

*Journal of Nusantara Studies* 2020, Vol 5(1) 189-210  
Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin  
ISSN 0127-9386 (Online)  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol5iss1pp189-210>

---

## SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

\*Donnie Adams & Viceswary Muthiah

Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, Jalan Universiti, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

\*Corresponding author: [donniedadams@um.edu.my](mailto:donniedadams@um.edu.my)

Received: 29 Jul 2019

Accepted: 10 Dec 2019

### ABSTRACT

**Background and Purpose:** This systematic review article focuses on leadership challenges encountered by school principals in the 21st century. International evidence indicates principal leadership affects school and student performance. However, little systematic review has been carried out on the issue. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to analyse the existing literature on leadership challenges faced by school principals in the 21st century.

**Methodology:** Following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines, a systematic review was done on two main databases, Web of Science and Scopus. There were three main stages in the process: identification of keywords, screening of articles, and determination of the articles. This resulted in a final database of 16 eligible documents.

**Findings:** The review of these documents resulted in three main themes – personal challenges, school context, and stakeholders, and 11 sub-themes. There were three subthemes for personal challenges such as lack of knowledge and skills, while school context challenges can be divided into six sub-themes such as lack of trained staff and inadequate facilities and resources. The two subthemes for stakeholders challenges are negative attitudes of parents and interventions from the Ministry.

**Contributions:** This systematic review expands the literature of principalship in the 21st Century by highlighting the challenges faced in the context of North American, African, European, and Australian schools. Further work on the challenges faced by school principals in other continents should be carried out to achieve a better understanding on the issue.

**Keywords:** 21st century, challenges, principal leadership, school leadership, systematic review.

**Cite as:** Adams, D., & Muthiah, V. (2020). School principals and 21st century leadership challenges: A systematic review. *Journal of Nusantara Studies*, 5(1), 189-210. <http://dx.doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol5iss1pp189-210>

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

A substantial amount of research studies has confirmed there exists a strong link between principal leadership and student learning (Harris, Jones, Adams, & Cheah, 2018; Hallinger, Adams, Harris, & Jones, 2018; Reardon, 2011; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). Moreover, many researchers agree that leadership is a key element in improving schools and performance (e.g. Adams & Velarde, 2018; Fullan, 2007; Harris, 2014). On a similar note, there is a considerable amount of international evidence (e.g. Allen, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015; Harris, Jones, & Adams, 2016; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008) indicating that principal leadership has a direct effect on school performance as well as an indirect effect on student performance.

In response to this issue, researchers around the world have emphasized various characteristics of school leaders who are considered successful, which includes critical thinking, integrity as well as managing internal and external settings efficiently (Fullan, 2008; Hallinger & Walker, 2013; Minckler, 2014). However, Stringer and Hourani (2016) stated that the roles of school principals have changed considerably in today's educational era. Therefore, this has caused significant expectations and demands on school principalship (Hult, Lundström, & Edström, 2016; Vekeman, Devos, & Tuytens, 2015).

Researchers, educators, and policy makers have now increased their attention on principals' competencies, practices, recruitment, and leadership style (e.g. Sun & Leithwood, 2015; Walker & Hallinger, 2015; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Davis & Wilson, 2010). Most research focused on the appropriate practices and leadership styles that can be inculcated and enforced by school principals in ensuring excellent student achievement and positive influence on student learning (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2012).

However, despite the abundance of research on principal's leadership on student learning, school development, school and student performance, efforts to systematically review the challenges of principalship in the 21st Century are still lacking. This article attempts to fill the gap on understanding the challenges faced by school principals in the 21st Century. This

review is important to guide stakeholders and policymakers on the challenges faced by school principals in order to promote effective principalship policies and practices.

The development of the current systematic review is based on the main research question: What are the challenges faced by school principals in the 21st Century? A special focus was given to principals as they are required to be equipped with complex leadership and management skills (Vaillant & Marcelo García, 2009). The job of school principals has become more demanding due to the new expectations, change in governmental policies, and accountability pressure (West, Peck, Reitzug, & Crane, 2014).

This introductory section discusses the need to conduct a systematic review of the challenges faced by school principals in the 21st century, while the following section presents the approach that is employed to answer the research question. The third section conducts a systematic review and synthesizes the scientific literature in order to distinguish, select, and evaluate significant research on the challenges faced by school principals in the 21st Century. Finally, the last section discusses where attention needs to be placed for the additional support and capacity building of principals.

## **2.0 METHODOLOGY**

This section of the article will discuss the five main sub-sections, namely PRISMA, resources, inclusion and exclusion criteria, systematic review process, and data abstraction and analysis which are employed in the current research.

### **2.1 PRISMA**

PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) is a published guideline to conduct systematic reviews of research (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009). According to Sierra-Correa and Kintz (2015), PRISMA has three unique advantages: (1) it clearly formulates the research question that permits a systematic and explicit method to collect and analyse data; (2) it specifies the inclusion and exclusion criteria for a study; (3) it sets a defined time to examine large database of scientific literature; and (4) it enables coded information concerning future reviews.

### **2.2 Resources**

The review of the present study was done on two main databases, Web of Science and Scopus considering that both databases cover more than 256 fields of studies, including educational leadership and management studies. Scopus database is widely used for systematic reviews of

research and has a superior coverage while WOS has higher visibility than Scopus (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). Specifically, Scopus indexes a total of 1398 journals related to education, while Web of Science (Social Science Citation Indexed) indexes 217 journals related to management.

### 2.3 The Systematic Review Processes

There were three main stages in the systematic review process in selecting relevant articles for the present study. The first stage was the identification of keywords for the search process, second stage was screening of articles based on several inclusion and exclusion criteria determined by the researchers, and the final stage was to determine the articles eligibility and inclusion.

