

Promoting the quality of small-sized primary schools in Northeastern Thailand through Developing a Culture-based Educational Management Model

Thanida Phon-intr, Somkit Suk-erb and Atikan Suksri

The Faculty of Cultural Science, Mahasarakham University, Khamriang Sub-District, Kantarawichai District, Maha Sarakham Province, 44150, Thailand
tponin194@gmail.com

Date Received: August 17, 2015; Date Revised: September 14, 2015

Abstract – *The reason for developing education is to develop students as high-quality individuals who are able to meet education standards and make a positive contribution to society. This qualitative investigation aimed to 1) study the background and history of small-sized primary schools in Isan; 2) to study the current conditions and problems with educational management based on culture in small-sized primary schools in Isan; and 3) to study a model for developing education management on the basis of culture in order to promote the quality of small-sized primary schools in Northeastern Thailand. Seven schools were chosen as research areas for this investigation. Tools used for data collection were survey, participant and non-participant observation, structured and non-structured interview, focus group discussions with groups of five to seven respondents and a workshop. Results show that there is a network for developing small-sized schools in Northeastern Thailand and this is an important medium for pooling resources and exchanging ideas about how to solve administration problems in the primary education of the Isan region. There are four key areas and eight components of educational administration that could be identified from observation, interviews and discussions with respondents. From the outcome of data gathering, the research team recommends a structural-functional approach to the development of educational management of Northeastern Thai primary schools. This approach consists of consideration of parts of the administrative system, the eight components, to determine the health of the whole, the quality of primary school education.*

Keywords – *Administration, culture, education, management, primary, school*

INTRODUCTION

The reason for developing education is to develop students as high-quality individuals who are able to

meet education standards and make a positive contribution to society. These aims are consistent with the revised National Education Plan (2009-2016), which used the sufficiency economy philosophy of King Bhumibol as the basis for a set of educational objectives to develop children as well-rounded human beings, in terms of physical health, mental health, spiritual devotion, intellect, values and cultural awareness. The plan specifically identified three areas in which students should be balanced, which were social values, traditional and modern knowledge and social harmony. Three objectives were set out for Thai students, which were development of educational quality and standards, increase of educational opportunities and participation by all social groups in educational administration and management. A number of areas of educational management were identified as key for the achievement of these objectives, which include: 1) development of modern Thai values, 2) development of education, working knowledge, motivation and ability of students, 3) development of teacher quality, 4) development of the teacher and administrator training system, 5) development of educational institutions, 6) development of school administration to be more standardized and transparent, and 7) development of resource management [1].

The Office of the Basic Education Commission is responsible for the management of 31,821 educational institutions, of which 13,915 (43.73%) are categorized as small-sized schools. These smaller schools often experience greater problems than the larger schools due to a lack of teachers, a lack of resources and a lack of budget. Therefore, the quality of education in small-sized schools is generally lower than the quality of education in large and medium-sized schools. This is reflected in poor student quality and poor education management [2].

It has been suggested that one reason for these problems is the high cost required to run a small

school in comparison to a large school. Additionally, small schools lack the quality of administration to adequately manage public funding [3]. The ratio of teachers to students in large-sized Thai schools is 1:25, while in small-sized schools the ratio is 1:8. Although the quality of education should arguably be higher, the collective problems with small-school administration mean that the overall quality of small-sized schools is low in comparison to larger schools.

There are a number of areas in which Thai schools need to develop, most notably effective educational administration and a child-centred teaching approach. These needs are nowhere more evident than in the Northeast of Thailand (Isan). This largest region of Thailand is home to a varied collection of ethnic groups, who are able to live together harmoniously under the social code of *heet sip song, kong sip see*. The culture of Isan is rich, unique and vibrant. It is a crucial factor in the strong family ethos and community spirit of Isan people. However, there are problems in the area due to its comparatively low agricultural fertility in comparison to other regions of Thailand. Isan thus suffers from poverty, drought and crime. Both the positive and negative aspects of Isan lifestyle are reflected in the education system and, in order to successfully and efficiently develop schools, effective educational management is crucial. For these reasons, the research team designed this investigation to develop education management on the basis of culture in order to promote the quality of small-sized primary schools in Northeastern Thailand.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This investigation aimed to 1) study the background and history of small-sized primary schools in Isan; 2) to study the current conditions and problems with educational management based on culture in small-sized primary schools in Isan; and 3) to study a model for developing education management on the basis of culture in order to promote the quality of small-sized primary schools in Northeastern Thailand.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a qualitative investigation conducted from August 2014. A set of data was collected from document analysis and field study. The research area was purposively selected according to six criteria: 1) the school was in one of three Isan provinces – Nakhon Ratchasima Province, Khon Kaen Province and Chaiyaphum Province; 2) the school was in one of

three educational areas - Nakhon Ratchasima Province Primary Educational Area Number 6, Khon Kaen Province Primary Educational Area Number 3 and Chaiyaphum Province Primary Educational Area Number 1; 3) the school adopted a local primary curriculum; 4) the school placed particular emphasis on Isan culture; 5) the school was evaluated as ‘good’ in the third round of school evaluations; 6) the school was a small-sized primary school with 120 students or fewer. The seven schools chosen as research areas for this investigation based on the six criteria given above were:

