

Schools are complex
social systems
education essay



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Schools are complex social systems which perform various organizational functions involving administration, teachers, students, parents, communities, and government bodies. The charge for the education system to reinvent itself was generated by a push for reform from commentators, researchers, policymakers, public bodies, and Ministry of Education, Youths, and Sports (MoEYS). The process for implementing new educational reform and bringing organizational changes affects the core functions of school's social system (WB, 2007).

The global initiatives of Education for All (EFA) of the 1990s, as well as other policy initiatives have stressed the importance of improving the quality of education. In developed and developing countries alike, educational reformers have faced with intensive attention to the perennial question of what is meant by improving educational quality. The message is clear that recently since Cambodian government has experienced peace and political stability, it introduced the institutional reforms based on the good governance. A vital element of governance is decentralization (Daun, 2007). Different forms of decentralization have been suggested, but educational decentralization always plays as the first priority in the ground that providing more classrooms, more teachers, and more textbooks to schools is not enough to make schools work better. As a result, it is not surprising that the transfer of some decision-making power to schools becomes a popular reform over the past decade (WB, 2007)

Like the rest of the world, Cambodia government regards educational decentralization as one of the most important sectors in improving quality education for all. Accordingly, government as well as MoEYS has drafted <https://assignbuster.com/schools-are-complex-social-systems-education-essay/>

several policies to meet the targets and respond to the international conventions from Jomtien to DaKar. Furthermore, Education Strategic Plan 2009-2013 listed a series of strategies to achieve EFA goal with regard to decentralization. National Strategic Development Plan 2009-2013 also mentioned about the educational reforms, and vitally Education Sector Support Program and EFA National Plan 2003-2015 have stated the plan to strengthen the capacity of school directors, particularly at basic education, and decentralized the management and responsibilities into local schools in that any educational change has to be linked to the roles of school principals and school principal also has effects on staff motivation, student learning outcomes, and school climate and culture(MoEYS, n. d& WB, 2002).

1. 2 Problem Statement

In reference with the guidelines of training the school principals at primary schools (MoEYS, 2004), the roles and responsibilities of the principals are to manage the administration, to perform pedagogical techniques, to communicate insiders and outsiders, and to develop the school plans such as school-budget operation and so on. Although MoEYS has gradually decentralized the responsibilities and decision-making to the grassroots, there are still challenges for the primary school principals (PSP). One of the challenges is that when MoEYS increases the tasks as stated in MoEYS's guideline book in 2004 there is less support from senior management such as Provincial Office of Education (POE) and District Office of Education(DOE) and they even get less pay as well. According to NEP and VSO (2008), PSP receive a basic salary only \$30 and \$40 and thus it makes them under

financial pressures. Additionally, POE and DOE staffs are not trained enough to give advice and support needed by school directors.

In other words, in EFA National Plan 2003-2015, as an educational officer PSP play a very important role in attaining EFA targets and in order to ensure that they can execute the tasks effectively, Royal Government of Cambodia has a strong desire to decentralize planning, and management, and to build the capacity to implement basic education services (MoEYS, n. d). Though these things have been stipulated and planned at national level, the actual practices of training PSP's capacity in managing the school are not fully implemented. According to schools for children of Cambodia(SCC) (2009), 7 school directors and deputy directors in Siem Reap were trained with leadership skills such as administration, management, and motivation for teachers and staffs because SCC believed they were not fully equipped with enough capacity to carry out the responsibilities. As a SvayDungKum Primary School director, he was happy to have joined this training and he really needed this knowledge to implement his roles and responsibilities. Another research conducted by NEP and VSO (2008) was that school directors focused much on the Ministry guidelines rather than teacher's problems. This reflected the responsibility of PSP articulated in the guideline book of MoEYS in 2004. PSP had to facilitate, guide, and resolve the problems of teachers in terms of enhancing quality of teaching and learning. Therefore, the idea of decentralization on the role and responsibilities of PSP as stated in EFA National Plan 2003-2015 has not been completely practiced and absorbed fully by PSP.

Research Objectives

This research thesis attempts to understand the roles, responsibilities of Cambodian primary school principals. The paper continues to hear emerging challenges they face in carrying out those roles and responsibilities in dealing with various changes in education service reforms.

Research Questions

The study will look at the levels of roles and responsibilities of PSP. The specific questions will be included.

What are the roles and responsibilities of PSP- as prescribed in the MoEYS administrative guideline?

How relevant are the guidelines to the current school management environment?

What are the challenges perceived by PSP in managing and improving the school?

