

DECENTRALISATION AND SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT IN THAILAND

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Abstract – School-based management (SBM) in Thailand began in 1997 in the course of a reform aimed at overcoming a profound crisis in the education system. The present contribution reports on the introduction and institutionalisation of decentralisation and SBM with community participation in Thailand. The data reported here are based on an empirical survey of 1,000 school-board members from Bangkok as well as provincial and rural areas which was followed by 45 interviews with all relevant stakeholders. The results of the study are promising, as they show broad support for the reform among school principals as well as board members. However, they also reveal a continuing need to train principals and board members in educational leadership and management.

Zusammenfassung – DEZENTRALISIERUNG UND MANAGEMENT AUF SCHULEBENE IN THAILAND – Das Management auf Schulebene in Thailand begann 1997 im Zuge einer Reform, deren Ziel es war, eine tiefe Krise des thailändischen Bildungssystems zu überwinden. Der vorliegende Beitrag berichtet von der Einführung und Institutionalisierung der Dezentralisierungsbewegung und des Managements auf Schulebene unter Beteiligung der Gemeinden in Thailand. Die Angaben basieren auf einer Umfrage unter 1,000 Mitgliedern der Schulausschüsse aus Bangkok, der Provinz und ländlichen Gebieten. Anschließend wurden 45 Interviews mit allen bedeutenden Beteiligten des Projektes durchgeführt. Die Resultate der Studie sind vielversprechend, da sie eine breite Unterstützung für die Reform unter den Schulleitern und den Ausschussmitgliedern erkennen lassen. Allerdings machen sie auch deutlich, dass die Schulleiter und Ausschussmitglieder nach wie vor in Leitung und Management im Bereich des Bildungswesens unterwiesen werden müssen.

Résumé – THAÏLANDE : DÉCENTRALISATION ET GESTION PAR L'ÉCOLE – La gestion par l'école a débuté en Thaïlande en 1997 dans le cadre d'une réforme visant à surmonter une grave crise du système éducatif. Cet article décrit l'introduction et l'institutionnalisation de la décentralisation et de la gestion par l'école en Thaïlande, impliquant la participation communautaire. Les données présentées proviennent d'une enquête empirique menée auprès de 1,000 membres de conseils d'établissement originaires de Bangkok ainsi que de régions provinciales et rurales, suivie de 45 entrevues avec toutes les principales parties prenantes. Les résultats de l'étude sont prometteurs, car ils montrent un solide soutien en faveur de la réforme de la part des directeurs d'établissement et des membres des conseils. Néanmoins, ils révèlent également un besoin permanent de formation pour ces derniers à la direction et à la gestion dans le secteur éducatif.

Resumen – DESCENTRALIZACIÓN Y GESTIÓN A NIVEL ESCOLAR EN TAILANDIA – En Tailandia, la gestión a nivel escolar comenzó en 1997 en el



transcurso de una reforma que apuntaba a superar una crisis profunda del sistema educativo. Esta contribución informa sobre la introducción e institucionalización de la descentralización y la gestión a nivel escolar con participación de la comunidad en Tailandia. Los datos presentados en este informe están basados en un estudio empírico de 1.000 miembros de juntas directivas de escuelas de Bangkok y de zonas provinciales y rurales, seguido por 45 entrevistas con todos los actores implicados relevantes. Los resultados del estudio son prometedores, puesto que muestran un amplio apoyo de la reforma por parte de los directores de las escuelas y de los miembros de las juntas directivas. No obstante, también revelan una necesidad permanente de capacitar a los directores y miembros de las juntas directivas en liderazgo y gestión educativa.