1. Ban Nong Jan School, Nong Wa Sub-District, Bua Lai District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province
2. Ban Keum Ma Oo School, Nong Wa Sub-District, Bua Lai District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province
3. Ban Nong Puea School, Nong Wa Sub-District, Bua Lai District, Nakhon Ratchasima Province
4. Ban Nong Waeng Nok School, Nong Makuea Sub-District, Pon District, Khon Kaen Province
5. Ban Baw Ta Krong Non Fai Samakee School, Nonka Sub-District, Pon District, Khon Kaen Province
6. Ban Non Po School, Kon Sawan Sub-District, Kon Sawan District, Chaiyaphum Province
7. Ban Prong Ko School, Ban Sok Sub-District, Kon Sawan District, Chaiyaphum Province

The research sample was purposively selected from the population of these seven schools and their surrounding communities. 63 respondents were chosen and divided into one of three groups, key informants, casual informants and general informants. The key informant group was composed of nine government experts (three academics, three educational officers and three school directors) and six community leaders. The casual informants group was composed of six school directors, 18 school teachers and 12 school councilors. The general informants group was composed of six parents of students at the schools and six members of the local community. All respondents provided information on the condition of anonymity. Collected data was stored in a security protected file on the researchers’ personal computers and used only for the purposes of this investigation.

Tools used for data collection were survey, participant and non-participant observation, structured and non-structured interview, focus group discussions with groups of five to seven respondents and a workshop attended by three representatives of the key

informants, 18 representatives of the casual informants and six representatives of the general informants. All data were validated in three ways, by member checks, data triangulation and methodological triangulation. The data were then categorized according to the three aims of the research and analyzed by analytic induction and typological analysis. Results are presented below as a descriptive analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to generate a better picture of the problems and current condition of educational management of small-sized primary schools in Northeastern Thailand, the researchers conducted a SWOT analysis of the six sample schools. The results of this SWOT analysis are presented below in table 1. There is a network for developing small-sized schools in Northeastern Thailand and this is an important medium for pooling resources and exchanging ideas about how to solve administration problems in the primary education of the Isan region. There are four key areas and eight components of educational administration that could be identified from observation, interviews and discussions with respondents. The four areas are 1) academic administration, 2) financial administration, 3) human

resource administration and general administration. The eight components are 1) systematic administration of educational content, 2) administration of teachers, 3) administration of media and educational resources, 4) administration of pedagogy, 5) administration of sponsors, 6) administration of budget, 7) administration of location and learning environment and 8) administration of students. The identification of these areas and components is consistent with the findings of the research of Kittipong Dongpimai [4]. Dongpimai conducted an investigation into the the factors causing some small-sized schools to provide a good standard of education. The findings showed that teachers and especially their level of experience and training are a crucial factor in the level of quality education that small-sized schools are able to provide. Additionally, Jirawat Kleungklandon found that a dedicated and driven school culture was crucial to the success of administrative policy in small-sized Isan primary schools [5]. Culture is an extremely important part of Northeastern Thai primary schools that can determine the quality of the education each establishment offers and consequently the quality of each student graduating from primary curricula in the Isan region [6].

Table 1. A SWOT analysis of educational administration in small-sized primary schools in Northeastern Thailand.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All teachers are academically qualified. 2. All teachers have subject specialisms. 3. All teachers are skilled and able to produce effective lessons. 4. All schools have an effective management structure. 5. All schools have a sound administrative planning policy. 6. All schools direct, supervise and follow-up administrative tasks. 7. All schools are standardized according to Ministry of Education stipulations. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Schools lack modern technological equipment and resources. 2. Teachers do not use, or do not effectively use, a variety of modern technological equipment and resources in teaching. 3. Teachers do not use enough resources in their lessons. 4. Teachers do not adequately evaluate their lessons. 5. Teachers do not continuously follow their teaching plans.
Opportunities	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The local communities participate in the development of education. 2. The communities are interested in the quality of education provided by the schools and its development. 3. The communities provide resource and budget support for the development of local primary education. <p>There are supplementary learning centers in the local communities.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students come from poor backgrounds and some are malnourished. 2. 70% of students live with elderly relatives, causing a number of related difficulties in their everyday lives. 3. Local community knowledge about healthy lifestyle and diet is insufficient. <p>There are people in the local communities who do not act as good role-models (alcohol, narcotic and physical abuse is common).</p>

