surveyed a southwest county and found that compared with large and medium-sized schools, rural small-scale schools have many problems in terms of academic performance, such as significantly lower scores in Chinese and mathematics. However, during this period, most scholars opposed the policy of withdrawing schools and merging schools and fully explained that small-scale rural schools are still valuable to the development of China's education.

Research on the development dilemma and path of rural small-scale schools has attracted much attention (2012-present)

After entering the era of “withdrawing schools and merging schools”, the development direction and development path of rural small-scale schools are issues of great concern to academic circles. Scholars have proposed three development scenarios (as shown in Tab. 1): First, improve the existing system.

Zhou (2014) proposed that teachers’ demands should be solved according to the workload of teachers in rural small-scale schools, rather than the standard staff-to-student ratio or class ratio.

Zhao (2017) and Zhou (2020) believe that the public funding system for small-scale rural schools should be improved. In terms of funds, equipment, and teachers, realize the linkage guarantee of the supply of information-based teaching resources (Jin, 2020), etc.

Second, seek a high-quality school support model. "Urban-Rural Education Integration" (Zhao & Guo, 2021), "Regional Community of Practice" (Tan & Xu, 2009).

Third, the endogenous development model. Some scholars have suggested that small-scale rural schools in the area should form a community to develop together, such as the rural small-scale school alliance (An & Wu, 2017; Zhu, 2020), school cluster development (Zhao et al., 2019), the area Teaching and Research (Guo, 2021), Li (2021) analyzed the "promoting development through cooperation" model of small-scale rural schools in the UK-cluster development and alliance cooperation. Some scholars pay attention to the study of micro-school teaching and curriculum.

For example, Li & Chen (2017) proposed that micro-school courses should be integrated, Su & Zhao (2018) believed that compound teaching should continue to be carried out, and Wang & Fang (2016) focused on small classes. teaching etc.
Table 1 - Three development models of rural small-scale schools
(compiled by the author)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>development model</th>
<th>representative</th>
<th>The main points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| improve the existing system | Zhou (2020)  
Zhao (2008)  
Zhao & Guo (2021) | Use the workload of teachers in small-scale rural schools to solve the problem of teacher demand; improve the public funding system |
| Seeking high-quality school help | Zhao & Guo (2021)  
Tan & Xu (2009)  
Zhou (2014) | Integration of urban and rural education, a regional community of practice |
| endogenous development | An & Wu (2017)  
Zhu (2018, 2020)  
Zhao et al. (2019)  
Wu (2008) | Community development, school cluster development, district education |

In general, scholars’ research has combined the particularity of rural small-scale schools and believes that it is difficult to promote the development of rural small-scale schools simply by applying the development requirements of compulsory education schools. There are two different paths in development: external assistance and Self-reliance.

The value dimension of research on small rural schools

Rural small-scale schools are in remote rural areas, with a shortage of teachers and a small number of students. They cannot organize large-scale activities, and the cost of running a school is high.

It is difficult to attract excellent teachers for education and teaching. However, it is still an important educational organization for the development of education in rural areas of various countries (Wu, 2008), because it has economic, educational, cultural, and social equity values (Zhang, 2022), as shown in Tab. 2.

Elemental dimensions of research on small-scale rural schools

The research on external factors is mainly reflected in the management of rural small-scale schools by education administrative departments and rural central schools, and the relationship between rural small-scale schools and their communities.

Higher-level management departments, including county and township education administrative departments, cannot treat rural small-scale schools fairly in terms of teacher allocation. In England, rural schools attach importance to leading community development with rich cultural and recreational activities and encourage their communities to actively support school development.

However, the relationship between rural schools and communities in Sweden has not yet been fully appreciated (Hargreaves et al., 2009).

Research on internal factors mainly focuses on teachers and finance. Studies in various countries have shown that the shortage of primary school teachers is a common and increasingly serious problem in all countries, which has an immeasurable impact on rural education, and the situation is even more serious in rural small-scale schools.
A SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON THE LEADERSHIP

