Recruitment and Selection of Principals: Using Narratives to Explore the Process and the Challenging Aspects

Adel Al-Dhuwaihi and Eman I Ahmed

Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, Saudi Arabia.

Abstract:
The purpose of this study is to explore the process of recruitment and selection that principals engage in as experienced by career principals in Saudi Arabia and the problematic aspects that schools face in hiring qualified candidates. Approach: This qualitative research study examined the perceptions of 40 public school principals regarding their principal recruitment and selection experiences. Data are collected through semi-structured interviews that are analyzed thematically in a four-stage process of condensing, coding, textual and structural description, and composite description. Findings: The findings reveal that the shortage of qualified candidates is related to the lack of appropriate resources for new principal recruitment. The hiring process lacks a clear set of criteria that would make a candidate the best fit for the principalship. It has limited advertising strategies to attract and recruit high-quality external candidates. The capability and the expertise of the selection committee also come as a challenging aspect in the process of recruitment. Implications: Therefore, the study presents a model to improve the current recruitment and selection efforts. Keywords: Recruitment and selection, hiring practices, principals, human resources, personnel selection, school leaders.

1. INTRODUCTION

The recruitment and selection of effective school administrators are among the major priorities of educational policy in Saudi Arabia. According to (Grisson and Loeb, 2011; Leithwood, Harris & Strauss, 2010; Kwan, 2012; Huber, 2013; Engel and Curran, 2016; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005), principal managerial skills are the most important factors of student achievement. The principal provides a nexus of innovative ideas, and empowerment continues to hold a significant position in policy and practice (Portin, Alejano, Knapp, and Marzolf, 2006; Ng, 2013; Champ et al., 2019). The quality of education depends on the quality of school principals (Normore, 2006; Coelli and Green, 2012; Tran, 2017). High achieving school leaders tend to increase the academic achievement of the student between two and seven months, while unqualified leaders lower the achievement of the students by a similar amount.

Successful administration is derived only from systematic hiring practices (Chapman et al. 2005). Despite the crucial importance of these practices, there has been a scarcity of research on how principals are recruited and selected. As Blackmore et al (2006) commented that “what is surprising is that the practices used to select the key players (principals) have not been subject to substantive interrogation by researchers” (P. 297). And yet, as true the US and many European countries, in Saudi Arabia struggle to find highly qualified candidates to fill principal positions. Although the process of principal’s hiring practices has received attention in the literature, no research to date has been done to explore the processes of principals’ recruitment in Saudi Arabia.

The current study contributes to the existing literature by exploring the recruitment and the selection practices that principals engage in as experienced by career principals in Saudi Arabia and the challenging aspects that schools face in hiring qualified candidates. In the following sections, the authors review the literature on recruitment and selection, explore the principal hiring context in Saudi Arabia, set out the methodology employed in the current study, analyze the findings, and present the conclusions and the limitations in the final section of the study.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Effective principals are a critical component of school improvement efforts. Darling-Hammond (2010) states that the identification of effective prospective candidates is crucial to the recruitment and selection of effective principals. The new concept of effective leadership has caused recruitment and selection to be one of the most problematic human resource functions within the field of education and a major challenge to school reform (Normore, 2006).

According to Engel and Curran (2016), human resources should have a comprehensive practice related to leader staffing that perceives leaders as a critical determinant of the school improvement. Recruitment and selection are two different hiring processes (James et al., 2018). Hook, Jenkins, and Foot (2015) commented that recruitment and selection should be treated separately. Although the two processes may interact, they require different skills and capabilities (James et al., 2018). Recruitment is a set of practices that attract candidates to fill a vacancy (Searle, 2009; Walker and Kwan, 2012; Reboire, 2004), while the selection is data collection process that assesses the “suitability of a candidate” to fill an available position (Herriot, 2002; Searle, 2009). According to Reboire (2004), “the recruitment practice has never been more important to the school districts as they search for the best people available to achieve the mission of each district, educating children and young people. This is the major trust of every recruiting program- not to hire just to fill a position, but
rather to acquire the number and the types of the people necessary to the success of the school” (p.92).

