

A STUDY OF PRINCIPALS' SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

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Abstract

The primary purpose of this study is to study sustainable leadership practices of principals. By using purposive sampling, 30 principals and a total of 399 teachers from Basic Education High Schools in Four Townships of Hinthada District in Ayeyarwaddy Region were selected as the participants. Two sets of questionnaire and open-ended questions were used to collect the required data. The internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of the questionnaire for principals' practices was (0.96). Descriptive research method was used to tabulate the mean values and standard deviations for groups of items. Moreover, Independent Samples *t*-Test, One-way ANOVA and post-hoc test by Tukey were used for the analysis of the data. The results found that the extent of principals' sustainable practices was 3.46. According to the mean value, all principals participated in this study were found that *sometimes practiced* on principals' sustainable leadership practices. Statistically significant differences were found in some areas of sustainable leadership practices according to their personal factors perceived by teachers. When investigating the levels of sustainable leadership practices of principals according to the qualitative findings, it was found that the principals performed in sustainable leadership practices according their responses.

Keywords: sustainable leadership, leadership practice, sustainable leadership practice

Introduction

Today's leaders need to adopt appropriate leadership to lead the organization and subordinates. It is to face and live up to the challenges of the 21st century. Sustainable leadership is a new concept in leadership approaches in organizational aspects (Avery, 2005). Sustainable leadership respects future, present and past and builds on the past in its quest to create a better future (Hargreaves, 2007). Positive Changes brought towards the meaningful progress of the organization can be attained by sustainable leadership (Rushton, 2003). Sustainable leadership now very popular leadership style that transforming the narrow image of organization into the broad concept (Rehman, S. *et al*, 2019). Sustainable leadership practices are prevalent in education and it can be utilized what direction school leadership should be going in order to create lasting and positive change in leadership practices (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Based on scientific research results, sustainable leadership involves ethical, social, and responsible all aspects. It can be assumed that the idea of a sustainable leadership practices related to the principals for the development of organization competencies that can help to create better future. Therefore, the principals' sustainable leadership practices are needed to study.

Significance of the Study

Myanmar is trying to enhance the quality of education and upgrade the education system. In doing so, this can only be achieved through well-trained leadership and informed staff about the globalization trends as well as education standards coupled with the problems and challenges of the community. There is an urgent need in education today for a new type of Leadership_ one that makes the long-term sustainability. Sustainable leaders look beyond immediate, short-term gains to see the role their organization plays in a larger context. Sustainable leadership practices can balance short-term and long-term priorities and create value for a variety of stakeholders (Russell Reynolds Associates, 2015). Principals' sustainable leadership practices is essential to the academic growth of students and professional growth of faculties and staff (Hargreaves, 2007). Therefore, it is vital for us to explore the role of principal sustainable leadership and their actual practices.

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Objectives of the Study

General Objective

The general objective of the study is:

- To study principals' sustainable leadership practices in Basic Education High Schools

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are:

- To study the extent of principals' sustainable leadership practices in Basic Education High Schools
- To study the differences of teachers' perception on the extent of principals' sustainable leadership practices in terms of the principals' personal factors

Research Questions

This study is especially targeted to answer the following research questions:

- To what extent do the principals perform sustainable leadership practices in Basic Education High schools?
- Is there any significant difference in teachers' perception on the extent of sustainable leadership practices of principals in terms of their personal factors?

Limitation of the Study

The research area was geographically limited by thirty Basic Education High Schools in four Townships of Hinthada District in Ayeyarwaddy Region.

Theoretical Framework

According to Hargreaves and Fink (2003), sustainable leadership matters, spreads and lasts, and is fundamental to enduring and widespread school improvement. Hargreaves and Fink (2003) developed a model of sustainable leadership in education sector particularly primary, secondary and post-secondary. The model is comprised of seven dimensions including such aspects as: length, depth, justice, breadth, resourcefulness, diversity and conservation (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003). Hargreaves and Fink's (2003) work have been developed for a number of subsequent models such as Hill (2006), Davies (2007), Fullan (2005) and Lambert (2011).