Rational/Significance of the study

Decentralization of education system is one of the educational phenomenon to accomplish EFA and quality education (UNESCO, 2004). In centralized education system, central governments have been facing increasingly difficulty in administering the expanding mass education. The situation in sub-Saharan Africa seems to be carefully considered because many governments have faced the expansion of school systems to achieve the universal primary education. Thus, it required the governments to adapt the alternative approaches which mean moving from central education system

to a modern approach which enable the flexibility to shape education to local schools, (Pellin, 2007). However, one of the most important aspects of the educational changes is the increased roles and responsibilities of the school principals as commented by Shoraku (2006). As a consequence, this study is dispensable to find out how PSP bears his responsibility and roles in providing education services.

The research findings will first benefit the researcher with regard to education since the researcher wants to see the differences between what he has read in the books and the real practices of primary school principals.

This research will also provide plenty of primary indications of how PSP plays a significant role in improving schooling and quality education.

The findings from the study will be also given as feedbacks to all stakeholders such as community, MoEYS, Development Partners, and policymakers to reform their education policy and build up a concrete structure to strengthen PSP's capacity in regard to implementing their roles in the future.

The findings will exactly inform the policymakers how important PSP is in implementing the education policy and also suggest the top decision-makers if there are any specific points of current frameworks needed to be changed or revised in order to improve the implementation and participation.

Definitions of key terms

Decentralization is the transfer of responsibility for planning, financing and managing certain public function from the central government and its

agencies to field units or government agencies (e. g. provincial or district line agencies) (Pellin, 2007).

The study uses the term school principal or school director with the same meaning in Cambodia context.

School principal is a delegation of MoEYS in charge of managing the school. As a representative of MoEYS, school principal is the head of an institution, and has administration authority which he/she has a high responsibility for dividing the affairs, and managing the school such as administration, technical issues, and communications. (MoEYS, 2002)

Decentralized school management can be viewed conceptually as a formal alteration of governance structure as a form of decentralization that identifies individual schools as a primary unit of improvement and relies on the redistribution of decision-making authority as primary means through which the improvement might be stimulated and sustained. (WB, 2007, p. 2)

Proposal chapter organization of the research paper

This proposal will be arranged as follows: chapter I covers the Introduction of the study that include the background of the study, the problem statement, the objectives of the study, the research questions, the rational of the study, the definitions of key terms, and the proposal chapter organization; Chapter II will be the Literature Review; Chapter III will also prescribe the Methodology of the research (research design); Chapter IV will analyze data and the findings of the study; and at the end Chapter V will discuss, conclude, recommend and provide the further study.

Chapter II

Literature Review

The new political dispensation in Cambodia has brought its own unique set of changes in other spheres. Cambodian education has been the focal point in terms of management changes since the new era. Decentralized school management under the responsibilities of the school principals is the new management type which has been mostly advocated by not only government education policy, but also various researchers and literatures. The purpose of this chapter is to present the notions of global perspectives on school principal's roles under educational decentralization, challenges of Cambodian school principals, and school principal leadership and management in a culture of change.

2. 1 School Principals' Roles under Decentralized Education from International Perspectives.

Within this section, the study will examine various literatures about the school principal's roles from different countries and specific discussions of research findings are also picked up.

Nowadays, decentralization policies are not altogether new, given that some modern nations such as U. S or Canada have these policies. The demand for political self-government on the part of certain communities also goes back a long way. Since the 1980s, nevertheless, there has been a paradigm shift in public management which has transformed our perception of the processes of decentralization and the functions that it serves. As the states become more liberalized, the needs to decentralize education systems are the most important phenomena in educational planning over the past 20 years
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(UNESCO, 2004). Furthermore, Daun (2007) reported that the reasons for educational decentralization of some countries were (i) the inabilities of governments to finance the education system, or increasing educational costs; (ii) cultural factors; (iii) weakening public sectors;(iv) state overload; (v) declining the performance of education system; (vi) global and international pressures (p. 28).

Moreover, policies toward decentralization of the education sector exist in almost every country in Asia. However, there is considerable difference in the form it takes within each country context. Decentralization is generally defined as the devolution of authority and responsibility for schools from the central-level administration to intermediate-level organization and ultimately to schools (Sindhvad, 2009). Much of the literature explaining decentralization discusses the challenges specific to the central administration and district authorities in decision-making processes and the changes necessary to the functions within those of levels of management (Sindhvad as cited in ADB, 2002). A section of literature discusses the challenges the school management must confront and take on new responsibilities inherited by central-level administration and the changes demanded to operate effectively in their new roles to improve school management, specifically emphasizing on the school principals (Sindhvad, 2009).