Troubled with hard working conditions, inadequate incentives, higher expectations and the enormous responsibilities for the principalship, many schools are struggling to recruit qualified candidates with appropriate qualifications. Recruiting a qualified person is crucial for school improvement (Engel and Curran, 2016; Lytle, 2013; Walker and Kwan, 2012). Whitaker (2003) commented that the task of recruiting principals is a daunting one. Increasing high-quality principal candidates’ pools will require coordinated and collaborative action on the part of the schools, national governing bodies, and the universities (PP.50-51). According to Rebore (2004), it is a mistake to assume that the correct candidate will be there to fill vacancies without making an effort to seek qualified persons to meet human resources needs.

The literature on recruitment in education has moved from examining the perspectives of either the candidate or the institution to examining the perspectives of both. In their recruitment theory of Job choice Young, Rinehart, and Place (1989) explained that the prospective candidate’s choices are influenced by objective factors including salary, benefits, location, educational reform; subjective factors including work environment, satisfaction; and critical factors such as physical facility and the recruiter’s characteristics. Rynes and Barber (1990) constructed an interdisciplinary applicant attraction theory. The theory describes how recruitment is influenced by the position, institutional characteristics, phase of the attraction process, and legal considerations. While the theories of job choice and applicant attraction described recruitment from the applicant’s perspective, Maurer, Howe and Lee’s model (1992) defined recruitment from the institutional perspective as an opportunity to improve human capital by filling vacancies with highly qualified candidates.

However, Winter’s model thought that recruitment is a two process. It involves both the institution and the applicant. It states that school leaders should focus on the applicant’s perspective during the recruitment process. It should address the attributes of the position in the recruitment message. The recruitment message should be understandable, clear, accurate, and realistic. Winter’s model of recruitment involves six steps including setting recruitment goals by identifying the desired number and the quality of the applicants. The second step involves creating a profile that includes the desired, actual applicant characteristics and the job requirements. The third step includes developing job advertisements, descriptions, and interviews. The fourth and fifth step involves matching recruitment with marketing practices. Finally, recruitment is implemented and evaluated.

Rebore (2004), commented on several practices of recruiting qualified principals through internal research, referrals, the internet, newspapers, and publications of professional associations. To focus on their own strategic plans, many schools decided that recruiting should be within their own districts. To seek quality applicants, “practitioners from the bottom of the organization must become scouts, site-based and internal recruitment strategies should be encouraged and supported (Lovely,2004, p.18).” Whitaker (2003) commented that the administration must support preparing deputies and aspiring teachers with leadership capabilities for the principalship. Cavanaugh (2008) suggested implementing mentorship programs by paring high-quality principals and aspiring leaders. According to Whitaker (2003), creating partnerships with colleges and universities could provide aspiring leaders with training opportunities.

Recruiting through internet-based has become an extremely important recruitment method. According to Rebore (2004), the greatest advantage to recruit through the Internet is “the ability to reach as many candidates in most cost-effective manner...it could reduce the number of the staff members that manage the recruitment process” (p.101). Potential candidates can easily access the website to gather information about the post and the hiring strategies. However, the staff members involved in the recruitment process have a critical impact on the applicants (James et al, 2018). According to Knight having credibility averting bias is critical in communications with potential applicants.

Recruitment and Selection is “unusual discipline in one important case” (Billsberry,2007, P.9). Principal’s selection is critical to the school efficiency and effectiveness. According to Billsberry (2007), there are three major approaches to selecting potential candidates including psychometric approach, social process, and person-organization fit. Psychometric is a leading selection paradigm that dominates the selection process in many countries. It considers how selection decisions should be done the perspective of the institution. It is based on the assumption that selecting candidates who best fit the criteria. “This approach assesses individuals against the knowledge, skills, and other attributes (KSAOs)” (Billsberry, 2007, P.9). It is a structured decision-making process designed by the recruiter. The psychometric paradigm involves selection methods (e.g. assessment tests). This paradigm works well when job criteria are clearly developed and agreed on.

Despite the preeminence of the psychometric approach, two other approaches emerge in the selection process literature. The social process approach emerges from the social-psychological. It considers the selection as a social process. It is an exchange process where the applicant comes to understand the nature of the recruiter and the organization assesses the fit of the applicant. Unlike the psychometric approach, the candidate is active in the process of selection. According to Billsberry (2007), the social process approach “has not replaced the psychometric paradigm. Instead, it used a critical adjunct to explore the impact of the psychometric process”. (p.9).

