



## A Comparative Study of Supervisory Role of Primary Schools Principals in Iran, Japan and South Korea

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 06 May 2021            Revised: 28 August 2021            Accepted: 05 October 2021            Online: 06 February 2022</p>	<p>The aim of study was to identify supervisory role of primary school principals and its developments from a comparative perspective in the three countries of Iran, Japan and South Korea. The research method was comparatively qualitative and unit of observation and selection strategy were at the macro level (countries) and "different social systems, different educational outputs" respectively. Data collection method was documentary and two methods of John Stuart Mill's agreement and difference and Bereday were used to analyze the data and present the results. The findings reveal that out of fifteen components, in six components, there are similarities between Iran, Japan and South Korea. These six components are centralized structure, social status of school principal, need to have at least one university degree to hold a management position, written test and interview, and the great variety of supervisory roles of principals. Another important finding of study is determination of eight differences between Iran's education system with Japan and South Korea. Some important differences are the wider supervisory role of the principal in Iran, higher level of satisfaction of school principals in Japan and South Korea, and reform developments in supervisory role of principal in Japan and South Korea. According to the findings, it is suggested to the policy makers of the Iranian educational management system that specific and objective standards be prepared to evaluate the performance of supervisory role of school principals.</p>
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## **1. Introduction**

In the new millennium, education systems, under the pressure of various demands of the people, governments and stakeholders have been forced to change their ordinary functions. These pressures have taken place at both macro and micro levels: At the macro level, international assessments reflect the position of each country's education system. As a result, reports from organizations such as UNESCO and the World Bank and results of evaluations such as the TIMSS and PIRLS have intensified pressure on policymakers and education planners to implement fundamental reforms (Gilmore, 2005; Cordero, Cristobal, & Santin, 2018). At the micro level, the level of expectation from school principals and teachers has increased. One expectation is that school administrators provide "effective professional management." Based on this demand, roles and responsibilities of school leaders have become more important in the era of educational reform (Owaki, 2007). Politicians, members of parliament, parties, the government, economical stakeholders, as well as parents, mostly wanted an effective and creative educational leadership. In fact, this extra pressure is influenced by increasing public awareness of the effective role of school principal in the process of educational achievement.

Numerous studies have shown that learners' successful performance largely depends on principal's leadership in creating appropriate learning opportunities, level of expectation from teachers and pupils, and his or her managerial initiatives (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010; UNESCO & SPBEA, 2020). Also, the findings of the PISA International Test (OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment) reveal that in successful educational systems, school principals generally have more power and authority to shape and use a variety of curricula and assessment methods (Schleicher, 2012). In fact, research findings emphasize that after teacher, the school principal is most important person in teaching-learning process and academic achievement (Wang & Huang, 2020). Accordingly, today a specific set of characteristics - which often includes interpersonal and communication competencies and skills - has been formed that school principals should be equipped with (Ismail, Don, Husin & Khalid, 2018). These characteristics change the traditional role of principal from "supervisor" to decision maker, facilitator, problem solver, and even social change agent (Kim & Kim, 2005). These changes occur when school management really wants an effective school leadership who requires a new look at the traditional duties and missions of a manager. This new perspective also requires redefining the principal's supervisory role, providing more learning

opportunities for teachers (in-service training), providing more opportunities for principal professional development, and increasing her/his power and authority in school affairs (Schleicher, 2012). In this situation, the principal becomes a "leader as a learner" to learn how to lead the diverse and varied affairs of the school (Kim & Kim, 2005).

One of the most important changes should occur in the traditional role of principal supervision. A comparative study of OECD education systems in school leadership shows that monitoring and evaluating teacher behavior and performance is still one of the most important responsibilities of school principals (Schleicher, 2012). Evaluation criteria include items such as teaching performance evaluation, participation in in-service training courses, class observation, interviews and documentation of each teacher's activities. The international trend in teacher professional development reflects the move towards community-based and inquiry-oriented approaches, which require a change in the traditional roles of school principals in favor of the inevitable learning-driven leadership (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Hallinger & Walker 2017). In learner-centered leadership, the principal five main behaviors are: (1) exercising strong leadership to facilitate teacher growth and guidance; (2) providing opportunities for teacher growth; (3) discussion with teachers to optimize teaching methods, (4) maintaining curriculum coherence, and (5) emphasizing role and responsibility of teacher in the teaching-learning process (Kim & Lee, 2020: 263).

Despite the persistence of these management practices, the goal of the supervisory role of the principal - according to the modern concept of educational leadership - should be to pay attention to such things as improving the quality of teachers' professional development, improving learners' learning conditions and self-control (Alkrdem, 2020). Of course, the realization of these matters largely depends on the scope of power and authority of the principal. In some communities, this area is wide, while in some it is moderate and low. However, we are now witnessing two reform movements in management policies of education systems in the world: the first movement is trying to increase power of school principals and teachers and reduce the role of the Ministry of Education in school affairs. The goal of the second movement is to reduce the supervisory power of school principals in favor of increasing the role of parents, students and teachers in the decision-making process. The consequence of this movement can be considered the establishment of a new approach in school management called "distributed leadership" (Göksoy, 2015; Shava & Tlou, 2018). Distributed leadership is an appropriate response to proponents of traditional top-down structures that run schools. This leadership seeks to reduce the power of centralized education systems and place greater value on the active role of principals, teachers, parents, and students in

the teaching-learning process (Kim & Kim, 2005). Here we need to have a brief look at previous research findings:

