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PRINCIPALS' ACADEMIC TRAINING FOR THEIR ROLE AS HUMAN CAPITAL MANAGERS

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Abstract

Human capital management is discovering, developing, and retaining qualified individuals in organizations; this is vital to educational institutions' success. As the school's leader, the principal is crucial in human capital management. This article will examine the academic training principals receive to prepare them for their role as principals, specifically the human capital functions of their role. A comprehensive content analysis revealed the types of institutions, courses, and modalities often associated with educational leadership master's degree programs. The results of this study indicate that many schools offer courses in human capital management. The range and depth of these courses vary widely, as some institutions provide a comprehensive education in human capital management while others offer only a minimum education. The study's findings contribute to our understanding of how colleges and universities approach the topic of human capital management, reveal the prevalence of human capital management courses in educational leadership programs, and variations of human capital management skills within these programs across geographical regions, types of institutions (private vs. public) and program modalities. To determine how effectively these courses educate principals for their jobs as human capital managers, future research may assess the course content.

Keywords: principal preparation, human capital management, principalship, academic preparation, curriculum

1. Introduction

Liu et al. (2017) define a human capital manager as personnel in an organization entrusted with overseeing the human capital function whose leading roles include recruitment and selection, talent management, performance evaluation, and employee training and development.

Principals are human capital managers because they have a vital role in managing human capital in their schools, including the recruitment, development, and retention of teachers and other personnel. Effectiveness in this aspect of their job requires that principals acquire the requisite academic preparation. In recent years, the significance of human capital management in education has become more acknowledged. Effective human capital management has been linked to improved student results, enhanced teacher retention, and greater work satisfaction among educators (Allui & Sahni, 2016). Thus, many colleges and universities in the United States offer master's degree programs in educational leadership that emphasize human capital management (Allui & Sahni, 2016). However, the extent to which these courses sufficiently train future principals for their roles as human capital managers remains uncertain.

This study aims to analyze how principals are prepared academically, specifically regarding their role's human capital management functions. This role is often overlooked when considering a principal's responsibilities, yet it is crucial to their success. Principals require an academic background applicable to the range of their responsibilities, such as human capital management, due to the complexity of their various responsibilities. Similarly, principals must understand the nuances of human capital management, given the vast array of experts they supervise. Few studies have examined the principal's role as a manager of human capital and the competencies required to lead schools. Although several research studies and program designs have stressed the significance of principals as instructional leaders (Glickman, 2010), the vast majority minimize their role as human capital managers. Uncertainty surrounds the success of principal preparation programs in addressing the responsibilities, challenges, and vulnerabilities connected with people management, as well as the negative impact of the principal's knowledge gap on individual and institutional accomplishment. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What human capital management skills are emphasized in master's level educational leadership programs?

RQ2: To what extent do master's level educational leadership programs prepare principals to serve as human capital managers?

2. Methodology

For this study, a content analysis of educational leadership program information was conducted. Qualitative and quantitative analysis was performed to assess whether educational leadership master's programs provide sufficient training in human capital management for school principals. In educational leadership, human capital management is essential for school principals, who manage teachers and staff, implement policies and procedures, and ensure the school's overall success. For the purpose of this study, adequate training in human capital management was defined as the presence of one or more preparation courses dedicated to the concept of human capital management.

The study population includes all universities in the United States that offer graduate degree programs at the master's level in educational leadership, which may include majors such as educational administration, school leadership, instructional leadership, and school administration. The National Center for Education Statistics, Search for Schools and College database was used to identify all the colleges and universities within the United States that currently offer a master's degree in educational leadership. All colleges and universities not currently offering a master's degree in educational leadership were excluded. From the colleges and universities offering a master's degree in educational leadership, 258 of the 691 total educational leadership programs were selected using a random probability sampling method. These programs were included because they met the criteria of being master's level principal preparation programs, and they are the best fit for the study design as they allow for the collection of satisfactory data through online and text-based content by providing a detailed program course of study and course descriptions (Neuendorf, 2017).