Резюме – ДЕЦЕНТРАЛИЗАЦИЯ И ВНУТРИШКОЛЬНОЕ УПРАВЛЕНИЕ ОБРАЗОВАНИЕМ В ТАИЛАНДЕ – Внутришкольное управление образованием в Таиланде было начато в 1997 году в ходе реформы, направленной на преодоление глубокого кризиса в системе образования. В данной статье освещается введение и институционализация децентрализации и внутришкольного управления при участии общественности в Таиланде. Данные, приведенные в статье, основаны на результатах эмпирического опроса, проведенного среди 1,000 членов школьного совета в Бангкоке, а также в провинциях и сельских районах и на результатах 45 интервью со всеми участвующими спонсорами. Результаты исследования являются весьма оптимистичными и показывают, что директора школ и члены школьного совета горячо поддерживают эту реформу. Тем не менее, выявлена необходимость дальнейшей подготовки директоров и управленцев в области образовательного руководства и менеджмента.

Decentralisation and education reform issues in Thailand

Since the late 1980s, the decentralisation and devolution of authority to school level have emerged as a phenomenon in most education systems around the globe. Decentralisation in education has occurred with a view to improving student outcomes and the effectiveness of the school systems in both developed and developing countries as well as in Western-style democracies and even in former Soviet block countries. These reforms were the result of the attempts to devolve power and authority from federal, state, district and local education authority (LEA) levels to either advisory or governing bodies comprising principals, teachers, parents, community and, in the case of secondary schools, students. While it is true that calls for reforms exist in most countries, any widespread turnaround in performance or examples of significant success are limited. Louis (1986) suggests that educational reform is difficult, and most of the work has to be done in schools. Real reforms in education require extensive, consistent support, accompanied by in-service training and technical assistance for school leaders – enabling them to change management and planning skills, and helping them to deal with the school and classroom implications of reforms.

Some researchers and policy analysts believe that schools need to effect changes in order to deliver society needs for the 21st century, but are reluctant to overthrow existing structures for the governing and managing of schools. Professional school administrators know this and make extensive efforts to acquire the necessary skills with supportive authorities providing adequate professional development programmes to help them change their practices. This contribution reports on a success story in the introduction and institutionalisation of school-based management (SBM) undertaken with community participation in Thailand. Data supporting this study are based on an empirical survey of 1,000 school-board members from Bangkok, provincial and rural areas, followed by 45 interviews with all relevant stakeholders.

Why school systems should adopt SBM

Gamage (1996: 21) asserts that SBM identifies the individual school as the primary unit of improvement by relying on the re-distribution of decision-making authority to stimulate and sustain improvements in a school. For this purpose, varying degrees of power and authority to make decisions in the domains of the school's mission, goals and school policies relating to financial, material and human resources are not simply delegated but transferred to a representative managerial body called the school council or board. Accordingly, a school community, together with the principal and teachers, could be seen as followers of a dream who are committed to making it real, thus rendering the leadership nothing more than a means to make it happen (Gamage 1998: 47).

It is important to note that community control of the local school is an idea which came about in the United States in the mid-17th century. By contrast, the Australian state-education systems, which were highly centralised bureaucracies until the early 1970s, began then to move away from the centralisation to decentralisation and SBM involving community participation. Since the late 1980s, the concept of community participation in SBM has become a major theme and has been largely accepted as a policy initiative in school reforms in a significant number of education systems. These include Australia, Britain, New Zealand, the United States, Spain, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Hong Kong, Mexico and South Africa. Later, China, Japan and Southeast Asian countries began introducing SBM within their school systems. It was only after the Asian Financial Crisis that Thailand began to show an interest in SBM.

Guthrie (1995) argues that SBM is an eminently sensible approach. It remains in public control while simultaneously fostering good instructional practices and good management tactics, including the prospect of effective accountability to all stakeholders. These decentralisation initiatives take many forms, including the empowering of principals, teachers and parents. Today, educational decentralisation with devolution of authority to individual institutions is a popular reform theme of governments around the world.

Goals, strategies and outcomes are as varied as the countries themselves (Hanson 1998; Cranston 2000; McInerney 2003).

