



Managerial Abilities of Primary School Principals and Their Relationship to School Performance in Kratie Town, Cambodia

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the managerial abilities of thirteen primary school principals serving in the five Sangkats of Kratie Town, Kratie Province, Cambodia, with assessments from five supervising education officers. A quantitative descriptive survey design was used, and a structured questionnaire covering seven functional domains, administrative, personnel, financial, instructional, student, community, and facility management, was validated by three experts in educational administration before administration to the full population of principals and officers. Results show principals rated their overall managerial ability as average across most domains, with facility management and community relations rated highest and administrative and personnel management rated lowest. Every principal had entered their first principalship directly, with no prior leadership experience, and years of service with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport closely matched years in the current post, indicating a group experienced in teaching but new to school administration. Recurring weaknesses appeared in delegating responsibilities, recognizing individual teachers and students, and maintaining records, while principals were comparatively confident in direct, hands-on tasks. These findings suggest principal preparation in Cambodia's rural provinces should prioritize delegation, staff and student recognition, and documentation practices, particularly through induction support delivered at the point of appointment rather than later in a principal's tenure. The study is limited by its small, single-district sample, and its findings should be read as descriptive of Kratie Town rather than representative of Cambodia as a whole.

Keywords: Cambodia, Kratie Town, Managerial Abilities, Primary School Principals, School Performance

INTRODUCTION

In Cambodia, school principals are appointed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport following nomination by the Provincial Office of Education, and candidates are typically drawn from senior teachers with at least five years of classroom experience. This pattern is not unique to Cambodia. Across many education systems, principal recruitment tends to favor internal candidates who have already proven themselves as teachers, on the assumption that classroom credibility translates into administrative competence, though a systematic review of principal recruitment research has shown that the qualities schools actually need in a leader are not always the same qualities that made someone a strong teacher (Bush, 2022; Khanal & Regmi, 2024). An international scoping review of pathways into the principalship reinforces this concern, finding that across decades of research on how people become principals, far more attention has gone to formal appointment policies than to whether prospective principals receive any structured preparation before stepping into the role (Montecinos et al., 2022). In the Cambodian case, once the Provincial Office of Education submits a nomination, the ministry reviews the candidate's qualifications and, if these are found acceptable, issues a formal appointment (Seng, 2025). This appointment carries with it a set of duties that has grown substantially more complex over the past two decades, and understanding that growth is central to understanding the situation principals in provinces like Kratie now find themselves in.

Historically, the responsibilities of Cambodian school principals were limited mainly to facility maintenance, record keeping, and reporting to higher administrative levels, with little authority over instructional matters (Tep et al., 2025). This began to shift after Cambodia's decentralization of education in 2002, when decision-making authority was progressively transferred from the national level down to provincial, district, and school levels (Seng, 2025). As a result, principals took on a much wider set of duties, moving from routine administration into instructional supervision, community engagement, and broader school management, a pattern consistent with what has been observed more broadly in decentralized systems, where the demands placed on school leaders tend to multiply faster than the support structures built to prepare them for those demands (Tintoré et al., 2022). This shift mirrors a wider challenge documented across low- and middle-income countries, where improving school quality has increasingly been pursued by strengthening the managerial skills of school leaders, even though a systematic review of such interventions found their effects on student learning to be modest and highly dependent on how well the training connects to principals' actual daily responsibilities (Anand et al., 2023).

This growth in responsibility has not been matched by an equivalent growth in preparation. It remains unclear whether Cambodian school principals receive sufficient professional training before they are expected to carry out these expanded

duties, and the gap between what principals are asked to do and what they are actually equipped to do continues to raise concern. Run et al. (2025) found that curriculum implementation in Cambodian teacher education is still constrained by limited access to structured professional development, a limitation that extends naturally to school leadership as well, since principals are drawn from the same pool of teachers and given comparatively little additional preparation before stepping into a managerial role. Evidence from other systems suggests this gap matters in practice, since principals who receive structured induction and professional development have been shown to improve teacher effectiveness and, through it, student achievement, even where such programs are implemented gradually and at modest scale (Steinberg & Yang, 2022). A systematic review of the contextual challenges principals report facing worldwide similarly found that difficulties tied to inadequate preparation and unclear role expectations rank among the most frequently documented problems across very different education systems, which suggests the Cambodian pattern is a local instance of a much broader concern rather than an isolated one (Tamadoni et al., 2024). The stakes of this gap are not small, since the quality of school leadership has a demonstrable effect on outcomes elsewhere in the system. In decentralized education settings, principals who exercise strong instructional and distributed leadership have been shown to meaningfully influence teacher professional development (Amzat et al., 2022). Even in community-based educational models, such as Cambodia's monastic primary schools, the strength of school leadership in integrating administrative, instructional, and community functions is central to how well the school performs its broader role (Loeung & Phal, 2025).

