Conditions for Change in Small-Sized Primary Schools, Northeast Thailand

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to study change in small schools in Thailand's Northeast from 351 schools using an open-ended questionnaire and focus group discussion. It was found that during 2010 – 2014 schools are progressing according to expectations of the Act. Key elements of success were student-centered learning and enhanced instructional development. A combined effort in school improvement has created academic success, improved staff-student relationships, and cooperation among teachers, administrators, and the community. Although much success has been attained, there are significant obstacles and many issues to be resolved.
Key words: Change, condition for change.

Background

According to the declaration of the National Educational Act 1999 initiated August 20, 1999 a variety of changes have occurred according to the content outlined in the National Educational Act. All of Thai society knows that education is the key to the future of a Thailand's success in a global society. It was determined that in order to achieve this goal an effective, meaningful education must be developed and that the efforts to achieve that goal would require a much higher level educational performance from teachers, students and the community at large. The higher the effort expended, the higher the achievement attained.

This study spanned a five year period from 2010 until 2014. The focus of this research was on small schools where facilities are typically located in rural areas, facilities and equipment are out of date, teacher shortage exists and the potentiality for change is not ideal. These conditions are counter to medium and large school sites located in suburban and urban areas where funding, teacher availability and a stronger focus on strong student learning exists.

Research Questions

This study was about implementation of change in Thai small-sized primary schools in the Northeast from 2010 – 2014 according to 8 specific questions:

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1. What were determined as the important objectives and mission for small school development?
2. What were identified as success, opportunity, problems and obstacles in school development?
3. What were teachers' important characteristics as facilitated factor and non facilitated factor for school development?
4. What were the school committee's performance, problems, and obstacles for implementation of change?
5. What were the sub-district administration organization's performance, problems and obstacles in implementation?
6. What were identified as performance, strong and weak points of a community?
7. What were the problems of school development in administration, financial, administration, administration and instructional material and equipment issues?
8. What were factors supporting students' ability, morality, and satisfaction?

Methodology

The population of this study consisted of 4019 small-sized primary schools with fewer than 120 students in Thailand's Northeastern Region. A sample of 351 schools were selected from the study population using Krejcie & Morgan' stratified random sampling method according to the proportion of each province. The instrument was an open-ended questionnaire and focus group interview constructed by the researcher. Each were checked for validity by five experts and checked for reliability with a pilot group who were not part of the study sample. Twenty five persons tested the instruments in order to verify objectivity of the items. A total of 351 sets of open-ended questionnaires were sent by mail to school administrators for distribution in order to collect from a variety persons including: 1 school administrator, 1 teacher, 2 school committee representatives, 2 sub-district administration organization committee representatives, 2 community representatives, and 2 student representatives. Two hundred eighty seven (287) questionnaires were returned for an 81.6% response. For the focus group discussion, the researcher collected data from 6 schools. Data were analyzed by calculating percentage together with descriptive narrative.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from the data based on 8 specific questions:

What were determined as the important objectives and mission for small school development? - The importance elements of the primary "objective" included: 1) student achievement (28%), 2) environment and building and site (21%), 3) personnel (20%), 4) instruction (12%), 5) administration (10%), and 6) others (9%).

The important aspects of the mission included: 1) instruction (34%), 2) administration (25%), 3) personnel (18%), 4) environment and building and site (12%), and 5) others (11%).

What were identified as success, opportunity, problems and obstacles in school development? -- School success included the following aspects: 1) academy (43%), 2) community relations (42%), and 3) others (15%). Those issues deemed not successful included: 1) the students' quality improvement based on standard criterion (28%), 2) the instructional management of student-centered (25%), 3) teacher development to professional status (20%), and. 4) others (27%).

"Opportunity" included the following: 1) cooperation and support from community (37%), 2) eagerness and quality of school staff (24%), 3) the students' eagerness students' quality (15%), 4) eagerness in local wisdom (10%), and 5) others (4%).

For **"problems and obstacles"**, the following issues were found to be problematic to successful school change: 1) insufficient budget (37%), 2) insufficient personnel (30%), 3) some of personnel lacked (18%), 4) low level of cooperation from some communities (8%), and 5) others (7%).

What were teachers' important characteristics as facilitated factor and non facilitated factor for school development? - The concept of "facilitating factor" included the following: 1) unity and cooperation (19%), 2) self-development (17%), 3) dedication and time dedication (15%), 4) responsibility (14%), 5) eagerness, attention, and interest (10%), 6) teaching centered and continuously instructional development (10%), 7) diligence, patience, and responsibility awareness (10%), 8) knowledge, ability and ethics (4%), 9) teacher spirit and professional teachers (4%), and 10) others (8%).

Ten issues for non - facilitating factor" included 1) non self-development, non changing (22%), 2) lacking of responsibility (17%), 3) being lazy to teach, coming to class late (14%), 4) being inert, not be eager (10%), 5) salary left a little, having debt (7%), 6) not dedicate (6%), 7) limited number of teachers but too much responsibility (6%), 8) not improve one's teaching, doing as ritual (5%), 9) lacking of work interest, having interest in other things (5%), and 10) others (8%).