#### a) Identification of Sources

The identification of keywords for the search process began with the searching for related and similar terms based on thesaurus, encyclopedia, dictionaries, and past research studies. Search strings on Scopus and Web of Science database were developed (Refer to Table 1) after all relevant keywords were determined. A total of 82 articles from both databases were successfully identified and retrieved in the first stage of the systematic review process.

Table 1: The search strings

Database	Search string
WoS	TS= (“principal* lead*” OR “school* lead*” OR “school* head*”) OR “school* head*” AND ( “challenges*”) AND (21st Century*)
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (“principal* lead*” OR “school* lead*” OR “school* head*”) AND ( “challenges*”) AND (21st Century*)

#### b) Screening

In the second stage, 82 articles were screened based on several inclusion and exclusion criteria determined by the researchers. The inclusion criteria to identify the published articles for this review study are as follows: (1) the literature focus is only on journal articles as they are primary sources that offers empirical data. Therefore, publications in the form of book, book chapter, conference proceedings, meta-analysis, systematic review, literature review, and meta-synthesis were excluded in the current research; (2) journal articles must be published in

English; (3) must be published between 2012 and 2018; (4) articles must focus on principalship, leadership, 21st century, and challenges as the subject area in line with the objective of the review. In addition, articles published in the field of social science, educational leadership and management studies were selected to increase the possibility of retrieving related articles. Eventually, a total of 66 articles were excluded based on these criteria (Refer to Table 2).

Table 2: The inclusion and exclusion criteria

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Eligibility</b>	<b>Exclusion</b>
<b>Literature type</b>	Journal (research articles)	Review Journals, book, conference proceedings, book chapter
<b>Language</b>	English	Non-English
<b>Time line</b>	Between 2012 and 2018	<2012
<b>Subject area</b>	social science, educational leadership and management studies	Other than Social Science, educational leadership and management studies

### *c) Eligibility & Inclusion*

In the third and fourth stage, a total of 16 articles were prepared to determine its eligibility and inclusion. Each article's title, abstract, research questions, problem statement, methodology, and findings were examined thoroughly to ensure that they fulfilled the inclusion criteria and fit to be included in the present study to achieve the research objectives of the study. A "Cross-article examination" template in Microsoft Word document was created to store data such as author information, problem statement, research question(s), findings, and techniques/methodology that were extracted from the articles. Articles that do not have these specific details were recorded as 'not mentioned'. Finally, all 16 articles were analysed. Figure 1 demonstrates the flow of the systematic review analysis.

### **2.4 Data Abstraction and Analysis**

The remaining articles were assessed and analysed using an integrative review technique. This technique is used to analyse and synthesise diverse research designs (qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods) by quantizing qualitative data or qualitzing quantitative data (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). Qualitative analysis was performed on all selected data. Thematic analysis was carried out to develop the appropriate themes and sub-themes.

Firstly, data was compiled during the theme development process. The authors carefully analysed the 16 articles to extract the data that answers the research question. Secondly, data were coded into meaningful groups of themes, concepts, or ideas (Patton, 2002). A total of three main themes namely personal challenges, school context, and stakeholders were identified. Thereafter, the authors developed sub-themes based on any themes, concepts, or ideas that have some connection with each other. This resulted in a total of 11 sub-themes.

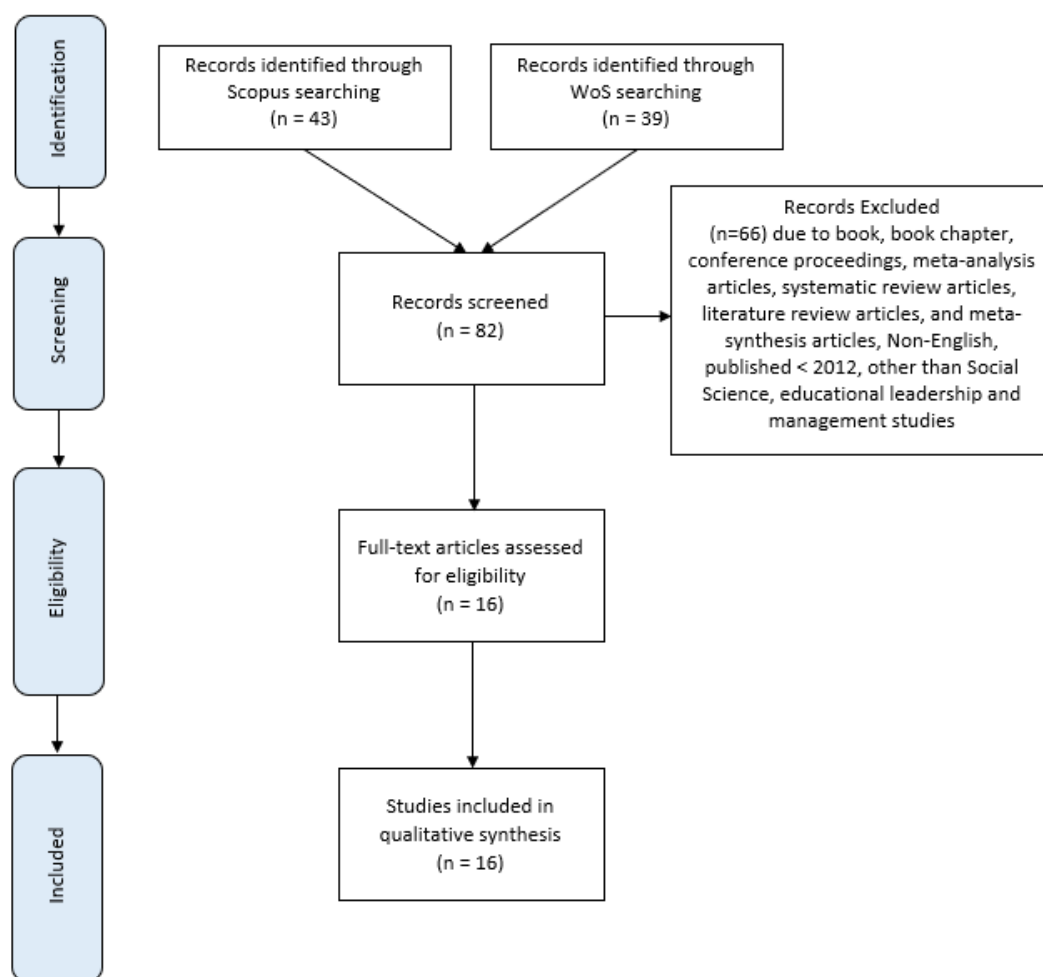


Figure 1: Flow diagram of the systematic literature review (adapted from Moher et al., 2009)