Recent research by Kim & Lee (2020) highlighted that the educational leadership of principals can affect teachers' participation in guiding learners and observing the teaching of colleagues and their professional development. Also, the findings of Fedorchuk (2019); Karatas (2016) and Militello, Fusarelli, Alsbury & Warren (2013) emphasize the role of principals in students' professional development and academic achievement. In Turkey, Karatas (2016) sought to determine the professional standards of school principals through a survey of more than 300 principals. Based on the findings, the basic skills of school leaders are: knowledge base, effective communication, institution management, leadership change, technology leadership, educational leadership, school environmental relations; and life and society (Wang & Huang, 2020: 62). In Singapore a study by Tan (2020) also found that the personal characteristics, beliefs, and values of school principals affect positive school performance. While Omar (2016) also believes that the success of schools depends on elements such as knowledge, skills, quality and commitment of school principals. Thus, Johnson (2011) rightly emphasizes that in the past, the school principal was primarily concerned with personal autonomy and execution of orders according to a top-down hierarchical approach. Today, this trend has changed through attention to transformational concepts such as "learning leader". Studies of Abdulghani (2016); Abdul Wahab, Mohd Fuad, Ismail, & Majid (2014); Ahmad Tatlah & Iqbal (2012) and Noor, Daud, Rashid & Aftanourhan (2018) also show the consequence of effective leadership of the school principal on teachers' job satisfaction and organizational effectiveness. Hussin & Al Abri (2015) consider professional knowledge & skills, education and learning, effective organizational communication, use of information & communication technology, proper goal setting and standardization as the most important competencies required by school principals. Young & Dulewicz (2005) argued that educational management and leadership competencies include planning, coordination, decision-making, control & monitoring, and time management.

In Iran, several studies have been conducted on role of school principals and its various dimensions. For example through designing an appropriate model of self-leadership of educational managers, Mousavi, Abbasian, Abdollahi & Zeinabadi (2020) emphasized on role of eight indicators of self-knowledge, self-direction, self-monitoring, self-control, effectiveness, goal setting, self-motivation and thought about self. Abedinia (2020) investigated relationship between leadership styles of primary school principals in Talesh (Northern Iran) with teachers' job satisfaction and

found that among different leadership styles still charismatic leadership has an stronger relationship with job satisfaction. Research by Pourrahim & Hosseinpour (2016) indicated that the educational leadership of primary school principals in Ardabil (Northwestern of Iran) affects professional development more than teacher self-efficacy. Karimi Arghini, Mirzaei, & Entesar Foumani (2020) point out to the eight factors of planning, training and learning, extracurricular activities, physical education & health, participation, human relations, supervision & guidance, and management of executives & financial affairs that improve the quality of school management in primary schools. Shahrabi Farahani, Khosravi Babadi & Khorshidi (2019) tried to prepared a model of educational-oriented leadership in Tehran primary schools and indicated five main components namely religious component, work structure & environment, leadership style, principal personal characteristics and organizational capacities. Zahed Babalan, Kolaei, Moeini Kia & Rezaei Sharif (2019) showed that there is a positive and significant indirect relationship between educational leadership of school principals and teachers' job motivation.

Ghasemzadeh, Jafari & Ghorchian (2018) investigated the " role of primary school deputies in promotion of educational leadership at Mazandaran province" and found that teachers - by referring to gap between current and desired situations - emphasizing on need of school deputies to participate in in-service training courses. Yassini, Abbaspour & Norouzi Koohdasht (2016) by analyzing the findings of eighteen researches - which was conducted during 1385-1395 - found that there is a significant relationship between school management approach and leadership style. Rajabzadeh, Lisani, & Motahhari Nejad (2015) found that teachers' perceptions of managerial educational leadership behaviors significantly predict their attitudes toward job effectiveness. Abdollahi & Sadin (2012) revealed that in primary schools of Karaj City, there is a significant relationship between leadership functions and effective teaching of teachers.

Ahmadi & Mir Moeini (2012) have compared the impact of school management process on success rate of junior high school students in Iran, USA, Taiwan, Russia, Japan, South Korea and Hong Kong in the 2007 International Test of TIMSS concluded that there is no significant relationship between executive activities, control and educational supervision of principals and students' academic success. In Isfahan province by studying the views of primary school teachers about school principal's methods of supervision, Sobhaninejad & Aghahseni (2006) indicated that school principals use the classical supervision and guidance style to a moderate level and human relations and human resources styles to a large extent. The findings of Iranian researchers reveal that: First, the supervisory method of school principals has not changed in line with the changes of

the time; Second, many principals and teachers have largely limited the concept of supervision to exercising control over teacher and student behavior; Third, the centralized structure of the Iran Ministry of Education perpetuates this situation.

