CHAPTER ONE
BACKGROUND OF STUDY

1.0 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the background of the study carried out by first giving general definitions of principal, leadership, management and manager. The statement of problem, purpose of research, research questions and definition of terms will follow this.

1.1 At the pinnacle of the hierarchy of the school administrative system is the Principal. In this position, the principal has the authority or power to influence his subordinates and is responsible for their work performance. He is the leader in all aspects of school management. The principal plays a significant role as an administrator, leader and manager of the school in helping the school achieve a high level of performance through the utilization of its human and material resources. In other words, a principal's job is to get things done by working with and through other people. This is management.
Leadership is a well-known concept but defining it clearly and precisely is not a simple task. According to Stogdill (1974), there are as many definitions of leadership as those trying to define it. Hodgetts (1975) defined leadership as a process to set in motion the initiative of the subordinates to achieve the goals of the organization. In the educational field, leadership is defined as an individual given the responsibility to lead and stimulate group activities with the sum of achieving the determined goals (Segiovanni, 1982). Whatever the definitions of leadership, there are three agreed common characteristics;

(i) The leaders are able to exert influence;

(ii) Leadership always involves other people; and

(iii) The outcome of leadership is some form of goal attainment.

On the other hand, management is the art of attaining intended organizational objectives by working effectively with and through the human and material resources of an organization. Basically, it involves planning, organizing, coordinating and controlling work done together or through another person to achieve certain goals. A manager directs, evaluates and guides on official matters like setting
regulations for staff (Hussein, 1992). Bennis and Nanus (1985) suggest that leaders are concerned with "doing the right thing" and managers emphasize "doing things right" such as planning, organizing and monitoring. The right things include:

(i) The ability to create and communicate a vision of what the organization should be,
(ii) The ability to communicate with and gain support of multiple constituencies,
(iii) The ability to persist in the desired direction even under bad conditions, and
(iv) The ability to create the appropriate culture and to obtain the desired results.

Managers and leaders are expected to meet the needs of individuals and the goals of the organizations. However, managers tend to work impersonally with others and are more concerned with attaining organizational goals. A school needs both a leader and a manager. Ideally, a Principal should combine the two roles by striving to be both. As a leader he prepares and explains the vision, motivates his subordinates and sets the path to be followed. And as a manager he
plans, sets the tasks, implements plans, controls and evaluates. Both roles should be juxtaposed in order to achieve an excellent performance from a school. In the ideal world of theory, it is simply a matter of combining management skills with leadership talents. However, in reality, the path is not a clear. A Principal would be judged primarily on his success in satisfying organizational requirements – what is explicitly or implicitly expected of him by his superiors, peers and subordinates – among which the present and the future goals of the organization are uppermost. To attain these goals, leadership ability is important, but management finesse is essential. It is ultimately a question of fine-tuning management principles in combination with leadership skills in order to achieve the desired effect.

1.2 Statement of The Problem

Anyone appointed a principal cannot escape the task of administering, leading and managing a school. All these work fields are related to one another. The principal as the manager will have to maintain sufficient control over everything under his surveillance so that he meets his organization’s requirements at a satisfactory level. He or she
knows what falls within his/her responsibility and does what is necessary to gain adequate control over his/her organization.

The manager’s way of thinking is relative to his managerial activities. The basic thought patterns – assumptions, outlooks, beliefs and attitude- largely determines the manner in which the manager carries out his everyday activities. Numerous studies in the context of managerial work have been carried out and consistent findings have proven that there are many related and common patterns in how managers spend their time managing their organizations. Mintzberg (1973) suggests that a manager’s work is influenced by an enormous number of variables, which include the size and type of organization, the manager’s personality and preferred style of working which changes over time. He also indicated that managers show preference to brevity and interruptions.
In effect, the manager is encouraged by the realities of his work to develop a particular personality – to overload himself with work, to do things abruptly, to avoid wasting time, to participate only when the value of participation is tangible, to avoid too great an involvement with any one issue. To be superficial is no doubt, an occupational hazard of managerial work. In order to succeed, the manager must, presumably, become proficient in his superficiality. (Mintzberg, 1973:35)

McCall et al (1978) found that a manager’s working day typically consists of a large number of brief, varied and fragmented activities with significant and trivial matters interspersed in no particular pattern. In reviewing the data from studies comparing responses of managers to an interview or questionnaire, he found that managers consistently overestimated the time they spent on production, reading and writing, telephone calls and thinking and consistently underestimated the time spent on meetings and formal discussion. Using findings of researchers in the past as basis, this study will concentrate in examining the nature of Assunta Secondary School
Principal's managerial activities. The structured observational study is
hoped to be expedient in revealing a certain pattern of how the
Principal spends her working time, congruent with previous findings
by researchers.

1.3 Purpose of research

This study purports to explore the characteristics of the Assunta
Secondary School's principal's managerial activities based on
adaptation from research done by Wright (1966). Management
function and characteristics of a manager's job have been a topic of
serious discussion among management researchers since the 1970s.
Research findings as demonstrated by Mintzberg (1973), Martin and
Willower (1982) and Morgan and Hall (1983) have been consistent in
identifying that there are many related and common patterns in how
managers spend their time in managing their organizations. The
purpose of this research is thus, to collect the required data through a
structured observation of the principal's work activities. The data will
be analyzed qualitatively and the analysis is hoped to determine that
there is a specific work pattern activities illustrated by the principal's
behaviour and therefore, confirms the findings of earlier researchers.
1.4 Research Questions

Research questions forwarded are:-

(i) What are the main activities of the principal throughout the observation period, that is, the activities on which the principal spends or allocates most time to in a week?

(ii) Is there a certain specific pattern of work activities done by the Principal?

(iii) Does the pattern exhibit common and similar to those found by earlier researchers?

1.5 Definitions of Terms

The definitions given to selected terminology are aimed at clarifying them as used contextually.

1.5.1 Secondary School

The secondary school referred to throughout the study is the Assunta Secondary School, Jalan Changgai, Petaling Jaya, Selangor. It is a Grade A, semi-government school with a student population
amounting to 2100. The school operates in two sessions. The morning session is led by the principal and assisted by the Senior Assistant and the Senior Assistant for Student Affairs. The afternoon Supervisor supervises the afternoon session.

1.5.2 Principal

Reference to the principal denotes the position of headmistress of the Assunta Secondary School, in this case study, a lady whose retirement is due in November 1999.

1.5.3 Managerial Activities

Managerial activities in this context simply signify the occupational tasks and routines the Principal does daily at her work place. Her managerial activities begin the moment she arrives in school and end when she leaves for the day.