### 3.0 RESULTS

#### 3.1 General Findings and Background of The Studies Included in The Review

In this section, the background of the studies included in the review such as the countries and the year of publications will be discussed. From the 16 selected articles, six studies focused on North American principals (Bottery, 2016; Beam, Claxton, & Smith, 2014; Fink & Silverman, 2014; Madsen & Mabokela, 2014; Murray, 2014; Parson, Hunter, & Kallio, 2016), three studies

investigated Kenyan principals (Abaya, 2016; Mingaine, 2013; Onderi & Makori, 2013), two studies examined Nigerian principals (Abdulrasheed & Bello, 2015; Abdulrasheed, Hussin, & Kasa, 2016), and another two research studied Turkish principals (Bayar, 2016; Sincar, 2013). Besides that, studies also focused on Bahraini principals (Razzak, 2015), Bangladeshi principals (Salahuddin, 2012), and Australian principals (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012) (refer to Figure 2).

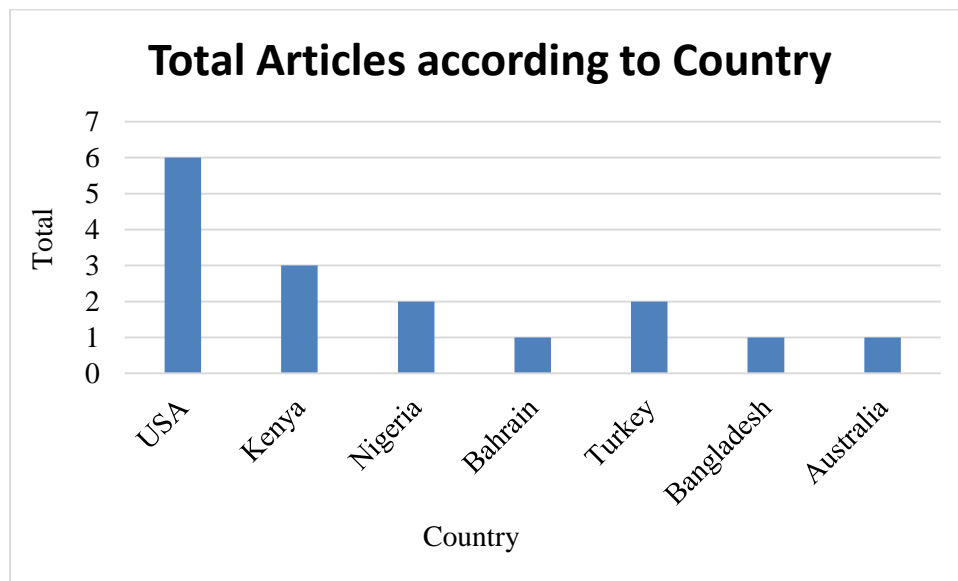


Figure 2: Total number of articles according to country

In terms of the year of publication, two articles were published in 2012 (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012; Salahuddin, 2012) and three articles were published in 2013 (Mingaine, 2013; Onderi & Makori, 2013; Sincar, 2013). In 2014, four articles were published (Beam et al., 2014; Fink & Silverman, 2014; Madsen & Mabokela, 2014; Murray, 2014). Furthermore, two articles were published in 2015 (Abdulrasheed & Bello, 2015; Razzak, 2015), followed by five articles in 2016 (Abaya, 2016; Abdulrasheed et al., 2016; Bayar, 2016; Bottery, 2016; Parson et al., 2016) (refer to Figure 3).

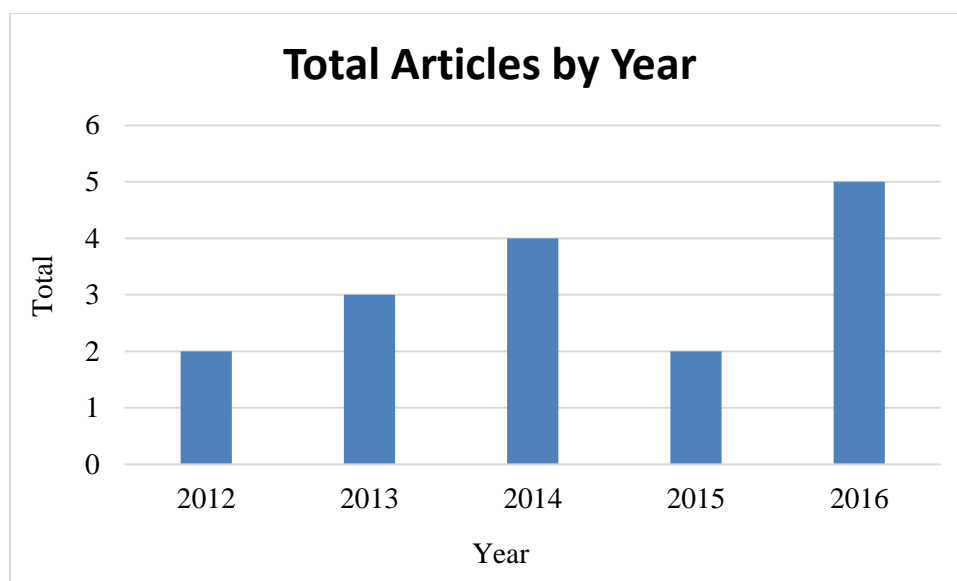


Figure 3: Total articles according to year of publication

### 3.2 Main Findings

In this section, the discussion revolves around the findings from the thematic analysis on 16 articles that answers the research question on the challenges faced by school principals in the 21st century. Three main and emerging sub-themes, personal (3 sub-themes) school context (6 sub-themes), and stakeholders (2 sub-themes) were identified (Refer Table 3).