Educational decentralisation reforms have their roots in the political arena. As nations make the transition from autocratic to democratic forms of government, a natural outcome is an effort to decentralise educational systems. This is one important mechanism for enabling citizen participation in government institutions. Winkler (1993) suggests that improving the quality of education is often offered as a goal of decentralisation, reflecting the notion that local people can solve local education problems better than the centralised state system. However, Zajda (2003: 72) notes that an adequate definition of quality in education may also include student outcomes and the nature of the educational experiences which help produce those outcomes, especially within the learning environment.

Global trends in reforming school administration

In 1966, an initiative on the part of the concerned citizens of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) established a representative committee to recommend an alternative model of school governance to the existing bureaucratic model. This report: the Currie Report of 1967, recommended that representative governing bodies should be established at each school which would consist of teachers, parents, local community members and, in the case of secondary schools, students, with the principal as an *ex-officio* member. After a lengthy public debate carried out in the print-media, in 1974 the new concept was implemented at ACT schools. By 1976, the ACT, Victoria and South Australia were able to establish school councils or boards as mandatory, corporate governing bodies to manage their schools, with varying degrees of authority devolved to the school level. By the late 1990s, all eight Australian school systems had enacted legislation introducing reforms involving SBM (Gamage 2001a).

Based on a White Paper issued in 1988, SBM was introduced in New Zealand after October 1989, with representative Boards of Trustees at the school level as mandatory corporate governing bodies. More than 90% of the cost of running each school was devolved onto schools in the form of school-based budgets with authority to govern the school, including recruitment and employment of staff by the board (Caldwell 1990; Dimmock 1993; and Gamage 1996). In Britain, the 1988 Education Reform Act empowered school communities to establish boards as mandatory, corporate governing bodies consisting of the head-teacher (principal) and governors, elected by the parents, teachers and nominees of the LEA (Bell 1999; Gamage 2001b). This model of SBM, known as local management of schools (LMS), left only the day-to-day management of a school to the head-teacher. Governors' accountability is mediated through procedures adopted to elect, appoint or co-opt governors and through the requirement that they meet with and report to parents annually (Bell 1999).

Guthrie (1995) asserts that the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the Report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE 1984), triggered one of the longest sustained periods of school reforms in American history. It reported on the educational 'crisis' in cataclysmic terms, blaming schools for setting low standards for students leading to detrimental effects on the economy and society. Since then, SBM has been adopted and implemented by school systems in literally every corner of the nation: from Washington to Florida and from California to Massachusetts (Ogawa 1992). Each state adopted different strategies for improving its system. Gamage (1996) states that the most radical set of educational reforms in the United States occurred in 1988, due to the efforts of a coalition of parents and citizens in Illinois. On the basis of their campaigns to empower school councils, in 1988 the State Legislature amended the School Reform Act, instituting school councils as mandatory, corporate governing bodies.

In May 1992, the Mexican federal government transferred the responsibility over basic and teacher education to the 31 states. This decentralisation strategy was at the core of an overall education reform that began in the late 1980s. The central government had strong motives to decentralise the educational system, as it was notoriously rigid, inefficient, conflict-laden and unresponsive to the needs of local schools (Ornelas 2000). In the late 19th century, Japan centralised its institutions, including education, in order to catch up with the Western industrialised nations. In order to maintain its competitive edge as a world leader in economic globalisation, the Japanese national leadership instituted a series of reforms to deregulate and decentralise the educational system in the late 20th century (Muta 2000; Nakatome 2003). Hong Kong's school system, which was developed as a highly centralised education system by the British, began to move towards decentralisation and devolution in 1991, operating its own SBM model called the school-management initiative (Gamage 2002; Cheng and Cheng 2003; Wong 2003).

Current reform in the Thai system of education

With the Asian financial crisis of the mid-1990s, Thailand was confronted with dramatic social problems both from within and due to its interdependence on the complex and rapidly changing world. A significant degree of the blame for this disaster was placed on the country's weak human-resources base, which resulted from poor-quality education provided by a badly coordinated and hierarchical bureaucratic administration. It was believed that education was very important for enhancing individual development and so contributing to the social and economic development of the country, enabling Thailand to survive the Asian Financial Crisis. It was acknowledged that the crisis exposed serious weaknesses in the national economy: inadequate export competitiveness and a low human-resources

quality. Thus, a new era of national education commenced in 1997, which placed more emphasis on a better coordinated, high-quality education system to improve the country's competitiveness in the face of globalisation (ONEC 1997).

