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

Dawruwan Thawinkarn [a], [*], Keow Ngang Tang [b], Wallapha Ariratana [a]

[a] Department of Educational Administration, Faculty of Education, Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen 40002, Thailand
[b] International College, Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen 40002, Thailand

ARTICLE INFO

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.

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

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: dawtha@kku.ac.th (D. Thawinkarn).

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
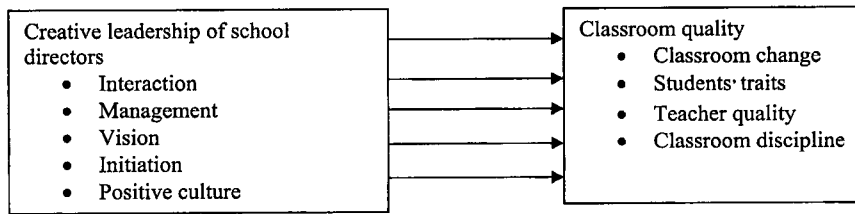
Figure 1 Conceptual framework

measured indicators for management were coordination, the chain of command, and direction of orders to the same goal. Vision is defined as the behavior of school directors to express their views for future change. The school director has a clear goal and direction with various processes to enable the school to achieve the shared goal. The measured indicators of vision were creation of a vision, dissemination of the vision, fulfillment of the vision, and setting a good example.

Initiation covers the behavior of a school director to demonstrate his or her ability to think creatively. This process is aimed to develop innovation and integration-capped links to benefit successful work outcomes. The measured indicators of initiation were fluency, flexibility in thinking, new initiatives, and thorough thinking. Finally, positive culture refers to the behavior of a school director to demonstrate caring to his or her subordinates, positive reinforcement, openness, ability to listen to his or her colleagues, team building, and freedom of the creative process. The measured indicators of positive culture were positive reinforcement, openness to listen to other opinions, team building and collaboration, and the freedom to be creative.

Classroom quality in this study was defined as the internal and external environment that is conducive for students' quality learning to occur in the classroom. Teachers' knowledge management is up to the quality standard, ICT learning resources are available for teachers and students, and students must meet the quality standards as well as the goal of a core curriculum. It can be measured by four components: the change in the classroom, students' traits, teacher quality, and classroom discipline.

The classroom change component was defined as the ability to execute the vision by providing a conducive learning environment. Teachers are encouraged to use information technology, to form networking, and to share and learn innovative teaching methods to provide a conducive atmosphere in the classroom. Students are encouraged to address, learn, and analyze the issues independently. Students' traits refer to ethical criteria that students have to meet besides having the knowledge and skills to work with others. Teacher quality means teachers are able to deliver effective teaching, improve the instructional design, and develop learning activities by focusing on innovation, research, and development. Classroom discipline was defined as classroom atmosphere with respect, dignity, fairness, encouragement, and reinforcement rules and regulations to encourage the students' learning process.

Method

Researchers employed a survey questionnaire to collect quantitative data. The target group was 1,711 school directors and teachers who worked in the 163 schools under the Office of Primary Educational Service Area 1. A stratified sampling technique was administered to select samples. The required sample size was 437 according to Krejcie and Morgan's table at the 95 percent confident level. In total, the 437 samples were comprised of 310 teachers and 127 school directors.

Survey questions in the form of the questionnaire were distributed to the 437 teachers and school directors to collect information on their perceptions on creative leadership practice and classroom quality. This method was suited to this study in terms of obtaining data more efficiently as time, energy, and costs could be minimized (Wyse, 2012) and it provided an excellent means of measuring attitudes and orientations in a large population which can, therefore, be generalized to a larger population (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012).

The survey questionnaire instrument was administered in the Thai language to ensure that the respondents were clear about the statements. There were 90 questions in this instrument. Section A of the questionnaire was intended to gather information regarding demographic factors of the respondents which included information pertaining to their personal backgrounds such as gender, age, the level of education, working experience, school size, and job position.

Section B was specifically designed by the researchers to gauge the frequency of the school directors' implementation of creative leadership practice at their workplace. There were five aspects for creative leadership: interaction (12 items), management (9 items), vision (10 items), initiation (10 items), and positive culture (10 items), giving a total of 51 items. To measure the respondents' responses towards creative leadership practice, a five-point Likert scale was used.

