Article

Dissecting the School Management Rubric in a Japanese Reform-Oriented Municipality

Hirokazu Yokota

Childcare Policy Division, Child Development Bureau, Children and Families Agency, Tokyo 100-6090, Japan; hirokazu0116@gmail.com

Abstract: In Japan, there is almost no national policy that details the attributes and abilities desirable for school management staff. However, in March 2023, Toda City in Saitama prefecture, a city famous for its aggressive education reforms, published the Toda City School Management Rubric (SMR) as perspectives to be referred to in the daily practice of school management through a time-consuming hearing from principals and vice principals. By categorizing each dimension of the rubric itself as well as the documents relating to the creation process with the four school leadership styles, while making a comparison to school leadership standards in the U.S. and U.K., this paper aims to illuminate how the magic words of "school leadership" were turned into concrete perspectives for school leaders to reflect on. As a result, there are similarities and differences among leadership standards in three countries. Moreover, a transformational leadership style seems to be the most frequently mentioned among the four school leadership styles, and many of the principals and vice principals referred to instructional leadership in a sense that they need to take a lead in transforming traditional teacher-led instruction into student-centered learning. Furthermore, a distributed leadership style is considered to be important by many school leaders, especially because they continue to seek an appropriate balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches, and some principals and vice principals take the issue of work style reform seriously, which assumes an aspect of transactional leadership. As an arguably unprecedented attempt to comprehensively analyze the detailed policy documents on school leadership in Japan, this article will provide cross-cultural implications for school leadership policy and practice.

Keywords: Japan; school leadership; transactional leadership; instructional leadership; transformational leadership; distributed leadership; educational leadership; educational administration; leadership standard

1. Introduction

The role of school leaders cannot be emphasized enough. As policy reforms are increasingly focusing on the work of school leaders as a way to bridge the gap between policy and practice [1], countries around the world have invested in defining the characteristics of effective leadership. Simultaneously, because school principals are frequently expected to perform unreasonable tasks, especially when supplemental support resources are limited due to district budgetary constraints [2], building the capacity of principals and other school leaders so that they can fulfill these multifaceted roles should be a priority of education policy makers. In this context, within which school leaders' work has been characterized by increasing complexities in expectations for school leaders and greater demands for accountability, there have been more calls for better professional preparation programs, and greater attention to programs tailored to the needs of established school principals [3]. Undoubtedly, school leadership development has taken on more importance than ever in this era of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.

In this worldwide policy trend, Japan seems to be an exception—it neither specifies perspectives on effective leadership in addition to referring to it as a "magic word" [4], nor

implements well-intended, coherent, and systemic capacity-building policies for school leaders [5], at least at a national level. However, to what extent prefectural and municipal Boards of Education have tackled this issue has been under the veil because too little information on policies as well as practices relating to school leadership development is available even in Japanese, let alone in English.

As an interesting case, in March 2023, the Toda City Board of Education in Saitama prefecture, a city famous for its aggressive education reform [6], published the Toda City Version School Management Rubric (Ver 1.0) (Toda City SMR). This city is famous for its innovative approach to learning, with former principal Tsutomu Togasaki spearheading transformative reforms such as cultivating skills resistant to automation, fostering collaboration across sectors, and leveraging data for informed decision-making in education, upon assuming superintendency in 2015 [7]. One of these reform concepts is to study school management, just as to study lessons and give teachers feedback based on quantitative and qualitative data for lesson improvement [8]. Specifically, from the policy document published in November 2022, it seems that the Toda City Board of Education (BOE) situates the SMR as one of the policy initiatives to study lessons and school management for continuous improvement. Additionally, the BOE mentioned that "school leadership has become more important than ever in times when issues surrounding schools are getting diverse and complicated", "the guidance issued by the national government emphasizes assessment and facilitation by school principals in addition to management skills", and thus "perspectives (lenses) for school management staff to reflect on daily school management practices are needed" [9].

In this policy context, the Toda City SMR, as perspectives (lenses) to be referred to in the daily practice of school management, has been developed through a time-consuming hearing from and dialogue with principals and vice principals. Additionally, the rubric will be utilized by school management staff and the school organization as a whole to reflect on daily practices and make improvements as needed [10]. The original SMR, which was written in Japanese, is translated into English by the author and shown in Table 1.

What is striking about the Toda City SMR is that the BOE not only refers to a variety of literature on school leadership but also incorporates views from the ground—from principals and vice principals—when creating this rubric, thus trying to strike a balance between theory and practice. When it comes to the international comparison of school leadership standards, Ingvarson et al. [3], reviewing school leadership standards from the USA, the UK, the Netherlands, and Australia, found that standards did not vary much by national and cultural contexts. Because their study did not include Japan as a subject of analysis, it remains to be seen whether or to what extent the school leadership standard(s) in Japan differs from those in other countries. Additionally, since the knowledge base on the international adoption of school leadership standards is limited, particularly about its associations with various role demands (or imperatives) of school administration [11], the Toda City SMR, with detailed information on what school leaders think about their school management, will fill in this research gap by laying out different leadership styles as demonstrated in this particular standard.

With these research imperatives, the present study, by dissecting the Toda City SMR through the lenses of transactional, instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership styles, will help understand how leadership is shaped in the context of K-12 education in Japan. Additionally, it creates a paradigm for future studies on the evolution of school leadership in Japan, where there is a research desideratum, in comparison with other countries, thus contributing to a global field of research and practice. Specifically, this study is an unprecedented attempt to comprehensively analyze the detailed policy documents on school leadership in Japan, where such research is virtually nonexistent, at least as it relates to the literature written in English.

Table 1. Toda City Version School Management Rubric (Ver.1) ([10]: translated into English by the author).

1. School management staff as a Visionary	1-1. Is the school vision articulated, referred to with the school leader's own words, and revised as needed?
	1-2. Is there any intentional system to make the vision referred to by teachers and children as a common language?
	1-3. Do you identify phenomena contrary to the vision based on data and make regular improvements as needed?
2. School management staff who lead Curriculum Designers	2-1. Does the curriculum reflect the vision, and are resources from private companies, governments, academia and the community fully utilized to realize it?
	2-2. Is there any concrete system to realize "active learning" with ICT as a must throughout the school?
	2-3. Do you establish collegiality and promote information sharing across subjects/grades through in-school professional development and other approaches?
3. School management staff as a Manager	3-1. Do you establish a school organization in which teachers can bring out their potential synergistically?
	3-2. Do you ensure quality time directly related to children for teachers by work style reforms such as leveling burden and Business Process Re-engineering?
	3-3. Do you catch small signs in order to prevent issues and make a swift and apt decision in risk management?
4. School management staff as a Facilitator	4-1. Do you observe what's going on in classrooms with your own eyes and give feedback on learning/instruction to teachers?
	4-2. Do you provide opportunities for growth such as dialogues with encouragement to school staff in a timely manner tailored to each staff's situation?
	4-3. Do you strike a balance between creating value added unique to yourself and ensuring sustainability after you leave?
5. School management staff as a Buffer	5-1. Do you engage stakeholders intentionally in school management in addition to sharing information with and listening to stakeholders?
	5-2. Do you stay informed of national and the Toda City Board of Education's policies and reflect them on school management and educational activities as needed?
	5-3. Do you look objectively at and update yourself, as well as analyse school management from a variety of perspectives, through continuous learning?

2. Literature Review

Given the aforementioned research objective, the relevant literature on school leadership standards, as well as different leadership styles as lenses to dissect school leadership standards, are reviewed to set the stage for the present study.

School Leadership Standards

Assessing school principals' work is an issue that has drawn special attention internationally in recent years, either for recruitment and continuous improvement processes or for research purposes to identify the key characteristics and core competencies for student learning outcomes [12,13]. Allowing principals to identify quality and progress in their performance is especially necessary when promoting self-assessment. For this reason, rubrics are preferred because they allow for identifying specific levels of attainment in addition to assessing their own achievements and their improvement gaps and help principals to determine what they need to do to perform at a higher standard [14]. This resonates with the way the Toda City SMR is constructed, for the BOE officially acknowledges the need to "intentionally create a system where the policy (rubric) is referred to in daily school management and educational activities rather than keep the rubric 'a document on the table'" [15]. Although the rubric does not seem to explicitly include rating scales by numbers,

the policymakers apparently encourage school leaders to use it repetitively over a certain period of time to make continuous improvements.