#### 3.2.1 Personal Challenges of Principal Leadership

This subsection focuses on the personal challenges faced by school principals. Personal challenges can be divided into three sub-themes such as lack of knowledge and skills, work-life balance, and inadequacy of leadership training programmes.

##### a) Lack of Knowledge and Skills (LKS)

Initially, school principals were only expected to manage schools; however, in recent years, the job of a school principal has transformed drastically. Principals need to equip themselves with the knowledge and skills to do their jobs effectively. A study by Murray (2014) conducted in the USA revealed that principals do not possess the necessary skills and knowledge to organize and understand student achievement data which are commonly used for accountability purposes rather than as an instrument to enhance teaching and learning. Another study by Mingaine (2013) in Kenya found principals lack the vision and knowledge to lead the integration of ICT in their schools. Principals fail to use the infrastructures in a significant manner to facilitate the teaching and learning process even after putting so much effort to obtain



the required ICT infrastructure. Meanwhile, in a Bahraini study, similar findings were reported where principals lack the knowledge in implementing ICT infrastructure in schools (Razzak, 2015).

*b) Work-Life Balance (WB)*

There is an increasing trend in principal occupational demands and responsibilities due to the development in educational policies, which causes the school principals to feel over-burdened and suffer from illness that does not only add limitations to their job but also impair their personal lives. Extra working hours tend to cause extra worry and stress to the principals and less sustainability of their personal lives (Bottery, 2016). A study in Turkey revealed that school principals acknowledged the fact that a principal's job is very challenging; hence, they could barely allocate time for their personal development due to the significant amount of work which requires them to spend most of their time solving problems in schools (Sincar, 2013). A study in Virginia, United States on novice and experienced school principals found that both groups of school principals tend to encounter the balance of duties and time management issues throughout their job (Beam et al., 2014). These principals struggle between balancing the family time, graduate studies, and an administration position which usually end up putting them in a stressful situation (Beam et al., 2014).

*c) Inadequacy of Leadership Training Programmes (LTP)*

There is a great demand for efficient school leaders to manage the daily administration of schools due to the current era of technology and digital learning. Over the past two decades, there have been discussions that principal preparation programmes have failed to sufficiently prepare principals to raise student achievement. Bottery (2016) stated that leadership unsustainability happens when individuals fail to adequately prepare themselves for their role as school principals. For example, a study conducted at Highline Public Schools, United States, found that principal job satisfaction and efficacy are low (Fink & Silverman, 2014). This is primarily due to failure of the principals to acquire the necessary intensive, coordinated, and embedded professional training programmes that can further enhance their leadership skills (Fink & Silverman, 2014). Meanwhile, another study conducted in Bangladesh found that principals do not receive adequate professional leadership training programmes considering that the government secondary schools require only a bachelor's in education (B.Ed.) degree instead of a professional leadership degree (Salahuddin, 2012). Hence, the author suggested that government should integrate contextual factors in the leadership training programmes. On

another note, a different study conducted in Turkey focused on the challenges faced by school principals in the context of technology leadership. The findings of the study revealed that principals lack the in-service training programme in preparing themselves for technology leadership (Sincar, 2013). From the study, the school principals admitted that they require the necessary training to apply and integrate technology in both administration and education. On another note, the education boards in Nigeria do not have a proper framework to organize programmes such as seminars and workshops to re-train the school principals and enhance their instructional leadership skills effectively (Abdulrasheed & Bello, 2015).

Table 3: The main themes and the sub themes

Authors	Personal			School Context						Stakeholders	
	LKS	WB	LTP	MR	LTS	DA	DSP	IFR	FC	NAP	IM
Gurr and Drysdale (2012) (Australia)					✓			✓			
Salahuddin (2012) (Bangladesh)			✓		✓			✓	✓		✓
Mingaine (2013) (Kenya)	✓						✓		✓		
Onderi and Makori (2013) (Kenya)					✓			✓	✓		✓
Sincar (2013) (Turkey)			✓		✓			✓	✓		✓
Beam et. al (2014) (North America)		✓					✓		✓		✓
Fink and Silverman (2014) (North America)			✓								✓
Madsen and Mabokela (2014) (North America)							✓			✓	
Murray (2014) (North America)	✓										
Abdulrasheed and Bello (2015) (Nigeria)			✓						✓		✓
Razzak (2015) (Bahrain)	✓			✓	✓			✓			
Abaya (2016) (Kenya)						✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Abdulrasheed et al. (2016) (Nigeria)					✓		✓		✓		
Bayar (2016) (Turkey)						✓	✓			✓	
Bottery (2016) (North America)		✓	✓								
Parson et al. (2016) (North America)				✓							
Personal	School Context			Stakeholders							
LKS = Lack of Knowledge and skills	MR = Multiple Roles			NAP = Negative attitudes of parents							
WB = Work-life Balance	LTS= Lack of Trained Staff			IM = Interventions from the Ministry							
LTP = Inadequacy of leadership training programmes	DA = Differing Agenda										
	DSP = Discipline and Social Problems										
	IFR = Inadequate Facilities and Resources										
	FC = Financial Constraints										

### 3.2.2 Challenges in the School Context

This subsection focuses on the challenges faced by school principals in their school context. School context challenges can be divided into six sub-themes such as multiple roles, lack of trained staff, differing agenda, discipline and social problems, inadequate facilities and resources, and financial constraints.