Another competing approach is the Person –Organization fit (Profit). This approach is centered on the connection between the organization and the applicant. It emerges from the interactional psychology. This approach overcomes one of the major weaknesses of the psychometric approach. The psychometric approach focuses on the perspective of the recruiter; the social process focuses on the perspective of the prospective candidate, while the fit-organization paradigm considers the perspective of both the candidate and the employer.
3. THE PRINCIPAL HIRING CONTEXT IN SAUDI ARABIA

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932. It covers four-fifths of the Arabian Peninsula. The legal system in KSA is based on the Sharia Law and the Sharia Law is derived from Islamic law. The discovery of the oil in the 1938s sparks a rapid economic and educational development.

It is significant to address the education governance system in Saudi Arabia in order to understand how the recruitment and selection process works. There are three types of schools in Saudi Arabia; Public, Private and International schools. In this paper, the authors will focus on public education which constitutes about 85.7% of the whole number of schools in Saudi Arabia (General Authority for Statistics KSA, 2019). The Ministry of Education established in 1953 administered on over public, private, and international education. Established in 1960, the General Presidency of Girl’s Education presided over education for girls. Avoiding dualism, the ministry of education, located in Riyadh, the capital of KSA presides in 2003 the General Presidency of Girl’s Education. Saudi Arabia is divided into thirteen provinces. Each province is supervised by a general educational administration. There are about forty educational offices all located in the major cities. These entities act in a centralized hierarchal system. In the eastern province of Saudi Arabia, there are about 2,713 public schools. The public schools have more autonomy in staff remuneration than private and international schools (Directorate of Education in Eastern Province, 2019).

The educational system in Saudi Arabia is segregated by gender. It is characterized as a dual system of female and male education (El-Sanaby, 2006) divided into five administered systems, general education for boys, parallel education for boys and girls, general education for girls, private and international education for boys, and private and international education for girls. Regardless of the type of school, all schools are evaluated by educational supervisors on the basis of evidence gathered during site visits. Principles in the public schools are appointed directly by the ministry of education through the hiring practices supervised by the General Director of the educational administration in each province of the kingdom. Saudi Arabia does not have a scheme of certification for school leadership. Since the hiring practices of the private schools are not the same as those of the public schools, they are not included in the current study.

In the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia - and the rest of the Kingdom - the process of selecting new principals happens each year, usually, at the end of the academic year. This process takes place in preparation for filling the vacancies in schools caused by the retirement of headteachers and/or their movement to other schools. There are several criteria that must be taken into consideration for candidates during this process. These criteria include the following:

1. The candidate should hold at least a bachelor's degree in the field of education.
2. The candidate should have experience as a deputy for at least four years.
3. The candidate must have worked on the same level (elementary, intermediate, or high school) for at least four years.
4. The candidate should have a score of at least a very good or excellent in his annual appraisal for the last four years.
5. The candidate has never been issued a punishment against him or proved that he has low performance … etc.

One thing in this selection process is missing; that is to measure the candidate’s leadership abilities and competencies. Also missing is a measure of the willingness of the candidate to be promoted. Among the methods used in the principal selection process is the application that needs to be filled by the applicant. The interview is central to the current selection practices in Saudi Arabia. The interviews held by a panel constituted of the General Director of the educational administration and other officials. It is used to gather more information about the candidates’ attitudes, experiences, and perspectives through their responses to predetermined questions. Coughlan and Cronin (2009) argue that interviews enable the collection of a large amount of data. Although the interview is considered to be a time-consuming method of selection principals, it provides valuable insight into the candidates’ perspectives and attitudes (Coughlan and Cronin, 2009). Smith (2009) recommends that the “look-for” must be clarified before the interviews. Tod (2006) states that well-designed interviews help enhance credibility and trustworthiness.

Because of the limitations of the interviews, the ministry of education test candidates who are seeking principalship. These tests focus on measuring the applicants’ job-related situations (Harris, 2013). However, the effectiveness of these tests on the subsequent achievement of the principal is still unclear.

Despite the importance of the recruitment and selection processes, the relevant authorities laid little effort in developing a better way of selecting leaders for the region’s schools. They rather wait until the end of the academic year to discover the number of schools with principal vacancies and then they try to convince deputies to take on the job. These are ineffective hiring practices that should be completely avoided. Those deputies who refuse to be promoted will face the probability of being downgraded or demoted and leave their role to become classroom teachers.