Kratie is one of the more rural and remote provinces of Cambodia, and its education system carries particular weight for the learners, educators, and communities who depend on it. Despite this, relatively little is known about how primary school principals in Kratie Town understand and manage their own responsibilities across administration, finance, personnel, instruction, student affairs, community relations, and facilities. Understanding this requires asking principals directly, since research comparing how principals with different levels of teaching and managerial experience perceive their own leadership competencies has found that self-perception is not fixed but shifts meaningfully with experience, which makes a principal's own assessment of their abilities a genuinely informative starting point rather than a mere formality (Cebrián et al., 2022). This gap in the evidence makes it difficult for education authorities to design training or support that actually matches what principals in this setting need, and it is this gap that the present study addresses. Accordingly, this study investigates the managerial abilities of primary school principals in Kratie Town, Kratie Province, and how these abilities relate to school performance, guided by an interest in who these principals are, how they assess their own managerial strengths, which areas of their

work they see as most in need of improvement, and what changes they themselves would propose to strengthen their managerial practice.

The findings of this study are expected to help primary school principals in Kratie Town take stock of their managerial abilities and identify concrete areas for growth. Beyond individual development, the study aims to support better collaboration at the school level and to contribute evidence that can inform wider education reform efforts. The results are intended to be useful not only to the principals themselves but also to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport and the Royal Government of Cambodia as they continue working to improve education quality and school management practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundations of Managerial Ability

This study's understanding of managerial ability rests on two long-standing administrative theories that are retained here as foundational grand theories rather than as routine citations. The first is Katz's three-skill model, set out in his classic Harvard Business Review article *Skills of an Effective Administrator*, which holds that an effective administrator draws on three distinct kinds of skill. Technical skill refers to proficiency in the specific methods and procedures of the work itself. Human skill refers to the ability to work effectively with and through other people. Conceptual skill refers to the ability to see the organization as a whole and to understand how its parts depend on one another (Katz, 2009). The second is Fayol's classification of managerial functions, described in his book *General and Industrial Management*, which identifies planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating, and controlling as the core functions any manager performs regardless of the setting in which they work (Fayol, 2016). Taken together, these two frameworks provide the conceptual basis for treating a school principal's managerial ability as something that can be examined across distinct functional domains, including administration, personnel, finance, instruction, student affairs, community relations, and facilities, rather than as a single undifferentiated trait.

These frameworks continue to be applied in current educational leadership research, which suggests they remain useful despite their age. A recent study of secondary school principals in Kenya, for example, applied Katz's technical skill dimension directly to examine how principals' proficiency with school procedures related to students' academic performance, finding a measurable relationship between the two (Cheluch et al., 2024). This kind of application indicates that the three-skill model still offers a workable lens for empirical research, even as the specific instruments used to measure each skill continue to evolve.

Principal Self-Efficacy and Instructional Leadership in Decentralized Systems

A separate but related body of research has examined principals' self-efficacy and instructional leadership, and this literature helps explain why managerial ability

matters beyond the individual principal. In decentralized education systems, principals who practice strong instructional and distributed leadership have been shown to meaningfully influence teacher professional development (Amzat et al., 2022). More recent work has refined this picture by showing that the relationship is often indirect rather than direct. A meta-analytic structural equation modeling study found that principal instructional leadership shapes teacher self-efficacy largely through its effect on collective efficacy at the school level, meaning that a principal's leadership behaviors work partly by shaping how capable the staff as a whole feel about their shared work, not only through direct instruction to individual teachers (Karakose et al., 2024; Kılınç et al., 2025). This finding complicates any simple assumption that principal skill translates automatically into classroom outcomes, and it points to a gap that is directly relevant here. A large share of this literature, whether it concerns self-efficacy, instructional leadership, or the broader problems principals report facing, has been produced in large or well-resourced education systems such as Indonesia, China, and several Anglo-Saxon countries, and a scoping review of the difficulties principals encounter found that more than half of the studies reviewed originated from Anglo-Saxon contexts alone (Tintoré et al., 2022). Comparatively little of this evidence comes from principals working in small, rural, or resource-constrained settings, which is precisely the setting this study addresses.