#### a) Multiple Roles (MR)

The role of a school principal has also been compared with the role of a chief executive officer (CEO) of an organization who is responsible for budgeting, acquiring resources, strategic

planning, and managing public relations. A study in Bahrain found that school principals are expected to play more roles in ICT integration in schools despite their wide contribution in providing incentives, moral support, training opportunities, and others (Razzak, 2015). The Bahraini principals are expected to act as role models in terms of ICT proficiency and competency as well as to promote a culture of innovation and provide efficient ICT coordinators in their schools. Meanwhile, in North Dakota rural schools, principals noted that most of their time are spent on student discipline or student management albeit the fact that instructional leadership is the main element of their responsibility (Parson et al., 2016). However, principals claimed that other responsibilities such as management often takes the primary attention that causes them to be faced with a lack of alignment between their action plans and daily tasks.

*b) Lack of Trained Staff (LTS)*

In a study conducted in Bahrain by Razzak (2015), most principals and assistant principals agree that their schools lack trained staff in regard to the ICT integration at their respective schools. Hence, it is necessary for most schools to only employ technologically literate teachers. In Bangladesh, schools have insufficient skilled teachers, thus further revealing a dire need for ongoing professional skills and teaching programmes for the teachers (Salahuddin, 2012).

Meanwhile, in a different study examining the challenges faced by principals in the context of technology leadership, the finding revealed that school teachers need to be better educated in terms of technology leadership, but unfortunately, most of them possess no necessary skills for this subject matter (Sincar, 2013). Similarly, in Nigeria, most secondary schools have insufficient professionally trained educators (Abdulrasheed et al., 2016). Meanwhile, in Kenya, 25% of the participating principals are not satisfied with the qualifications of the school teachers, which further notes that some of the teachers are not professionally trained and not qualified to teach their subjects (Onderi & Makori, 2013). In Australia, it was reported that teacher quality has been a persistent problem for the past 20 years. In particular, principals in Australia are in dilemma in regard to teacher quality because they aren't aware of the teacher quality and its evaluation process (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012).

*c) Differing Agenda (DA)*

In regard to this issue, a study by Abaya (2016) in Kenya found that the teachers tend to reduce the total contact hours in schools because most of them are trying to secure a transfer to a better

and safer school, which is a a major challenge for the school principals. In Turkey, teacher unions (syndicalism) are considered as a great challenge to the school principals because each union is connected to different political parties with the attempt of publicising their political views in schools, thus hindering the principals' effort to bring them to an agreement (Bayar, 2016).

*d) Discipline and Social Problems (DSP)*

The disciplinary condition of a school poses a great challenge to principals' leadership. A study conducted in Virginia, US revealed a different finding between novice and experienced principals in regard to student discipline whereby novice principals highlighted that student discipline is the most challenging issue, whereas experienced principals stated that it is the third most challenging task (Beam, Claxton, & Smith, 2016). Furthermore, in a study conducted in the USA revealed that the resolutions provided by African American principals in addressing disciplinary between American and African American students were always questioned because it is deemed important to ensure that all of them are treated fairly (Madsen & Mabokela, 2014).

Meanwhile, principals in Nigeria also highlighted the main problem that challenges the management of their schools is the students' behaviour such as disciplinary problems and continuous dropout rates (Abdulrasheed et al., 2016). In Kenya, principals often had to deal with serious disciplinary issue such as out-of-school fights and, thus making it hard to discipline them (Abaya, 2016). In Turkey, principals are faced with a growing amount of undesired behaviours in school such as smoking and drugs abuse considering that there are limited policies being imposed on the undesired behaviours of the students (Bayar, 2016). Another study in Kenya revealed that principals often delay the implementation of ICT integration in their schools out of fear that the students may damage the ICT infrastructure and equipment which is a serious disciplinary problem (Mingaine, 2013).

*e) Inadequate Facilities and Resources (IFR)*

Abaya (2016) in his study revealed schools in the violence-plagued areas of Borabu-Sotik border, Kenya are heavily dependent on the parents of the students to provide some provision needed to run the schools as well as the necessary support in different developmental projects. In Bahrain, it was found that public schools which undergo ICT integration are challenged with inadequate high-quality teaching software, hardware, and infrastructure equipment, thus further indicating that the available technology resources are outdated or in constant need of

repair (Razzak, 2015). On the other hand, principals in Bangladesh admitted that insufficient physical facilities and teaching tools such as science instruments are considered as part of the constant struggle considering the large teacher-student ratio due to the fact that teachers are not allocated with the appropriate enrolment size (Salahuddin, 2012).

A study conducted in Turkey found that most principals are challenged with the lack of technological facilities considering that most infrastructures are old with no technical personnel that can work on the technical support (Sincar, 2013). Another study in Kenya indicated inadequate resources is also considered as a challenge for majority of the principals due to the fact that most schools are not even equipped with the basic facilities such as library (20%), laboratory (11%), workshop (47%), playground (4%), and sport facilities (1%), whereby more than half of the principals rated the resources provided to be in average or poor condition (Onderi & Makori, 2013). On another note, in Australia where school buildings are being renovated to support the 21st century teaching and learning, a different challenge is faced by the principals because they are put in a stressful condition due to the fact that they have less control over the building designs as well as the need to decide the building type that will continue to exist for decades (Gurr & Drysdale, 2012).

#### *g) Financial Constraints (FC)*

In the war-plagued border of Borabu-Sotik, Kenya, principals tend to profoundly rely for financial help from the parents in order to deal with the part of the expenses needed to sustain the school. Nevertheless, principals do receive some funds from the government at random times, but the amount was insufficient to realize the school planning (Abaya, 2016). Similar findings were reported in another study in Kenya reported that many principals are either submissive or opposing the implementations of new programs that could drain their already inadequate funds (Mingaine, 2013). Likewise, in Nyamira County, Kenya, principals have been confronted with financial challenges that prevent them from executing their responsibilities (Onderi & Makori, 2013). The study also explained that the schools in the county are financially restrained due to the low number of students considering that student enrolment size is related to free funding system in Kenya. Hence, this financial difficulty indirectly denotes the lack of learning resources such as teachers (Onderi & Makori, 2013).