As one of the most well-known school leadership standards overseas, in the United States, the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSELs) was established by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration, a consortium of professional organizations committed to advancing school leadership. The PSELs were formerly known as the ISLLC standards, when the Council of Chief State School Officers published the first version in 1996, followed by a modest update in 2008 based on the empirical research at the time [16]. The PSELs include ten standards for "educational leaders (who) need new standards to guide their practice in directions that will be the most productive and beneficial to students"; (1) Mission, Vision, and Core Values, (2) Ethics and Professional Norms, (3) Equity and Cultural Responsiveness, (4) Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, (5) Community of Care and Support for Students, (6) Professional Capacity of School Personnel, (7) Professional Community for Teachers and Staff, (8) Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community, (9) Operations and Management, and (10) School Improvement [16]. Each standard includes a detailed description of what effective educational leaders should do in each realm, which mainly applies to principals and assistant principals.

The transition from the ISLLC to the PSELs is regarded as relatively positive, for the new standards support, among others, the need to plan, the need to constantly collect and analyze data to inform plans and revisions of plans, the need to be collaborative and to genuinely seek and value diversity of input, the need to focus all plans on their potential effects on the success of all students, the need for a consistent, strong value and ethical system to guide all plans, the need to focus on how the plan will become implemented and assimilated into the culture of the school, the need to consider organizational readiness for change, and the importance of a shared vision [17]. These elements are also seen in the first dimension (School Management Staff as a Visionary) of the Toda City SMR, which embraces the shared vision of the school that includes the child's vision, the permeation of the vision into teachers as well as students, and the use of data to detect gaps between the vision and reality and make adjustments as needed.

It is also important to mention that the PSELs treat issues related to ethics, equity, and culturally responsive schooling (taking into account students' customs, characteristics, and experiences when designing learning) as discrete topics, each requiring an extensive discussion of its own, whereas, in the former ISLLC standards, issues related to these were grouped together under a single heading. Similarly, the new PSELs offer more detailed guidance related to leadership for curriculum, instruction, and assessment, give more attention to the need for school leaders to create a community of care and support for students, more fully describe school leaders' responsibility to develop the professional capacity of teachers and staff, and stress the value of engaging families and community members in student learning [18]. The Toda City SMR, puts an emphasis on "School Management Staff who lead Curriculum Designers" which includes the curriculum, lesson improvement, and collegiality among school staff, and "School Management Staff as a Facilitator" which entails support for teacher growth including giving feedback, however such issues as the collaboration with family and the community are touched upon as one of the three elements of "School Management Staff as a Buffer" and there is almost no mention of ethics and culturally responsive schooling.

Another renowned example of school leadership standards are the Headteachers' Standards (HSs) in the United Kingdom. The HSs include ten standards as well: (1) School culture, (2) Teaching, (3) Curriculum and assessment, (4) Behaviour, (5) Additional and special educational needs and disabilities, (6) Professional development, (7) Organisational management, (8) Continuous school improvement, (9) Working in partnership, and (10) Governance and accountability [19]. The first six standards build on the teachers' standards, whereas the remaining four focus on leadership responsibilities specific to headteachers. The standards can be used to shape headteachers' own practice and professional development, within and beyond the school, to support the recruitment and appointment

of headteachers, including the development of job descriptions and person specifications, to underpin frameworks for the training of school leaders, including current and aspiring headteachers, and to inform the performance management of headteachers [19]. Just as with the PSELs, the HSs include sentences to specify what each standard actually means.

Although the policy formation processes of the PSELs and the HSs are qualitatively different, with the former promoted by nongovernmental organizations and the latter as an authoritative governmental initiative [20–22], they share some common characteristics. Quinn [23] reports that (1) the standards have come to characterize all training programs for prospective principals; (2) the standards provide the focus for the ongoing training of principals; (3) the standards emphasize instructional leadership as the most important ingredient in professional development (rather than traditional management issues that are previously emphasized); and (4) the standards reflect the changing nature of the work of the principal. Although the latter two points will be explored later while making comparisons with the Toda City SMR, as for the former two points, the Toda City BOE seems to plan professional development opportunities for principals and vice principals with the five dimensions of the rubric in mind [8]. Moreover, according to Ingvarson et al. [3] who researched five countries' systems, they share common purposes for using school leadership standards: clarify expectations about school leadership for all those affected by it; enhance student learning outcomes; enhance the quality of educational leadership; provide a framework for professional development; provide a framework for certification; provide a framework for self-reflection and assessment; and provide a basis for determining eligibility for school leader positions. When it comes to the Toda City SMR, it does not contain the fifth (proving a framework for certification) and last (providing a basis for determining eligibility for school leader positions) purposes because in Japan, prefectural Boards of Education, not municipal BOEs, have the legal authority to fulfill these functions. However, it still covers the remaining five purposes mentioned above.

As a result of the preliminary comparison, it is reasonable to argue that the Toda City SMR has a relatively similar function to the PSEL and the HS in terms of its scope (to whom they apply) and usage (how to use them), with some minor differences. Given the content of each element of the aforementioned standards, the basic inter-relationship among the Toda City SMR, PSELs, and HSs is illustrated in Figure 1, which will be used for detailed analysis in the coming sections.
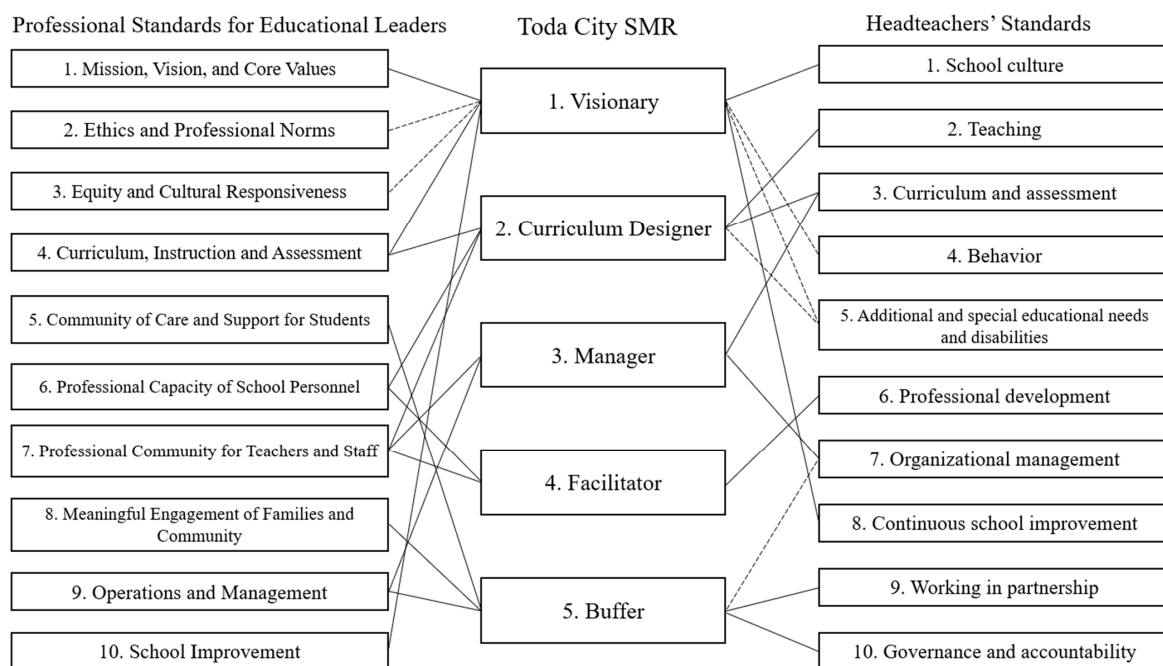

Figure 1. Four school leadership styles.

As a lens to dissect these school leadership standards, this article adopts four school leadership (transactional, instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership) styles articulated by Yokota [4], given the fact that these four styles seem to have been introduced in Japan without substantial conceptual modifications, and this classification was developed specifically for analyzing legislative as well as policy documents in Japan. A review of the literature on these leadership styles as pertinent to the research theme is briefly touched upon to help clarify the relations to and differences from each other.