Section C of the instrument was used to gauge information about classroom quality. Four components were measured, giving a total of 33 items in Section C. This section was used to measure the classroom quality based on classroom change (10 items), students' traits (7 items), teacher quality (8 items), and classroom discipline (8 items). Section C was scored using a five-point Likert scale.

The questionnaire was then sent to a panel of experts for comments and feedback. The panel of experts was selected using criteria based on their expertise. The three experts for validation purposes were a professor in educational

administration, a vice director of the Primary Educational Service Area office, and an excellent school director from a primary school. From the feedback from the panel, some modifications were made to the original instrument. In addition, the questionnaire was checked using the index of item objective congruence, with values produced from 0.75 to 1.00.

Pilot testing of the instrument was carried out using 30 teachers and school directors in three different-sized primary schools (large, medium, and small) which were located in Primary Secondary Educational Service Area Office 4 and did not include any of the samples used in the actual study. They were chosen because their structure and population were the same as in the actual study. To improve the quality of the items in the instrument, the pilot testing group was also asked to give suggestions and comments on the items in the instrument and some revisions were made based on these suggestions and feedback. It could be concluded that the instruments were reliable and suitable to use as the Cronbach alpha values for all the research variables were higher than .98 and .97 for creative leadership and classroom quality, respectively.

All 437 distributed questionnaires were successfully collected with the assistance from the senior assistant of each research school, giving a response rate of 100 percent. Descriptive statistics (mean score and standard deviation) were utilized in this study. Furthermore, inferential statistics (Pearson's correlation coefficients and stepwise multiple regression) were used to explain the relationship between creative leadership practice and classroom quality.

Results of the Study

The results of this study are presented in accordance with the research aims indicated above. The initial findings were the descriptive findings of the two variables of perceptions on creative leadership practice and its aspects as well as classroom quality level. Finally, the relationship between the two variables was analyzed. Table 1 below shows the interpretation of the levels of variables as proposed by Sauro (2011).

Descriptive Findings of Creative Leadership and Classroom Quality

Table 2 shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the creative leadership aspects (interaction, management, vision, initiation, and positive culture) from the school directors' perception, teachers' perceptions, and the overall perceptions. The mean score for the five creative

Table 1
Interpretation of variable level based on mean score

Mean score range	Interpretation
4.50–5.00	Highest
3.50–4.49	High
2.50–3.49	Medium
1.50–2.49	Low
1.00–1.49	Lowest

Table 2
Ethical leadership practice

Creative leadership aspects	Directors (n = 127)		Teachers (n = 310)		Total (n = 437)	
	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD
Positive culture	4.57	0.48	4.24	0.66	4.33	0.63
Management	4.56	0.44	4.21	0.65	4.31	0.61
Vision	4.52	0.47	4.20	0.63	4.29	0.60
Interaction	4.51	0.46	4.18	0.63	4.28	0.61
Initiation	4.50	0.49	4.16	0.65	4.26	0.63
Total	4.53	0.42	4.20	0.61	4.29	0.58

leadership aspects of school directors' perceptions ranged from 4.50 to 4.57. The average mean score of creative leadership from school directors' perception was 4.53.

The result of the study revealed that all the creative leadership aspects were at the highest level. The first two orders found that the highest level was in the positive culture aspect ($\bar{x}$ = 4.57, SD = 0.48). The second order was management aspect ($\bar{x}$ = 4.56, SD = 0.44), followed by the vision ($\bar{x}$ = 4.52, SD = 0.47) and interaction ($\bar{x}$ = 4.51, SD = 0.46) aspects. The aspect with the lowest level (average value) was initiation ($\bar{x}$ = 4.50, SD = 0.49).

As indicated in Table 2, the mean score for the five creative leadership aspects of teachers' perceptions ranged from 4.16 to 4.24. The average mean score of creative leadership from teachers' perceptions was 4.20. Generally, teachers' perceptions on their school directors' creative leadership practice were found to be lower than school directors' perceptions. However, the result of the study revealed that the overall mean score for school directors' creative leadership practice and its aspects were high ranging from 4.26 to 4.33.