Results similar to those revealed by the American report on *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 issued from a comparative study of some of the most advanced national systems of school education by the Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC 1997). It revealed that the Thai education system was inferior to most other systems, including those of neighbouring countries. It was a bitter reality for Thailand that the quality of Thai school education was rated as very low in comparison to other member countries of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) group. It was recognised that Thai education, which seemed to be unresponsive to socio-economic needs, required rapid change and improvement to meet the shortage of human resources in terms of both quantity and quality, especially in science and technology (Atagi 2002).

Accordingly, the National Education Act of 1999 was enacted to pave the way for extensive nationwide educational reforms. All of the agencies involved in the drafting process and the deliberations of the Act made arrangements for the implementation of educational reforms. A Committee on Reform of the Educational Administrative Systems and a Committee on Learning Reforms were established. ONEC, as the major state institution responsible for the implementation of the Act, conducted studies to identify efficient strategies of educational reform through the Committee on Strategic Planning on Education Reforms, established by the National Education Commission (NEC). The major tasks following the guidelines of the Act were the reform of educational administrative structures and those of learning and legal measures. Implementation of the provisions of the Act started with the least possible delay (ONEC 2002, 2003).

Research on the institutionalisation of SBM reforms

A research project was launched for the purpose of evaluating the effectiveness of the new educational reforms involving the introduction of SBM with community participation. The key objective of the project was to determine:

1. The perceptions of school principals on the new reforms for addressing the problems with which they were confronted.
2. The perceptions of school-board members on the feasibility of the new structures, procedures and processes set in place for the efficient operation of the system.
3. The expectations of principals regarding board members and their own expectations of the principal.

4. The challenges faced by principals in their capacity as Chief Executive Officers of their schools.

The research methodology consisted of both quantitative and qualitative dimensions, with an empirical survey based on an instrument developed for the New South Wales school system for a similar project in 1991 by Gamage (1996). Appropriate modifications to suit the Thai context were added. A series of interviews were also conducted with relevant stakeholders on the basis of a specially developed semi-structured interview schedule. The sample comprised 1,000 school-board members from 100 co-educational primary schools in Bangkok as well as in provincial and rural areas in Thailand. The data collection was conducted in mid-2002 with a response rate of 53.2% to the empirical survey, followed by 45 interviews to seek clarification and additional information on the quantitative data. In analysing the data, an SPSS computer software package was employed for the quantitative data, while an N-vivo software package was employed for the qualitative data.

How principals perceive SBM management reforms

Data analysis suggests that 66.7% of the principals who responded to the survey agreed with the idea of seeing themselves as a member of the team instead of the leader of the team. When asked whether being a principal under the new system enabled them to seek advice and support from the school-board members, 70.3% of the principals agreed. Further, 69.7% of the participating principals strongly believed that it was essential for them to discuss issues with staff and board members in order to agree upon strategies for implementing change.

When the principals were asked whether they thought that the involvement of the local community in the management of the school was increasing, 68.5% believed that this was the case. Again, 68.5% of the participating principals agreed that the ability to delegate is an essential skill of a school principal. Even though some principals felt that with the introduction of SBM their workloads had increased, 51.8% indicated that there was adequate provision for them to seek help from other school-board members to reduce their workload, whereas only 16.7% disagreed with this position; 31.5% did not respond to the question.

The discussions during the interviews complemented the findings of the empirical survey, as the majority of participants (71.1%) at some point in their answers expressed the view that the principal's workload should not have increased, as there are more people involved in activities related to school management. This position was further reinforced when 88.9% of participants (40 out of 45) were in agreement with the position that there was adequate provision for the principals to seek help to reduce their workloads under the school-board structure.

