



## School Principals in Mainland China: Core Leadership Practices

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This study investigated the core leadership practices of Chinese school principals. It aimed to unveil the practical knowledge shared by school leaders in Chinese schools.

The study adopted a mixed methods research approach, sequentially integrating a quantitative survey with qualitative interviews. The survey involved 572 practitioners working at secondary schools located in four cities in Mainland China. Valid data were analysed through statistical methods in SPSS 15.0 and LISREL 8.7. The interviews included six secondary school principals and fifteen other school members selected from the relevant focus groups. The qualitative data were analysed through three steps of coding (i.e. open coding, axial coding, and selective coding) in NVivo 8.7. Finally, findings from both methods were compared and combined.

The integrated findings suggested that:

Chinese school principals adopt six core leadership practices to perform their functions. These are:

- setting direction
- shaping school climate and core ideas
- developing people
- managing instruction and curriculum
- managing administrative affairs
- developing external relationships and resources

These six interrelated core leadership practices could be grouped into three classifications in accordance with their essential functions. The relationships between the different classifications indicate the theoretical pattern of how the core leadership practices work in schools. Based on this understanding, three specific patterns characterise the enactment of these core leadership practices.

- Chinese principals put emphasis on both student academic performance and holistic development.
- Chinese principals adopt a differential pattern of participative decision-making.
- Chinese principals apply the core leadership practices in a hybrid way that integrates visionary, democratic, exemplary, human-oriented and authoritarian leadership behaviours.

