CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The introduction chapter provides an insight into the study. It discusses the background of the study, problem statement, purposes, research questions, hypotheses, significance, delimitations and limitations, as well as definition of terms in order to provide a thorough understanding of the study’s focus.

Background of the Study

Belize is a very small country located in the Central American Region. As such, the Ministry of Education in Belize is striving for country wide improvement of the educational sector so as to upgrade the human capital. Due to the massive expansion in the education system as well as with new openings of schools, including secondary schools, there is a need for principals to strengthen and assume their roles as administrative leaders. Hence, this current study focused on the leadership styles, practices and the factors that have contributed to the leadership styles and practices based on current theories of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles.

To collect meaningful data a mixed research method was used to identify the leadership styles, practices and influential factors of principals in secondary school in Belize. For the quantitative method analyses of leadership styles the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ Form 5X) was used. Then the data obtained were tested using SPSS to find the dominant preferred leadership style. After calculating and identifying the dominant preferred leadership style, it was tested against the demographic factors to discern their statistical significance among secondary education principals.

The study also employed qualitative methods to obtain a deeper understanding of the leadership practices and factors that have influenced the development of principals’ leadership in secondary institutions. Qualitative research, through the interview process, direct observation and documentation inquiry, assisted in gathering in-depth data about leadership practices and factors which influence leadership.
Furthermore, the research’s findings provide information that can assist principals, especially new principals who are venturing into the career of administrative leaders, with foresight into principals’ roles in the systems in order to better equip them to be effective leaders. The in-depth exploratory analysis offers first hand case stories of leaders’ best practices and roles (differences and similarities) and constraints within the profession. Basically the information generated from these findings will fulfill the present needs for supplementary information which are necessary to guide leadership in Belize.

Statement of the Problem

The Ministry of Education lacks data on effective leaders in Belize, which can provide an exemplary platform for young and aspiring principals or reference base for other professionals and researchers. This absence of data encouraged the researcher to pursue this area so as to provide meaningful information to equipped principals and aspiring principals within the educational arena with a direction.

Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this study are:
1. To examine leadership style based on transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire theories.
2. To explore the leadership style preferences among secondary school principals in Belize.
3. To investigate the influential factors (family background, formal education, discipleship, one-on-one mentorship relationship, peer relationship, personal mentorship, philosophy of education and demographic background) that have contributed to leadership style practices among secondary school principals.
4. To study the effects of demographic data (nationality, gender, marital status, age, educational level, experiences, school management, school size, ethnic group, and
religious affiliation) on the preferred leadership styles of secondary school principals in Belize.

5. To provide suggestions to Policy Makers and principals regarding leadership styles of secondary school principals in Belize.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Since the researcher used mixed research methods, the research questions and hypotheses were put into two sections. For the quantitative part, both questions and hypotheses were formulated, however in the qualitative section only research questions were asked so as to obtain the results in order to explore leadership styles and factors that have influenced leadership practice among secondary school principals. The research questions and hypotheses that were investigated are as follows:

Quantitative section research questions and hypotheses

1. What are the preferences of leadership styles among secondary school principals in Belize?

Hypothesis 1

H₀ = There is no difference among average score on transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles practiced by Secondary School Principals in Belize.

H₁ = There is a difference among average score on transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles practiced by Secondary School Principals in Belize.

2. What are the influences of demographic factors on the preferred leadership style among secondary school principals in Belize?
Hypothesis 2
\[ H_0 = \text{Nationality of principals has no influence on their perception about transformational leadership style.} \]
\[ H_A = \text{Nationality of principals has an influence on their perception about transformational leadership style.} \]

Hypothesis 3
\[ H_0 = \text{Gender of principals has no influence on their perception about transformational leadership style.} \]
\[ H_A = \text{Gender of principals has an influence on their perception about transformational leadership style.} \]

Hypothesis 4
\[ H_0 = \text{Marital Status of principals has no influence on their perception about transformational leadership style.} \]
\[ H_A = \text{Marital Status of principals has an influence on their perception about transformational leadership style.} \]

Hypothesis 5
\[ H_0 = \text{Age of principals has no influence on their perception about transformational leadership style.} \]
\[ H_A = \text{Age of principals has an influence on their perception about transformational leadership style.} \]

Hypothesis 6
\[ H_0 = \text{Education Level of principals has no influence on their perception about transformational leadership style.} \]
\[ H_A = \text{Education Level of principals has an influence on their perception about transformational leadership style.} \]
Hypothesis 7
$H_0 = \text{Experience of principals has no influence on their perception about transformational leadership style.}$
$H_A = \text{Experience of principals has an influence on their perception about transformational leadership style.}$