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from the websites of the educational leadership master's programs. The qualitative data consisted of textual information from the program curriculum and course descriptions related to human capital management development. A summative content analysis was conducted to identify common themes and sub-themes of human capital management across the programs. This involved systematically analyzing the collected data by comparing it with pre-established themes and drawing inferences and conclusions from the analysis (Belias & Trehaus, 2022). Applying the human capital manager definition of Liu et al. (2017), four themes of human capital management were identified: selection and recruitment, training and development, employee evaluation, and retention. The researcher then searched for references to each theme in the program and course descriptions and counted their frequency.

The collected quantitative data was used to make inferences on whether educational leadership programs offer sufficient training in human capital management. The data calculated included the proportion of programs with a dedicated course in human capital management and the percentage of program coursework dedicated to human capital management. The statistics were stratified into different groups, such as public or private institutions, geographic regions, and modes of instruction. In order to analyze data for each program in the sample, data were collected from their respective websites, including the name of the college or university, the U.S. state where the program is located, whether the institution is public or private, the total number of credit hours required for the educational leadership program, the mode of instruction, the presence of a course in human capital management, and the number of program credits associated with courses in human capital management. The program's region was determined based on the U.S. state where it was located, using the Bureau of Labor and Statistics regional categorization (n.d.). Additionally, the percentage of coursework dedicated to human capital development was computed for each program by dividing the number of course credits in human capital development by the total number of course credits required for the program. This data was analyzed in Excel using descriptive statistical approaches to determine outcomes such as human capital management knowledge, skills, and education (Flores, Xu, & Yu, 2020).

3. Results

The qualitative data summary of the results is presented in the codebook in Table 1. The frequency of each code found within the program descriptions is shown.

Table 1

Frequencies of human capital management skills within course descriptions.

| Theme | N | Description |
|--------------------------------------|-----|--|
| Elements of human capital management | 149 | Human capital management involves the management of human resources, intending to optimize the performance and productivity of its employees. |
| Selection and recruitment | 46 | This involves attracting and hiring the best candidates for available positions using various channels such as job boards, social media, and employee referrals. |
| Training and development | 47 | This involves providing employees with the skills and knowledge they need to perform their jobs effectively and advance in their careers. |
| Employee Evaluation | 42 | Employee evaluation assesses an employee's job performance, skills, strengths, weaknesses, and potential for future growth. |
| Retention | 14 | This involves creating an environment that promotes employee commitment, fulfillment, and devotion. |

Using quantitative data, we examined the presence of human capital management courses in master's level educational leadership programs. Table 2 shows that of the 258 programs in our sample, 90 (34.9%) had a course dedicated to human capital management, and 168 (65.1%) did not offer any course in human capital management.

Table 2

Presence of human capital management courses.

| Presence of Coursework | N | % |
|------------------------|-----|-------|
| No | 168 | 65.1% |
| Yes | 90 | 34.9% |
| Total | 268 | 100% |

Table 3. Frequencies of programs with and without human capital management training in private and public institutions.

| Institution Type | Yes | % | No | % | N |
|------------------|-----|-------|-----|-------|-----|
| Private | 41 | 33.9% | 80 | 66.1% | 121 |
| Public | 49 | 35.8% | 88 | 64.2% | 137 |
| | 90 | 34.9% | 168 | 65.1% | 258 |

Of the 121 private institutions, 41 (N = 121, 33.9%) had human capital management training, and of the 137 public institutions, 49 (N = 137, 35.8%) had such training. Table 4 shows the frequency of each human capital management skill within programs, split by public and private institutions.

Table 4

Frequencies of human capital management skills training in private and public institutions.

| Institution | Selection and Recruitment | | Training and Development | | Employee Evaluation | | Retention | | Total |
|-------------|---------------------------|-------|--------------------------|-------|---------------------|-------|-----------|-------|-------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N |
| Public | 25 | 31.2% | 23 | 28.7% | 23 | 28.7% | 9 | 11.2% | 80 |
| Private | 21 | 30.4% | 24 | 34.7% | 19 | 27.5% | 5 | 7.2% | 69 |
| | 46 | 30.8% | 47 | 31.5% | 42 | 28.1% | 14 | 9.4% | 149 |