This unplanned hiring process causes the deputies to feel insecure. They may at any time be asked (or forced!) to be promoted to headships without any preparation or consent (Al-Dhuwaihi, 2011). Moreover, this process puts pressure on the authorities themselves because the result is either selecting the wrong people for the job by forcing them to accept the promotion, or by leaving some of the schools without heads and the loss of good deputies.

Thus, principal recruitment and selection practices in Saudi Arabia lack what is needed, causing schools to go short of highly qualified principals. Educational administration should re-imagine the principal’s role, which is a position that quality leaders seek and are equipped to execute successfully (Doyle and Locke, 2014). Many aspects of school principalship in Saudi Arabia are little investigated and still poorly known.
Despite its critical role, a huge gap exists between the number of principal related research and teacher-related papers. Relatedly, little is known about how educational administration recruits leaders and match their skills to the demands of the schools. The current study contributes to the existing literature by exploring the recruitment and hiring processes that are experienced by career principals.

4. METHODOLOGY

Most studies of school hiring practices had been conducted from the superintendents' perspectives (Weber, 2009; Kwan, 2012; James et al., 2018). This study was qualitative in nature. It used the narrative approach to provide a rich description of the processes of recruiting and selecting among career principals and the aspects that were considered problematic. As the kingdom's regional capital, the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia provides a unique opportunity to analyze the hiring practices of principals.

4.1. Participants

Maximal variation sampling was used to maximize the richness of the data. This is a type of purposive heterogeneous non-probability sampling technique that studies a specific number of cases that maximize the diversity relevant to the questions and the purpose of the study. It enables the researcher to get a greater diversity of the perspectives of the participants (Patton, 2002). This study did not begin with a specific number of participants, but it developed as the interview progressed. The authors interviewed 39 principals in the fall of 2018 of whom 19 female principals and 20 male principals represented the maximal variation sampling regarding the principals’ experience, age, gender, and education. Male principals had an average of 15 years of teaching experience and nine years of leadership experience. Most of the male principals had a bachelor's and one had a master's degree. Female principals also had an average of 15 years of Educational experience and 9 years of leadership experience. Most of the female participants had a bachelor's degree.

4.2. Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data for this study. Interviews lasted for approximately 45-60 minutes. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and then analyzed. The interviewer developed the interview protocol which includes a list of questions to be covered during the interview. The topics covered during the interview focus on the process of recruiting and selecting principals and the challenges of the process that were experienced by the career principals. The participants consented to participate voluntarily in this study. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were assured.

4.3. Data Analysis

The data was analyzed based on a four-stage process of condensing, coding, textual and structural description, and composite description. At first, the data was transcribed. This first stage helped to have a general sense of the data. Second, each interview was coded to help to develop a set of statements about "the participants' perspectives. This step was data-driven and theory-driven, developed by careful explanation of the perspectives of the principals regarding the hiring practices (Shaked, Glanz & Gross, 2018). This step is called the horizontalization of the data. The authors developed a "clusters of meanings" from "significant statements" into unique themes (Creswell, 2007). Thematic development was significant to answer the research questions namely to examine the process of recruiting and selecting the school leaders. In the third step of the analysis, a textual and structural description was developed. Finally, the authors developed "a composite description of the topic incorporating the textual and structural description (Creswell, 2007). The authors wrote reflective journals throughout the analysis that included the influences of the personal experience on the data.

5. FINDINGS

Our qualitative data analysis revealed in more detail on the pages that follow (a) the participants’ perceptions of the recruitment and the selection in Saudi Arabia; and (b) the challenges that schools and provinces face in hiring quality candidates.

The nature of the new principals' recruitment and the selection processes

Analysis of data revealed that the principal plays a significant role in improving students’ achievement and educational outcomes. Thus, the overall performance of the school rests on the principal hiring process. F4, a high school principal, with more than three years of work experience as a principal noted that “the principal recruitment and selection processes constitute of few steps where the ministry engages in an effort to attract a pool of qualified candidates from internal sources (e.g. teachers, and assistant principals within the province). Then, she added “initial eligibility screening through which the ministry makes an initial assessment of the candidates’ eligibility of principalship followed by a test and an interview to select the best candidate from the pool. F7, high school principals, with more than three years of work experience as a principle also mentioned that “the principal recruitment and selection process follows more thoughtful procedures in comparison to other fields.”