In the northern region of Nigeria, it was discovered that most principals criticised the inadequate funding provided to the schools as well as the availability of funds that can negatively impact their leadership and reduce their ability to run the schools due to the restricted resources (Abdulrasheed & Bello, 2015). In Bangladesh, school principals from

under or average performing schools reported that they have been struggling to reward their teachers for good teaching and learning procedures because they do not have sufficient funding source, thus restricting the principals from providing extra facilities (Salahuddin, 2012). Similarly, in Turkey, principals stressed that they are constantly required to improve and repair their resources such as computers, projectors, and other technological tools, but unfortunately, there is no budget allocated for these necessary expenditures and needs of their schools (Sincar, 2013). Meanwhile, a study in Nigeria found that a flip-flop funding has been challenging the leadership styles of school principals because the fund allocated or provided to manage the schools are always diminished (Abdulrasheed et al., 2016). In Virginia, USA, experienced principals (18%) mentioned that the most challenging issue for their leadership is school finance (Beam et al., 2014).

### *3.2.3 Challenges from Stakeholders*

This subsection focuses on the challenges faced by school principals from the stakeholders. Challenges from stakeholders can be divided into two sub-themes such as negative attitudes of parents and interventions from the Ministry.

#### *a) Negative Attitudes of Parents (NAP)*

A study in Turkey found that negative attitudes of parents tend to undesirably influence principals' aspiration to maintain their jobs due to the reason that some parents have negative bias or less respect towards them as well as negative thoughts about the schools (Bayar, 2016). In the USA, a study found that African American principals need to constantly handle parents who complain to their supervisors regarding the incapability of the principals to run the schools, while European American principals noted that they have been struggling to handle parents who are unsatisfied with the amount of diversity in the schools which refers to the African American teachers and students (Madsen & Mabokela, 2014). Madsen and Mabokela (2014) also stated that some parents refuse to let their children to be placed in the classrooms of African American teachers, in which causes the European American principals to feel annoyed having to deal with parents' complaints. Apart from that, an additional challenge for the European American principals refers to their incapability to balance the needs of parents of both groups. On the contrary, African American principals had to constantly struggle with parents' negative beliefs who perceived them as incompetent leaders (Madsen & Mabokela, 2014).

*b) Interventions from the Ministry (IM)*

A prime entity that is responsible to govern the principals and schools is the Ministry of Education. However, it is important to note that even the Ministry of Education can present critical challenges to principals in executing their roles. In Highline Public Schools, Seattle, principals work in systems that the districts do not provide the principals with the time needed to actively participate with teachers in order to improve the teaching and learning process (Fink & Silverman, 2014). The study by Abaya (2016) in Kenya, highlighted that the Kenyan Ministry of Education imposed a policy that requires the schools to retain a minimum number of student enrolment to ensure the school are eligible for financial aids from the government, thus compelling the principals to be dependent on parents and other bodies to obtain financial support in the case of lower enrolment. The same study also noted that there was no official attendance policy provided by the government, thus allowing the parents to simply send their children to different schools to avoid paying tuition fees, which then results in lower enrolment and financial subsidies (Abaya, 2016).

Meanwhile, principals in Nigeria were found to have less power in the decision-making process on disciplinary matters of teachers and staff who are not dedicated to the profession due to the external interventions from the Ministry of Education (Abdulrasheed & Bello, 2015). Likewise, in Virginia, USA, both novice and experienced principals mentioned that they have trouble navigating relations with stakeholders due to the lack of support and respect from the stakeholders (Beam et al., 2014). On the other hand, school principals in Bangladesh are constrained from making vital decisions because they are controlled by a centralised administrative system (Salahuddin, 2012).

In Turkey, a study conducted on six principals by Sincar (2013) found that the Ministry of National Education provides insufficient support to schools and forbids the schools from receiving donations from parents including voluntary donations without government approval. Meanwhile, in Nyamira County, Kenya, where most schools are sponsored by churches, more than 30% of the principals stated that the relationship with the Ministry of Education are poor or average noting that the Ministry often interfere with daily school management including harassing, intimidating, and unnecessarily transferring principals to other schools (Onderi & Makori, 2013).

#### **4.0 DISCUSSION**

In this section, principals' leadership challenges are grouped into two categories. The first category refers to internal challenges, concerned with the principal, teachers, and the school

itself. Meanwhile, the second category refers to external challenges brought about by the stakeholders such as Ministry and parents.

#### ***4.1 Internal Challenges***

Principals nowadays are challenged with the rapidly evolving 21st century trends which is considered as the era of science, information, and technology. Technology is seen as a catalyst of change in the education field (Fullan, 2007). A school principal in the 21st century is required to be equipped with complex job skills (Vaillant & Marcelo García, 2009) and the job becomes more demanding due to new expectations, change in governmental policies, and accountability pressure that increases over time (West et al., 2014).

A number of studies have revealed that principals are somewhat concerned with their working environments due to lack of trained staff (Razzak, 2015; Salahuddin, 2012; Sincar, 2013; Abdurashed et al., 2016; Onderi & Makori, 2013; Gurr & Drysdale, 2012). According to Mestry (2017), in the wake of technology developments across the globe, significant investments are made in the educational field based on the expectation that a highly competent workforce and high proportion of employment can be generated. Regardless of these investments and expectations, there are concerns that the current school principals may be faced with obstacles that are not in their preparation programs (Beam et al., 2016). According to a recent OECD report, three key elements to build a 21st-century school are educators who believe in their teaching capability, a readiness for innovation, and dedicated school principals who create the appropriate environments in the school which will empower the former two elements to thrive (Schleicher, 2015).