Overall, private institutions showed a lower presence of courses dedicated to each human capital management skill in comparison to public institutions. Of the programs that offered human capital management courses, public colleges and universities have emphasized training and development and employee evaluation equally (N = 80, 28.7%). Also, among public institutions, selection and recruitment were emphasized the most (N = 80, 31.2%), while at private institutions, training and development were emphasized the most (N = 69, 34.7%). Retention was the least emphasized skill at public (N = 80, 11.2%) and private institutions (N = 69, 7.2%). Next, we analyzed descriptive statistics for human capital management training across geographic regions in the United States, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Frequencies of programs with and without human capital management training by geographic region.

| Geographic Region | Yes | % | No | % | N |
|-------------------|-----|-------|-----|-------|-----|
| Northeast | 13 | 34.2% | 25 | 65.8% | 38 |
| Midwest | 20 | 30.8% | 45 | 69.2% | 65 |
| South | 42 | 36.5% | 73 | 63.5% | 115 |
| West | 15 | 37.5% | 25 | 62.5% | 40 |
| | 90 | 34.9% | 168 | 65.1% | 258 |

The number of programs with human capital management training was the highest in the South (N = 115, 36.5%), followed by the Midwest (N = 65, 30.8%), West (N = 40, 37.5%), and the Northeast (N = 38, 34.2%).

Table 6

Frequencies of human capital management skills training by geographic region.

| Geographic Region | Selection and Recruitment | | Training and Development | | Employee Evaluation | | Retention | | Total |
|-------------------|---------------------------|-------|--------------------------|-------|---------------------|-------|-----------|-------|-------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N |
| Northeast | 10 | 25.6% | 15 | 38.4% | 11 | 28.2% | 3 | 7.6% | 39 |
| Midwest | 4 | 23.5% | 5 | 29.4% | 6 | 35.2% | 2 | 11.7% | 17 |
| South | 21 | 31.8% | 20 | 30.3% | 18 | 27.2% | 7 | 10.6% | 66 |
| West | 11 | 40.7% | 7 | 25.9% | 7 | 25.9% | 2 | 7.4% | 27 |
| Total | 46 | 30.8% | 47 | 31.5% | 42 | 28.1% | 14 | 9.4% | 149 |

All geographic regions showed a presence of courses focusing on human capital management skills. Colleges and universities in the South showed the highest rate at 66, while those in the Midwest showed the lowest rate of human capital management skills at 17. Selection and recruitment showed the highest rate of all skills across all regions at 21. In contrast, at 2, retention was the lowest among all geographic regions and skills. Next, we examined the amount of human capital management training for the mode of instruction—either on-campus only, online-only, or a hybrid design that combines both on-campus and online components. This data is summarized in Table 7.

Table 7*Frequencies of programs with and without human capital management training by mode of instruction.*

| Mode of Instruction | Yes | % | No | % | N |
|----------------------------|------------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|
| On-Campus Only | 16 | 31.4% | 35 | 68.6% | 51 |
| Online Only | 24 | 37.5% | 40 | 62.5% | 64 |
| Hybrid | 50 | 35.0% | 90 | 65.0% | 143 |
| | 90 | 34.9% | 168 | 65.1% | 258 |

The number of programs with human capital management training was 16 in programs that were on-campus only, 24 in programs that were online only, and 50 in hybrid programs. The percentage of programs with human capital management training within each instruction type was the highest in online programs ($N = 64$, 37.5) in comparison to hybrid programs ($N = 143$, 35.0%) and in-person programs ($N = 51$, 31.4%). We also examined the rate of human capital management skills split by modes of instruction. This data is summarized in Table 8.

