

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences

journal homepage: <http://www.elsevier.com/locate/kjss>

Relationship between perceived directors' leadership and classroom quality of primary schools in Thailand

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 8 February 2016

Received in revised form 9 December 2016

Accepted 13 December 2016

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

classroom quality,
creative leadership,
primary education,
school directors

ABSTRACT

This study explored the relationship between the perceptions of creative leadership and classroom quality of schools under the Office of Khon Kaen Primary Educational Service Area 1, Thailand. A survey design was employed to obtain 437 samples consisting of 127 directors and 310 teachers from 163 primary schools to collect information on creative leadership practices and the classroom quality level. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the perceptions of creative leadership and the classroom quality level while inferential statistics (correlation coefficient and stepwise multiple regression) were used to examine relationships between the two main variables. The findings revealed that school directors had a high level of practicing creative leadership, particularly from a positive cultural aspect. The classroom quality was found to be high too. Classroom quality was significantly related to the five aspects of creative leadership practice at a significance level of .05. The significant predictors were the vision, initiation, and management of creative leadership. These three creative leadership aspects were successfully contributing 71.3 percent of the variance towards the classroom quality level. The results contribute significantly to knowledge proposing creative leadership which can guide school directors in promoting classroom quality.

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Introduction

Change is a constant in the educational administration; therefore being a school director and leading the school is difficult and consequently, most professionals end up taking direction from others. In fact, becoming a leader is something anyone who is committed to the task can master. However, there is no inborn quality that leaders possess. They are an ordinary individual who decides at one point or another to do extraordinary things. That does not just take courage but also demands creativity. Creativity is

very much needed for school directors to actively nurture and practice (Wahl, 2015). As a result, a school director needs to tap into his or her creative intelligence in order to keep ahead of the group, stay nimble, and inspire his or her subordinates to push themselves too.

The link between creativity and leadership was demonstrated by a review of leadership literature showing what leaders do in their administration. For example, school directors have to innovate, solve problems, and inspire a vision while they are administering their schools. These activities implicitly tap into the notion of creativity and work to expand the concept of leader intelligence beyond just analytical skills to also include creative capacities (Puccio, Murdock, & Manee, 2007). In short, the general work environment in schools can be supportive or obstructive of creative processes. Leadership style can

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Peer review under responsibility of Kasetsart University.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.kjss.2018.03.008>

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Please cite this article in press as: Thaiwinkarn, D., et al., Relationship between perceived directors' leadership and classroom quality of primary schools in Thailand, *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences* (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.kjss.2018.03.008>

make a difference. If school directors want creative output, then they should be open to change, support new ideas, allow autonomy, encourage risk taking, and be supportive of failure (Puccio et al., 2007).

In a high-quality classroom, interactions are respectful, students are granted autonomy in the learning processes, teaching is organized, discipline is fair, and instructions are appropriate and effective (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Students in these kinds of environments are most likely to perform well academically, develop strong social-emotional skills, and retain motivation to work and learn (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Classroom quality must be assessed across multiple dimensions, including social-emotional climate, instructional support, and classroom organization (Hamre, Pianta, Mashburn, & Downer, 2007). Thus, to foster positive student development, educational settings must meet students' multifaceted developmental needs (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczek, & Hawkins, 2004).

Currently, the professional practices in schools require creative leadership which troubles policy and invites creative action on the part of students and teachers. Creative leadership is a skill that can and needs to be developed in educational administration. School directors can benefit from developing creative leadership characteristics and therefore use these characteristics to take an active and positive approach to making change by shifting from negative to positive, becoming an active part of the school community, contributing to the greater, future good of school management, and to improve the quality of classroom management. Creative leadership involves the actions of a school director who uses leadership strategies to implement positive change in the name of primary education. Therefore, a study has to be designed to examine the effect of this leadership style further enabling future directors to adjust to and keep up with fast-paced changes in educational administration.

Leadership takes many shapes and forms in our society. In fact, it is a word that is commonly used in multiple ways throughout personal and workforce conversation. School directors need creative leadership to provide a shift in focus from disparity and discouragement to inspiration and perseverance for primary education teaching under the current implications of Thailand's education system. Thailand Basic Education Core Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2008) stipulated the significant competencies of students which mainly cover thinking competency especially analytical thinking, synthetic thinking, and creative thinking, which will lead to a construction of bodies of knowledge or information or in students being able to make appropriate decisions for themselves and society (Ministry of Education, 2008). Consequently, school directors need creative leadership awareness in order to positively survive in a competitive and challenging educational environment so that they can progress positively as a professional for their students and their community.

Exposure to a high-quality classroom appears especially important for the later school success of at-risk students (Schweinhart, 2004). Most of the previous researchers had associated teachers' education with both classroom quality

and students' outcomes and still believed that education should matter for school directors as it does for a host of other professions (Morgan, 2015). Therefore researchers have to find evidence to confirm their belief that school leadership may matter in terms of classroom quality as well. Creative leadership is a new leadership style for which researchers intend to find evidence to confirm belief in the possibility of the association between creative leadership and classroom quality.

Aims of the Study

The main aim of this study was to explore the effect of creative leadership of school directors on classroom quality among schools under the Primary Educational Service Area Office 1. More specifically the study sought:

- 1) To identify the perceptions of creative leadership practice and the classroom quality level.
- 2) To study the relationship between the perceptions of creative leadership practice and the classroom quality level.

Conceptual Framework

The variables in this study are elucidated in Figure 1. The variables consisted of school directors' creative leadership practices, and classroom quality. The independent variable was the perceptions of creative leadership practice. The aspects of creative leadership consisted of interaction, management, vision, initiation, and positive culture. On the other hand, the perceptions on classroom quality level acted as the dependent variable. There were four components of classroom quality: classroom change, students' traits, teacher quality, and class discipline.

These four components of classroom quality are predicted to be associated with good creative leadership practice of school directors. This framework also predicts that creative leadership of directors promotes classroom quality. This view is associated with studies conducted by past researchers. Creative leadership was synthesized from the theories of past researchers such as Jon-Chao and Yi Chih (2006), Palus and Horth (2005), Pasu (2010), Puccio et al. (2007), Robinson (2007), and Ubben, Hughes, and Norris (2010).

Creative leadership was defined as the behavior of a school director to represent quality and creativity in management. It can be measured from five aspects: interaction, management, vision, initiation, and positive culture. Interaction is the behavior of school directors when they demonstrate their abilities to have a good relationship with colleagues. By establishing this good relationship, a school director provides support and encouragement to create positive work atmosphere internally and externally. The measured indicators for the interaction aspect were building the relationship, support, and creating familiarity. Management refers to the behavior of a school director to express work with a clear goal. The school director coordinates the school's activities to ensure it is operating smoothly by utilizing a clear chain of command. The

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