Other than that, studies also indicated the challenges school principals had to deal in regards to management duties such as finance, budgeting (Abaya, 2016; Mingaine, 2013; Onderi & Makori, 2013; Abdurashed & Bello, 2015; Salahuddin, 2012; Sincar, 2013; Abdurashed et al., 2016; Beam et al., 2014) and inadequate resources such as school equipment (Abaya, 2016; Razzak, 2015; Salahuddin, 2012; Sincar, 2013; Onderi & Makori, 2013; Gurr & Drysdale, 2012), thus contributing to higher job stress among them. The principals claimed that other responsibilities such as management often takes the primary attention that causes them to be faced with a lack of alignment between their action plans and daily problems. Furthermore, the disciplinary condition of a school poses a great challenge to principal leadership where principals face a highly stressful working condition when handling students' disciplinary problems (Beam et al., 2016; Madsen & Mabokela, 2014; Abdurashed et al., 2016; Abaya, 2016; Bayar, 2016; Mingaine, 2013).



#### **4.2 External Challenges**

Few studies also found that negative attitudes of parents have an undesirably influence on principals' aspiration to maintain their schools (Bayar, 2016; Madsen & Mabokela, 2014). For example, Madsen and Mabokela (2014) stated principals have been struggling to handle parents and to balance the needs of parents' groups. However, it is important to note that even the Ministry of Education can present critical challenges to principals in executing their roles (Fink & Silverman, 2014; Abaya, 2016; Abdulrasheed & Bello, 2015; Beam et al., 2014; Salahuddin, 2012; Sincar, 2013; Onderi & Makori, 2013). Studies reported principals work in systems which policies are imposed that results in negative effects towards the schools and that principals are vulnerable due to politics of the country (Abaya, 2016; Beam et al., 2014). It is crucial to note that challenges also exist in a centralised administrative system (Salahuddin, 2012; Sincar, 2013) where the Ministry interferes with daily school management (Onderi & Makori, 2013). Consequently, this situation leads to principals being harassed, intimidated, and unnecessarily transferred to other schools (Onderi & Makori, 2013).

#### **5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The findings of this systematic review have led to a number of recommendations, particularly in the context of 21st century technological innovations that are being integrated into the education field. Firstly, it is highly recommended for both, school leaders and teachers to be provided with more professional developments to ensure that they are well equipped with the current necessary skills based on their needs for a more professional development and active engagement in school activities (Schleicher, 2015).

On another note, the review of the present study highlighted that the principals or leaders tend to suffer from a limited support from the Ministry and parents, which directly affects the effectiveness of the principals' leadership in steering the school to success. Therefore, it is recommended for the schools and the Ministry to act as the central component in the strategies to achieve a more sustainable educational improvement, which will consequently enable the principals to actively participate with the communities to create a bond between the schools and their communities.

The present study only reviewed issues that challenge the principal leadership in the context of North American, African, European, and Australian schools. Hence, it is clear that there is limited number of studies on the challenges faced by the Asian and South American school principals. Therefore, it is recommended that more studies should be carried out on the

challenges faced by the leadership of Asian and South American school principals, especially in terms of education and learning in the 21st century. A possible explanation to this is due to the fact that the challenges faced by school principals in each continent and each country may be unique due to several factors such as the geographical limitations, national fiscal inadequacies, cultural differences, political inconsistencies, and others. More importantly, a broader research on the challenges that affect the principal leadership may yield results that can allow researchers, policy makers, and educators to better understand and acquire the related knowledge that will enable them to work on a more global solution which can be applied by countries from different parts of the world.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this systematic literature review was to explore the challenges faced by the principals in executing their responsibilities. In summary, the evidence from the present study indicates that principals are still faced with numerous challenges that can negatively affect their profession. According to this review, some challenges are universal, while some are unique or specific to certain countries. In addition, the present study also reviewed the challenges faced by school principals by further categorising them as internal and external challenges. Specifically, internal challenges are confined to personal reasons and those who are closely related to the school and education, whereas external challenges cover broader entities. The evidence from the present study highlighted that principals are more often faced with internal challenges compared to external challenges. Therefore, further work on the challenges faced by school principals in the Asian and South American continents should be carried out to achieve a better understanding on the unique issues faced by school principals in both parts of the world.

## **REFERENCES**

- Adams, D., & Velarde, J. (2018). Leadership and management in education: Role and influence. In D. Adams (Ed.), *Mastering theories of educational leadership and management* (pp. 1-10). Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press.
- Abaya, J. (2016). School leadership challenges along Kenya's Borabu-Sotik border. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 44(5), 757-774.
- Abdulrasheed, O., & Bello, A. S. (2015). Challenges to secondary school principals' leadership in northern region of Nigeria. *British Journal of Education*, 3(3), 1-5.