Table 2- Value performance of rural small-scale schools
(compiled by the author)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value Type</th>
<th>Main Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic Value</td>
<td>It can reduce the cost of student education and help families increase their income (Su &amp; Zhao, 2018); It can also save the government's high school bus costs (Zhu, 2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>educational value</td>
<td>It can form a relatively close parent-child relationship and home-school connection, which is conducive to the development of children's emotional and physical, and mental health. In terms of educational resources, although the conditional resources are not as good as urban and medium-sized schools, small-scale rural schools are rich in natural, agricultural, and other material resources, and have developed school-based courses with a more rural flavor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Value</td>
<td>Rural small-scale schools are landmark buildings in remote and impoverished rural areas, as well as spiritual symbols and &quot;cultural&quot; signs of their rural areas (Wu, 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social equity value</td>
<td>Small-scale schools help to improve education in poor communities. The poorer the community where the school is located, the greater the positive effect of rural small-scale schools on students' academic achievement (Tan &amp; Xue, 2009)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lack of post-employment training and limited space for professional development (Blum & Diwan, 2007). However, some scholars believe that the relationship between teachers and students and colleagues in rural small-scale schools is more harmonious, the teaching arrangement is flexible, it is conducive to the development of individualized teaching, the competition in the school is weak, and the interpersonal relationship is very good. It is considered that it is more suitable for novice teachers to start their careers here.

Funds for most rural small-scale schools are uniformly allocated to rural central schools for management and distribution, and there is “distribution discrimination” in the allocation of funds by central schools to rural small-scale schools (Zhao, 2008), and rural small-scale schools are even more stretched.

Some states in the United States stipulate that the larger the school size, the more funding it will receive. The government tends to build new schools rather than repair old school buildings. This kind of fiscal means to induce and encourage school mergers will exacerbate the shortage of funds for small-scale rural schools (Tan & Xu, 2009).

A summary of research on principal leadership

Foreign scholars have studied the principal's leadership behavior earlier and initially established a research framework at the individual level and organizational levels. In 1945, Ralph M. Stogdill and Carroll L. Shartle of the Ohio State University Business Institute summarized leadership behaviors into "care for people" (consideration) and "care for work" (structure).
Two aspects, each of which is divided into high and low areas, and thus designed a "leadership behavior" quadrant map (i.e., high empathy high structure, high empathy low structure, low empathy high structure, low empathy low four quadrants of the structure).

China began to study the leadership of principals after the beginning of the 21st century. Through literature search and analysis, it is found that Chinese scholars' research on principal leadership also pays attention to its organizational and individual levels.

**Research on the concept of principal leadership**

Scholars mainly have three views on the concept of principal leadership.

The first is defined as "principal ability". Zhang (2014) summarized principal leadership from the aspects of lofty personality charm, super communication ability, precise foresight and judgment ability, continuous innovation ability, and continuous extension ability. The second definition is "principal influence".

Sun & Zhao (2018) believed that the principal's leadership is the principal's influence on the leader, including charisma.

Zhang (2014) pointed out that the principal's leadership is the principal's ability to influence stakeholders such as teachers and other staff, students, parents, community personnel, and educational administration departments.

Yao (2008) emphasized that the principal’s leadership is based on power and achieves goals by influencing the behavior of followers, which is essentially a kind of influence.

Li (2021) pointed out that the quality of whether a person can influence others is leadership. The third definition is "principal's comprehensive ability". The principal's comprehensive ability is at least "three forces in one", that is, ability, influence, and power. The first two are at the individual level, and the third is at the organizational level.

**Research on specific areas of principal leadership**

Zhang (2014) reflected on the current popular view that "teaching leadership is the core leadership of the principal", and believed that the particularity of the school organization and the centrality of teaching work do not directly determine or equal to teaching leadership, and there is a lack of opposition between teaching leadership and administrative leadership. According to the basis, the role of teaching leadership belongs to one aspect of the principal's multiple roles.

Lei & Ma (2019) pointed out that the principal's leadership is not only affected by organizational factors such as school environment and school autonomy, but also by individual factors such as educational background, management experience, and learning input.

Zhou (2020) found through empirical research that the curriculum leadership of principals of compulsory education schools is easily affected by individual factors such as gender, age, and education, as well as organizational factors such as school size and school location.

Wang et al. (2020) focused on the influence of the principal's leadership style on the principal's informatization leadership and believed that organizational climate and self-efficacy have a mediating effect between transformational leadership style and the principal's informatization leadership. Other researchers have also looked at whether principal leadership affects student academic achievement.
Yu & Qin (2012) believed that the leadership of rural principals and its elements have a significant independent impact on students' academic performance.

Li (2021) influenced the interaction between principal leadership and principal professional training, students' family background, and stakeholder needs. School conditions, classroom conditions, and teacher quality affect students' academic performance.

Judging from the literature, no matter the research on the different leadership contents of principal leadership, or the correlation research with students' academic performance, these research results play an important role in promoting the professional development of principals and improving the quality of school teaching.