Due to the unique culture and sense of collective identity shared by the people of the Isan region, there is a very strong community spirit that revolves largely around the family unit. The findings of this investigation show that successfully administered primary schools in Northeastern Thailand recognize the importance of community and have strong communication links with local people. These findings corroborate the research of Govinda and Diwan, who showed that school administrators must seek the help and participation of local people when designing and implementing a school policy that is appropriate and effective for the children at the school [7]. It must also not be forgotten that teachers are an integral part of administration. Chester found that the success of American primary schools is due to the emphasis of pedagogic variety and the active role teachers play in the administration system. This role makes teachers feel a sense of responsibility and power in the direction of school policy and helps to create a stronger school culture in which all individuals are significant.

The findings discussed in the previous two paragraphs are a reflection of the structural functionalism espoused by British social anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown in the mid-twentieth century [8]. Radcliffe-Brown argued that social structures are composed of a collection of component parts that must all function for the entire system to work at optimum capacity. In a similar fashion, the eight components of school administration identified by this investigation must all function properly for the school to develop as a high-quality educational institution. However, the make-up of the Isan population is a varied mix of people from different social and ethnic backgrounds. Certain behaviours or practices in the educational management components may have different effects on different individuals. For this reason, it is necessary to further study the impact of educational management techniques on Northeastern Thai students to determine the nature of 'optimum functionality' [9]. From the outcome of observations, interviews and focus-group discussions, the research team recommends a structural-functional approach to the development of educational management of Northeastern Thai primary schools. This approach consists of consideration of parts of the administrative system, the eight components, to determine the health of the whole, the quality of primary school education.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative investigation aimed to develop education management on the basis of culture in order to promote the quality of small-sized primary schools in Northeastern Thailand. Results show that there is a network for developing small-sized schools in Northeastern Thailand and this is an important medium for pooling resources and exchanging ideas about how to solve administration problems in the primary education of the Isan region. There are four key areas and eight components of educational administration that could be identified from observation, interviews and discussions with respondents. From the outcome of observations, interviews and focus-group discussions, the research team recommends a structural-functional approach to the development of educational management of Northeastern Thai primary schools. This approach consists of consideration of parts of the administrative system, the eight components, to determine the health of the whole, the quality of primary school education.

The similarities of the schools in this investigation are striking. Despite being from three different provinces in Northeastern Thailand, the seven schools shared very similar strengths and weaknesses. This seems to support the cultural diffusion theory, which states that strong cultures become adopted by neighboring societies and assimilated into the local norm. There is a danger of adopting or enforcing generic educational policies or models such as the one suggested by this investigation but the differences between the sample schools is so minimal that a single policy is appropriate [10]. For use of the ideas expressed in this paper in other education contexts, further research must be conducted. This investigation is a qualitative case-study of seven schools in Northeastern Thailand. Consequently, the results cannot be generalised to other schools or other areas. In light of this, further research is needed to gather more data and paint a more accurate picture of education management in Northeastern Thai communities and other regions of the country. Further studies could then be compiled and collected to form a database for the country as a whole.

REFERENCES

- [1] Office of the Secretary of Education (2009). *Recommendations for the implementation of education in the second decade (2009-2019)*. Bangkok: Prik Wan Graphics.

- [2] Office of the Basic Education Commission (2008). *Procedural method for human resources departments and participation*. Bangkok: Office of the Basic Education Commission
- [3] Chumporn Primary Education Area Office (2012). *Research report into the development of educational management in small-sized schools under the jurisdiction of the Chumporn Primary Education Office, Area 1 (2011)*. Chumporn: Chumporn Primary Education Area Office.
- [4] Dongpimai, K. (2008). A study of the factors causing some small-sized schools to provide a good standard of education. PhD Thesis, Wongchualitkul University, Nakhon Ratchasima.
- [5] Kleungklandon, J. (2004). The culture of educational institutions that effects practice according to the standards of the teaching profession in basic secondary schools of Chaiyaphum Province. PhD Thesis, Nakhon Ratchasima University, Nakhon Rachasima.
- [6] Kamkaew, J. (2004). School culture that affects the supervision of primary schools in Bangkok. PhD Thesis, Kasetsart University.
- [7] Govinda, R and Diwan, R. (2002). *Community participation and empowerment in primary education*. Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd.
- [8] Radcliffe-Brown, A.R. (1940). On social structure. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 70(1): p.3.
- [9] Satsongwon, N. (1996). *Research in the humanities*. Bangkok: Odeon Store.
- [10] Gronn, P. (2001). Crossing the great divides: problems of cultural diffusion for leadership in education. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 4(4): pp.401-414.