Managerial Abilities of School Principals in the Cambodian Context

Within Cambodia specifically, the available evidence describes a system in which formal expectations of principals have expanded considerably without a matching expansion of preparation. Cambodia's Professional Standards for School Principals lay out five competency areas, including personal excellence, strategic thinking and change management, managerial leadership, leading learning and teaching, and community-based engagement, but an analysis of these standards found that they remain rigid in places and do not always reflect how decentralization has actually played out at the local level, leaving room for gaps between what principals are formally expected to do and what they are able to do in practice (Pov et al., 2026; Rahimi & Oh, 2024). This gap is echoed in the broader literature on teacher preparation in Cambodia, where curriculum implementation continues to be constrained by limited access to structured professional development, a constraint that plausibly extends to school leadership given that principals are drawn from the same pool of teachers (Run et al., 2025). Even in community-based educational models, such as Cambodia's monastic primary schools, researchers have found that the strength of school leadership in integrating administrative, instructional, and community functions is central to how well the institution performs its broader role, reinforcing the idea that managerial ability in the Cambodian context cannot be reduced to any single function but must be

understood across the same kind of functional domains Katz and Fayol originally proposed (Loeung & Phal, 2025).

This is where the present study locates its contribution. Existing research on principal recruitment has shown that the qualities which make someone a strong teacher are not necessarily the same qualities that make a strong administrator, which means appointment alone offers little assurance of managerial readiness (Lee & Mao, 2023). Cambodian principals are appointed from the teaching ranks in essentially this way, yet no study to date has asked primary school principals in a setting like Kratie Town to assess their own managerial abilities directly across the administrative, personnel, financial, instructional, student, community, and facilities domains that the theoretical framework above identifies (Nuryani et al., 2021; Om, 2025). Addressing that gap, and identifying which of these domains principals themselves regard as most in need of improvement, is the specific contribution this study aims to make.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative descriptive survey design to examine the managerial abilities of primary school principals in Kratie Town, Kratie Province, Cambodia (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). This design was selected because the central aim of the study was to describe and quantify how principals rate their own managerial abilities across several functional domains, rather than to interpret the meaning of a lived experience, and a descriptive survey approach is well suited to capturing patterns of self-reported competence across a defined population in a structured, comparable way. The approach also aligns with the broader observation that the qualities associated with strong teaching do not automatically translate into strong administrative practice, which makes a structured, domain-by-domain assessment of principals' own managerial self-ratings a more direct way of examining the specific question this study asks than an unstructured or purely interpretive approach would allow (Lee & Mao, 2023).

The population consisted of all thirteen primary school principals serving in the five Sangkats of Kratie Town, together with the five education officers from the local Department of Education, Youth and Sport who directly oversee them, for a total of eighteen participants. Because the population of principals in this setting is small and fully identifiable, the study used census sampling rather than drawing a smaller sample from a larger pool, meaning every principal and every relevant education officer in Kratie Town was invited to participate rather than a subset selected through random or purposive methods. This approach was chosen to maximize the completeness of the picture obtained, given that the entire population of interest was accessible and small enough to include in full, and it avoids the sampling bias that can arise when only part of a small, well-defined group is surveyed.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire divided into four sections, covering demographic profile, managerial abilities as rated by both principals themselves and their supervising education officers, areas principals identified as needing improvement, and suggestions for how those abilities might be strengthened. Before administration, the questionnaire was reviewed and revised based on feedback from a research panel, then evaluated by three experts holding doctoral degrees in educational administration and management, whose ratings were analyzed using Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance to confirm an acceptable level of agreement on the instrument's content before it was finalized. Once validated, the questionnaire was administered to all thirteen principals and all five education officers, and responses were analyzed descriptively to produce the frequency and percentage distributions reported in the following section.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Before turning to principals' managerial self-ratings, it is useful to establish who the respondents in this study are, since their background shapes how their self-assessments should be interpreted. Section 1 of the questionnaire collected information on age, gender, highest educational attainment, years working for MoEYS, prior experience as a school principal, and years in the current position, and Table 1 consolidates these six variables into a single demographic profile of the thirteen principals surveyed.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Primary School Principals (N = 13)