Within this segment, Sindhvad (2009) recognized the fact that decentralization is placing new pressures on the school principal that few are prepared to meet while emphasizing the emerging tasks of enhancing and supporting school-level management across Asia. Sindhvad (2009) also <https://assignbuster.com/schools-are-complex-social-systems-education-essay/>

provided the insight on how these significant changes of improving education quality and increasing competition for resources impact on the school leadership in Asia.

Sindhvad (2009) further explained in theory that school principals have responsibility in four areas. First, school management, which includes ordering supplies, ensuring teachers are hired and assigned, information gathering, and basic record keeping, is viewed in many countries as the school principal's main set of responsibilities. Second, school-ministry communications, which consist largely of reporting to central ministry, is a chief task of school principals in some countries. Third, school-community relationship entails community councils, community development associations, parent-teacher associations, parent groups, and other local organizations that have interests in the schools. Finally, instructional supervision is the responsibility most directly linked to the teaching quality. Nonetheless, the extent of which school principals regard instructional supervision as a part of their responsibility varied across countries and in some countries, it is a responsibility of district inspectors or teacher supervisors. As a result of decentralization, school principals are required to take full responsibility for instructional supervision, in spite of the fact that this function is the least engaged by school principals. It is the crucial point for SP to spearhead any school improvement efforts toward student achievements.

The level of responsibility of SP is further compounded by the pressures for education quality improvement and efficiency within education systems in most Asian countries. According to Sindhvad (2009), the urgency of <https://assignbuster.com/schools-are-complex-social-systems-education-essay/>

strengthening and supporting school-level management is not only due to the new waves of decentralization, but also as a result of demographic and economic trends seen in many Asian countries. Chapman (2009) continued to argue that many countries were experiencing near universal access and leveling of enrolment growth at the primary school level which increasingly focused on improving the quality of education. One consequence of this shift is that administrators at all levels of education sector, particularly SP, will need a better understanding of the teaching and learning processes and which actions are likely to improve the quality of education. Even when resources are available, the problems SP face in improving school quality are which inputs and actions will lead to positive outcomes in student learning. Sindhvad (2009) also commented that the competition for scarce resources was huge in many Asian countries due to issues of poverty, epidemic, and pollution that forced the governments to allocate resources for causes of catastrophes. Thus, spending on education is often cut and long-term gains offered by education are minimized. For this matter, SP as well as administrators at all levels need to be knowledgeable about strategies that are effective in producing the outcomes and skilled at using fewer resources.

In Philippine, based on Sindhvad (2009), traditional roles of principals were limited to school building management and maintenance and responsible for repairing and receiving orders from central offices. In addition, SP had no flexibility on the national curriculum and had little influence on decision-making processes regarding to management of school funds and procurement of school supplies and learning materials. However, under decentralization of education sector, the Government of Philippines passed

the Governance of Basic Education Act in 2001 which redefined the roles of SP in an effort to dismantle a centralized system and promote shared decision making. It is also a framework for school principal empowerment aiming to strengthen leadership roles and school management within the context of transparency and local accountability.

The model of decentralization and school-based management applied in this program is based on the assumption that school principal will be supported and empowered through training and a network of support from central offices and also promotes the leadership needed to work with the concerned parties such as Parent-Teacher Associations(PTA), School Management Committee(SMC), and local government to develop the schools (Sindhvad, 2009). The network of support will develop lateral coordination between and among the principals, SMC, PTA, and others. Sindhvad (2009) wrote that lateral coordination is being viewed as less formalized and more flexible than authority-bound system and rules. In addition to this, lateral techniques such as formal and informal meetings, coordinating roles, and network organizations are crucial factors to open communication between principals and stakeholders and facilitate the ways toward school improvement efforts.

The roles of principals in Philippines are undergoing a huge change after the passing of Republic Act 9155. Through the development program of the School Improvement Plan, principals are given more authority in terms of implementing school improvement initiatives on a monthly and annual basis. Rather, principals can provide necessary training and workshop to teachers and guide them to reshape the national curriculum to meet students' needs.

Beside this, school principals directly receive funds from the central offices
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to maintain school buildings and to spend on school operations and these funds are to be allocated by principals' discretion, (Sindhvad, 2009).