In fact, Iran is one of the countries whose school principals are still - in many affairs - subject to a centralized education system. This centralism may be one of the reasons that have not yet allowed the necessary opportunities to flourish creativity of principals and teachers. While more than half of Iranian students are in primary schools, the importance of primary school management is obvious to policymakers and educational planners. On the one hand, Iran is the 17th largest country in the world in terms of geographical size (Worldview, 2011). This shows that primary schools are spread over a wide geographical area and in more than 400 cities and hundreds of villages. Organizationally, the structure of Iran's education system is centralized and all school affairs - including textbooks and selection and appointment of principals - are the same for all schools. However, this geographical diversity does not allow the Ministry of Education to be able to oversee - literally - everything. For this reason, the quality of students' learning, teachers' professional commitment and academic achievement is greatly affected by the efficiency and effectiveness of school principals and especially their supervisory role (Haji Aghaei & Khalkhali, 2020; Islameyeh & Mohammad Davoodi, 2014; Soleimani & Motahhari, 2009).

At the same time, school principals do not put much effort into exercising their supervisory role for a variety of reasons. Some of them, despite not being interested in playing a supervisory role, do not have much scientific information in this regard. On the other hand, teachers consider the supervision of the principal as a kind of intervention in education and think that they do not need to improve and reform their work (Elmi & Barzi, 2009; Sadeghinia, Salehi & Moghadamzadeh, 2018). As a result, principals and teachers do not have a positive view of each other's role so that they can work together to eliminate educational problems. Given the size of Iran's educational system, the large number of students and the lack of close supervision by school principals, the present researchers felt that using global experiences could be the first step to accurately identify new approaches to the supervisory role of school principals. Also, the experience of the last four decades in Iran shows that usually the change in the macro structure of the educational system is slow and difficult (Arefi, 2008; Musapur, 2012; Safi, 2003). Therefore, one of the first and best steps that can be taken is to start the changes and reforms at the school level. It is clear that even school changes are not easy and sometimes require changes in the rule and regulation of the Ministry of Education. Nevertheless, knowledge of global experiences and

especially of successful countries - which have largely started educational developments from the elementary level - can be a good place for Iranian educational leaders to begin changes. Therefore, there is a basic premise for current researchers that the use of educational experiences and ideas is the most useful and valuable type of borrowing. Based on these points, the present researchers decided to study this issue in selected countries. The selection and study of the educational systems of South Korea and Japan for comparison with Iran is mainly based on the fact that these two countries currently have successful performance in international evaluations. According to the purpose of the research, the specific objectives of the research are:

- Investigating the similarities between supervisory role of primary school principals and its components in selected countries
- Investigating the differences between supervisory role of primary school principals and its components in selected countries

## **2. Research Method**

This is a comparatively qualitatively research using the four-step approach of George Bereday to present result. The unit of observation was at the macro level (countries) and selection strategy is "different social systems, different educational outputs". Documentary method was used to collect data and review of primary and secondary sources (upstream documents, books and articles) (n = 103). The Boolean method – search of keywords - was used to find sources. Selected sources were also identified in foreign information databases - such as Google Scholar, FindArticles, Eric -, and Iranian information databases - such as SID, ElmNet, ISC, MegaIran and information databases of research institutes. John Stuart Mill's similarities and differences method were used to analyze the data and design the tables.

## **3. Findings**

Although According to the regional method of Bereday, the results of data analysis are presented in four sections:

### *A) Description step*

In this stage, data related to different dimensions of school principal' supervision in selected countries is presented:

## *Iran*

In Iran, school principals are selected from undergraduate and senior staff employed by the Ministry of Education with at least 5 years of experience. Also, the Ministry of Education has recently designed and launched an internet system namely "Selection", through which school management candidates must express their willingness for the position of school principal (<http://entekhab.medu.ir>). Candidates must meet the necessary general and specific conditions, and in addition to passing the written test, must also take part in an interview. The general conditions of managers are:

- Belief in Islam and practical adherence to Islamic rules and Velayat-e-Faqih and the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran
- A good background of following Islamic ethics and good reputation among colleagues
- Lack of criminal and political background and affiliation with illegal groups and parties
- Benefit from mental and physical health necessary to perform management duties
- Possessing leadership and management power and ability to establish competent relations with others
- Permanent employee of the Ministry of Education
- Married (for male candidates) (Higher Council of Education, 1996)

Specific conditions for principals include a bachelor's degree or higher and having at least 2 years of educational experience in the relevant course. In Iran, because schools are separated by gender, the gender of school principal should be similar to gender of pupils. Of course, since the majority of primary school teachers are female teachers, in boys' schools, some school principals are selected from among women. In terms of age group, there is no specific age limit for management candidates. However, the majority of school principals appear to belong to the age group of 30 years and older. Supervisory duties of school principals in Iran According to the regulations of the Ministry of Education are divided into two general groups of educational duties and administrative and executive duties, which include more than 40 duties. Some of the most important tasks of a principal are:

- Supervising the excellent implementation of formal and extracurricular programs and activities
- Supervision and Guidance of school staff to perform tasks and programs in optimal
- Develop, implement and evaluate the annual school program with the participation of teachers, parents and students in accordance with the rules and regulations
- Attending the classroom, observing the activities of teachers and learners, providing advice, modifying monitoring methods, reviewing and recording the progress of students in the class booklet