How board members perceive new governance structures

In the empirical survey, 89.2% of the respondents identified the new SBM reforms as the type of reforms that the Thai education system needed, while 85.9% of the school-board members believed that the new school-board structure was effective. Further, 85.4% of the school-board members indicated that they were either happy or very happy with the way their principals were working with the school-boards. Similarly, 79.2% of the participants felt quite satisfied with the way the other members or categories of stakeholders were performing their duties on the school-boards. The qualitative data suggest that 93.3% of the participants had positive feelings about their school-board participation, while 86.7% of the participants agreed that the new SBM reforms were what the Thai education system needed, thus reaffirming the findings of the empirical survey. Additionally, 80% of the interviewees were happy with the new school-board governance structure and believed that it was effective, while only 20% were not sure if they could agree with the view that the school-boards were effective, as they thought more time was needed for the new structure to function well. However, 95.6% of the participants believed that their participation in a school-board was not a waste of time.

To a question on how decisions were made by the school-boards, 334 out of 532 or 62.8% indicated that decisions were made by majority vote, while another 201 or 37.8% indicated that decisions were made by consensus. In this context, it is clear that almost all board members declare that at the board level the decisions are made either by majority vote or by consensus – a very satisfactory achievement after two-and-a-half years. With regard to the process of decision-making, 75% believed that every member received a fair chance to express his or her views, while another 35.9% confirmed that it was a true partnership of all stakeholders. In response to another question as to whether any stakeholder category dominated the decision-making process, the vast majority indicated that no particular category dominated the decision-making process. However, 22.7% indicated that the principal dominated the process. This latter view appears to be a misinterpretation of the process, as very often the principal would be called upon to provide clarification on government policies or report progress made on different issues and on implementation of decisions already made as well as on projected school development. An overwhelming majority of 88.9% of the respondents stated that it was not detrimental to the decision-making process. Regarding the current composition of the school boards, 85.7% of the participants were of the opinion that it was either good or very good.

In evaluating the effectiveness of the decision-making process, 450 of 532 or 84.6% of the board members rated it as either good or very good, while 3.2% rated it as excellent. In considering whether the information provided was adequate for making informed decisions, 86.5% rated it as either good

or very good, while 2.8% rated it as excellent. Finally, in reflecting on the overall functioning of the school-boards, 86.5% rated it as either good, very good or excellent, which shows there is a high degree of consensus that the new structures were working well and that they were effective. In considering the power and authority vested in the school-boards, 81.8% perceived it as either adequate or more than adequate, whereas only 15% considered it as either inadequate or barely adequate. In answering a question as to whether the time available for school-board business was adequate, 85% believed that it was either adequate or more than adequate. When the question of ensuring accountability to the relevant constituencies was raised, 56% indicated that it was done by extending invitations to attend board meetings, while another 20.5% indicated that this was done by co-opting opinion leaders to the sub-committees where issues and problems are discussed and recommendations made.

In considering the influence of the school-board on the teaching and learning environment in the school, 75.4% of the participants believed that the operation of the school-board has resulted in some or significant improvements, whereas none of them indicated that the situation had deteriorated. Reflecting on areas in which the school-boards were empowered to make decisions, they nominated the following, prioritised on the basis of the numbers supporting a particular area: (1) fund-raising; (2) developing policy; (3) articulating school vision and goals; (4) composing mission statements; (5) making improvements to buildings; (6) developing curriculum; (7) deciding about repairs to buildings; (8) managing the school budget; (9) caring for school discipline; (10) managing performance management; (11) managing the canteens; (12) building new schools.

It is clear from the findings of both the empirical survey and the interviews that the vast majority (around four-fifths) of the school-board members appreciated the structures, procedures and process set in place and expressed their satisfaction regarding the operational effectiveness of the SBM processes. However, a small minority of the board members felt that a longer period of time was needed for the reforms to work more effectively.