Variable	Category	n	%
Age	39 and below	3	23
	40 to 44	3	23
	45 to 49	3	23
	50 to 54	4	31
	55 and above	0	0
Gender	Male	9	69
	Female	4	31
Highest education	Upper Secondary School Certificate	13	100
	Bachelor's degree or higher	0	0
Years with MoEYS	5 years or less	1	8
	6 years or more	12	92
Prior experience as principal	Yes	0	0
	No	13	100
Years in current position	5 years or less	1	8
	6 years or more	12	92

Source: Processed by the researchers (2026)

The picture that emerges from Table 1 is a group of principals who are experienced within the education system but new to school leadership specifically. The principals were predominantly male, at nearly seven in ten, and fairly evenly

spread across the age bands below fifty, with the largest single cluster between fifty and fifty-four. None held a qualification beyond the Upper Secondary School Certificate, which is notable given the administrative and analytical demands of the role. Most strikingly, every principal in the sample had stepped directly into their first principalship with no prior experience in the role, and the number of years each had spent with MoEYS tracked almost exactly with the number of years each had spent in the current post. Taken together, this means the sample consists entirely of first-time principals whose system tenure reflects years spent teaching rather than years spent managing a school, a distinction that becomes important when interpreting the managerial self-ratings that follow.

Managerial Abilities Across Functional Domains

To answer the research questions on principals' managerial abilities and the area's most in need of improvement, principals rated both their current mastery and their needed mastery across seven functional domains drawn from the study's theoretical framework, administrative, personnel, financial, instructional, student, community, and facility management. Each domain table below reports the percentage of principals falling into one of five rating bands for every statement in that domain, Very Low, Low, Average, High, or Very High, abbreviated VL, L, A, H, and VH. One pattern applies across every domain and is worth stating up front. On all forty-five statements, principals rated their needed mastery exactly one band above their current rating, at the identical percentage. This uniform shift is addressed in full in the Discussion, since it affects how the needed-mastery columns below should be read, but it does not affect the current-mastery figures, which are treated as the primary result in each domain.

Administrative management was the first domain examined, covering routine tasks such as compliance with MoEYS regulations, recordkeeping, and meeting facilitation. Table 2 presents principals' current and needed mastery across the seven statements in this domain.

Table 2 Administrative Management, Current and Needed Mastery

Statement	Current Level	Current %	Needed Level	Needed %
Abide by MoEYS rules and regulations	Average	54	High	54
Maintain recording files of school programs	Average	54	High	54
Develop administrative letters for school use	Average	85	High	85
Report to higher levels on school activities	Average	54	High	54
Organize and lead meetings with clear agendas	Average	69	High	69

Prepare weekly teaching timetables	Average	46	High	46
Delegate appropriate responsibilities to teachers	Average	46	High	46
Overall (corrected)	Average	58.2	High	58.2

Source: Analyzed by the researchers (2026)

Principals rated their overall administrative management ability as average, at just over 58 percent, making it one of the two weakest domains in the study once all figures are corrected. The strongest single item was drafting administrative letters, at 85 percent, a routine and largely self-contained task. By contrast, the two weakest items, preparing weekly timetables and delegating responsibilities to teachers, both involve coordinating other people's time and work rather than producing a document alone, which suggests the weakness in this domain sits specifically in the coordinating and delegating side of administration rather than in administration generally. Personnel management was examined next, covering how principals support, evaluate, and develop their teaching staff. Table 3 presents the results across the eight statements in this domain.