- Planning and encouraging staff and students to observe Islamic standards and monitor the observance of Islamic hijab
- Accurate identification of students' academic progress and decline and providing guidance and advice to parents
- Communicating written exam results and teachers' opinions to parents
- Concern for students' personal-environmental health and efforts to meet the needs of equipment to improve the quality of school health
- Predict the required manpower of the school and announce it to the district education department at least one month before the beginning of the school year
- Communicating job descriptions of employees as well as regulations and circulars to relevant people and supervising their full implementation
- Preparing and compiling a folder of personal and professional records for all employees and recording their continuous and final evaluation performance
- Identifying and introducing motivated and active employees to the relevant authorities to encourage them, as well as identifying and introducing inactive and negligent employees to the relevant authorities (Higher Council of Education, 2000)

According to the law, all school principals are required to participate in in-service training courses about educational administration approved by the Ministry of Education.

Table 1. In-service training courses for school principals according to subject and time

No.	Topic	Hours
1	Educational Leadership	24
2	Operational planning in education	16
3	Principles of teaching and evaluation strategies	12
4	Participatory management at the school level	24
5	Educational supervision and guidance	24
6	Innovation and entrepreneurship in school	24
7	Principles of happiness in school	12
8	School communication management	16

Source: Bylaw dated 11 June 2019 of the Ministry of Education

### *Japan*

In Japan, school principals are appointed by regional and local administrations, and selected individuals are appointed according to leadership characteristics. In addition, the attitude of the volunteers about teaching profession and her/his success in the specialized field is also considered. They also have to participate at in-service training (Aksoy & Karagozoglu, 2021). Cisse and Okato (2009) emphasize that in many cases, candidates have to take exams that measure their leadership ability. In general, school principals in Japan must have at least one university degree in the field of educational sciences and more than twenty years of teaching experience. This situation shows that in terms of age structure, Japanese principals mainly belong to the age group of 50 years and above. Leadership in Japan is top-down, and teachers are under pressure to succeed in professional exams,

active parental involvement, and continuous student development, and principals need professional competence and organizational skills for school success.

The Central Board of Education - which sets government policies for school management - recently reported on three characteristics that school leaders are expected to possess: First, leadership power to communicate with school staff who have different specialty; Second, to provide a clear vision of the school's mission and goals; and Third, communication skills for engaging with the local community (Yamamoto, Anomoto, & Yamaguchi, 2016). Research by Cisse and Okato (2009) indicated that school principals should take a variety of actions in their area of supervisory duty, such as: using assessment results to improve school affairs, educational planning, determining the school's success in achieving goals, exact number of staff in each school section, main issues and challenges, degree of rationality governing the performance of school management, level of staff morale and consciousness, skills and abilities of teachers, facilitating individual management of staff, handling personnel matters based on the performance of each employee, providing data about relationship between the community and school, and status of cooperation with local and regional education departments and parents. A study by Chen, Cheng & Sato (2017) comparing Japanese and Taiwanese school principals showed that Japanese principals are more willing to intervene to facilitate teacher learning. They found that Japanese principals were more willing to lead educationally and professionally support teachers, while Taiwanese administrators were more focused on student performance (Kim & Lee, 2020).

Detailed in-service training has been provided for school principals in Japan. For example, Yamamoto, Enomoto & Yamaguchi (2016) refer to the National Center for Teacher Development (NCTD) programs organized nationally in collaboration with the Japanese Ministry of Education. These programs are implemented for individuals nominated by the local education council who are to take over the management of schools - or play a pivotal role in training their district administrators (NCTD, 2015). The content of these courses includes topics such as organizational management, school compliance, risk management and other issues related to education. The training program includes various activities such as lectures, discussions and group work.

#### South Korea

The first component to consider is how to choose a school principal in South Korea. In this country, the teaching profession and especially school management have a very respectable and popular social situation. Accordingly, the two most common methods for selecting school principals are professional promotion and competitive invitation. All candidates must first obtain a

"Certificate of Management Competence". Those who obtain this certificate are mainly school deputies or teachers. These people are also a priority for the school management position. As with presidential courses in many countries, the school management period in South Korea is four years, and volunteers can be the principal of a school for a maximum of eight years. Of course, in private schools, the tenure of school principals depends on the rules of each school (Aksoy & Karagozolu, 2021; Kim et al., 2006).

Data analysis also shows that in terms of gender structure, women's access to managerial positions in the South Korean education system (especially executives' positions) is very limited. Kim and Kim (2005: 294) shows that the majority of school principals in South Korea are male (86%) and in the age group of 50 years and older (91%). In fact, it is very unlikely that a person in the age group of 20-30 could be elected as a school principal. Professional development takes place over the years, and seniority is an important factor in selecting people to run the school. In South Korea, having 20 years of teaching experience is a prerequisite for running for school management, and people with less experience are not eligible for school management positions (Kim & Kim 2005: 299).