Hypothesis 8
$H_0 = \text{School Management of principals has no influence on their perception about transformational leadership style.}$
$H_A = \text{School Management of principals has an influence on their perception about transformational leadership style.}$

Hypothesis 9
$H_0 = \text{School Size of principals has no influence on their perception about transformational leadership style.}$
$H_A = \text{School Size of principals has an influence on their perception about transformational leadership style.}$

Hypothesis 10
$H_0 = \text{Ethnic Group of principals has no influence on their perception about transformational leadership style.}$
$H_A = \text{Ethnic Group of principals has an influence on their perception about transformational leadership style.}$

Hypothesis 11
$H_0 = \text{Religious Affiliation of principals has no influence on their perception about transformational leadership style.}$
$H_A = \text{Religious Affiliation of principals has an influence on their perception about transformational leadership style.}$
Qualitative section research questions

3. What are the differences and similarities in terms of leadership styles among Secondary School Principals in Belize?
4. What are the practices employed in schools by secondary school principals in Belize?
5. What are the general leadership philosophies amongst secondary school principals in Belize?
6. What are the impacts of gender on the practice among secondary school principals in Belize?
7. What are the influential factors that affect practices among secondary education principals in Belize?

Significance of the Study

The findings from the investigation of principal leadership have produced documentation of exemplary or outstanding principals in leading secondary school systems in Belize. The study identified the practices, roles, differences and similarities, constraints and influential factors that have contributed to the development of principal leaders within the context of existing school environments in Belize. The documentation has provided a wealth of information to support employed principals, aspiring principals and the Ministry of Education. Moreover, Belize lacks valid information on real cases of professional principals and this information would be an asset to other leader, especially for the young and aspiring leaders who are to fill the new principal’s positions in secondary school systems in Belize.
Delimitations and Limitations

This study was delimited to leadership styles, practices, and influential factors contributing to leadership styles and practices. This study was delimited to transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership theories. This study was delimited to the assessment of secondary school principals in Belize, who were employed in the August 2006-2007 academic year. The sample size for the in-depth study was delimited to secondary principals who were seen by experts as exemplary or outstanding principals. The information collected from the in-depth study addresses outstanding schools, so the results must be interpreted with caution, but the results can be used as a meaningful benchmark. Still, data collected from the sample were not generalized to other leaders in other levels of the educational system (i.e. pre-school, primary or tertiary school principal), since different leaders have different points of view. Similarly, the data from the sample were not generalized to other disciplines in the country of Belize or to countries within the Latin American Region. Data collected were only used to discuss and compare secondary school principals in Belize. Furthermore, the data collected from the sample were not generalized to other leadership theories, since this study focused only on transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership.

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions and terms are offered so as to clarify their usage in this current study:

1. **Leadership Style** in this study refers to the characteristics exhibited by a person. Harris & Lambert (2003) noted that it is the latent as well as the currently lived and enacted expressions of leading. It is an enacted variable dependent upon the interactions between leaders, followers and context. The leadership style was measured using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire modified from Bass (1994) that discriminates among transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership.
to find the dominantly preferred. The highest rated leadership type is indicated with the highest mean score for the SPSS descriptive analysis of the data.

2. **Transformational Leadership Style:** this leadership style assumes that people will follow a person who inspires them. These leaders are persons with vision and passion who can achieve great things. Their characteristics give way to get things done by injecting enthusiasm and energy. The characteristics of transformational leadership are; idealized influence, inspirational stimulation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration (Avolio and Bass, 2002).

3. **Transactional Leadership Style:** this leadership style assumes that people are motivated by reward and punishment. It suggests that the social systems work best with a clear chain of command. This approach to leadership is carried out through either positive rewards or negative punishment. The prime purpose of a subordinate is to do what their manager tells them to do.

4. **Laissez-faire Leadership Style:** this leadership style minimizes the leader's involvement in decision-making, and hence allows people to make their own decisions, although they may still be responsible for the outcome. Laissez-faire represents the near absence of leadership. Under this leadership nothing is transactional and nothing is transformed.

5. **Leadership Practice** in this study focuses on the roles and duties the leaders execute on a daily basis.

6. **Secondary School Principal** refers to administrative leaders, in the school system of Belize, who manage and operate four (4) year secondary schools.