Table 8*Frequencies of human capital management skills training by mode of instruction.*

| Mode of Instruction | Selection and Recruitment | | Training and Development | | Employee Evaluation | | Retention | | Total |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------|----------|----------------------------|----------|------------------|----------|--------------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | |
| On-Campus Only | 8 | 30.7% | 8 | 30.7% | 7 | 26.9% | 3 | 11.5% | 26 |
| Online Only | 11 | 39.2% | 7 | 25.0% | 9 | 32.1% | 1 | 3.5% | 28 |
| Hybrid | 27 | 28.4% | 32 | 33.6% | 26 | 27.3% | 10 | 10.5% | 95 |
| | 46 | 30.8% | 47 | 31.5% | 42 | 28.1% | 14 | 9.4% | 149 |

Colleges and universities offering a hybrid mode of instruction showed the highest rate ($N = 95$) of courses focused on human capital management skills. In contrast, on-campus programs showed the lowest rate ($N = 26$) of human capital management skills-focused courses. Training and development were the highest at 32 compared to retention at one, which showed the lowest rate among all modes of instruction. Additionally, we examined program majors. Table 9 shows some principal preparation program majors offered in various colleges and universities within the United States.

Table 9*Frequencies of principal preparation program majors.*

| Major | N | % |
|--|----------|----------|
| Instructional Leadership | 17 | 6.6% |
| Educational Leadership | 131 | 50.8% |
| School Administration | 12 | 4.7% |
| Educational Administration | 42 | 16.3% |
| Administration and Supervision | 6 | 2.3% |
| Administration and Leadership | 3 | 1.2% |
| Education | 4 | 1.6% |
| Educational Administration and Supervision | 4 | 1.6% |
| Building Level Administration | 4 | 1.6% |
| Leadership in Pre-K to 12 Education | 2 | 0.8% |
| Education Leadership, Management, and Policy | 4 | 1.6% |
| Educational Leadership and Administration | 7 | 2.7% |
| School Leadership | 13 | 5.0% |
| School Administration and Leadership | 2 | 0.8% |
| Education Management | 2 | 0.8% |
| Principal License | 5 | 1.9% |
| Total | 258 | 100.0% |

Most institutions offer educational leadership as the major for candidates preparing to become principals ($n = 131$, 50.8%), followed closely by master's degree programs ($n = 42$, 16.3%) in various United States institutions offering educational administration as their major course.

Furthermore, among master's degree programs offered, 6.6% (17) offered instructional leadership, followed by 5% (13) representing school leadership courses offered under master's degree programs in various institutions. Finally, illustrated in Table 10, we examined the percentage of coursework attributed to human capital management training.

Table 10

Coursework attributed to human capital management training.

| Human Capital Management Training Coursework | | | |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| HCM Credits | Avg. Total Credits | Avg. HCM/Total % | Std. Dev HCM/Total |
| <i>M</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>%</i> |
| 3.1 | 33.7 | 9.28% | 1.8% |

The average percentage of coursework, as found by taking the ratio of credit hours attributed to human capital management training to the program's total credit hours. Across all educational leadership programs, only 9.3% (with a standard deviation of 1.8%) of course credits focused on human capital management skills ($n=258$).

4. Discussion

This research study explored academic preparation variables impacting how school principals can function as human capital managers. It aimed to determine how school principals are academically prepared to carry out the human capital functions of their role. Unfortunately, previous research has shown that many school principals do not receive adequate preparation (Grissom et al., 2019), causing subsequent issues as they attempt to manage human capital within their schools. Therefore, this study sought to analyze how principals are prepared academically, specifically regarding their role's human capital management functions. Overall, the research questions asked how principals are academically prepared to perform the tasks involved in human capital management. There were two specific research questions: 1) what human capital management skills are emphasized in master's level educational leadership programs, and 2) to what extent do master's level educational leadership programs prepare principals to serve as human capital managers. The hypothesis stated that principal preparation programs academically prepare principals to assume primary functions of their role with limited course considerations to their role's human capital management functions.

These study results indicate a noticeable deficit in human capital management training within master's level principal preparation programs across U.S. colleges and universities. The study sought to determine if the human capital management skills of being able to select, recruit, train, develop, evaluate, and retain staff were being taught in these principal preparation programs. After analyzing and coding the data, the central theme discovered from the human capital management course descriptions was that these courses in master's level educational leadership programs emphasized training and development skills. In contrast, skills involving the retention of teachers and staff were least emphasized across all courses. This suggests that principals receive adequate training in training and developing staff but may require further academic training in retaining employees.