Another component for choosing a school principal is background of participating in in-service training courses. Data analysis shows that more than 90% of school principals in South Korea have a record of participating in a three-month in-service training course. Of course, school administrators appear to be more involved in these courses in many developed countries than Korean administrators - for example, school principals in the United States with at least one year of in-service training (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015). The report by Kim et al. (2006) indicates that in South Korea, as in many countries, there is no special institution to provide in-service training to managers, and school principals can receive this training through various institutions. At the same time, Kim et al. (2006: 93) mention the important role of three institutions in in-service training of school principals. These include the Elementary Education In-Service Education Center attached to Seoul National University of Education, the Secondary Education Center in Seoul National University of Education and Center for In-Service Education attached to Korea National University of Education. The programs of these centers generally include a one-month course and 180 hours of classes for teaching topics such as organizational management, financial management and educational management.

Another significant component of in-service training courses for school principals in South Korea is to increase their monitoring capabilities as training leaders. According to Kim & Kim (2005: 301) the content of these courses includes topics such as research in education, administration of teaching personnel, legal aspect of educational administration, contemporary administrative leadership, curriculum development, school and community relations ,management of human resources , organization of schools and fieldwork.

Organizationally, the duties of a school principal in South Korea go beyond simple supervision, and the principal must simultaneously act as the school's financial manager, facility supervisor, curriculum specialist, educational leader, teacher evaluator, and mediator between the school and the local community. School principals also face challenges such as overcoming conflict among school members, increasing democracy in management, transparency in finances, and efforts to improve student achievement. Kim et al. (2006) believe that the supervisory duties of the school principal in South Korea include cases such as: deciding on school days, semester and holidays, and school year; determining class size and enrollment; acknowledging subjects, exams and completion; deciding on re-admission, special admission, transfer, leave, cancellation and graduation; deciding on promotion and early graduation; deciding on tuition, admission and other miscellaneous expenses; deciding on pupil awards and disciplinary action; organizing and managing students and self-governing activities; and procedures for revising school regulations; temporary teachers, and decision to promote teachers, while the employment and transfer of teachers is done by the education departments of cities and provinces (OECD, 2014b).

In addition, the principal is responsible for liaising with the teachers' association, communicating with parents and the local community, and transmitting educational technology innovations, while making decision about school curriculum is entirely in the hands of the government. Naturally, when there is a conflict between the views of school staff and superiors, the principal is generally subject to the orders of superiors and has little power. In addition, school principals in South Korea have no responsibility for teaching. Due to the type of work and responsibilities, job satisfaction is high among school principals and more than 90% of them tend to stay in this position until retirement (Kim & Kim, 2005: 301). Despite the fact that school principals in South Korea have lower salaries than their counterparts in countries like the United States, internal rewards rather than external rewards motivate them to stay in the job.

## *B) Interpretation*

### *First) Iran*

The modern educational system in Iran is more than a century old. In the first decades, the educational system of countries such as France was considered by Iranian politicians. For example, the last Shah of Iran in social policy - including in the education system - was interested in following countries such as Britain and the United States (Messkoub, 2006). The victory of the Islamic Revolution in the late 1970s changed various aspects of the education system, including the method of selecting school principals. Nowadays, the age of children entering school in Iran is six years old and formal general education lasts 12 years. Also, the structure of the educational system includes two three-year primary levels (Grades 1-3 and Grades 4-6) and two three-year secondary courses (Irvani 2014). Statistics from the Ministry of Education (2021) showed that more than 15 million students are currently enrolled in 107,171 schools. Also, more than 90% of primary school teachers and principals are women (Ministry of Education, 2021).

Although during the last century and in different periods, different laws regarding the characteristics of school principals have been approved by the Iranian legislature, but in the early 2000s, the High Council of Education in Resolution No. 673 emphasized that candidate for school management must participate in management training courses or school management qualification exams (Abdullahi, 2013). Upstream documents - such as Transformative Documents of the Islamic Republic of Iran - also mention school principals as educational leaders and key elements in achieving the goals of this document (Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, 2011). According to this document, the school principal must be faithful, creative, committed, flexible, thoughtful, forward-thinking and participatory. According to the rules and regulations of the Ministry of Education, all school principals and deputies of education departments at the provincial, regional and district levels are required to attend in-service training courses.

In the last two decades, various programs have been designed in the Ministry of Education with the aim of improving and developing the professionalism of school principals. For example, the "Tadbir Plan" (Plan of Thought), which has been implemented since 2015 with the aim of annual planning of schools in the framework of upstream documents and helps principals to continuously improve processes, participation of human manpower based on goals, policies, regulations and indicators of education to formulate the annual school program. "Mehr Plan" (September Plan), which has been assisting the process of preparing favorable educational environment for schools,

emphasizes the reopening of schools (The school year in Iran starts in mid-September and ends in mid-June). According to the plan, schools will be visited and the activities of principals will be monitored at the national, provincial and regional levels.

Another program namely the "Excellence Plan" has been launched since 1989 to improve school performance by improving management processes. The main purpose of this program is to improve the scientific level and managerial knowledge of school principals and the proper implementation of school management with an emphasis on school-oriented approach. However, the findings of some studies highlighted that most of the time of school principals is devoted to minor matters such as executive and logistics affairs. Therefore, school principals have allocated very little time to address the basic issues of the school - such as educational planning activities, professional development of teachers and laying the groundwork for students' academic achievement - (Jahanian, 2012; Yazdani & Karami, 2019; Hajipour et al., 2015) The main reason for this situation can be due to causes such as lack of professional qualities, lack of creativity, weakness of in-service training or lack of authority and power of the principal to make decisions because of centralized education system (Tabatabai, 2014; Draji & Khalkhali, 2019).