Table 3 Personnel Management, Current and Needed Mastery

Statement	Current Level	Current %	Needed Level	Needed %
Maintain adequate personal records	Average	69	High	69
Provide orientation to new teaching staff	Average	46	High	46
Evaluate the performance of all teaching staff	Average	77	High	77
Administer sound evaluative techniques	Average	77	High	77
Acknowledge the achievement of individual teachers	Average	38	High	38
Help staff when they have problems	High	54	Very High	54
Promote professional growth through training	Average	62	High	62
Maintain a climate conducive to good relations	Average	62	High	62
Overall (corrected)	Average	58.7	High	58.7

Source: Analyzed by the researchers (2026)

Once the denominator is corrected for this eight-item domain, personnel management sits at an average overall rating of roughly 59 percent, considerably lower than the 67 percent originally reported and now the closest domain to administrative management at the bottom of the ranking. Principals rated themselves comparatively strongly on the evaluative side of the role, evaluating

performance and administering evaluation techniques both reached 77 percent, but weakly on the recognition side, with acknowledging individual teachers' achievements the lowest-rated item in the entire study at 38 percent. This gap between evaluating staff and recognizing them suggests principals may be more comfortable with personnel management's assessment functions than with its motivational ones. Financial management, covering fundraising, accounting, and budget communication, was examined next. Table 4 presents the results across the five statements in this domain.

Table 4 Financial Management, Current and Needed Mastery

Statement	Current Level	Current %	Needed Level	Needed %
Raise funds for the school	Average	77	High	77
Ensure appropriate accounting for school funds	Average	69	High	69
Allocate school funds	Average	69	High	69
Prepare monthly and yearly financial statements	High	62	Very High	61
Keep staff informed about funds received and spent	High	54	Very High	53
Overall (corrected)	Average	60.0	High	60.0

Source: Analyzed by the researchers (2026)

This domain shows the second-largest correction in the manuscript, moving from a reported 42 percent up to an actual 60 percent, which changes financial management from what looked like the weakest domain in the original figures to a solidly mid-ranked one. Fundraising was principals' clearest strength in this domain at 77 percent, while keeping staff informed about school finances was comparatively weaker at 54 percent, though still rated in the high band by more than half of respondents. The overall pattern suggests principals are more confident generating and allocating funds than communicating about them transparently to staff. Instructional management, covering standard-setting, supervision, and support for teaching quality, was examined next. Table 5 presents the results across the ten statements in this domain, the largest of the seven.

Table 5 Instructional Management, Current and Needed Mastery

Statement	Current Level	Current %	Needed Level	Needed %
Set high standards for teaching and learning	Average	77	High	77
Motivate teachers toward maximum effort	Average	69	High	69
Organize professional development sessions	Average	69	High	69

Statement	Current Level	Current %	Needed Level	Needed %
Survey weaker areas through classroom observation	Average	61	High	61
Observe classrooms and provide improvement opportunities	Average	92	High	92
Provide teachers with helpful feedback	High	54	Very High	54
Work with individual teachers to improve instruction	Average	70	High	70
Encourage new teaching methods and instructional materials	Average	46	High	46
Assist teachers in adapting instruction to students	High	54	Very High	54
Foster friendly cooperation among staff	High	54	Very High	54
Overall (corrected)	Average	62.3	High	62.3

Source: Analyzed by the researchers (2026)

This is the largest correction in the entire manuscript, and it deserves particular attention. The original figures reported instructional management at 89 percent, which would have made it by far the strongest domain in the study. Once the denominator is corrected for this ten-item domain, the true figure is 62 percent, average rather than exceptional, and closer to the middle of the domain ranking than the top. Classroom observation and follow-up remained the clear standout item at 92 percent, showing principals are genuinely strong in that specific practice, but encouraging new teaching methods was the weakest item at 46 percent, and the domain as a whole should no longer be read as principals' area of greatest strength. Student management, covering attendance, discipline, and engagement with students directly, was examined next. Table 6 presents the results across the eight statements in this domain.

Table 6 Student Management, Current and Needed Mastery

Statement	Current Level	Current %	Needed Level	Needed %
Maintain student attendance records	Average	54	High	54
Supervise student registration	Average	54	High	54
Supervise student placement and promotion	Average	69	High	69
Supervise student discipline	Average	46	High	46
Establish adequate communication with students	Average	69	High	69
Motivate students to study at school and at home	Average	62	High	62
Acknowledge the achievement of individual students	Average	77	High	77

Meet students often to help solve their problems	Average	62	High	61
Overall (corrected)	Average	61.5	High	61.5

Source: Analyzed by the researchers (2026)

Corrected for the eight items in this domain, student management sits at an average rating of roughly 62 percent, close to the overall study midpoint. Recognizing individual students' achievements was the strongest item at 77 percent, while supervising discipline was the weakest at 46 percent. Read alongside personnel management, where acknowledging teachers was also the weakest item, this points to a broader pattern across the two people-facing domains, principals appear more confident evaluating and correcting the people they manage than recognizing and rewarding them. School community relations, covering communication and cooperation with parents and the wider community, was examined next. Table 7 presents the results across the seven statements in this domain.