Firstly, *transactional leadership* is defined as a leadership style that prioritizes organizational achievements that are focused on the organization. The sub-dimensions of transactional leadership are conditional award, management with expectancy, and management with passive expectancy [24]. In other words, this leadership style aims to achieve desirable organizational outcomes by treating individuals equally without attending to their unique different dispositions and changing their behavior through rules and regulations, external incentives, and accountability. Although derived from the management literature, it has also permeated into the education field, but rarely gained currency in comparison to the three leadership styles explained below. Although this leadership style is somewhat unavoidable in the case of an emergency, it is difficult for the *transactional* leadership style to prevail in school management, where the impact of school leaders on students is mediated by teacher behaviors and other conditions.

Instructional leadership, as the second style, is rooted in the belief that if school improvement is to make a difference for children, it has to be in fundamental ways around improving teaching and learning, thus targeting improving instructional capacity centrally [25]. Although the concept of instructional leadership came into prominent existence in the effective school movement in the 1980s, and attention shifted somewhat away from it during the mid-1990s, interests in studying this role of the school principal have remained quite stable since then [1], probably backed up by quantitative research that revealed a positive relationship between this specific leadership style and student achievement. For instance, based on earlier research [26], Bessell et al. [27] found that principals who focused on academic and instructional goals to improve student achievement and who were actively involved and visible in both the school and community, paid attention to local norms and concerns, promoted collaboration for mutual benefits among teachers, and shared decision-making with teachers, tended to also lead schools with higher student standardized test scores in reading, writing, and math. As long as teaching and learning remain the centerpiece of school reform, it is reasonable that policymakers expect school leaders to exercise the *instructional* leadership style to make visible changes in classrooms so that they can provide students with opportunities for them to prepare for the future.

The third *transformational* leadership style places transformation, development, and human values at the forefront [28], and is formed with idealized effects to inspire motivation, intellectual stimulation, and personal importance dimensions. *Transformational* leadership entails thinking, examining, and taking risks in order to realize tasks in the organization, in addition to imbuing certain notions and visions for organizational purposes in the employees of these organizations [29]. This leadership style might better be understood by juxtaposing it with other styles. For example, Burns [30] contrasts transformational with transactional leadership, and Hallinger [1] asserts that interest in effective schools and instructional leadership, which has often been interpreted as being top-down and directive, was displaced by concepts such as school restructuring and transformational leadership. Additionally, with its relatively broad focus on setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization [31,32], *transformational* leadership arguably has emerged as a response to deficiencies of transactional as well as instructional leadership styles.

However, *transformational* leadership itself cannot evade its own limitations of focusing on the role of a single visionary, and sometimes charismatic, leader, which has something to do with the advent of *distributed* leadership as the fourth style. *Distributed* leadership is an analytic lens for understanding leadership as a feature of organizations that recognizes that leadership practice is the product of the interactions of leaders, followers, and their

situations. Thus, leadership is distributed in the sense that it is not simply the sum of individual actions, but it emerges in the dynamic and shifting interactions between leaders, followers, and their situations [33]. This movement away from person-specific leadership theories makes sense in light of real-world situations; sometimes organizations without any specific visionary or charismatic leaders thrive because stakeholders have collective efficacy, accountability, and thus impact.

In Japan, a large-scale survey targeted at municipal BOEs found that principal leadership was considered to be the most important condition for school improvement [34]. Similarly, principal leadership was regarded as the most necessary condition, among others, to permeate the concept of the school curriculum, according to a questionnaire to prefectural and municipal BOEs [35]. Just as in other countries, school leaders are expected to be the change agents who can bridge policy and practice in Japan.

That being said, definitions of these four leadership styles are borrowed from the prior literature [4], as is shown in Table 2, as an analytic lens to dissect the Toda City SMR.

Table 2. Four School Leadership Styles [4].

Transactional leadership *[TA]*	Leadership that is exercised to achieve prescribed outcomes mainly through mutual exchange, conditional rewards or compliance, without necessarily attending to a shared sense of purpose
Instructional leadership *[I]*	Leadership that is explicitly targeted at creating in-school conditions under which teachers can improve teaching and student can enhance learning, sometimes coupled with its focus on school mission and culture
Transformational leadership *[TF]*	Leadership that focuses on creating conditions for improvement by setting a vision, developing people and redesigning the organization (both within the school and its relationship with outsiders), without its explicit focus on teaching and learning
Distributed leadership *[D]*	Leadership that explicitly aims to move away from the notion of a single leader, and instead aims to foster distribution of leadership, mainly characterized by interactions among stakeholders

Because these four leadership styles have been already used to analyze school leadership policy and practice in Japan, the present study can be built on the prior literature that focused on each of them. For example, the *transactional* leadership style was said to have been prevalent from the 1940s to the 1980s in Japanese laws and regulations, but is the least common among the four leadership styles in Japanese policy documents. This is probably because of the nature of policy documents in serving as milestones for subsequent policy reforms, whereas legislative statutes tend to be transactional due to their stipulation of specific procedures that principals are required to comply with [4]. Given that Toda City is famous for its pro-reform education policy, it is reasonable to assume that the SMR is likely to deemphasize the *transactional* leadership style, a similar trend seen in Japanese laws and regulations as well as policy documents that have put an increased focus on the instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership styles over the last few decades [4].

Additionally, *instructional* leadership, which situates principals as "teachers of teachers", seemed to be a major approach until the 1990s in Japan [36]. However, an analysis of documents issued by the Japanese Ministry of Education revealed that principals spent a relatively limited amount of time giving instruction and advice to teachers, which might suggest that principals could not fully exercise educational leadership behaviors in the face of their managerial imperatives [37]. Therefore, there is a possibility that this leadership style cannot fit the reality of school management in Japanese schools. Specifically, research on school leadership in Japan mentioned two inherent limitations of this leadership style. First, *instructional* leadership cannot explain arrangements of organizational structures as well as the transformation of teachers' values, which are important prerequisites for this leadership style to be put into practice. Second, *instructional* leadership, in its definition, does not include school leaders' impacts on parents and community members, who are situated near the organizational boundary of schools [36]. Given that school leaders' daily

tasks include those of a visionary, manager, facilitator, and negotiator, in addition to a curriculum leader, the movement away from the *instructional* leadership style was also unavoidable in Japan.

Furthermore, the *transformational* leadership style has been referred to as a more appropriate approach than the instructional leadership style to explain the realities of school leaders' behaviors in Japan [36]. However, it does not necessarily follow that this leadership style has become prevalent in order to respond to issues inherent in the instructional leadership style. Specifically, the trends observed in the analyses of national policy documents in Japan do not corroborate the idea that *transformational* leadership styles emerged as a response to the criticisms of instructional leadership, for instructional leadership seemed to gain currency in the 2010s, whereas policies targeted at *transformational* leadership were prevalent in the 2000s [4]. On the other hand, since there is almost no research that focuses on how these two leadership styles are materialized in local government policies as well as how school leaders perceive them in Japan, the present study is expected to shed light on these aspects.

Last but not least, research revealed that Japan could not embrace *distributed* leadership in the very ways that were advocated in the Western literature, for its relatively centralized school system, in which principals have ultimate legal responsibilities for educational activities in their school, prevented this style from being fully put into practice; thus, they ended up adopting a modified approach to accommodate *distributed* leadership style within a centralized context [4]. This phenomenon should be taken into account when this study draws conclusions from the results because applying theories dominant in Western countries to Japan without any consideration to its unique culture and policy contexts might run the risk of simplifying differences among countries.

3. Research Design

3.1. Background and Objectives of Research

The objective of this study is to answer the following research question: *in what respects is the Toda City SMR different from standards in other countries, and how might the perceptions of school leaders in the city have affected these differences?*

The aim of this article is to shed light on how the magic words of "school leadership" were turned into the Toda City SMR as concrete perspectives for school leaders to reflect on through a time-consuming discussion with principals and vice principals while making a connection to the school leadership literature and standards in other countries.

3.2. Methodology

In light of the aforementioned research question, the present study employed qualitative content analysis to compare the Toda City SMR to other educational leadership standards: PSELs in the U.S. and HSs in the U.K. Essentially, this study employed a combination of grounded theory and a case study. Firstly, by examining the contents of three standards to search for the relationship between each dimension of the three standards through the lenses of transactional [TA], instructional [I], transformational [TF], and distributed [D] leadership styles, it aimed to clarify fundamental similarities and differences among them (the grounded theory approach). Secondly, by analyzing the document on the dialogue with principals and vice principals during the formation of the Toda City SMR, which is in fact conducted by the author himself (the case study approach), details of the policy context were explored through the lenses of the four aforementioned leadership styles while making comparisons to specific elements of the PSELs and HSs. This methodology allowed the author to delve into a basic, overall picture as well as detailed contextual differences among the three standards, with frequencies of four leadership styles as an appropriate milestone for comparison.