Many participants, for example, M7, M9, M17, and F6 reported that the school leadership committee had “pressure to appoint.” They stated that “sometimes the committee experiences the pressure to hire less qualified especially in remote areas to fill the vacancy.” If hiring could not be made, they added “the committee will ask any teacher to act up, regardless of his academic qualifications, experience, and inspirations.” M9, a high school principal with more than three years of work experience as a principal said that “the recruitment and selection process follows specific procedures; however, these procedures are not applicable especially in remote areas.” “In one school, he added, they had the pressure
to ask a first-year teacher to act up just to fill the vacancy.” M7, another high school principal with more than three years of experience as a principal said “We do not have thoughtful recruitment and selection processes; I was forced for example to act up and fill the vacancy. I know they have pressure to assign me the principalship duties.”

The participants also felt that the recruitment and the selection practices follow up “routinely written unclear (F10 & M2) and unstable procedures.” (M16) administered to all the schools in the provinces which “usually attract any internal candidate to apply.” (F4), followed by screening and finally an interview. Moreover, M13, another school principal with more than nine years of experience as a principal felt that “previous procedures are much better than the current recruitment, and selection procedures need improvements…following successful models in other successful countries”.

However, most participants, for example, M10, M5, F4, and F19 carried “a huge weight on the interviewer.” They felt that although the format of the interview might be different, “the interviewer plays a critical role in the whole process. Stakeholders including parents and teachers are completely absent in this process. Thus “biased subjective interviewer might lead for the selection of a low-quality candidate”. Because of its critical role, the interviewer should have the expertise to make such a selection. From the qualitative data, the majority of the participants, for example, M2 & M16 felt that the assessment, including the test and the interview “are good, but not good enough”. In addition to existing assessment practices, the ministry should develop a set of activities to assess the candidates’ true leadership competencies. Other participants, for example, F2 and F10 also reported that “the assessment test should not be part of the selection process because leadership is not about memorizing a set of skills and work procedures.”

Challenges facing the recruitment and the selection Processes

The data analysis revealed several obstacles involved in the recruitment and selection processes of prospective candidates. Participants reported that the first problematic aspect in the process concerns the failure of the then appointing a committee to define key measures of the prospective candidates. In line with this, F7, a high school principal with more than three years of experience as a principal said that “one of the major obstacles the school face in hiring principals is that they lack the set of qualities and measures that would make the prospective candidate the best fit for the school.” F4, another high school with more than three years of experience in the job believed that “the committee does not select the best candidate because they do not have clear criteria to assess the candidates’ leadership competences and performance”. M2, a high school principal who has eight years of experience as a principal, mentioned that “We do not have a clear quality measure of the type of the candidate that the school wants to recruit.”

Additionally, career principals reported that one of the major obstacles is that the committee neither establishes nor implements sustainable recruitment and selection procedures. M4, a high school principal with more than nine years of experience as a principal, mentioned that “there should be a well-structured recruitment and selection procedures.” M10, another high school principal with eight years of experience as a principal said that “Unfortunately, the procedures are not efficient or objective enough to obtain quality principals. He added, “No measures are available to recruitment and selection strategies accordingly.” Moreover, F16, a high school principal with more than nine years of experience as a principal mentioned that “the recruitment and the selection procedures are not up-to-date and do not conform to recent educational trends, they are time-consuming. Accordingly, it fails to define the qualities that would make the candidates a good fit for the school.” F18, a high school principal with eight years of experience as a principal, stated that “I do not support the current procedures; schools should follow specific steps for recruitment and selection”. F1, a high school principal with eight years of work experience as a principal felt that “the procedures are not effectively implemented, so schools suffer from low-quality candidates, especially in remote areas.”

The capability of the governing committee in the recruitment and the selection process came also as a problematic aspect in the principal hiring process. M2, a high school principal, with eight years of work experience as a principal mentioned that “some members in the committee are not competent, biased and do not have clear criteria that would make someone a good fit for the school.” Moreover, most of the participants, for example, M4, M5, F2, F11, F13, and F15, believed that some members in the committee might prefer an applicant over another for no reason. They revealed that “nepotism is a critical factor that the committee not to be selecting the best candidate from the pool.” F18, a high school principal with more than three years of work experience as a principal stated that “personal preferences of the committee inhibited many qualified teachers to fill the vacancies.”