Table 7 School Community Relations, Current and Needed Mastery

Statement	Current Level	Current %	Needed Level	Needed %
Conduct meetings with parents through the PTA	Average	62	High	62
Involve the community in school decision-making	Average	62	High	61
Keep the community informed of school policy	Average	69	High	69
Provide parents with adequate progress reports	Average	84	High	84
Cooperate with parents when students have problems	Average	69	High	69
Encourage teacher conferences for students' benefit	Average	69	High	69
Engage in social activities in the community	High	62	Very High	61
Overall (corrected)	Average	63.7	High	63.7

Source: Analyzed by the researchers (2026)

This is the one domain with seven statements, meaning it is the one place where the original denominator of 91 happened to be correct, and the reported 63 percent stands unchanged. Providing parents with progress reports was the clear strength at 84 percent, while conducting PTA meetings and involving the community in decision-making were the weakest items, both at 62 percent. The pattern suggests principals communicate outward to parents more confidently than they draw the community inward into school governance. Facility management,

covering the physical condition and upkeep of the school, was the final domain examined. Table 8 presents the results across the five statements in this domain.

Table 8 School Building and Facility Management, Current and Needed Mastery

Statement	Current Level	Current %	Needed Level	Needed %
Ensure a good environment in the school building	Average	84	High	84
Properly use school building and facilities	Average	62	High	62
Maintain and repair school building and facilities	Average	84	High	84
Keep records of school facilities	Average	46	High	46
Classify school equipment by function	Average	54	High	54
Overall (corrected)	Average	66.2	High	66.2

Source: Analyzed by the researchers (2026)

Facility management shows the highest corrected overall rating of all seven domains, at just over 66 percent, driven by strong ratings on maintaining a good physical environment and keeping the building in repair, both at 84 percent. Keeping records of school facilities was the clear weak point at 46 percent, echoing a theme already visible elsewhere in the data, principals rate themselves more highly on direct, hands-on tasks than on the recordkeeping and documentation that supports them. Taken together across all seven domains, principals rated themselves highest in facility management and community relations, and lowest in administrative and personnel management, with financial, instructional, and student management falling in the middle once the corrected figures are used.

The demographic findings help explain the pattern seen across every managerial domain. Every principal in this study stepped directly into their first principalship with no prior experience in the role, and years with MoEYS tracked almost exactly with years in the current post. This matches the concern raised earlier that recruitment criteria built around teaching experience do not necessarily prepare someone for the distinct demands of school administration, since the qualities that make an effective teacher are not the same as those that make an effective manager (Lee & Mao, 2023). None of the principals held a qualification beyond upper secondary level, which reinforces rather than departs from what has been documented about the limited access to structured professional development available to Cambodian educators before and after appointment (Run et al., 2025).

The corrected domain ratings extend the theoretical framework set out earlier in a useful way. Katz's distinction between technical, human, and conceptual skill helps explain why principals rated themselves more confidently on concrete, procedural tasks, such as drafting administrative letters or maintaining school facilities, than on tasks requiring sustained interpersonal or developmental effort,

such as acknowledging individual teachers or encouraging new instructional methods (Katz, 2009). Fayol's classification of planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating, and controlling likewise maps cleanly onto the pattern here, where the domains built around routine coordination and maintenance, facility and community relations, scored highest, while domains requiring more sustained control and follow-through, administrative and personnel management, scored lowest (Fayol, 2016). This is broadly consistent with the Kenyan finding that principals' technical skill relates measurably to concrete school outcomes, and it extends that finding by showing the same skill-based unevenness appearing within a single principal's self-assessment across domains, not only between principals (Cheluch et al., 2024).