3.3. Data Sources

The present study takes the form of secondary data collection, meaning that it employed already published data on the three standards as well as the interviews that the author himself conducted with school leaders in Toda City during the policy formulation of the SMR. Specifically, information on the Toda City SMR and the interview data themselves were publicly available on the Toda City Board of Education website as the document is discussed at its Education Policy Think Tank (a panel of experts to advise the BOE's specific education reform initiatives) [3]: the rubric itself is in page 4 as well as a detailed memo of the dialogue with principals and vice principals ((1) things that school leaders focus on in school management, (2) issues that school leaders are faced with, and (3) skills that school leaders need to improve and other dilemmas) in pages 10–14. The consent from all the school leaders to the publication of the record of the dialogue was already obtained prior to this study when the document was published at the Toda City Education Policy Think Tank. Since all information is written in Japanese, the author translated the relevant parts of the document into English, which will be presented in the sections that follow.

On the other hand, information on both the PSEL in the U.S. and the HS in the U.K. is available in English, with the former on the National Policy Board for Educational Administration [16] and the latter on the Department for Education, Gov UK. website [19]. As for the PSELs, the document includes sentences that articulate specific elements of each dimension (e.g., standard 1 (Mission, vision, and core values) on page 9 and standard 2 (Ethics and professional norms) on page 10). The HSs take on a similar appearance, except that each dimension and its constructs are put directly on the website rather than in the form of a PDF document.

3.4. Data Analysis

In terms of data analysis, this study employed constant comparison, which entailed coding data to detect relationships between codes and construct theories as the analysis proceeded. The basic comparison of the three school leadership standards was conducted by categorizing each dimension through the lenses of the transactional, instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership styles as defined in Figure 1. Since these four styles are not mutually exclusive, there are some dimensions that hinge on more than two leadership styles. Abbreviations (*[TA]* for transactional, *[I]* for instructional, *[TF]* for transformational, and *[D]* for distributed leadership, respectively) were added inside the box of each dimension to make it easier to understand coding.

Additionally, in order to prove further nuances and policy contexts, detailed information such as the conversation with principals and vice principals (the Toda City SMR) and specific constructs that shape each dimension of the standards (the PSEL and HS) were analyzed by the same definitions of the aforementioned leadership styles. The results are presented in the form of the frequency of the mention of each style, as divided by the total possible number, so that they capture overall trends. Moreover, although information on the detailed categorization of each element of the PSELs and HSs is not presented due to a constraint of the space, the result relating to the Toda City SMR is shown in the succeeding section, with the acknowledgement that this information provides invaluable clues for deeply understanding school management standards in Japan to an unprecedented extent.

The results will be presented in the sections that follow, with the intention that the analysis of the association between the data will shed light on how the Toda City SMR differs from school leadership standards in other countries in its focus on the aforementioned four leadership styles, and to what extent the differences that are detected relate to the perceptions of school leaders in Toda City, who were substantially engaged in the policy formation process of the SMR that will affect their practices.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. A Basic Comparison of Each Dimension of the Three School Leadership Standards

The result of the basic comparison among the Toda City SMR, PSELs, and HSs, is presented in Figure 2, with each element of the three school leadership standards marked with the four leadership styles. There are some implications that readers can draw from this preliminary comparison. Firstly, the *transformational* leadership style is the most prevalent throughout the three standards. This is not surprising considering the fact that this style covers a relatively broad range of elements from setting the vision, developing people, and redesigning the organizational structure in its definition.
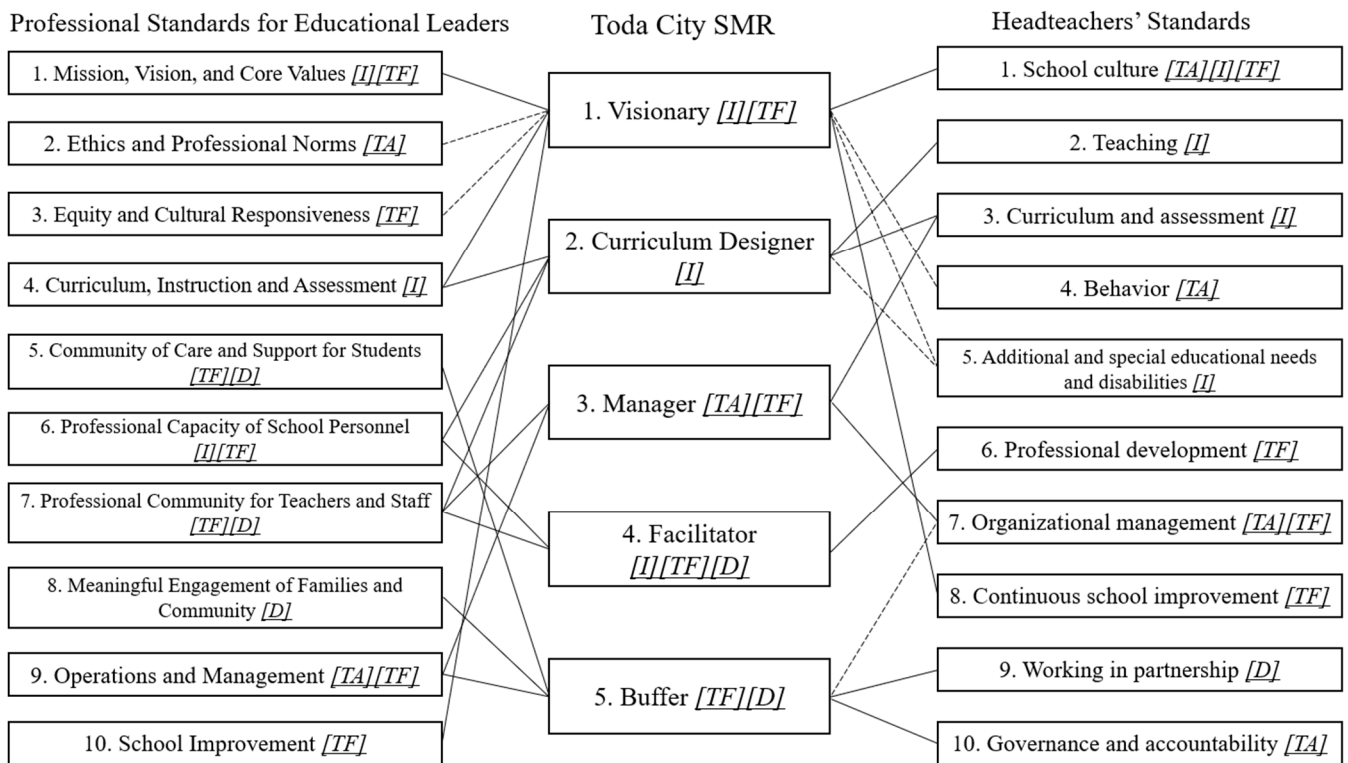

Figure 2. An analysis of the Toda City SMR, PSELs, and HSs through four leadership styles.

Additionally, there is an explicit focus on the aspect of *instructional* leadership ("Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment" in the PSELs, "Curriculum Designer" in the SMR, and "Teaching" as well as "Curriculum and Assessment" in the HSs), whereas the mention of *distributed* leadership is somewhat arbitrary. The former can be taken as a natural consequence given that these standards are education-specific and aim at improving teaching and learning at schools. The latter also seems reasonable since the three standards apply mainly to each school leader. As a result, the *distributed* leadership styles that capture an interaction among stakeholders are hard to be materialized within these standards. This phenomenon, somewhat inherent in studying school leadership standards, is corroborated by the research on the comparison between the U.S. and U.K. standards [32] that concluded the particular version of leadership which is privileged, tends to be individualistic and transformational, and is focused principally on the deeds of senior hierarchical role incumbents (a hero paradigm).

Moreover, there are relatively few elements focused on *transactional* leadership in the Toda City SMR (only 3-3: Do you catch small SOS in order to prevent issues and make a swift and apt decision in risk management?) compared to the PSELs ("Ethics and Professional Norms" and "Operations and Management") and the HSs ("Behaviour" and "Governance and accountability"). This finding is somewhat interesting given the prior literature that revealed overwhelming discursive prominence to leadership, rather than to

management or administration, in both the U.K. and U.S. standards [38]. Japan's reluctance to refer to *transactional* leadership might be reflective of the fact that because most of the obligations and responsibilities are already stipulated in laws [4], there is no need to repeat these transactional aspects in this reform-oriented rubric.