### *Second) Japan*

Japan's educational structure follows the 6 + 3 + 3 model, and education is compulsory until the end of junior high school. Also, the organizational structure of the Ministry of Education – with regards to cultural characteristics of the country - is centralized. This centralization starts at the national level and is communicated to the regions and schools through the provincial departments of education (Sakurai 2009). Despite the cultural roots of Japan's centralized education system, the concept of "school leadership" - aimed at increasing school autonomy and accountability - came to the attention of educational policymakers with the beginning of educational reform in school management in the 1990s (Owaki 2005; Tsujimura , 2014). The core of the 1990s reforms was the decentralization of education and changes in the school management system - by increasing the role and responsibilities of school leaders.

With this in mind, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) (1999) approved "Seventeen Proposals for Changing Education" to improve professional development, skills and knowledge of school principals from year 2000 onward. The program argues that school leaders must commit to increasing the efficiency of their schools - in terms of organizational management and dealing with a variety of complexities and problems. Accordingly,

during the years 2002-2004, MEXT developed a curriculum in the field of school management and “National Training Programs” and communicated it to all schools for implementation (Yamamoto, Enomoto & Yamaguchi, 2016). In addition, in the first decade of the new millennium “Special Committee for the Development of an Educational Program for School Principals” was established to train school leaders.

In 2006, the “Professional Standards for School Principals” program replaced the previous designs. According to this program, the main activities of the principal are: creation and implementation of the general concept of the school, creating conditions to improve the quality of education; creating appropriate conditions for teachers' professional development, effective use of various resources and risk management, effective interaction with representatives of the educational community, leadership and moral behavior and understanding the socio-cultural context of the school (Fedorchuk, 2019).

### *Third) South Korea*

Over the past two decades, South Korean students have scored very well on international tests such as PISA and TIMSS (OECD 2019). For example, while two generations ago the country ranked 23rd among OECD countries in terms of academic achievement, according to a PISA2009, Korean students ranked second in reading, fourth in mathematics and sixth in science (OECD 2014a). It is clear that this success is not just the result of the students' efforts, and the role of teachers and abilities of school principals should not be forgotten. School principals in South Korea deal with a 6 + 3 + 3 educational structure that includes six years of primary school and two separate three-year courses for high school. The organizational structure of the Korean education system consists of three central, regional and local layers. Although in this structure, more powers are given to regional and local levels, but centralism is still very strong (Nuffic, 2015). Therefore, the decision-making authority and supervisory role of the principal in the school are limited, and the Ministry of Education and the provincial education departments are the main custodians of the school's financial management and staff selection.

It also includes a monitoring and evaluation framework to improve the performance of the education system in South Korea from the macro level - such as national programs - to the micro level - student performance. In fact, the Ministry of Education has tried to make public what is happening in the education system by establishing organizations such as the “National Education Information System” (NEIS), “School Information Disclosure System” and “Statistical Surveys”. One

of the programs that have helped to play an effective role in supervising school principals is the “National Assessment of Educational Achievement” (NAEA) which has been extended to all South Korean schools since 2008. This system assists school principals in closely monitoring matters to make school principal aware of her/him performance and performance of other school principals (OECD 2014a).

However, one of the hallmarks of South Korea's education system is the high quality of its teachers, who are carefully selected, trained, supported and rewarded (OECD 2014b). Nevertheless, the traditional method of supervision is mainly student-centered. Since 2008, the Korean government has sought to strengthen the supervisory role of principals and parents through the “Evaluation of Teachers’ Skills Development Program” (Kim et al., 2006). Also since 2016, the government has emphasized the role of school principals in the professional development of teachers. Accordingly by sponsoring professional development programs, principals are tasked with encouraging teachers to participate in their teaching-related programs (Kim & Lee, 2020).

### *C) Juxtaposition & Comparison*

According to the data from description and interpretation stages, in this section, the data is juxtaposed and compared at the same time. To provide a logical framework, the available data can be explained according to the purpose of the research as follows:

The first subject is related to the organizational structure in which school principals work in all three selected countries. Probably all three countries, influenced by their historical, cultural and social factors, prefer the existence of a central power to create a unified procedure in the education system. For this reason, the main decision-maker for the management of schools in all three countries is the Ministry of Education - following a high / low structure and a centralized process. This centralization has led the Ministry of Education to oversee the performance of principals and teachers through provincial, regional, and local administrations. At the same time, during the last three decades, in all selected countries, there is a strong tendency among educational policymakers to delegate more power and authority to school principals and teachers.