In Indonesia, under USAID fund, the Government of Indonesia launched a project called Decentralized Basic Education Project (DBEP), aiming specifically to improve basic education delivery as well as management and governance at elementary school level in Indonesia. Within this project, all stakeholders such as Ministry of Education, schools, and community have been required to work in partnership with each other in order to implement a comprehensive program to support a school-based management in the targeted schools and it also includes the leadership training for school principals, school committee strengthening, and school development planning (USAID, 2010). Further, 526 elementary school principals were trained with the new roles of managing the schools such as implementing government policy relating to this project, the roles as educators, managers, leaders, innovators, motivators, and supervisors, and school leaderships. In effects, this project found that 99% of principals said the project had a positive impact on their schools regarding to management, governance, administration, community participation as well as student learning outcomes.

In Thailand, the influences of educational reform from international environment have brought the country into a new stage of decentralization of education. Basically focused, school management and decentralization of decision-making authority to school level are essential steps to play (Nenyod, 2002).

Again, in the case of Thailand, the 1999 National Education Act requires the Ministry of Education to decentralize powers in educational administration and management regarding to academic matters, budget, personnel, and general affairs of administration directly to committee and offices for Education, Religion, Culture of educational service areas and educational institutions in the areas (Nenyod, 2002). As stated by Shoraku (2006), any educational decentralization needs to be linked to the roles of SP. Principals play a significant role in managing and facilitating the general aspects of schools, teachers, staffs, student learning process, and community relations. Thus, decentralization of education in Thailand put SP in facing the new roles of managing the schools. A report by Nenyod (2002) about school-based management focused primarily on the essential competencies of SP for meeting the requirements of educational reforms, characteristics of management methods and relationship between SP's characteristics of management methods and competencies to meet the educational changes. Nenyod (2002) listed competency requirements of SP as follows:

Faith of colleagues;

Ability for teamwork;

Intellectual leadership;

Vision;

Creativity;

Good human relationship;

Knowledge and ability in management;

Resolve in decision making and taking responsibilities;

Integrity and transparency;

Attributes of good-coordinator;

Democratic outlook;

Supportive attitudes; and

Serving as desirable model. (p. iii)

The study results showed that rules and regulations still governed administration in spite

of decentralizing authority for decision-making to local schools. Principals still held central powers despite the new changes in management methods and structures. Regarding to principal's competencies, it has been found that, prior to the project implementation, some competencies of most principals were not at the level desired (Nenyod, 2002).

Also, a research conducted by Sakulsumpaopol (2010) wrote that the New Education Reform policy in Thailand played a framework to implement the national leadership strategy which the central government delegates powers to local schools. In this context, SP is seen a key factor in leading school restructuring and building collective ideas among school community. He/she is supposed to assume the responsibility for the progress of the school.

Beside this, SP highlighted by another research is also required to spend

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more time organizing and completing administrative work (Sakulsumpaopol, 2010). He continued that most principals had engaged in the routine work such as planning infrastructure development, organizing necessary human, financial and physical resources, controlling staff performance through evaluation and feedback.

In his study, Sakulsumpaopol (2010) recognized three broad areas which the principals can influence the school change: Management and Control, Leadership and Innovative and Human Development. Within these areas, Sakulsumpaopol identified eleven role types of SP which were responded by participating principals in Thai elementary and secondary schools. They were:

Team building

Professional development

Curriculum leadership

Establishing community partnership

Administration

Creating school vision

Maintaining effective communication

Collegial support

Delegating tasks

Monitoring

Evaluation (Sakulsumpaopol, 2010, p. 157)

According to the eleven roles above, he studied deeply and pointed out that they were involved in a broad range of related tasks emphasized on the principal roles and SP was a key figure in supporting school improvement. Last of all, this research result indicated there was a need for principal professional development, since in order to lead the change in schools, SP are required to be highly skilled, knowledgeable, and capable, (Sakulsumpaopol, 2010).

In Turkey, Gumuseli (2009) also conducted a research about professional capacity of primary school principals in performing the changes in school and investigated the responsibilities and authority in decision-making. The questionnaire was distributed to 1475 respondents and 1428 valid questionnaires were evaluated. The research results showed that the authority of average school principals in Turkey is limited and their responsibilities are imbalanced. Even though the increased responsibilities of primary school principals in implementation of educational reform have been proclaimed, the actual practice of decision-making authority is transferred to the provincial offices and this is due to the central management in Turkey (Gumuseli, 2009). He further found that many primary school principals realized their new roles such as program development and coordination, school improvement and effectiveness, and professional development and they desired to execute these responsibilities more effectively, but one of the main reasons was that school principals did not know the effective school

and leadership. Another reason was that the upper management teams expected a managerial role but not leadership from them.