The result of the study revealed that all the creative leadership aspects from teachers' perceptions were at the high level. The highest level was for the positive culture aspect ($\bar{x}$ = 4.24, SD = 0.66), followed by the management ($\bar{x}$ = 4.21, SD = 0.65) and vision attribute ($\bar{x}$ = 4.20, SD = 0.63) aspects. Next was the interaction aspect ($\bar{x}$ = 4.18, SD = 0.63), while the aspect with the lowest level (average value) was initiation ($\bar{x}$ = 4.16, SD = 0.65). The overall mean score for creative leadership from the teachers' perception was at the high level ($\bar{x}$ = 4.20, SD = 0.61).

Table 3 shows the mean scores and standard deviations of classroom quality and its components (classroom change, students' traits, teacher quality, and classroom discipline) from the school directors' perceptions, teachers' perceptions, and the overall perceptions. The mean score for all four classroom quality components from school directors' perceptions ranged from 4.23 to 4.50. The average mean score of classroom quality from the school directors' perception was 4.38.

The results of the study revealed that all the classroom quality components from the school directors' perceptions were at the high level. The highest level was for the classroom change component ($\bar{x}$ = 4.50, SD = 0.48) followed by the classroom discipline component ($\bar{x}$ = 4.45, SD = 0.52). Next came the teacher quality component ($\bar{x}$ = 4.33, SD = 0.55), while the component with the lowest level (average value) was the students' traits ($\bar{x}$ = 4.23,

Table 3
Classroom quality components

Classroom quality components	Directors (n = 127)		Teachers (n = 310)		Total (n = 437)	
	x̄	SD	x̄	SD	x̄	SD
Classroom change	4.50	0.48	4.25	0.59	4.33	0.57
Classroom discipline	4.45	0.52	4.28	0.52	4.33	0.52
Teacher quality	4.33	0.55	4.23	0.55	4.26	0.55
Students' traits	4.23	0.63	4.07	0.62	4.12	0.62
Total	4.38	0.49	4.21	0.51	4.27	0.51

SD = 0.63). The overall mean score for classroom quality from the school directors' perception was at the high level (x̄ = 4.38, SD = 0.49).

As indicated in Table 3, the mean score for all the four classroom quality components from the teachers' perceptions ranged from 4.07 to 4.28. The average mean score of classroom quality from the teachers' perceptions was 4.21. Generally, teachers' perceptions of classroom quality in their schools were found to be lower than school directors' perceptions. However, the results of the study revealed that the overall mean score for classroom quality and its components were high and ranged from 4.07 to 4.28.

The result of the study revealed that all the classroom quality components from the teachers' perception were at the high level. The highest level was for classroom discipline (x̄ = 4.28, SD = 0.52) followed by classroom change (x̄ = 4.25, SD = 0.59). Next came teacher quality (x̄ = 4.23, SD = 0.55), while the component with the lowest level (average value) was students' traits (x̄ = 4.07, SD = 0.62). The overall mean score for classroom quality from the teachers' perceptions was at the high level (x̄ = 4.21, SD = 0.51).

Relationship Between Creative Leadership and Classroom Quality

Table 5 presents Pearson's correlation coefficients between the five creative leadership aspects and classroom quality. Based on de Vaus's (2002) interpretation of correlation coefficients (see Table 4), the correlation results between the creative leadership aspects of classroom quality showed a significant relationship (p < .01), with the strength of association being 'very strong' and positive.

The values of Pearson's correlation coefficients between the five aspects of creative leadership practice and classroom quality showed a significant relationship at the level of .01, with a strength of association being 'very strong' and

Table 4
Designation strength of association based on size of correlation coefficients

Strength of association	Negative	Positive
Low to moderate	−.29 till −.10	.10 till .29
Moderate to substantial	−.49 till −.30	.30 till .49
Substantial to very strong	−.69 till −.50	.50 till .69
Very strong	−.89 till −.70	.70 till .89
Near perfect	−.99 till −.90	.90 till .99
Perfect relationship	−1.00	1.00

Table 5
Correlation coefficient between creative leadership and classroom quality

Classroom quality	(n = 437) r value
Management (X_2)	.899**
Vision (X_3)	.859**
Initiation (X_4)	.825**
Positive culture (X_5)	.821**
Interaction (X_1)	.780**

**p < .01

positive. The strength of correlation results ranked in order from high to low was: management, vision, initiation, positive culture, and interaction with classroom quality.