Expectations of principals and board members

At the interview phase of the study, 34.8% of the principals were so pleased with the support they received from their school-board members that they did not have any further expectations which needed to be met. However, 21.8% of the principals indicated that they would appreciate more participation from school-board members who tended to play passive roles, while another 17.4% expected more donations for school improvement. Further, 17.4% of the principals preferred the board members to have a better understanding of their roles, accountabilities and responsibilities. In order to obtain active community involvement, 68.5% of the principals were in

agreement that the ability to delegate authority was an essential skill of a principal.

The vast majority (90.6%) of the school-board members strongly supported the idea that the principal should work cooperatively with the other school-board members while providing leadership. For this purpose, 90.2% of the respondents strongly supported the view that it was important for school principals to undergo leadership and management training. Similarly, 89.1% of the board members were of the opinion that principals should be supported by other school-board members to achieve the set goals. Of the respondents, 77.9% felt that it would be better for the principal to be able to use a computer, while 77.3% of them had a good understanding of the principal's basic responsibilities and skills and the importance of his or her role as the school leader. Furthermore, 46.5% believed that teaching principals had the opportunity to understand students' needs better, as they were able to spend more time with their students in the classrooms. All those who participated at the interviews were of the opinion that there was a high degree of mutual respect between the principals and other board members.

Challenges faced by school principals

The data from the Thai empirical survey reveal that 66.7% of the principals were of opinion that they were facing new challenges as the leader of the school, while 59.2% of the principals were not sure whether they should also need to play the role of school manager as well. Yet, 55.6% of the principals were ready to agree with the view that they have to play the role of school supervisor. Another 53.7% of the principals could see themselves as one of the teachers in the school, while 46.3% felt that they also needed to play the role of public-relations officer, as they did not enjoy the luxury of having public-relations officers as in more popular schools in bigger cities. The majority of the principals also expressed the view that they had to play the role of conflict-handler. The importance of this role was more significant in city schools than in rural ones. However, the Thai principals were still not convinced that they needed to play the role of entrepreneur. Thai schools are not market-oriented organisations and continue to depend on state funds.

Need for training school leaders and board members

One critical finding of this study is that most study participants expressed uncertainty regarding the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of the SBM team members. There was no conclusive identification of an acceptable model for training for all concerned. Yet when five Thai newspapers participated in a national debate initiated through the media on 'The Future of Thai School Boards', some of the reports and discussions highlighted the

need to provide training for Thai school leaders in the areas of educational leadership, organisational leadership, school planning and strategic development, and entrepreneurial and marketing initiatives.

It is now widely accepted that school leaders need specific preparation if they are to be successful in leading and managing their self-managing or empowered schools. The development of effective leaders requires the adoption of a range of strategies including practically oriented university-level professional development programs, seminars and workshops enabling them to acquire a good knowledge-base on all relevant aspects and develop required skills and competencies. Principals should be made to feel that these reform efforts will lead to considerable school improvement and student learning, since their leadership affects the success of SBM.

The role of the principal leading a SBM-school involves changing his or her leadership style and managerial approaches and acquiring a new set of skills and competencies (Gamage and Pang 2003). This can only be done by building on the existing strengths with major training and development-support programs. At the same time, the employment conditions of principals need to be changed, and the prestige and status of the public image of school principal and other educators enhanced.

Pre-service training for school leaders

Culbertson (1990) notes that in America professional-development programs in the field of school management and administration have been developed since the turn of the 20th century. School leaders in all American states are required to have at least 3 years of teaching experience, a university master's degree, and a license or certificate to become a school principal. Su et al. (2003) state that these certificates and graduate programs in educational administration in American colleges and universities are well established. Gamage and Ueyama (2003) note that in the United Kingdom the government has launched a new initiative for improving the leadership and management skills of head-teachers, principals and educational administrators. The Blair New Labour Government has published a 'White Paper on Excellence in Education' emphasising the importance of all prospective head-teachers or principals undertaking formal preparation for their positions. For the purpose of professional development, newly appointed head-teachers are given the right to apply for a grant of £2,500 within the first 2 years of appointment. This preparation is expected to occur at the university level (Gamage 2001b; Gamage and Ueyama 2003).