Furthermore, the dotted lines, which indicate relatively weak relationships between standards, are worth mentioning. It is not surprising that such factors as "Ethics and Professional Norms" (PSELs) and "Behaviour" (HSs) do not find corresponding places in the Toda City SMR, which is composed of more concise sentences, although it does not necessarily follow that the Toda City SMR underestimates these things. The same argument applies to "Equity and Cultural Responsiveness" (PSELs) and "Additional and special educational needs and disabilities" (HSs). While the Toda City SMR does not specifically touch upon these issues, the BOE clearly defines the purpose of this rubric as "school management where nobody will be left behind", which consciously or unconsciously includes these factors.

4.2. Analysis of the Dialogue with Principals and Vice Principals through Four Leadership Styles

The aforementioned analysis remains somewhat superficial because it does not touch upon the details and backgrounds of the policy formation of the Toda City SMR. Fortunately, the Toda City BOE published detailed information on the dialogue with principals and vice principals, which formed the basis of the SMR [12]. Each opinion was also coded with the aforementioned four leadership styles, the result of which is shown in Figure 3. The original document was translated from Japanese into English, and then corresponding leadership styles were added in italics and underlines.
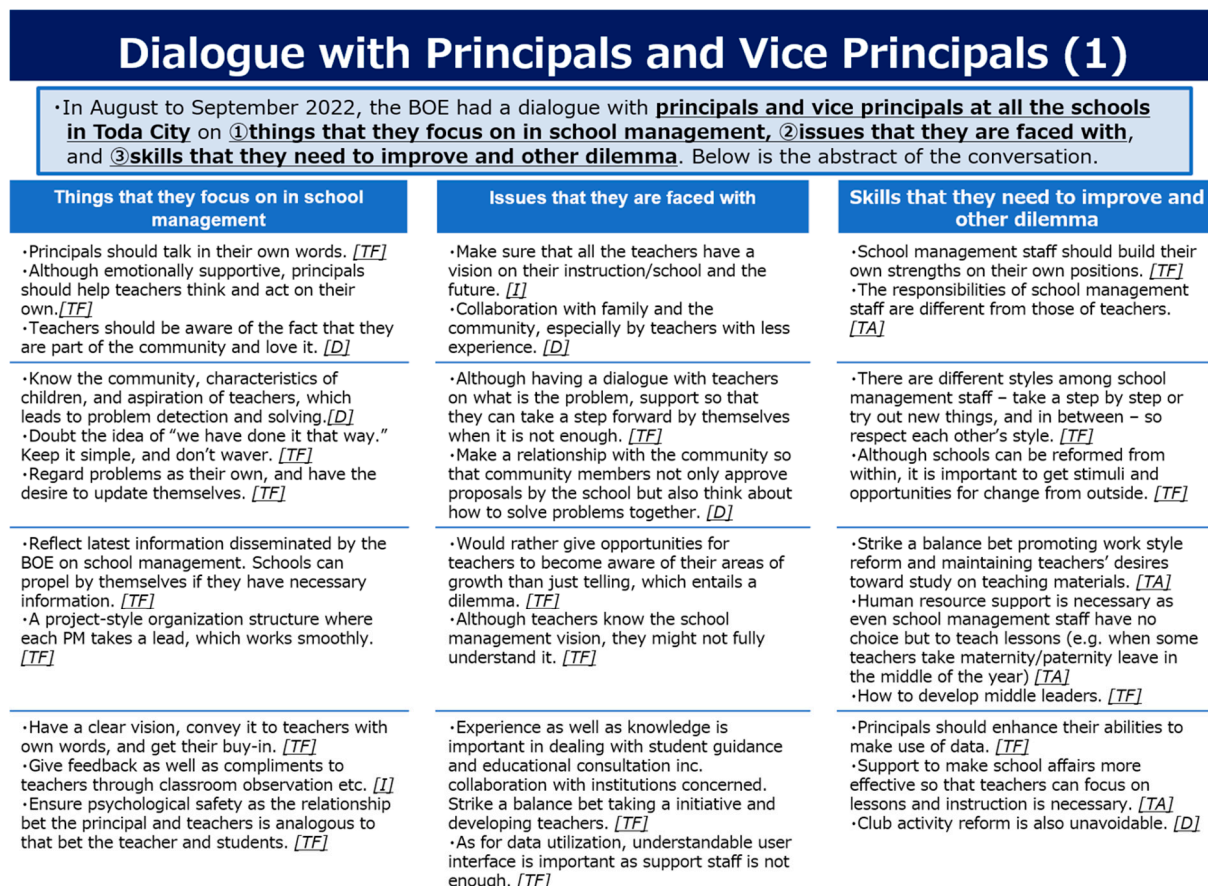

Dialogue with Principals and Vice Principals (1)

·In August to September 2022, the BOE had a dialogue with **principals and vice principals at all the schools in Toda City** on ①**things that they focus on in school management**, ②**issues that they are faced with**, and ③**skills that they need to improve and other dilemma**. Below is the abstract of the conversation.

Things that they focus on in school management	Issues that they are faced with	Skills that they need to improve and other dilemma
·Principals should talk in their own words. *[TF]* ·Although emotionally supportive, principals should help teachers think and act on their own.*[TF]* ·Teachers should be aware of the fact that they are part of the community and love it. *[D]*	·Make sure that all the teachers have a vision on their instruction/school and the future. *[I]* ·Collaboration with family and the community, especially by teachers with less experience. *[D]*	·School management staff should build their own strengths on their own positions. *[TF]* ·The responsibilities of school management staff are different from those of teachers. *[TA]*
·Know the community, characteristics of children, and aspiration of teachers, which leads to problem detection and solving.*[D]* ·Doubt the idea of "we have done it that way." Keep it simple, and don't waver. *[TF]* ·Regard problems as their own, and have the desire to update themselves. *[TF]*	·Although having a dialogue with teachers on what is the problem, support so that they can take a step forward by themselves when it is not enough. *[TF]* ·Make a relationship with the community so that community members not only approve proposals by the school but also think about how to solve problems together. *[D]*	·There are different styles among school management staff – take a step by step or try out new things, and in between – so respect each other's style. *[TF]* ·Although schools can be reformed from within, it is important to get stimuli and opportunities for change from outside. *[TF]*
·Reflect latest information disseminated by the BOE on school management. Schools can propel by themselves if they have necessary information. *[TF]* ·A project-style organization structure where each PM takes a lead, which works smoothly. *[TF]*	·Would rather give opportunities for teachers to become aware of their areas of growth than just telling, which entails a dilemma. *[TF]* ·Although teachers know the school management vision, they might not fully understand it. *[TF]*	·Strike a balance bet promoting work style reform and maintaining teachers' desires toward study on teaching materials. *[TA]* ·Human resource support is necessary as even school management staff have no choice but to teach lessons (e.g. when some teachers take maternity/paternity leave in the middle of the year) *[TA]* ·How to develop middle leaders. *[TF]*
·Have a clear vision, convey it to teachers with own words, and get their buy-in. *[TF]* ·Give feedback as well as compliments to teachers through classroom observation etc. *[I]* ·Ensure psychological safety as the relationship bet the principal and teachers is analogous to that bet the teacher and students. *[TF]*	·Experience as well as knowledge is important in dealing with student guidance and educational consultation inc. collaboration with institutions concerned. Strike a balance bet taking a initiative and developing teachers. *[TF]* ·As for data utilization, understandable user interface is important as support staff is not enough. *[TF]*	·Principals should enhance their abilities to make use of data. *[TF]* ·Support to make school affairs more effective so that teachers can focus on lessons and instruction is necessary. *[TA]* ·Club activity reform is also unavoidable. *[D]*

Figure 3. *Cont.*

Dialogue with Principals and Vice Principals (2)