What were the school committee's performance problems and obstacles in implementation? - For "performance", it included:1) supporting and cooperating in school development in every aspect when being invited (38%), 2) cooperating in planning policy and school development (32%), 3) taking care of students (12%), and 4) others (18%).

For "problems and obstacles", it included 1) having limited time (18%), 2) low income (16%), 3) lacking of knowledge in duty (12%), 4) lacking of understanding in new curriculum (10%), 5) Lacking conference funding (8%), 6) not paying attention because they thought that it was the teacher's responsibility (8%), 7) lack of coordination (4%), and 8) others (12%), and no obstacle *(12%)*.

What were the sub-district administration organization's performance, problems and obstacles in implementation? - Regarding "performance", the issues included: 1) buying extra food (milk) and allocation and support of the lunch program (31%), 2) supporting important events (30%), 3) supporting only a partial budget (20%), 4) supporting athletics and scholarship (10%), 5) others (9%).

For "problems and obstacles", issues included: 1) providing little importance to education (18%), 2) limited budgets, and also inconsistent and insufficient allocation of budgets (15%), 3) lacking cooperation (14%), 4) slow allocation of school lunch program (12%), 5) lacking personal responsibility (5%), 6) lacking personnel with specialized knowledge (5%), 7) lack of understanding the instructional administrational system in school (4%), 8) insufficient socio-economic status to provide service and serve society (3%), 9) misinformation that schools received an adequate budget (3%), 10) others (7%). It was found that there were no problems or obstacles *14%.*

What were the performance, strong points, and weak points of a community? - Performance included: 1) participating in the activity during important days (18%), 2) participating in school improvement (12%), 3) working or laboring without requesting payment from school (11%), 4) environmental improvement in

school (10%), 5) scholarship support (8%), 6) educational dedication (8%), 7) building school fence (7%), 8) others (26%).

Strong points included: 1) good cooperation with school even not so much, but it was no interruption (78%), 2) unity, dedication (12%), 3) others (10%).

Weak points" included: 1) low socio-economic, agricultural occupation, earning one's living from hand to mouth, migrating to other area (67%), 2) lacking of coordination and good relationship (11%), 3) low educational level (5%), 4) no time (5%), 5) others (12%).

What were the problems of school development in finance, administration, administration material, and instructional material and equipment? It was found that small schools had problems and obstacles in school development for the following issues:

Finance: 1) receiving a few budget whereas the responsibility was not different from the larger sized school (48%), 2) lacking of financial expert (13%), 3) paper arrangement was not up to date (6%), 4) too much regulation, slow (4%), and 5) others (29%).

Administration: 1) not enough teachers (25%), 2) no continuous following up and evaluating (14%), 3) no complete teacher's cooperation (12%), 4) lacking of budget (8%), and 5) others (41%).

Material and equipment for administration included: 1) small budgets, insufficient management (28%), 2) insufficient equipment such as document storage, teacher's desk etc., (24%) 3) lacking new technology, such as computers (14%), 4) outdated, dilapidated, and broken equipment (14%), and 5) others (20%).

Material and media for instructional items included: 1) small number of students, limited money per head, insufficient budget (45%), 2) no standardized media (not congruent with content) (19%), 3) lacking modern equipment, such as computers (16%), 4) teachers seldom developed instructional media (11%), and 5) others (9%).

What were factors supporting students' ability, morality, and satisfaction? According to student interviews data indicated that factors facilitating students' ability, merit, and satisfaction included the following factors respectively: 1) teachers' dedication, attentiveness, advice, homework assignments, and remedial teaching (26%), 2) students' commitment to study, self-help, attentiveness, love of learning (22%), 3) systematic reading (18%), 4) library facilities with a sufficient number of books (11%), 5) parent- caretaker dedication to both guidance and love (8%), 6) friends who supported each other (7%), and 7) others (8%).

Recommendations

Based on the results of this study the researcher has the following recommendations for small-sized primary schools in Thailand's Northeastern Region:

1) Further research should be conducted on how to increase school development as prescribed in the National Educational Act from 1999 on a consistant basis. Data suggest that the five years of change brought focus, unity, eagerness and a desire to change. How can this initial success be continued?

2) The role and function of the school committee should focus on policy decisions, school development, and activities for the benefit of school planning. In particular, the school committee should collect data from many sources for educational quality improvement projects.

3) Further research on information dissemination and campaigning for many reform activities especially for educational leaders in higher levels of government who influence the school personnel's opinion and belief would provide critical

information and data on how to improve the system. Further research on integrated analysis thinking should be conducted to establish a systematic policy.

4) Research analysis and systematic data and information regarding budgeting for small rural schools should be conducted to ensure that all administrators have skills and expected standards.

5) In Thai society it is said that the future national strengths in education lie with technology and satellite communication (TSC). It is recommended that further research be conducted that would expedite development of TSC as a medium for integrating local, national, and universal information and for personal development of all students situated in rural areas.

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