Furthermore, Gamage and Ueyama (2003) state that the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) established in England in 2002 has set out to train 100,000 head-teachers, including deputy heads and other aspiring leaders, in order to improve school effectiveness. They also note that most Australian universities have been offering graduate level programs on a

full-fee paying basis since 1998. In 2001, the Federal Government established a fund to award interest-free loans to educators who wished to undertake the programs. These programs are available at graduate certificate, graduate diploma, master's, and doctoral levels. For example, the University of Newcastle offers a master's program called 'Master of Leadership and Management in Education' (MLMED) designed to meet the growing demand for professional development of practicing and prospective educational administrators (Su et al. 2003). Thailand and many other countries such as Japan and China have been using a traditional apprenticeship model, in accordance with which school leaders have to learn their job on the job (Daresh and Male 2000; Su et al. 2000). This means that they move up the ranks from classroom teachers to master teachers to heads of departments and to school principalship with no proper preparation (Su et al. 2003).

In view of the fact that seniority tends to be more important in the selection and appointment of educational administrators, no pre-service training requirements are laid down by the Thai educational system. Consequently, Thai educational administrators learn to become principals by going through real school experiences every day. Therefore, most of them have little or no pre-service training before taking up leadership positions.

A number of empirical surveys conducted in the United States, Australia and Japan between 1999 and 2003 identified certain topic areas to be covered in pre-service training programs for educational administrators. Gamage (2004) notes that all three groups of principals consulted recommended the inclusion of: 'contemporary administrative leadership', and 'school and community relations', while two of the groups identified: 'effective communication and decision-making', 'management of human resources', and 'theory and practices of curriculum development' as areas to be included in the programs. Gamage and Pang (2003: 39) also emphasise that it is important for the educational leaders to have an appropriate understanding of their role. It is also desirable for a prospective administrator to have a strong background in liberal education, supplemented by training in education as a broad field of study and finally training in educational administration itself.

In the empirical survey of school-board members in Thailand, 90.6% of the school-board members believed that the principals should work cooperatively with the school-board, while providing leadership. Another 90.2% of the school-board members expect their principals to undergo leadership and management training, while 70% of the participating principals agreed that the ability to delegate authority is an essential skill of a principal. In this context, 66.7% and 59.2% of the principals believe that 'leadership' and 'management', respectively, are the biggest challenges they face in their principalship. These results emphasise the need to provide education and training to enable the principals to function as effective contemporary educational leaders.

The results of Phase Two of the study complemented the results of Phase One. The participating principals expressed the view that in order to lead

schools under SBM reforms, they needed to play many roles and face many new challenges which require new skills, competencies and professional development. The findings suggest that when one considers the dedication and commitment that the Thai principals have to their jobs, it is very important to provide the necessary training in leadership and management enabling them to be more efficient and effective pro-active leaders and managers.

It is the urgent responsibility of the Thai authorities to provide appropriate programs for training school principals especially in leadership and management. In addition, the Ministry of Education should encourage Thai universities to provide appropriate professional development programs at the graduate certificate, diploma and master's degree levels for current and prospective school leaders, with incentives offered to persuade them to undertake such studies. In developing such programs, it is important to take note of the views expressed by the American, Australian and Japanese principals referred above as well as such programs offered in the United States, Australia and England.

In-service training for school leaders

Su et al. (2003) describe formal, structured and well thought-out in-service training programs, often located on university campuses, which are pre-requisites for American educational administrators. The research done by Gamage and Ueyama (2003) and Su et al. (2003) found that principals in America, Australia and Japan had many similar views on in-service training. When the principals were asked to rate the areas they thought should be covered in in-service training, all three groups recommended the inclusion of: 'practicum in educational administration', 'information technology and information management'; and 'ethics, morals and values for educational leaders'. Both the Australian and Japanese principals agreed that 'initiation and orientation' and 'contemporary issues in educational administration' should also be covered. The American and Australian principals were keen to see that 'assessment of candidates' is also included, as they are responsible for the recruitment of staff. It is obvious that with the implementation of SBM, Thai principals also need such training.