Another factor that has less impact on the principal's supervisory role is the educational structure. While the primary level lasts 6 years in Japan and South Korea, in Iran the Ministry of Education has tried to divide this six-year into two three-year sections - with separate principals, teachers and schools. However, in some districts, pupils in all six years attend the same school due



to a shortage of students. Thus, it seems that the Iran education system has hired more principals to supervise and lead primary schools. According to Iran's law, the gender of school principals has been considered by educational policy makers. The gender of school principal should be the same as gender of pupils. For this reason, while the number of male principals in Iran is higher - due to the gender segregation of students - in Japan and South Korea, gender is not an important factor for selection of school principal. To what extent the principal's gender can affect her / his supervisory and leadership role, as well as the performance of the school and students, requires further research. Another feature of school principals' demographics is their age. Analysis of data related to the description section shows that the age of primary school principals in South Korea is more than Japanese and Iranian principals. Of course, the emphasis on the role of the principal's age and experience in all three countries has been considered by the policy makers of the educational system. However, due to Iran's very young population structure - 50% of the population is under 35 years old - age is not an important factor in the process of school principal selection.

Another component is the social status of school management in all three countries. What all three educational systems have in common is the high social respect of principals for parents, teachers, and students. At the same time, given the role of age and work experience, Korean and Japanese managers seem to enjoy much more social respect. The next component is the employment conditions of school principals. In all three countries, factors such as age, level of education, in-service training, passing written and oral exams (such as interviews), and professional reputation are considered in selecting a school principal. In terms of rules and regulations, it should be said that the Iran education system has more conditions and criteria for the election of the principal. For example, In Iran unlike South Korea and Japan, the principal's political and religious beliefs are taken into account. Also, male principals must be married. The role and responsibilities of school principals is another important issue for educational policymakers in all three selected countries. The data indicated that in all three educational systems, the level of professional expectation from school principals has increased. Of course, the beginning of educational reforms to redefine role of principal in Japan and South Korea has had a longer background and rapidity.

Other factor refers to diversity of the principal's supervisory role. In all three countries, school principals are legally entrusted with a number of responsibilities. At the same time, the educational structure in these countries supports centralism. However, the transfer of more power to school principals in South Korea and Japan has been faster than in Iran. Data analysis also revealed that

the supervisory role of principals in three countries is far from top-down, and principals - as educational leaders - must strive to enhance the professional development of teachers. In addition, role of school principals can be divided into three parts: educational, administrative and social. The current situation of supervisory role of school principals was considered in the previous sections. While the pace of reform in the supervisory role of school principals in South Korea and Japan is very fast, little has changed in the role of Iranian principals. School principals in Iran still devote most of their time to executive roles and in practice do not have much impact on teachers 'professional development and students' academic achievement.

The last issue refers to macro-policies aimed at changing the supervisory role of school principals. In all three countries, legislatures - in particular the Ministry of Education - have adopted a variety of documents, plans and programs to improve role of school principals in the face of societal developments. The main purpose of these remedial programs is to change the principal from role of "supervisor" to modern roles such as effective leadership, participatory decision maker, social activist and learner. Table 2 shows juxtaposition of different components which affect supervisory role of school principals in selected countries.

Table 2: Juxtaposition of different components of supervisory role of primary school principals in Iran, Japan and South Korea

<b>Components</b>	<b>Iran</b>	<b>South Korea</b>	<b>Japan</b>
Organizational structure	Centralized	Centralized	Centralized
Educational structure	Sexual segregation	No gender segregation	No gender segregation
Manager's social status	High	High	High
Age	Diversity	Seniority	Seniority
Gender	Important	Insignificant	Insignificant
Job experience	Relative importance	Maximum importance	Maximum importance
Political and religious beliefs	Very important	Insignificant	Insignificant
Success in written test	Relative importance	Relative importance	Relative importance
Success in interview	Maximum importance	Maximum importance	Maximum importance
Level of Education	University degree	University degree	University degree
In-service training	Relative importance	Relative importance	Maximum importance
professional expectation from principal	Relative	Ascensional	Ascensional
Variety of roles	High	High	High
Practical roles	Low	High	High
Role satisfaction	medium	High	High

According to Table 2, a more accurate picture of the status of supervisory role of primary school principals in the three selected countries can be provided. These data showed that out of fifteen components related to the supervisory role of school principal, there are similarities between selected countries in only six components, and in other components, there is obvious difference between these educational systems (Table 3).

Table 3: Comparison of different components of supervisory role of primary school principals in Iran, Japan and South Korea

<b>Components</b>	<b>Iran</b>	<b>South Korea</b>	<b>Japan</b>
Organizational structure	*	*	*
Educational structure	✓	*	*
Manager's social status	*	*	*
Age	✓	*	*
Gender	✓	*	*
Job experience	✓	*	*
Political and religious beliefs	✓	*	*
Success in written test	*	*	*
Success in interview	*	*	*
Level of Education	*	*	*
In-service training	*	*	✓
professional expectation from principal	✓	*	*
Variety of roles	*	*	*
Practical roles	✓	*	*
Role satisfaction	✓	*	*

The data in Table 3 show that there are similarities between three countries in six components of organizational structure, social status of principals, university degree, exams and interviews, and variety of school principal duties. This table also reveals that there are differences in status and role of school principals in eight components between Iran, Japan and South Korea. These differences are:

- Division of students and schools according to student gender in Iran
- Attention to age in selection of principal in Japan & South Korea
- Lack of attention to gender of school principals in Japan & South Korea
- Importance of work experience in principal selection process in Japan & South Korea
- Lack of attention to political and religious beliefs of principal in Japan & South Korea
- Maximum expectations from school principals in Japan and South Korea and moderate expectations in Iran