In this study, the principals' sustainable leadership practices are based on the seven principles of sustainable leadership practices by Hargreaves and Fink (2006). The following dimensions will be used to measure the sustainable leadership practices.

a. Balancing Short-term and Long-term Objectives

Sustainable leadership contributes and creates synergy between the long-term objectives of the organization and short-term targets. It preserves and advances the most valuable aspects of life over time, from one leader to the next and capacity building for the future (Lambert, 2011).

b. Developing a Sustaining Learning Community

Sustainable leadership seeks to work collaboratively to ensure deep learning that available meets the needs of locality. Sustainable leadership makes the learning the paramount priority in all leadership capacities (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

c. Developing Leadership at all Levels

It develops and depends on the leadership of others, not just one person at the top. In order for to be sustainable, the leadership in a school must be properly distributed (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Sustainable leadership empowers individuals at all levels of the organization to engage in leadership activities which bring about sustainable improvement (Lambert, 2011).

d. Building up the Issues of Social Justice

Sustainable leadership fosters opportunities to work collaboratively and develop partnership (Lambert, 2011). Justice in sustainable leadership presents a challenge in looking out for not only what is best for a principal's own school, but what is best for the surrounding schools and community. Sustainable leadership is socially just and focused on the common good at all (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

e. Developing the Diversity and Capacity in Professional Learning Community

Sustainable leadership learns from diversity, creating social inclusion and cohesion (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Sustainable leadership recognizes and cultivates many kinds of excellences in learning, teaching and leading and provides the networks to be shared in across-fertilizing processes of improvement (Lambert, 2011).

f. Transforming and Renewing the Resources

Sustainable leadership pays careful attention to its resources, both financial and personal. In order for leadership effective, leaders must look after themselves and the people around them (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Sustainable leadership provides intrinsic rewards and extrinsic incentives that attract and retain the best leadership and it provides time and opportunities for leaders to network, learn from and support each other, as well as coach and mentor their successors (Lambert, 2011).

g. Sustaining the Leadership and Learning Environment

Conservation requires that the leaders learn from the past in order to benefits the future (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Sustainable leadership honor and learn from the past to create a better future (Lambert, 2011).

This theoretical framework leads to the following research work.

Definition of Key Terms

Leadership Practice

Leadership Practices are the actions, behaviors or strategies a leader employs in order to achieve desired outcomes (Pitman, 2008).

Sustainable Leadership

Sustainable Leadership is defined as the preserving and developing everything that spreads and continues deeply, without being damaged, and positively influencing others, both today and in the future (Hargreaves, 2007, cited in Yue et al., 2021).

Sustainable Leadership Practices

Sustainable Leadership Practices is defined as the creating current and future profits for an organization while improving the lives of all concerned (MoCAnn & Holt, 2010)

Operational Definition of Principals' Sustainable Leadership Practices

In this study, principals' sustainable leadership practices is defined as the practices of principal that underpin balancing long-term and short-term objectives, developing a sustaining learning community, developing leadership at all levels, building up the issues of social justice, developing the diversity and capacity in professional learning community, transforming and renewing the resource and sustaining the leadership and learning environment.

These seven dimensions were used to measure the principals' sustainable leadership.

Methodology

In this study, both quantitative and a research method were used to collect the required data. For the quantitative research study, questionnaire survey was used. For quantitative research study, the open-ended questions and interviews were applied. For participants, 30 High School principals and 399 teachers from Basic Education Schools in Hinthada District, Ayeyarwady Region were selected by using purposive sampling method.

The questionnaire survey was used to investigate the teachers' perception on principals of sustainable leadership practices. There are 49 items through the five-point Likert Scale ranging 1-5 (1=never, 2=seldom, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=always) to measure the teachers' perception of actual practices of principals' sustainable leadership. Quantitative methods such as open-ended questions were used to investigate principals' sustainable leadership practices.

Quantitative Research Findings

Quantitative Research Findings

In this study, the levels of sustainable leadership practices of principals were investigated by teachers' ratings. Moreover, the variations of the teachers' perceptions on the principals' sustainable leadership practices levels in terms of their personal factors were also investigated.