In Sri Lanka, the role of school principal has been changing as a result of the greater devolution of responsibilities to schools through different policies. School principal will increasingly be held accountable for the quality of learning outcomes of schools, resource mobilization and associated staff development programs. So as to fulfill those responsibilities, they may be required to develop new management skills to work collaboratively and effectively with students, school management committee, teachers and school communities (Lekamge, 2010). In Lekamge's (2010) research paper, he mainly investigated the current practices of schools in Sri Lanka with regard to leadership and management roles of principals and the capacity of principals to perform the roles expected by the school community. Rather, the study explored how school leadership brought about the changes in student learning achievement and variation in management tasks of school principals in relation to school size and different locations. The study found that the principals performed different management and leadership roles such as traditional management and administration roles, transactional leadership roles, transformational roles, and transitional roles. Within these management and leadership roles, the researcher concluded that the strong personality characteristics of principals such as commitment, dedication, confidence, and motivation have overriding effects on the success of the schools. Additionally, there was a striking balance and a strong linkage between different aspects of leadership and management roles among the principals who have performed better than the others (Lekamge, 2010).

In Australia, Sahid (2004) discussed the changing nature of the role of principals in primary and junior secondary schools following the introduction of local school management in South Australia. This study reported the series of interviews with primary and junior secondary principals with regard to their roles in several areas namely; instructional leadership, teacher's professional development, teacher selection, staff supervision, supervision of students, decision-making, budgeting, and school finances, curriculum, school council and the parents of the students and major challenges of principal's roles. Further, the findings suggested there were not great changes in the role of primary and secondary school principals as a result of local school management in South Australia had increased. Moreover, the role of school principal was also in association with the emerging role in working with the governing council and the parents of the students in relation to decision-making and school budgeting and finances (Sahid, 2004).

In addition to above findings, in a study of Hansraj (2007) about financial management roles of principal in South Africa, he commented that:

all kinds of information in the school system, none is more important than financial

information since all the activities of the school and its ultimate performance rely on

soundly managed finances. (p. 23)

In regard to this, Hansraj (2007) implied that even though other roles of principal were associated with school management, financial management of

principals might be more essential with the reason that if the principals did not manage the budget efficiently, it may result in the lack of attaining the academic goals.

2. 2 Challenges of Cambodian School Principals

This section examines how school principals in Cambodia meet the challenges School Principals in Cambodia

After the result of implementation of decentralized education management, school principals in Cambodia have played a significant role on matters relevant to school management such as school development plan and school-operating budgets. Concerning the school development plan, the ministry said that the process of developing the plan should involve teachers not only in implementation but also in the planning process. In this context, MoEYS (2000) wrote.

The old way is one-person plans and the other group or departments implement the plan. This takes a lot of time, create misunderstanding, generate poor relationship, and the result in sub-standard quality. The modern way is the responsible group plans and implements their work together. More ideas are combined into a common objective. The same people or group plan the work, and implement their plan. Result is then acceptable as expected and of a good quality. (p. 6)

A reason to encourage principals to cooperate with other teachers is that the government wants the schools to change the structures in management so that the schools could produce the better performance result. In order to

prepare the school development plan which should be produced annually, the principals have to list all activities planned within a year and submit these plans to school support committees to gain their consensus, (MoEYS, 2000).

However, in reality, in spite of these rapid changes and increases in principals' workloads, principals in Cambodia have no training to become principals. Before coming the principals, they were in many cases assistant principals and appointed as principals by the ministry, (Morfield, 2003). Morfield (2003) argued that Khmer principals rarely practiced building strong relationship with parents, teachers, or especially children. They made communication based on the hierarchy, i. e. the top people order the people below, who order others below. However, this circumstance is somehow changed after the central ministry told them to work to build the relationship. But, no one shows them how to do it.

Involving other teachers in both implementation stages and preparations processes of school development plan is the new roles of the school principals in Cambodia. This style of school management is the literature on school management reviewed earlier as recommended as effective and ideal in the context of educational decentralization. MoEYS (2000) attempted that this style of school management could motivate other teachers to work better with principals to accomplish the shared and common objectives. Yet, the documents specifying the principals' new roles only emphasizes on the collaborative style with the teachers. They did not explain how the principals can make a change of teachers' will to achieve the targeted goals of the school. In other words, the documents did not discern how the teachers

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would react to this style of principals and what kind of interpersonal relationship the principals possessed with other teachers.

Moreover, the underrepresentation of female teachers in school management is another concern when principals intend to stimulate other teacher's decision-making in participation. Shoraku (2006) w