In Thailand, in-service training programs have been designed by the Office of Education Reform (OER) for educators. ONEC (2002) reports that two separate sets of curricula have been implemented. The first set emphasises whole-school reforms. The target groups for training include administrators in 40,000 schools of all levels. The second set is comprised of 14 courses. The target groups for training involve 500,000 educators. Among these, 28,289 educators were trained during the period 2000–2002. It is expected that the first round of training will be completed by 2006. The second and third rounds of training are planned to be implemented in 2007 and 2008, respectively.

In September 2003, Thailand played host to “The Third International Forum on Education Reform: Education Decentralisation Revisited: SBM”. The conference focused on the decentralisation of administrative authority from the national government to the schools. Kerri Briggs, who spent the last 2 years as a special assistant in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education of the United States Department of Education, made the following comments during this meeting on in-service programs for educational administrators:

You’ve got to have a principal who knows how to make the system work ... Finding good principals is a big challenge and training programs are a necessity ... We’re not going to have super-hero principals in every school, so you’ve got to find a way to train principals and give them the skills they need in order to be good principals (Fredrickson 2003: 1).

As mentioned above, in-service training programs are already being held in Thailand. In view of the changing educational environment, however, specific tasks related to SBM need to be included in these programs: for example, shared decision-making, school-based budgeting and conflict resolution, particularly related to the successful implementation of SBM and the creation of learning communities. During Phase Two of the study, 71.1% of the participants commented that training and more information on SBM are needed by the Thai educators. Moreover, approximately 78% of participants in the empirical survey were of the opinion that it is important for the principal to be able to use a computer. During the interviews, the principals who participated in the study claimed that in the position of school principal, they faced many new challenges, indicating that ‘leadership’ and ‘management’ are the key areas in which new skills and competencies are needed. In these circumstances, it is important for Thai authorities to take note of the views expressed by American, Australian and Japanese principals in formulating their in-service programs.

Need for training school-board members

To ensure the success of SBM, all stakeholders need to understand what SBM is and how it is implemented. Each participant must understand his or her new role, responsibilities, and accountability. School and district leaders must be supportive of SBM and ensure that communication channels are kept open. Most of all, SBM must be given time to succeed, with at least a 3-year period of transition. The empirical survey suggests that 89.1% of school-board members were of the opinion that other school-board members should support the principal to achieve set goals. Within a group of 23 school principals who participated in interviews, 34.8% were fully satisfied with the performance of their school-board members. Others expressed the view that they were interested and keen to participate but

were not sure of their roles, responsibilities and accountabilities as school-board members.

These findings make it obvious that the board members should be provided training to cover the above areas as well as those concerned with reviewing school budgets, designing strategic plans, and monitoring progress. The data based on the comments made in the questionnaires and views expressed by 71% of those interviewed suggest that there is a strong need for training school-board members. When asked if the principals had any expectations about other school-board members, most principals expected more 'participation' from school-board members. One principal even compared some school-board members to "the main Buddha image in the temple", as they did not say a word at the school-board meetings and perhaps knew little or nothing about their roles. Here, too, it is the responsibility of Thai authorities to design appropriate training programs for all school-board members, including the initiation and orientation of new members by the principal and the school-board chair.

Finally, the findings of the study and current literature suggest that teaching has become a less favoured profession in Thailand. The main reason for this appears to be that while the responsibilities are demanding, the salary remains relatively low. Therefore, the teaching profession is especially unattractive to the younger generation. Good and bright students have various career choices, and they often avoid the teaching profession. Low salaries discourage bright and vigorous students from becoming teachers. There appears to be an urgent need to improve the terms and conditions of education work both for itself and in view of securing the commitment of educators to reform.

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