Findings on the Extent of Sustainable Leadership Practices of Principals

Table 1 Mean Values and Standard Deviations Showing Perceptions of Teachers on the Extent of Principals' Sustainable Leadership Practices (N=399)

No.	Variables	Mean (SD)	Remark
1.	Balancing short-term and long-term objectives	3.21(0.39)	Sometimes
2.	Developing a sustaining learning community	3.00(0.40)	Sometimes
3.	Developing leadership capacities at all levels	3.45(0.39)	Sometimes
4.	Building up the issues of social justice	3.15(0.40)	Sometimes
5.	Developing the diversity and capacity in professional learning community	3.36(0.45)	Sometimes
6.	Transforming and renewing the resources	3.21(0.44)	Sometimes
7.	Sustaining the leadership and learning environment	3.46(0.50)	Sometimes
Principals' Sustainable Leadership Practices		3.26(0.36)	Sometimes

Scoring Range: 1.00-1.49=Never, 1.5-2.49=Seldom, 2.5-3.49=Sometimes,
3.5-4.49=Often 4.5-5.00=Always

According to the data presented in Table 1, the mean values across all items for Balancing short-term and long-term objectives was (3.21), the mean values across all items for Developing a sustaining learning community was (3.00), the mean values across all items for Developing leadership capacities at all levels was (3.45), the mean values across all items for Building up the issues of social justice was (3.15), the mean values across all items for Developing the diversity and capacity in professional learning community was (3.36), the mean values across all items for

Transforming and renewing the resources was (3.21) and the mean values across all items for Sustaining the leadership and learning environment was (3.46) respectively.

Generally, as the overall mean value for the extent of the principals’ sustainable leadership practices was (3.26). It implied that the teachers perceived their principals as having *sometimes practiced* on the sustainable leadership practices.

The Variations of Sustainable Leadership Practices of Principals Perceived by Teachers in terms of their Personal Factors

To investigate the variations in sustainable leadership practices of principals, their personal factors as gender, their age, administrative service, current school service and total service were utilized in this study.

The overall mean values for male and female groups of principals were 3.30 and 3.24 respectively. It can be found that the mean values between two gender groups were slightly different. Therefore, it was found that both male and female principals sometimes practiced on sustainable leadership practices. There was no significant difference in all areas of sustainable leadership practices between male and female principals.

In order to analyze whether principals’ sustainable leadership practices perceived by teacher depended on principals’ age groups or not, one-way ANOVA was utilized.

According to the Table 2, it was found that there were significant differences in three areas such as “Balancing short-term and long-term objectives” ($p<.01$), “Developing leadership capacities at all levels” ($p<.01$), and “Transforming and renewing the resources” ($p<.001$) among seven areas of principals’ sustainable leadership practices.

Table 2 One-Way ANOVA Results Showing Differences in the Perception of Teachers on the Principals’ Sustainable Leadership Practices Grouped by Age

(N=399)

Variables	Age (Years)		
	31-40 years (N1=2)	41-50 years (N1=6)	Above 50 years (N1=22)
	N2=399	N2=399	N2=399
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Balancing short-term and long-term objectives	3.24(0.16)	3.07 (0.49)	3.24 (0.37)
Developing a sustaining learning community	3.09(0.27)	2.96 (0.51)	3.00 (0.39)
Developing leadership capacities at all levels	3.62(0.31)	3.52 (0.41)	3.41 (0.39)
Building up the issues of social justice	3.20(0.30)	3.23 (0.41)	3.12 (0.41)
Developing the diversity and capacity in professional learning community	3.57(0.38)	3.38 (0.53)	3.35 (0.43)
Transforming and renewing the resources	3.39(0.34)	3.36 (0.38)	3.14 (0.46)
Developing the diversity and capacity in professional learning community	3.57(0.38)	3.38 (0.53)	3.35 (0.43)
Transforming and renewing the resources	3.39(0.34)	3.36 (0.38)	3.14 (0.46)
Sustaining the leadership and learning environment	3.64(0.42)	3.52 (0.52)	3.43 (0.51)
Overall Sustainable Leadership Practices	3.39(0.24)	3.30 (0.41)	3.24 (0.35)

Scoring Range: 1.00-1.49 = Never, 1.5-2.49 = Seldom 2.5-3.49 = Sometimes, 3.5-4.49= Often, 4.5-5.00 = Always

In order to analyze whether there were significant differences of teachers' perception on sustainable leadership practices among age groups of principals or not, Tukey HSD was conducted.