Things that they focus on in school management	Issues that they are faced with	Skills that they need to improve and other dilemma
·Develop grit (non-cognitive abilities) through PBL etc. *[I]* ·Ask teachers for their views on scenes where use of ICT is not effective, for instructional skills are needed to tackle new things. *[I]* ·Family and the community becomes supporters of the school, which is invaluable. *[D]*	·Since principals and vice principals have different obligations, craft my own color into a vision, and implement it while tailoring to students. *[TF]* ·Create a comfortable and friendly organization while acknowledging that I cannot talk with all the staff every day. *[TF]* ·Make the School Management Committee self-governing. *[D]*	·Appreciate that BOE provide info on new type of learning and instruction on perspectives other than each subject. As there is an atmosphere to promote it within school, how the school cooks with these raw materials is important. *[I] [TF]* ·In need of a person who has a dialogue with principals on school management vision while listening to their opinions. *[TF]*
·Putting children first is non-negotiable. Serve as a facilitator who observes and considers how to develop children and teachers while bringing out their potentials. *[TF]* ·Strike a balance bet the school vision that the principal aims at and human development that takes into account the movement of the society. *[TF]*	·Teachers should not force children with various characteristics into a box of their desirable class. How to support teachers themselves while taking into account their personalities. *[TF]*	·Although wondered if I should take a strong lead at the beginning of assuming principalship, now I would rather build up what I think is better on what is on the ground. *[TF]* ·Somebody who can take a look at school management objectively from outside makes a difference. *[TF]*
·School management staff should convey their opinions with passion and give feedback to teachers, while making use of Active Learning Instruction Rubric and SAMR Model etc. *[I]* ·Provide PD opportunities where teachers can discuss inter-subject themes and have a sense of ownership. *[TF]*	·Making use of outside resources is needed as new initiatives take time before adoption. *[D]* ·Teachers who have a memory of school violence in the past tend to have students sit down and listen to them. They need to adjust to the contemporary era, so support them as a team. *[TF]*	·Principals tend to become the Emperor's New Clothes. Should be humble to the community and family, and create an atmosphere in which teachers can express their opinions frankly. *[TF] [D]* ·Appreciate the School Management Advisor who was a former principals and gives instruction on school management. *[TF]*
·It's important for teachers to feel outcomes. Evidence without such feeling would not sustain reforms. *[D]* ·Initiate practices proactively and let policies follow them rather than following new directions from the BOE or MEXT. *[TF]*	·Since abilities and attributes of each teacher is different, set an individual goal and provide support as a school. *[TF]* ·Sometimes get nervous about the result of stress check survey although taking a lead without consideration of resistance. *[TA]*	·People cannot grow unless they are given opportunities. Professional development on model press conference after incidents and risk management was a great opportunity for me to hone these necessary abilities. *[TA]*
·Put an emphasis on educational activities that put children in the center as well as special education that is not special. *[I]* ·Management staff should be a coward who anticipates the worst situation and makes a decision while collecting necessary info. *[TA]*	·Would like to provide opportunities for teachers to actually touch upon the wind of education that anticipates future society. *[TF]* ·Never overlook small SOS from children. There is always a reason for what children do. *[I]*	·Don't make work style reform an end rather than a means to an end. There are things that we have to do now for children. *[TF]* ·There are schools that are self-running and always nervous about BOE's move. This is where principal leadership comes in. *[TF]*

Dialogue with Principals and Vice Principals (3)

Things that they focus on in school management	Issues that they are faced with	Skills that they need to improve and other dilemma
·Put well-being first. Let children have their own core so that they can survive after graduation, and teachers fulfill their vocation while taking advantage of their areas of strengths. *[I] [TF]* ·While update visions of school education and students, set aside time for teachers to think on their own and take them as matters of their own, which is important in school management. *[D]*	·Although it is best to self-control, teachers become better by being watched by others, so how to strike a balance between these two is important. *[TF]* ·Assign teachers to school affairs with a sense of foresight so that they become leaders in each team. *[D]* ·Think about what reducing teacher burden is for and whether it leads to learning material study for children. *[I]*	·Dare to wait. Once I immediately took actions when I felt they are necessary. It is as important to listen to teachers and consult with their struggles as strong leadership. *[TF]* ·Although there are many issues on a daily basis, principals should acquire a variety of knowledge. They should adeptly convey what the BOE considers to teachers [TA].
·①Student academic achievement, ②student guidance and educational consultation that supports lesson, ③development of teachers who support these, are my areas of focus. *[I]* ·Talk with my own words about why active learning or ICT is necessary, which sometimes does not work as I imagined. *[I]*	·Although trying to develop abilities and attributes with which students can survive the future, entrance exams still remain traditional is the issue. *[TA]* ·Rather than reactive student guidance, which means responding to issues once they arise, proactive students guidance as well as educational counseling are needed. *[I]*	·Skills to provide opportunities to grow with school staff and develop them with a sense of satisfaction and ownership are needed. *[TF]* ·Make top-down initiatives look non-top-down. Serve as a connection between the BOE and the school staff room. *[TF] [D]*
·Let students feel joy of learning so that they can come to school with a sense of safety and smile. *[TF]* ·In order to realize that, teachers should be happy as well. That's my focus such as having a dialogue with teachers. *[TF]*	·Implicit rules not embedded in the school organization, which turned out after some teachers leave, thus redress this problem. *[TF]* ·Create a school where its vision can sustain regardless of teacher turnover. *[TF]*	·Crisis management skills are not sufficient. *[TA]* ·Educational activities span beyond the school, so make further use of resources outside of the school while examining them. *[D]*
·My No.1 goal is to pursue a student-centered education. Put that kind of students we want them to be and what actions are necessary to realize that first rather than teacher well-being spreading into child well-being. *[I]*	·Have a same picture with teachers on the transformation of learning so that they can understand and change their mindset. ·While utilizing data, teachers should look objectively at their own instruction. *[I]*	·Management and HR strategies, such as starting with the vision and take measures according to it, are not enough. *[TF]* ·How to encourage self-propulsion of school staff. *[TF] [D]*
·How to envision a goal. For example, how to envision students as a result of in-school professional development. *[TF]* ·In addition to the direction of governments, take advantage of originality and areas of strength as a principal. *[TF]* ·Teachers should have a sense of efficacy. *[TF]*	·Except for in case of emergency, bring out originalities of teachers rather than giving detailed directions. *[TF]* ·Where to draw the line bet what the school and community should do. *[D]* ·Be mindful that some people cannot respond to new movements. *[TA]*	·Skills ana the rubric might subject to the specific period. *[TF]* ·Sometimes a position changes a person. This kind of guidance might be useful to school management staff who is striving. *[TA]*

Figure 3. *Cont.*

Dialogue with Principals and Vice Principals (4)

Things that they focus on in school management	Issues that they are faced with	Skills that they need to improve and other dilemma
·To what extent we share the prospect, goal, and vision, is the key. In order to realize that, building the organization is also essential. *[TF]*	·All the staff understand merits of new policies such as active learning and GIGA school initiative, so provide direct advice and support as an organization. *[I]*	·Although obsessed with everyday issues at the beginning, I now have enough space to pay attention to classes and students. *[I]*
·Make schools where people grow – where children as well as teachers can make mistakes, learn from them, and grow. Make the school staff room and classrooms where members can call for help and others provide support accordingly. *[TF]* ·Encourage the self-propulsion and collaboration of teachers through a mission-based organizational structure with project leaders assigned to each team. *[TF]* ·Promote learning that connects to the real society such as PBL and STEAM while collaborating with the family and the community. *[I] [D]* ·Get away with 3Ks (experience, intuition, and spirit) and study scientifically learning. *[TF]*	·Practice up-down management in which teachers themselves think and implement. On the other hand, because I have successful experiences of top-down management, I feel a dilemma when entrusting teachers. *[TF] [TA]* ·Courses of study may come to hallways but not into classrooms. How to provide support to teachers so that they become aware of their own problems. *[I]* ·Although using ICT very adeptly, there are still issues in terms of lesson design and subject education. *[I]*	·Principals themselves need to grow, learn, and change. *[TF]* ·Set a goal and show the ways to achieve it as a basis of organizational administration. While doing these, do not regard the organization as fixed. *[TF]* ·Know-hows of human development largely depend on experiences. *[TF] [TA]* ·Abilities to make use of information connected to the real society is at issue. *[TF]*
·Once teachers grow, children grow. My role is to make the school staff room a psychologically safe place. *[TF]*	·Teachers lack skills to capture the essence of lesson. Although they make efficient use ICT, they should be mindful of the "activities without learning" pitfall. School management staff will also need to update their instructional skills of subject education. *[I]*	·Not necessarily able to collect information on children, families, the community, and teachers, then make decisions and act accordingly. *[TA]* ·As I was a teacher in an old age, how to acquire necessary knowledge to move the organization ahead. *[TA] [TF]*
·My basic principle is to put well-being in the center, and well-being of teachers spread to children, parents, and the community. *[TF]* ·Try to form a shared understanding of the way the school organization ought to be as well as views of the world within the school, while taking into account competencies that children should acquire in the future. *[TF]*	·Convey the necessity of GIGA tablets to the families repeatedly as they might become a cause of troubles. *[TA]* ·There is a linkage between student guidance and work style reform, and teachers have to take actions even at night in case of emergency. *[TA]* ·Overlap children in school education with the latest world situation. *[TF]*	·Although we dealt with student guidance issues as a team, now it becomes difficult due to the capacity of teachers, so I as a principal take a lead from the beginning, which enhances my crisis management skills. *[TA]* ·There are a certain number of children who use the principal's office as a place of cool-down. Although it partly derives from family issues, it is desirable as a structure for the school to provide support. *[I] [TF]*