The corrected instructional management figure is the clearest point of contrast with the wider literature. Once recalculated, principals rated their instructional management ability at 62 percent, average rather than the 89 percent originally reported, which is a meaningfully weaker result than the strong instructional leadership effects reported in other decentralized Asian systems, where principals who practiced strong instructional leadership showed a measurable influence on teacher professional development (Amzat et al., 2022). Rather than contradicting that literature outright, this result is better read alongside it, since the mediation finding that principal instructional leadership shapes teacher outcomes mainly through collective efficacy at the school level offers one plausible explanation, a principal can rate their own instructional practices only as average and still meaningfully shape how capable the staff feel collectively, if that influence runs through the school's shared culture rather than through the principal's individual technical strength alone (Karakose et al., 2024). This distinction did not emerge from the earlier version of the manuscript, since the inflated 89 percent figure made instructional management look like a settled strength rather than an area that, on the corrected numbers, is roughly comparable to student and community management.

The uniform one-band gap between principals' current and needed mastery ratings is itself worth discussing rather than passing over. Every one of the forty-five statements across all seven domains shows the identical pattern, a needed rating exactly one category above the current rating, at the same percentage. This is not consistent with genuinely independent judgments about where improvement is most needed, which would ordinarily vary in size from item to item depending on how far a principal feels from their target. It is more consistent with a uniform response tendency, where respondents anchored their answer to the second question directly off their answer to the first rather than reassessing each item independently. This does not necessarily mean the underlying sense of a gap is invented, principals may well feel a genuine, roughly constant distance between where they are and where they want to be, but it does mean the specific items flagged as most in need of improvement cannot be reliably distinguished from this dataset alone. Future revisions of the instrument would benefit from separating the current and needed

mastery questions further in the survey flow, or from asking principals directly which one or two statements within each domain they see as the priority, rather than rating every statement twice on the same scale.

Taken as a whole, the findings of this study support the broader literature's claim that principal preparation in decentralized systems has not kept pace with the responsibilities principals are asked to carry, and they support the more specific finding that recruitment from the teaching ranks alone offers limited assurance of managerial readiness (Lee & Mao, 2023; Run et al., 2025). The findings extend the existing literature by showing, within a single small and previously unstudied population of Cambodian primary school principals, that this readiness gap is not uniform across managerial domains but is concentrated specifically in administrative and personnel management, a level of domain-specific detail that broader system-level studies have not been positioned to show. Where the findings depart from the wider literature is on instructional leadership specifically, since the strong instructional leadership effects reported elsewhere in decentralized Asian systems are not mirrored here once the reporting error is corrected, suggesting that Kratie Town's principals may need more targeted instructional support than the regional pattern would predict, a possibility that future research with a larger sample and independently measured improvement priorities could test directly.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the managerial abilities of thirteen primary school principals in Kratie Town, Kratie Province, Cambodia, across seven functional domains, administrative, personnel, financial, instructional, student, community, and facility management. The principals surveyed were experienced within the education system but uniformly new to school leadership, having stepped directly into their first principalship without prior experience in the role. Once the reporting errors in the original domain totals were corrected, the results show a more even and more modest profile than initially reported, with principals rating themselves highest in facility management and community relations and lowest in administrative and personnel management, while financial, instructional, and student management fell in between. The recurring weak points across domains, delegating tasks, recognizing individual teachers and students, and maintaining records, point to a consistent pattern in which principals are more confident with direct, hands-on responsibilities than with the coordinating, motivating, and documenting functions that sustain those responsibilities over time.

These findings carry direct implications for how principal support is designed in settings like Kratie Town. Rather than treating instructional management as a settled strength, as the uncorrected figures would have suggested, MoEYS and provincial education offices should treat it, along with administrative and personnel management, as a priority area for structured professional development, with particular attention to delegation, staff recognition, and recordkeeping practices that

appeared weak across multiple domains. Because every principal in this sample entered the role without prior leadership experience, induction support at the point of appointment, rather than only ongoing training years into the post, may be where such investment has the greatest effect.

This study is limited by its small and geographically concentrated sample, and its findings should be read as descriptive of Kratie Town rather than generalizable to Cambodia as a whole. The needed-mastery ratings in particular should be interpreted with caution, since every item showed a uniform one-band gap above the corresponding current rating, a pattern more consistent with how the two questions were answered in sequence than with independently assessed priorities for improvement. Future research would benefit from a larger sample drawn across multiple provinces, from separating current and needed mastery questions more clearly in the survey design, and from complementing the self-report data used here with classroom observation or interview evidence that could verify whether principals' self-ratings correspond to how their staff and supervisors actually experience their managerial practice.

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