Table 3 Tukey HSD Results of Principals' Sustainable Leadership Practices Perceived by Teachers Grouped by Age (N=399)

Variables	(I) Age (Years)	(J) Age (Years)	Mean Difference (I-J)	p
Balancing short-term and long-term objectives	41-50	Above 50	-0.16*	0.002**
Developing leadership capacities at all levels	31-40	Above 50	0.19*	0.040*
Transforming and renewing the resources	Above 50	31-40	-0.22*	0.034*
		41-50	-0.13*	0.039*

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

As shown in Table 3, Tukey HSD results indicated that there were significant differences among the principals. The principals who had age of 41-50 years and above 50 years differed significantly in their practices of "Balancing short-term and long-term objectives". The principals who had age of 31-40 years and above 50 years differed significantly in their practices of "Developing leadership capacities at all levels". The principals who had age of above 50 years and the principals who had age of (31-40) years, (41-50) years were differed significantly of "Transforming and renewing the resources".

According to Table 3, the overall mean value for a group of 1-5 administrative service years of principals and a group of 6-10 administrative service years of principals were 3.39 and 3.00 respectively. Therefore, it was found that all groups of principals *sometimes practiced* on all areas of principals' sustainable leadership practices.

Table 4 Independent Samples t-Test Results Showing Differences in the Perceptions of Teachers on Principals' Sustainable Leadership Practices Grouped by Administrative Service (Years) (N=399)

Variables	Admin Services (Years)	N1	N2	Mean (SD)	t	df	p
Balancing short-term and long-term objectives	1-5	2	27	3.24(0.16)	0.92	397	.004**
	6-10	28	392	3.20(0.40)			
Developing a sustaining learning community	1-5	2	27	3.09(0.27)	1.25	397	n.s
	6-10	28	392	3.00(0.41)			
Developing leadership capacities at all levels	1-5	2	27	3.62(0.30)	2.35	397	n.s
	6-10	28	392	3.43(0.39)			
Building up the issues of social justice	1-5	2	27	3.20(0.30)	0.72	397	n.s
	6-10	28	392	3.15(0.41)			
Developing the diversity and capacity in professional learning community	1-5	2	27	3.57(0.37)	2.35	397	n.s
	6-10	28	392	3.35(0.46)			
Transforming and renewing the resources	1-5	2	27	3.38(0.34)	2.15	397	n.s
	6-10	28	392	3.19(0.45)			
Sustaining the leadership and learning environment	1-5	2	27	3.64(0.41)	1.89	397	n.s
	6-10	28	392	3.45(0.51)			
Overall Sustainable Leadership Practices	1-5	2	27	3.39(0.24)	1.96	397	n.s
	6-10	28	392	3.00(0.41)			

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, ns= no significance

To analyze whether there were significant differences of principals’ sustainable leadership practices perceived by teachers depended on principals’ administrative or not, independent samples *t*-test was used. Table 5 presented the results of independent sample *t*-test of principals’ sustainable leadership practices grouped by administrative service.

It was found that there were statistically significant differences between administrative services groups in the areas of “Balancing Short-term and Long-term Objectives” ($p<.01$).

Moreover, Table 6 presented the overall mean values for the principals who had 1-5 years at current school and the principals who had of 6-10 years at current school were 3.23 and 3.70 respectively.

To analyze whether principals’ sustainable leadership practices perceived by teachers depended on principals’ current school service or not, independent samples *t*-test was conducted.

Table 6 presented the results of independent sample *t*-test of principals’ sustainable leadership practices, group by current school service. Out of three areas of principals’ sustainable leadership practices, it was found that there were statistically significant differences between current school’s services groups in the areas of “Developing a sustaining learning community” ($p<.05$), “Developing leadership capacities at all levels” ($p<.01$) and “Building up the issues of social justice” ($p<.001$). Moreover, there was statistically significant difference in overall sustainable leadership practices between two groups of principals ($p<.05$).