As indicated in Table 5, classroom quality was significant, positive and very strongly correlated with all creative leadership aspects. The strongest strength was for the management aspect (r = .899; p < .01). The second strongest strength was for the vision aspect (r = .859; p < .01) followed by the initiation (r = .825; p < .01) and positive culture (r = .821; p < .01) aspects. The only creative leadership aspect that had an interaction with the weakest association was classroom quality (r = .780; p < .01) but it still had a very strong correlation, indicating that, to a very strong extent, an increase in any of the creative leadership aspects was associated with an increase in classroom quality.

Significant Predictors of Classroom Quality

To identify the significant predictors for classroom quality, stepwise regression analysis was carried out. In this analysis, the five creative leadership aspects were treated as predictor variables, while classroom quality was treated as the dependent variable. The purpose of estimating this regression equation was to identify the aspects of creative leadership that have a significant impact on classroom quality, that is the creative leadership aspects which constitute the predictors for classroom quality.

The estimated regression equation was significant at .01 (p < .01), implying that from the five predictor variables, vision, initiation, and management had an impact on classroom quality; thereby qualifying these to be the predictors for the latter. In brief, these three variables had a linear relationship with classroom quality. The adjusted R^2 (.713) shows that the impact of the three significant

Table 6
Regression analysis results for the creative leadership aspects on classroom quality

Classroom quality	B	β	t	R^2	Change in R^2	p
					(n = 437)	
Constant	1.109	–	11.454	–	–	–
Vision (X_3)	0.234	0.276	4.279	.658	–	.001
Initiation (X_4)	0.250	0.306	5.759	.698	.040	.001
Management (X_4)	0.252	0.303	4.872	.713	.015	.001

predictors accounts for 71.3 percent of the variation in the dependent variable.

The adjusted R^2 (.658) in Table 6 shows that the impact of vision aspect was 65.8 percent, the additional initiation aspect was 4.0 percent and the additional management aspect was 1.5 percent. In conclusion, the three variables accounted for 71.3 percent of the variation in the dependent variable.

In this analysis, the size of the standardized coefficient (β) directly indicates the importance of these predictors relative to one another. In this context, the vision aspect ($\beta = 0.276$) was the most important predictor, followed by the initiation ($\beta = 0.306$), and management ($\beta = 0.303$) aspect. Table 6 shows variables for which the coefficients are statistically significant. Regarding the aspects of creative leadership practices, the data analysis showed that significantly, only three out of the five predictor variables were included in the regression model at $p < .01$ indicating that only three of these predictor variables were relevant factors of classroom quality. Therefore, interaction and positive culture aspects are not factor predictors of classroom quality. Table 6 shows the regression analysis results obtained.

In conclusion, the three variables accounted for 71.3 percent of variation in the dependent variable. The following multivariate linear regression model shows the relationship between the predictor variables on the dependent variable (variables defined in Table 6):

Unstandardized score:$\hat{Y} = 1.109 + 0.234\ (X_3) + 0.250\ (X_4) + 0.252\ (X_2)$.

Standardized score:$\hat{Y} = 0.276\ (X_3) + 0.306\ (X_4) + 0.303\ (X_2)$.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study showed that most of the respondents had positive perceptions toward their school director's creative leadership styles in promoting classroom quality in primary schools. It is also identified that there was a sense of awareness and consciousness among teachers on the role and competencies of school directors' creativity in ensuring and determining classroom quality. The main conclusion to be drawn from the current study is that particular aspects of creative leadership such as vision, initiation, and management have significant relationships regarding improvement of classroom quality. The more school directors focus these creative leadership aspects, they greater their likely influence on classroom quality.

Following this line of reasoning, the findings of the study revealed that school directors were implementing at a high level all five aspects of creative leadership. Thus, the findings indicated that the highest average value was for positive culture which indicated that school directors were able to promote and support students' learning achievement by building positive instructional activities (Ubben et al., 2010). In addition, the findings of this study indicated that the vision, initiation, and management aspects of creative leadership were the three significant predictors of classroom quality. This finding has broken new ground suggesting that school directors should focus on these three aspects if they want to improve classroom quality. Since school directors and classroom quality performance are associated with creative leadership, it is, therefore, critical for school directors to give attention to enhancing creative behavior in the workplace.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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