The experience of the selection team also emerged as a problematic aspect of the hiring process. F4, a school principal with more than three years of work experience as a principal said that “the selection team should include experienced principals who really know the reality of the field with its details and problems. Sometimes the selection team cannot assess the candidates’ competencies, so I recommend that it should include a psychologist who can assess the candidates’ ability to act in different situations. The obstacle here is the team’s inability to distinguish the best candidate.” M13, another high school principal with two years of work experience mentioned that “Most of the selection teams are not trained to accurately screen or assess the applicants to select the best candidate from the pool.”

Another major problematic theme is the shortage of candidates. F1, a high school principal with more than three years of work experience as a principal said that “the high shortage of principal candidate, especially in remote areas, contribute to the selection of low qualified candidate.” F2, another high school principal with more than nine years of work experience as a principal mentioned that “one of the mistakes is to assign the unqualified assistant principals the leadership duties just to fill the vacancy. She added and the school supervisors who are inexperienced and unaware of the basics of administration.” F6, a high school principal with more than nine years of work
experience as a principal believed that the current recruitment and selection model is not applicable because of the shortage of highly qualified candidates. F6 said that “sometimes, they assigned the teachers the principalship duties with no preparation or coaching which negatively affect the school performance.”

Most participants also felt that the assessment tools appear not to be selecting the best candidate from the pool. Although the province uses adequate selection strategies, the procedures through which they assess the applicants are flawed. M1 & F16, high school principals with more than nine years of work experience as principals mentioned that “the assessment tools do not measure the candidates’ leadership competencies. Thus, the committee appears to select the wrong person.” M4, a school principal with more than nine years of work experience as a principal felt that “selection criteria should align with the interview questions to evaluate the personality of the candidate.” M2, a high school principal with more than three years of work experience as a principal mentioned that “interview is an important assessment tool, but it should be proceeded by more rigorous assessment tools built on clear objective criterion.…. using multiple selection procedures should enhance the validity of the selection.” M7, a high school principal with more than three years of work experience as a principal stated that “an interview is a central tool in the selection process. It enables the committee to evaluate the candidates’ true competencies to fill the vacancy, however, she added, they are not implemented effectively to tap into the candidates’ competencies.”

M6, another school principal with more than nine years of experience as a principal stated that “the validity of the assessment test is very low, and the selection decision cannot be built upon.” F4, a principal with more than three years of work experience as a principal mentioned that “the interviewers must be experienced principals who can assess the candidates’ response to realistic school situations.” F10 and F18, high school principals with more than nine and three years of work experience as principals believed that interviews, as a selection method, need to be carefully designed and structured. They stated that the “interviews last no more than five minutes and do not assess the candidates’ leadership competencies.” Moreover, they added that “the validity of the assessment test is low …before taking the final decision; the candidate should be allowed to respond to the realistic school situation.” Finally, M15, a school principal with more than 9 years of work experience as a principal said that “the interview is an important aspect of the selection process; but it raises a number of problematic aspects, such as the interviewer bias, and the expertise to evaluate the candidate.” The interviewers, he added “are not qualified to reach the goals.”