Dialogue with Principals and Vice Principals (5)

Things that they focus on in school management	Issues that they are faced with	Skills that they need to improve and other dilemma
·Teachers need to look outside the school such as the collaboration with the School Management Committee, disaster prevention education, and reform of club activities. *[D]* ·Abolished school staff meeting when all the staff come together, and make efficient use of the planning committee instead. On the other hand, we come together at in-school professional development, where we are engaged in some group works. *[TF]*	·How to break the wall of subjects and the spirit of "just like before." Starting with chatting, encourage teachers themselves to become aware of the fact that they are talking too much in lesson. *[I]* ·While focused on PBL, instruction on subject education is not sufficient. *[I]*	·Assign vice principals and the chief teacher to each grade, which fostered a sense of focus in them. *[TF]* ·It's easy to give directions top-down, but this tends to hinder everyone's voluntary thinking and action, so take into account their motivation when communicating. *[TF] [D]*
·Update the school education goal while taking into account the child vision. All educational activities such as lesson, class activities, and school evaluation, should be under the umbrella of the school education goal, and everything should be considered in light of this vision. Then the whole school will head toward the same direction. *[TF] [I]*	·Conduct lessons that children feel enjoyable, which will lead to developing their willingness to learn. Take such actions as embedding this element in KPIs and encourage teachers to conduct such lessons with ICT and then give feedback. *[I]* ·Subject education and PBL are two sides of the same coin, but the subject education part is becoming smaller in my view. That's why school management staff should model subject lessons. *[I]*	·Creating a vision as a management staff and let people concerned understand which part of this vision they are implementing is needed. Meticulous support to teachers is still on the way. *[TF]* ·The Curriculum Management Professional Development is unique to the Toda City and very informative. *[I]* ·There needs to be platform where principals, including those working outside of the city, can get together and consult with each other. *[D] [TF]*
·How to motivate teachers by talking with and giving compliments to them rather than taking a top-down approach. It becomes better when examining teachers voices and the result of stress check etc. *[TF]* ·When it comes to lesson study, be mindful to improve lesson design through a interdisciplinary perspective, which benefits children. *[I]*	·How to develop self-esteem of children. Breaking the vicious cycle of teachers giving too much instruction to children with low self-esteem, which further hinders the development of such ability is needed. *[TF] [I]* ·Adopt proposals of teachers who like new things, and spread this practice by having others see his/her lesson. It's basically an extension of what I've done as a teacher to students. *[I]*	·I've developed my own criteria (something like a manual) through a variety of experiences. *[TF]* ·It's somewhat unique to Toda City that we're already heading to the new stage at the time when the current Courses of Study has just been implemented. *[TF]* ·Experience and real contact should be valued as well in this digital society. *[I]* ·Acquiring new knowledge and information utilization ability is at issue. *[TF]*

Figure 3. Analysis of the dialogue with principals and vice principals through four leadership styles.

As in Figure 2, the *transformational* leadership style seems to be the most frequently mentioned among the four. Typical remarks made by school leaders include "*Have a clear vision, convey it to teachers with own words, and get their buy-in*", "*Strike a balance bet(ween) the school vision that the principal aims at and human development that takes into account the movement of the society*", "*To what extent we share the prospect, goal, and vision, is the key. In order to realize that, building the organization is also essential*", and "*Update the school education goal while taking into account the child vision.*" This result is somewhat consistent with the prior research that most of the recent national policy documents featured an aspect of transformational leadership [4], although the Toda City SMR is focused more on practice rather than policy. Apparently, school leaders in Toda City are taking a further step to becoming visionaries, beyond their minimum obligations and responsibilities stipulated by national law and regulations.

Moreover, many of the principals and vice principals referred to *instructional* leadership in a sense that they need to take a lead in transforming traditional teacher-led instruction into student-centered learning such as PBL (project-based learning). Remarks such as "*Have a same picture with teachers on the transformation of learning so that they can understand and change their mindset*", "*Promote learning that connects to the real society such as PBL and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics) while collaborating with the family and the community*", "*Courses of study may come to hallways but not into classrooms. How to provide support to teachers so that they become aware of their own problems*", "*How to break the wall of subjects and the spirit of "just like before". Starting with chatting, encourage teachers themselves to become aware of the fact that they are talking too much in lesson*", and "*Conduct lessons that children feel enjoyable, which will lead to developing their willingness to learn. Take such actions as embedding this element in KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and encourage teachers to conduct such lessons with ICT (Information and Communication Technology) and then give feedback.*" support this finding. This phenomenon would be reflective of the fact that the instructional leadership style in Japan is practice-based rather than policy-mandated [4] and that Toda City is famous for its aggressive education reform [7]. Within this policy context, it is not surprising that school leaders in Toda City relentlessly focus on making changes in how teachers teach and students learn, rather than clinging to the status quo.

Another thing worth mentioning about *instructional* leadership is that although most of the principals and vice principals in Toda City promote the use of ICT in lessons, many of them simultaneously put a relentless emphasis on making subject education (i.e., Japanese language, mathematics, social studies, science, and so on), which is deemed to be a strength of Japanese education, more meaningful. Comments such as "*Although using ICT very adeptly, there are still issues in terms of lesson design and subject education*", "*Teachers lack skills to capture the essence of lesson. Although they make efficient use (of) ICT, they should be mindful of the "activities without learning" pitfall. School management staff will also need to update their instructional skills of subject education*", "*While focused on PBL, instruction on subject education is not sufficient*", and "*Subject education and PBL are two sides of the same coin, but the subject education part is becoming smaller in my view. That's why school management staff should model subject lessons.*" are indicative of this trend. Because PBL is one of the distinct policy initiatives of this city [6], this so-called pendulum swinging between PBL and subject education might be unique to school leaders in Toda City rather than a national trend.

Furthermore, the *distributed* leadership style is considered to be important by many school leaders, especially because they continue to seek an appropriate balance between a top-down approach and devolution to teachers. Such comments as "*(I) Would rather give opportunities for teachers to become aware of their areas of growth than just telling, which entails a dilemma*", "*Strike a balance bet(ween) taking an initiative and developing teachers*", and "*It's easy to give directions top-down, but this tends to hinder everyone's voluntary thinking and action, so take into account their motivation when communicating.*" are typical examples of the school leaders' struggles. In the policy environment where school leadership standards continue to focus on role-based expectations of the individual school leader, rather than attempting to assess the quality and effectiveness of leadership distributed across the

school organization [39], the concerns expressed by school leaders in Toda City might be considered somewhat unavoidable, although not desirable. This result resonates with the prior research that revealed Japan's modified approach to the distributed leadership style to accommodate it within the centralized school system [4], which indicates that this phenomenon might not be specific to Toda City.

Last but not least, some principals and vice principals take the issue of work style reform seriously, which assumes an aspect of *transactional* leadership. They express their opinions in a variety of ways: "*Strike a balance bet(ween) promoting work style reform and maintaining teachers' desires toward study on teaching materials*", "*Support to make school affairs more effective so that teachers can focus on lessons and instruction is necessary*", and "*There is a linkage between student guidance and work style reform, and teachers have to take actions even at night in case of emergency.*" This trend is somewhat consistent with previous research that found a broad consensus among countries promoting standards on managerial aspects within the policy environment of accountability [11] and is not surprising given the fact that Japanese teachers work for the longest hours among the OECD countries; thus, improving their working conditions is currently high on the national agenda.