- Implementation of new roles of school principals in South Korea and Japan more than Iran
- More job satisfaction among school principals of South Korea & Japan than Iranian school principals

Also, there is a similarity between Iran and South Korea in only one component (in-service training). While attention to in-service training for school principals is somewhat taken seriously in these two countries (with an average of less than 6 months attending in-service school management courses), in Japan school principals have to spend more time in In-service training classes.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The purpose of this article was to present findings related to a comparative study of supervisory role of primary school principals in three countries of Iran, South Korea, and Japan. The research literature highlighted that a few study has been done about supervisory role of school principals in developed and developing countries. Also, a review of previous research showed that the supervisory role of school principals has undergone a conceptual change. However, the present research indicates that out of fifteen components, in six components, there are similarities between Iran, South Korea and Japan education system. This research also revealed:

- The Ministry of Education plays a pivotal role in formulating policies related to the selection of school principals in all three countries,
- In selected countries, school principals have good social respect,
- In all countries, school principals must have a university degree,
- In selected countries, getting a school management position depends on passing a written test and an interview,
- In three countries, many roles and expectations have been assigned to the school principal.

These findings are consistent with research of Ahmadi & Mir Moeini (2012); Arefi, (2008); Musapur, (2012); Safi, (2003) and Shahrabi Farahani, Khosravi Babadi & Khorshidi (2019). They showed that in Iran, several roles have been assigned to school managers. They also noted the impact of centralized structure of education system on power and authority of principal. Research by Kim & Lee (2020); Kim & Kim (2005) and Kim et al. (2006) also indicated impact of this factor on the supervisory and leadership role of school principals in South Korea and Japan.

Another important finding of present study is to determine the eight differences between Iran's education system with South Korea and Japan. The first difference is the attention to gender in choosing a school principal in Iran. This difference reflects influence of two factors, i.e. politics

and religion, on the Iranian education system, while Koreans and Japanese do not value the gender similarity of pupils with teachers and principals. This finding has not been considered in previous studies. Another difference is lack of serious attention to age and seniority in choosing a principal for schools in Iran. In fact, in the last decade, the Iran educational system has been facing the challenge of "teacher retirement" in such a way that it has become more and more forced to employ young teachers and principals. Another finding of study indicates that in selection process of school principals in South Korea and Japan, the political and religious beliefs of volunteers are not important, while in Iran these beliefs play a vital role. This finding has not been considered by researchers in previous studies. Another finding is that in all three countries, the traditional role of school principal has changed from the person in charge of overseeing everything to the person who should lead the school. However, in Iran, this change has not occurred in practice, and school principals do not play an active role in matters such as teachers' professional development, teaching and learning, and students' academic achievement.

In fact, they are mostly intermediaries between teachers and the district education department, and to some extent parents. In other words, the many problems that schools in Iran have - such as lack of funding, centralized system, multiple administrative and administrative duties - does not remain more opportunity for principals to play important roles same as constructive leadership, learning leader, and active learning partner. This finding is also observed in research of Ahmadi & Mir Moeini, (2012); Anderson & Reynolds, (2015); Kim & Lee, (2020); Owaki (2005); Tsujimura (2014) and Zahed Babalan et al., (2019). These researchers have also mentioned the gap between what school principals should do and what they really do.

Another interesting point to note is that the principal's supervisory role in Iran is much broader than roles defined in South Korea and Japan. In Iran, for example, school principals have responsibilities related to the student's religious, social, family, or cultural aspects (such as supervision of religious rites performance at school), while in Japan and South Korea; principal roles are primarily focused on educational and professional affairs. This indicates cultural / social differences between societies and their impact on school management system. From the perspective of comparative research, previous researchers have not paid much attention to these regional and local differences.

Other finding is that the level of satisfaction of school principals in Japan and South Korea is very high, while empirical evidence shows that Iranian principals are generally less satisfied due to

the many problems of schools. The latest finding is that in all three countries it is very difficult to prove how the school principal really contributes to the professional development of teachers, what steps she/he takes to transform traditional leadership into constructive leadership, and how she/he helps students' academic progress. In fact, this is an international challenge that reveals that there are still not many objective criteria for measuring the supervisory performance and leadership of school principals. What we do know is that role of school principal in interacting with teachers has expanded in countries such as Japan and South Korea. Principals are more concerned with parents and the local community, and are more inclined than ever to downplay their supervisory and empowering role. They also pay more attention to students' performance than ever before. However, it is not yet clear to what extent principal's role will lead to better scores by students in international exams. For this reason, it is difficult to make suggestions for educational planners. However, according to the findings of present study, it is suggested to the policy makers of the Iran educational management system that : Firstly reduce the scope of power and authority of regional and local education departments and increase the powers and responsibilities of school principals; Second, with regards to experiences of Japan and South Korea in process of school principals selection, senior and experienced teachers should be given priority; Thirdly, the role of senior teachers in establishing communication between teachers and parents with the principal should be emphasized and role of teachers' council in decision-making should be more prominent; and Fourth, efforts should be made to prepare specific and objective standards for evaluating the performance of school principals - according to the social and professional realities of Iran society.

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