Research on principal leadership issues and improvement strategies

Zhang (2014) analyzed the process of the principal’s leadership and believed that the current primary and secondary school principals’ problems in decision-making behavior, organizational methods, and implementation effects are mainly caused by their ambiguous personal roles, poor organizational methods, and lack of common goals.

Therefore, primary, and secondary school principals should correctly position their roles and identities to improve individual leadership; change traditional organizational behaviors and develop group leadership; develop a common school vision and build vision leadership; cultivate teamwork awareness, and enhance cultural leadership.

Shang (2018) pointed out that the leadership of primary school principals has the problems of weakening structural leadership, lack of teaching leadership, insufficient external adjustment ability, and insufficient cultural leadership.

Xu & Zhu (2019) found based on the results of the TALIS survey that compared with other 47 countries or regions, school principals in Shanghai have lower systematic or strategic leadership investment in school planning, vision formulation, and organizational deployment, but administrative the work efficiency is high, the burden is light, and the proportion of time spent on courses and teaching ranks first among all 47 countries or regions participating in this survey.

A study on the leadership of principals in rural small-scale schools

The academic circles pay more attention to the "line" research of rural small-scale schools-management system and development path, and less research on "principal".

Wang & Fang (2016) believed that "the spring of the construction and development of small-scale rural schools is coming", but after ten years of "withdrawing and merging schools", the principals of small-scale rural schools have been in a "passive state" for a long time. So, are the principals mentally prepared for such development opportunities? (Wang & Fang, 2016).

On the one hand, Kong (2016) pointed out that the headmasters of small-scale rural schools are younger, the management knowledge of school leaders is relatively weak, and the understanding of school positioning, school characteristics, and school philosophy is not clear. These problems indicate that the headmasters are not fully prepared.

On the other hand, Zhao (2017) conducted an empirical study on rural small-scale schools in L County, Gansu Province, and demonstrated that the professional ability and development of principals of rural small-scale schools directly affect and restrict the development of schools.
However, Zhu (2020) mentioned that after urban and rural education has achieved balanced development in terms of funding, resource allocation, and school-running conditions, the development of rural small-scale schools relying on foreign aid has gradually turned into endogenous development. The key to endogenous development. Both show that principals of rural small-scale schools are a group that urgently needs care at the practical level and attention at the theoretical level.

The principal is the leader of the school, and his level of leadership directly determines the effect of school transformation (Ding, 2019), and the principal of a rural school is a key link in the process of revitalizing rural education (Wang et al., 2020).

Therefore, as the main body of rural schools, the leadership of principals in rural small-scale schools is a subject worth studying. There are three main aspects of research on the leadership of small-scale rural school principals:

First, given the particularity of the leadership of small-scale rural principals, many scholars Xu & Zhu (2019), Ding (2019), Yu & Qin (2012) using a case study approach. Second, along the line of research on principal leadership, some scholars have also focused on a specific field of principal leadership in rural small-scale schools, such as Fu research (2019) on the value leadership of rural small-scale schools, Lei & Ma (2019) and Zhang (2021) focused on the teaching leadership of small-scale school principals in rural areas. The third is that although Kong (2016) and Geng (2018) macroscopically outline the basic situation of the leadership of rural primary school principals, such as gender, education, and tenure, Kong’s research scope is broader than conducted by Geng.

Conclusion and suggestion

The above-mentioned research results highlight the research on the "rural nature" of schools, examine the differences between urban schools and rural schools, emphasize the influence of the principal's gender, education, etc., and leadership, and study the differences between the elements that constitute principal leadership, etc., but there are still deficiencies: First, most studies have not highlighted the impact of such schools' distance from the city and "size" on the principal's leadership.

As principals, what can often be done in urban schools or large and medium-sized schools may not be able to be done in rural small-scale schools. Second, the principal of a small rural school is an ordinary teacher, without any administrative level.

Principals have multiple roles, and role conflicts can easily lead to job burnout, which is not conducive to the sustainable development of principals' specialization, but this variable has not been valued by scholars. Third, there is no analysis of the leadership of principals in rural small-scale schools from the perspective of leadership theories, such as distributed leadership theory. Therefore, after the review, it is suggested that scholars should strengthen the research on the leadership of rural small-scale school principals from these three perspectives.

References:

A SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON THE LEADERSHIP


A SUMMARY OF RESEARCH ON THE LEADERSHIP


*Paper submitted* 08 May 2023
*Paper accepted for publishing* 19 July 2023
*Paper published online* 30 September 2023