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This study used qualitative analysis of career’s principals regarding their experience of the recruitment and selection processes and its challenging aspects. The findings have indicated that the principal hiring processes in Saudi Arabia constitute of few linear steps where the ministry engage in an effort to attract candidates from internal resources, followed by initial screening, and a test and a formal interview to select the candidate from the pool. The findings also revealed several challenging aspects in this process. The literature on recruitment and selection may help to explain that although the hiring process appears to be linear and simple, it is “complex” (James et al. 2018, 14), anecdotal (Hooker, 2000) and unstable processes. The findings also revealed that the schools suffer from a shortage of high-quality candidates and reliance on internal candidates. The shortage of the qualified candidates is related to the lack of appropriate resources to new principal recruitment. This finding is consistent with the New Teacher Project (2006) who found that US urban districts suffer from low quality candidates and that the lack of human recourses and attention “exacerbates this shortage” (2006, p2). Moreover, the process lacks a clear set of criteria that would make a candidate a good for fit for the principalship. No criteria are available to indicate when assistant principal is ready to be a principal. This finding is consistent with Baron (Kwan, 2012) who found that school districts lack clear set of measures and criteria for new principal recruitment and selection processes. In addition, the ministry had limited advertising strategies to attract and recruit high quality external candidates. The team involved in the process are not trained enough to achieve established mission and goals. The capability and the expertise of the selection committee came as a challenging aspect in the process. Most participants reported that some of the interviewers are not prepared to select the qualified candidate from the pool. Although interview appears to be a key assessment tool in the hiring process (Coughlan and Cronin, 2009), interview bias came as a crucial problematic issue in the assessment. This finding is consistent with Knight (2017). In fact, recruitment and selection researchers consider this as a major challenge that lead to the selection of the wrong person. These findings are consistent with James et al. (2008) whose purpose was to analyze the recruiting and the selection processes among school head teachers in England, they found that the expertise of the governing board came as a significant theme since the process of selection require specialist skills and knowledge to ensure that the accuracy of the process. These findings reinforce James’ et al study regarding the use of multiple selection activities to assess the candidates’ competencies, although scoring the candidates in all these activities might be a major challenge for the selection committees. Our findings also reinforce the fact that the selection committee should include a team of retired and high achieving principals who can evaluate prospective candidates’ leadership competencies.

Principals play a critical role in improving school performance and based on the findings of this study schools are currently struggling to recruit qualified candidates that commensurate the mission and the needs of our schools. Delays in the hiring process will increase the chance that the recruitment and selection process will not be accurate. Therefore, building a rigorous recruitment and selection procedures, providing needed resources and adequate training can increase the chance of significant improvements that can be achieved. Figure 1 shows a model of recruitment and selection for principals.
Figure 1 Model of recruitment and selection approach for principals.

Significant changes can be achieved by following the next steps:

- Provide appropriate budget, resources, and training to human resource staff to effectively communicate with prospective candidates.
- Identify the type of candidates and design recruitment and selection strategy accordingly.
- Differentiate the advertising tools and strategies to attract a large number of applicants internally (assistant principals within the school) and externally (qualified teachers, assistant principals, principals who show leadership capabilities from neighboring provinces).
- Change reliance on internal candidates (The New Project Teacher, 2006) and recruit candidates who could contribute to the mission and the needs of schools.
- Conduct initial screening to determine minimum eligibility requirement for the principalship positions.
- Have a comprehensive database of the candidates to track all the prospective applicants.
- Form a rigorous team of high achieving career principals, retired principals, and senior leaders, representatives of the educational offices, parents, and teachers and professors of the graduate school leadership programs.
- Use competency assessment that addresses the prospective candidates’ leadership skills.
- Start recruiting as early as possible to attract enough high qualified candidates who can fill the principal positions as they arise.
- Fit the principal hiring timeline to teacher hiring (The New Teacher Project, 2006).
- Assessment measures must be clear and comprehensive.
- Evaluate the prospective candidates against the assessment tools and the selection criteria to reach the final decision and ensure that the prospective candidates can achieve the mission and the plans of the schools.

Compared with previous studies, one of the strengths of the current study is the lack of research on recruitment and selection practices of school leadership in Saudi Arabia compared to other processes in schools (e.g., professional development, classroom management, and instruction). This study provides new insights into the critical components of human resource management in school. It also identified challenging aspects of recruiting and selecting new principals to help develop a system to recruit high achieving prospective candidates and focus more on the constraints that discourage qualified candidates. However, this study had several limitations. The first fact is that this research is limited by the qualitative methodology to identify the lived experiences of career principals. Second, the data collected here within a particular setting. To generalize the results to other settings and populations, it would be advisable to repeat this research in other contexts. Since this study is based on the principals’ personal experiences of a specific phenomenon, further research could replicate this study using other methods of data collection such as observations and questionnaires. This study provides new data regarding a crucial aspect of human resource management. However, exploring the principal’s recruitment and selection practices should not be isolated from other processes of human resources management. This alignment is critical to the effectiveness of human management (Engel & Curran, 2016). Further research could examine principalship hiring practices in combination with other aspects of human resources management.

Funding: The authors didn’t receive any direct funding for this research.
REFERENCES