Table 5 Independent Samples *t*-Test Results Showing Differences in the Perceptions of Teachers on Principals’ Sustainable Leadership Practices Grouped by Service Years at Current School (N=399)

Variables	Current Service (Years)	N1	N2	Mean (SD)	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Balancing short-term and long-term objectives	1-5	28	373	3.17 (0.37)	-6.50	397	n.s
	6-10	2	26	3.66 (0.42)			
Developing a sustaining learning community	1-5	28	373	2.97 (0.38)	-4.91	27.07	.023*
	6-10	2	26	3.46 (0.49)			
Developing leadership capacities at all levels	1-5	28	373	3.42 (0.37)	-4.34	26.96	.009**
	6-10	2	26	3.85 (0.50)			
Building up the issues of social justice	1-5	28	373	3.12 (0.36)	-3.78	26.18	.000***
	6-10	2	26	3.59 (0.62)			
Developing the diversity and capacity in professional learning community	1-5	28	373	3.33 (0.43)	-6.13	397	n.s
	6-10	2	26	3.87 (0.47)			
Transforming and renewing the resources	1-5	28	373	3.18 (0.42)	-5.14	397	n.s
	6-10	2	26	3.63 (0.56)			
Sustaining the leadership and learning environment	1-5	28	373	3.44 (0.50)	-3.94	397	n.s
	6-10	2	26	3.84 (0.58)			
Overall Sustainable Leadership Practices	1-5	28	373	3.23 (0.33)	-5.10	26.80	.014*
	6-10	2	26	3.70 (0.46)			

Note: * $p<0.5$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$, n.s= no significance

The overall mean values for a group of principals who had total services of (11 -20) years, a group of principals who had total services of (21-30) years and a group of principals who had total services of (21-30) years and a group of principals who had total services of above 30 years were 3.39, 3.26 and 3.25 respectively. Therefore, it was found that all total services groups of principals sometimes practiced on Principals' Sustainable Leadership.

In order to analyze whether principals' sustainable leadership practices perceived by teachers depended on principals' total service or not, one-way ANOVA was utilized.

Table 7 presented one-way ANOVA results of principals' sustainable leadership practices grouped by total service.

Out of four areas of principals' sustainable leadership practices, it was found that there were statistically significant differences between two groups of principals in the areas of "Balancing short-term and long-term objectives", "Developing leadership capacities at all levels" and "Transforming and renewing the resources". However, there was no significant difference in overall sustainable leadership practices between two groups of principals.

Table 6 One-Way ANOVA Results Showing Differences in the Perception of Teachers on Principals' Sustainable Leadership Practices Grouped by Total Service (N=399)

Variables		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Balancing short-term and long-term objectives	Between Groups	1.28	2	0.64	4.27	.015*
	Within Groups	59.38	396	0.15		
Developing a sustaining learning community	Between Groups	0.57	2	0.28	1.74	n.s
	Within Groups	64.45	396	0.16		
Developing leadership capacities at all levels	Between Groups	0.97	2	0.48	3.13	.045*
	Within Groups	61.07	396	0.15		
Building up the issues of social justice	Between Groups	0.13	2	0.07	0.41	n.s
	Within Groups	64.27	396	0.16		
Developing the diversity and capacity in professional learning community	Between Groups	1.18	2	0.59	2.91	n.s
	Within Groups	80.59	396	0.20		
Transforming and renewing the resources	Between Groups	1.44	2	0.72	3.64	.027*
	Within Groups	78.37	396	0.19		
Sustaining the leadership and learning environment	Between Groups	1.20	2	0.60	2.35	n.s
	Within Groups	101.21	396	0.26		
Overall Sustainable Leadership Practices	Between Groups	0.47	2	0.23	1.85	n.s
	Within Groups	49.92	396	0.13		

Note: * $p < .05$, n.s= no significance

In order to analyze whether there were significant differences of teachers' perception on sustainable leadership practices among principals' total service or not, Tukey HSD was conducted.