4.3. A Comparison of the Frequency of the Mention of Four Leadership Styles among Three School Leadership Standards

As a possible method of cross-country comparison, the frequency of the mention of the four leadership styles among three standards was calculated and is presented in Table 3. In this study, as for the PSELs in the U.S. [13] and the HSs in the U.K. [16], specific constructs that shape each dimension of these standards were analyzed by the same definitions of the aforementioned leadership styles. Although the Toda City SMR does not include corresponding information that shows constructs of each dimension, the detailed information shown in Figure 3 was instead used for further analysis. This decision is considered to be a reasonable alternative given that this dialogue with principals and vice principals set the basis for the formulation of the rubric [15]. The frequency of the mention of each style was derived by dividing the times that each style appeared by the total possible number of times. A similar analysis was conducted by prior research [4] to calculate the frequency of the mention of the transactional, instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership styles in national legislation and policy documents in Japan. Because these leadership styles are not mutually exclusive, there are some constructs that assume more than two leadership styles, and the percentage relating to each standard does not add up to 100%.

Table 3. The frequency of the mention of four leadership styles among three school leadership standards.

	Toda City SMR (JPN)	PSEL (U.S.)	HS (U.K.)
Transational	14.0%	19.3%	39.5%
Instructional	23.5%	27.7%	31.6%
Transformational	57.4%	55.4%	42.1%
Distributed	16.2%	26.5%	21.1%

The international comparison generated five major implications. To begin with, among the four leadership styles, the *transformational* leadership style was the most prevalent throughout the three standards. This result seems reasonable given the fact that this leadership style has in its own sense a broad coverage over vision, people, and the organization. There are both pros and cons; although it is necessary to include *transformational* leadership elements in school leadership standards, it might be difficult to differentiate distinguished leadership components from others solely by using this leadership style. There is a possibility that the comprehensiveness of the framework might discourage its users from engaging in a critical interrogation of their own practices, as was mentioned regarding the Ontario Leadership Framework [40].

Additionally, the HSs in the U.K. contained more *transactional* leadership styles than the Toda City SMR and the PSELs in the U.S. Constructs within the dimensions "Behaviour" and "Organisational Management", such as "establish and sustain high expectations of behaviour for all pupils, built upon relationships, rules and routines, which are understood clearly by all staff and pupils", "implement consistent, fair and respectful approaches to managing behaviour" (the former) and "ensure the protection and safety of pupils and staff through effective approaches to safeguarding, as part of the duty of care", as well as "ensure rigorous approaches to identifying, managing and mitigating risk" (the latter), are typical examples. It is interesting to note that although the accountability movement is more prevalent in the U.S. and U.K. than in Japan, the HSs still put more focus on *transactional* leadership than the PSELs.

Moreover, *instructional* leadership appeared at a stable rate throughout the three standards. The contents are also similar, including "Ensure instructional practice that is intellectually challenging, authentic to student experiences, recognizes student strengths, and is differentiated and personalized" in the PSELs and "establish and sustain high-quality, expert teaching across all subjects and phases, built on an evidence-informed understanding of effective teaching and how pupils learn" in the HSs, among others. This result resonates with the prior literature that school improvement has to occur in fundamental ways around improving teaching and learning and improving instructional capacity has to be the central target of school improvement initiatives [25]. The fact that the Toda City SMR has more mention of the use of ICT in lessons might be reflective of the GIGA (Global and Innovation Gateway for All) School Initiative, in which the national government subsidized one device per one student in all public elementary and junior high schools throughout the country.

Furthermore, *transformational* leadership was the most prevalent in the Toda City SMR. Specifically, in addition to setting a vision, the three standards have in common an element of the use of data to inform school management, seen with "Principals should enhance their abilities to make use of data" in the SMR, "Use assessment data appropriately and within technical limitations to monitor student progress and improve instruction" in the PSELs, and "make use of effective and proportional processes of evaluation to identify and analyze complex or persistent problems and barriers which limit school effectiveness, and identify priority areas for improvement" in the HSs. However, policymakers and practitioners should be mindful not to make the rhetoric of "transformation" in these standards reproduce the status quo, inequities, and achievement gaps, among others [41], and not to contribute to the overall bureaucratization of what should be a comprehensive improvement process and useful tool such as the yearlong School Improvement Plan advanced by the No Child Left Behind Act in the U.S [42].

Last but not least, the *distributed* leadership style is referred to most frequently in the U.S. and less dominantly in Toda City, with the U.K. in the middle. Given previous research that the narrow focus on individual leadership development has excluded the full spectrum of leadership development interventions from being explored and analyzed [43], constructs explicitly relating to distributed leadership ("Develop the capacity, opportunities, and support for teacher leadership and leadership from other members of the school community" in the PSELs and "establish and sustain the school's ethos and strategic direction in partnership with those responsible for governance and through consultation with the school community" in the HSs, among others) should be valued as a way to share responsibility and accountability with the stakeholders concerned.

5. Concluding Remarks

The results acquired through the analysis of the SMR and the dialogue with school leaders somewhat reflected on both recent national policy trends and reforms unique to Toda City. By analyzing the policy formation process through the lenses of transactional, instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership styles, the results illuminate how the same words of "school leadership" hinge on similar as well as distinct elements and nuances in the three countries. One consistent finding throughout Sections 4.1–4.3 is

that *transformational* leadership seems to be the most preferred style among the four in all the three leadership standards. Specifically, the fact that the many school leaders in Toda City mentioned the importance of the use of data in their daily school management might be reflective of the BOE's policy focus on EBPM (evidence-based policy making) [6]. On the other hand, the current study revealed differences in the way the transactional, instructional, and distributed leadership styles are referred to. First of all, the Toda City SMR has less mention of the *transactional* leadership style than the PSELs in the U.S. and HSs in the U.K. However, this finding should be taken with caution given the relatively hierarchical and top-down organizational structure of Japanese schools; the Toda City school leaders still need to comply with laws and regulations, which assume mostly *transactional* leadership elements, in addition to this rubric.

Moreover, whereas the standards in the three countries put a similar emphasis in terms of their frequency of the mention of the *instructional* leadership style, which is unique to the education field, Toda City seems to be leaning toward the use of ICT, project-based learning, as well as subject education. Even though the city's effort to change the "grammar of schooling" (traditional teacher-centered instruction) by continuing past objectives and pioneering the future while developing them [44] might explain this phenomenon, it does not necessarily follow that the Japanese education system as a whole has the same policy preference. Furthermore, the *distributed* leadership style does not appear at a stable frequency among the three standards, and although each standard acknowledges the need to share decision-making with the people inside (school staff) and outside (families and the community) of school, some school leaders in Toda City face a dilemma between giving directions (top-down) and waiting until other people fulfill what they expect (bottom-up). To what extent the leadership trends seen in this analysis materialized in daily school management, as well as how this Toda City SMR is situated in the national policy sphere in Japan, remains to be seen in future studies.

As an arguably unprecedented effort to dissect Japan's school leadership policy documents in detail while making a connection to those abroad, the present study provides a unique foundation for future comparative studies on school leadership policy. Considering the real promise of the standards is to provide a new way to think about leadership and what it looks like in one's everyday work in schools [18], policymakers, by applying the definition of four school leadership styles to their standards, will be able to explore strengths and areas for growth in their standards, and thus lay the foundation for training programs and professional development opportunities. However, given the comparative study that showed American principals were given more positional powers than Japanese counterparts [45], in their implementation, policymakers should be mindful not to just "import" promising practices abroad and end up ignoring cultural and policy contexts unique to Japan.

One of the limitations of this study is that it compares a city policy with national policies, which might make an apples-to-apples comparison difficult. Acknowledging that there is almost no more detailed policy document than the Toda City SMR that is specifically focused on school leadership in Japan, the author expects that the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology will shed light on this issue in the near future. Another issue is that only educational leadership standards in the U.S. and U.K. are referred to as a unit of comparative analysis. Future studies can build on the present study and expand the comparison to standards in other countries as well. Last but not least, as yet another perspective, stakeholder engagement in standard setting could also be examined, for the extent to which teachers, principals, and other stakeholders participate in this process may affect the impact of their perspectives on their interpretations and uses of standards [46]. In this sense, the present study could be situated as a foundation on which future studies will further illuminate school leadership policy and practice in Japan.

Abbreviations

BOE	Board of Education
HS	Headteachers' Standards
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
PSEL	Professional Standards for Educational Leaders
SMR	School Management Rubric
STEAM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics

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