- Abdulrasheed, O., Hussin, F., & Kasa, M. D. (2016). Challenges of principal leadership styles and school management: A solution oriented approach. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education, Arts and Sciences*, 3(4), 61-68.
- Allen, N., Grigsby, B., & Peters, M. L. (2015). Does leadership matter? Examining the relationship among transformational leadership, school climate, and student achievement. *NCPEA International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 10(2), 1-22.
- Bayar, A. (2016). Challenges facing principals in the first year at their schools. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 4(1), 192-199.
- Beam, A. P., Claxton, R. L., & Smith, S. J. (2014). *Challenges for novice principals: Facing 21st-century issues in school administration*. Lynchburg, VA: Bepress.
- Beam, A. P., Claxton, R. L., & Smith, S. J. (2016). Challenges for novice school leaders: Facing today's issues in school administration. *Faculty Publications and Presentations*, 3(1), 145-161.
- Bottery, M. (2016). Not so simple: The threats to leadership sustainability. *Management in Education*, 30(3), 97-101.
- Davis, J., & Wilson, S. M. (2010). Principals' efforts to empower teachers: Effects on teacher motivation and job satisfaction and stress. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 73(6), 349-353.
- Fink, S., & Silverman, M. (2014). Principals as instructional leaders. *The Education Digest*, 80(4), 22-26.
- Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Fullan, M. (2008). *The six secrets of change: What the best leaders do to help their organizations survive and thrive*. New York: Jossey-Bass.
- Gurr, D., & Drysdale, L. (2012). Tensions and dilemmas in leading Australia's schools. *School Leadership & Management*, 32(5), 403-420.
- Hallinger, P., & Walker, A. (2013). Values: The core of successful school leadership. In Hughes, P. (Ed), *Achieving quality education for all: Education in the Asia-Pacific region: Issues, concerns and prospects* (pp. 217-222). Dordrecht: Springer, Science & Business.
- Hallinger, P., Adams, D., Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2018). Review of conceptual models and methodologies in research on principal instructional leadership in Malaysia: A case of

- knowledge construction in a developing society. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 56(1), 104-126.
- Handford, V., & Leithwood, K. (2013). Why teachers trust school leaders. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 51(2), 194-212.
- Harris, A., Jones, M., & Adams, D. (2016). Qualified to lead? A comparative, contextual and cultural view of educational policy borrowing. *Educational Research*, 58(2), 166-178.
- Harris, A. (2014). *Distributed leadership matters*. California: Corwin Press.
- Harris, A., Jones, M., Adams, D., & Cheah, K. (2018). Instructional leadership in Malaysia: A review of the contemporary literature. *School Leadership & Management*, 39(1), 76-95.
- Hult, A., Lundström, U., & Edström, C. (2016). Balancing managerial and professional demands: School principals as evaluation brokers. *Education Inquiry*, 7(3), 293-304.
- Leithwood, K., & Seashore-Louis, K. (2012). *Linking leadership to student learning*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.
- Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2008). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. *School Leadership and Management*, 28(1), 27-42.
- Madsen, J., & Mabokela, R. (2014). Leadership challenges in addressing changing demographics in schools. *NASSP Bulletin*, 98(1), 75-96.
- Mestry, R. (2017). Empowering principals to lead and manage public schools effectively in the 21st century. *South African Journal of Education*, 37(1), 1-11.
- Mingaine, L. (2013). Leadership challenges in the implementation of ICT in public secondary schools, Kenya. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 2(1), 32-43.
- Minckler, C. H. (2014). School leadership that builds teacher social capital. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 42(5), 657-679.
- Moher, D., Liberati, A., Tetzlaff, J., & Altman, D. G. (2009). Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: The PRISMA statement. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 151(4), 264-269.
- Mongeon, P., & Paul-Hus, A. (2016). The journal coverage of Web of Science and Scopus: A comparative analysis. *Scientometrics*, 106(1), 213-228.
- Murray, J. (2014). Critical issues facing school leaders concerning data-informed decision-making. *The Professional Educator*, 38(1), 1-8.
- Onderi, H., & Makori, A. (2013). Secondary school principals in Nyamira County in Kenya: Issues and challenges. *Educational Research International*, 1(1), 67-90.

- Parson, L., Hunter, C. A., & Kallio, B. (2016). Exploring educational leadership in rural schools. *Planning and Changing*, 47(1/2), 63-81.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and education methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication.
- Razzak, N. A. (2015). Challenges facing school leadership in promoting ICT integration in instruction in the public schools of Bahrain. *Education and Information Technology*, 20(2), 303-318.
- Reardon, R. M. (2011). Elementary school principals' learning-centered leadership: Implications for principals' professional development. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 10(1), 63-83.
- Salahuddin, A. N. (2012). Challenges to effective leadership of urban secondary schools in Bangladesh: A critical study. *Critical Literacy: Theories and Practices*, 6(2), 50-65.
- Schleicher, A. (2015). *Schools for 21st-century learners: Strong leaders, confident teachers, innovative approaches*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Sebastian, J., & Allensworth, E. (2012). The influence of principal leadership on classroom instruction and student learning: A study of mediated pathways to learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48(4), 626-663.
- Sierra-Correa, P. C., & Kintz, J. R. C. (2015). Ecosystem-based adaptation for improving coastal planning for sea-level rise: A systematic review for mangrove coasts. *Marine Policy*, 51(1), 385-393.
- Sincar, M. (2013). Challenges school principals facing in the context of technology leadership. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practices*, 13(2), 1273-1284.
- Stringer, P., & Hourani, R. B. (2016). Transformation of roles and responsibilities of principals in times of change. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 44(2), 224-246.
- Sun, J., & Leithwood, K. (2015). Direction-setting school leadership practices: A meta-analytical review of evidence about their influence. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement: An International Journal of Research, Policy and Practice*, 26(4), 1-25.
- Vaillant, D., & Marcelo García, C. (2009). *Desarrollo Profesional Docente. ¿Cómo se aprende a enseñar? [Teacher development. How does one learn to teach?]*. Madrid, Spain: NARCEA.
- Vekeman, E., Devos, G., & Tuytens, M. (2015). The influence of teachers' expectations on principals' implementation of a new teacher evaluation policy in Flemish secondary education. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 27(2), 129-151.

- Walker, A., & Hallinger, P. (2015). A synthesis of reviews of research on principal leadership in East Asia. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 53(4), 554-570.
- West, D. L., Peck, C. M., Reitzug, U. C., & Crane, E. A. (2014). Accountability, autonomy, and stress: Principal responses to superintendent change in a large US urban school district. *School Leadership & Management*, 34(1), 372-391.
- Whittemore, R., & Knaf, K. (2005). The integrative review: Updated methodology. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 52(5), 546-553.