Table 7 Tukey HSD Results of Principals’ Sustainable Leadership Practices Perceived by Teachers Grouped by Years of Total Service (N=399)

Variables	(I) Total Service (Years)	(J) Total Service (Years)	Mean Difference (I-J)	p
Balancing short-term and long-term objectives	21-30	Above 30	-0.12*	0.012*
Developing leadership capacities at all levels	11-20	Above 30	0.19*	0.045*
Developing the diversity and capacity in professional learning community	11-20	21-30	0.23*	0.045*

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01

As shown in Table 8, Post Hoc test results indicated that principals who had total services of 21-30 years and principals who had total service of above 30 years differed significantly in the practices of “Balancing short-term and long-term objectives” ($p<.05$). The principals who had total services of 11-20 years and principals who had total services of 21-30 years and above 30 years differed significantly on “Developing leadership capacities at all levels” and “Developing the diversity and capacity in professional learning community” ($p<.05$).

Qualitative Research Findings

Responses to Open-ended Question

As the qualitative findings, the open-ended questions were conducted in this study to investigate the principals’ sustainable leadership knowledge and practices. There are eight open-ended questions for principals in this study and the principals’ various responses for these questions are described in detail as follow.

When investigating the levels of sustainable leadership practices of principals according to the qualitative findings, it was found that the principals performed in balancing short-term and long-term objectives according their responses. The principals emphasized on the teaching learning process as a priority of their schools therefore they performed to develop the sustaining learning community. The principals shared the experience in terms of management and leadership skills to improve the leadership skills of teachers for developing leadership at all levels. The principals emphasized common good at all to build up the issues of social justice. They provided opportunities for teachers to work and learn together and emphasized to respect individual differences to develop the diversity and capacity in professional learning community. The principals energized people for transforming and renewing the resources. The principals reflected the previous work experiences and aligned with the current situation. They always reflect the past experiences to sustain the leadership and learning environment.

Cook (2014) argued that sustainable leadership has sets of activists to involve people, and creates an educational environment with community diversity, enabling cross-pollination of great views and compelling experiences in organizations of collective learning and development.

According to McCann and Holt (2010), leaders in today’s organizations are attempting to utilize their concepts of sustainability to adjust and continually improve overall performance. Therefore, it was concluded that principals’ sustainable leadership practices were essential for the all-round development of the schools at the long-term.

Conclusion and Discussion

When investigating the levels of sustainable leadership practices of principals, it was found that the mean values for the perceptions of teachers on the principals' sustainable leadership practices on balancing short-term and long-term objectives, developing a sustaining learning community, developing leadership capacities at all levels, building up the social justice, developing the diversity and capacity in professional learning community, transforming and renewing the resources and sustaining the leadership and learning environment were 3.21, 3.00, 3.45, 3.15, 3.36, 3.21 and 3.46 respectively. Generally total mean value of principals' sustainable leadership practices was 3.26. Therefore, the principals' sustainable leadership practices were *sometimes practiced*.

When investigating the differences of the teachers' perception on the levels of sustainable leadership practices of principals according to their personal factors, it was found that there were significance differences in age, administrative services years at current school and total service.

When investigating the levels of sustainable leadership practices of principals according to the qualitative findings, it was found that the principals sometimes performed in principals' sustainable leadership practices according to their responses.

Suggestions

Based on the results of this study, the following suggestions are presented for principals' sustainable leadership practices in Basic Education High Schools. It is important for policy makers to provide the principals to conduct the work-shops and training programs with regard to the specialized in leadership and management which are arranged in accordance with the building of leadership capacity before posting them as principals. For the long-term development of the schools, the policy makers need to provide the School Improvement Fund based on the necessities of each school and the principals should be provided adequate personal and financial resources because there are some limitations in time, financials and resources regionally. For the long-term development of the schools, the tenure of principals served at current schools need to be enough for a dual commitment to short-term and long-term results. Therefore, the policy makers need to provide a plan to create positive flow of leadership across many years. The principals should fully-equip themselves with up to date and relevant knowledge, skills and practices in order to lead the schools effectively.

Need for Further Study

This study should be conducted to cover with principals at different state and region in order to represent the principals in Myanmar. It should be conducted at education college sector and higher education. Thus, the studies at all levels of institution may explore the principals' sustainable leadership practices.

Further research should be conducted to verify the leadership framework to perform the sustainable leadership practices of principals proposed in this study.

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