This need for further training in retention is consistent with the current retention challenges schools face today. Grissom & Bartanen (2019) identified a lack of administrative support, leadership opportunities, and school culture as primary reasons why retention issues exist in schools, all of which are influenced by school principal actions. These conditions compel many teachers to switch schools, while others leave the profession altogether (Grissom & Bartanen, 2019). Young (2018) also highlights that principals play a significant role in retaining teachers, which further necessitates that principals are adequately trained in retaining employees. Young (2018) also notes that teachers are more likely to stay at their schools and in the teaching profession when given advancement opportunities, mentoring and coaching, and proper evaluation. This further emphasizes the importance of principals being adequately prepared in all areas of human capital management.

Furthermore, the retention issue is that it may not be easy for schools to find teacher replacements of equal caliber, forcing them to accept teachers with lower standards and qualifications (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Replacing these teachers of equal quality is detrimental and has long-term consequences on the quality of education children receive (Grissom & Bartanen, 2019). Moreover, apart from the difficulties in finding quality replacements, schools that experience turnover are forced to spend more costs for the whole recruitment and selection process (Harris et al., 2019).

It is understood that recruiting new teachers is costly, let alone the challenges of securing highly qualified teachers. School districts can offset these costs by ensuring principals are prepared to assume their role's human capital management functions (Harris et al., 2019). Principals who receive the necessary training will be more likely to retain the teachers in their buildings, thus reducing the need for costly recruitment efforts.

The second research question focused on the degree to which master's level educational leadership programs prepared principals to function as human capital managers. The quantitative results show that only about a third of institutions provide this academic preparation. For public institutions, only 35% offered courses on human capital management, equivalent to private institutions (34%). This suggests that approximately 65% of institutions preparing principals as school leaders are missing a significant aspect of their preparation. Principals could mismanage this aspect of their job without adequate academic training in managing human capital. This could lead to staff dissatisfaction, high staff turnover, and poor student academic performance resulting from the lack of stable, well-developed staff. Anderson (2017) posits that highly trained and developed school principals often lead to better school performance than their poorly trained counterparts. This is particularly so because the former translate their knowledge and skills into actions that favor students' achievements. However, in creating and administering preparation programs for principals, there is often a lack of curriculum related to human capital management. Academic preparedness enhances a principal's knowledge, skills, and competence in a particular discipline. When that discipline is not included in required academic preparation, the principal is left with a skills gap that may impact all areas of their performance. Consequently, this study holds that changes should be made to the coursework offered by colleges and universities, preparing candidates for the principal role. The programs of study offered by these institutions should include a more robust integration of human capital management courses into their curricula to ensure principal effectiveness.

It is vital to consider the study's limitations when evaluating the results. The study focused primarily on educational leadership programs offered by U.S. schools at the master's level. Thus, the findings may not apply to other countries or programs for educational leadership provided at the doctoral level. In addition, the study relied on secondary data collected from university websites, which may not have been exhaustive or trustworthy. The study did not examine each schools' course materials in human capital management. This would have provided more insight into how they approach the individual skills within this topic.

Since the absence of human capital management coursework in principal preparation programs has been shown to exist within the results of this study, it is recommended that additional research be conducted. This may include qualitative and quantitative studies, aiming to understand this phenomenon better while identifying methods that may be used to promote better academic preparation of school principals for taking on human capital management functions. The subject content of these courses may be the topic of future research to determine the specific competencies and skills educational leaders need to gain in human capital management. The effectiveness of these programs in preparing educational administrators to manage human resources in higher education institutions is also the subject of additional research. Studies could also determine what should be included in these human capital management classes, with school principals surveyed to get their opinions and perspectives.

7. Conclusion

This content analysis shows that approximately one-third of schools and universities offering master's level educational leadership programs for school principals also provide human capital management training. The study's findings contribute to our understanding of how universities approach the topic of human capital management and reveal the preponderance of human capital management courses in educational leadership programs. The implications underscore the current issue within these programs. The minimal number of courses offered and the lack of emphasis on some skills suggest that these programs may not adequately prepare most school principals to take on roles as human capital managers. This study concludes by emphasizing the necessity of universities in providing complete and relevant education to aspiring educational leaders and the continual need for human capital management in educational leadership programs.

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