REINFORCEMENT OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION MANAGEMENT: A CASE IN SUPHANBURI PROVINCE

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Abstract: This qualitative research firstly aims to study the present situations and problems of community participation in education management in Suphanburi province. Secondly to capture lessons-learned from an achievement of prototype school in promoting community participation in education. And finally, to propose some guidelines to promote 'community participation in education' in the area. Target populations are education stakeholder consisting of school board committee, school directors, teachers, parents, and people in the research area. Data was collected by using in-depth interview and focus group discussion and was analyzed by technique of content analysis and constant comparison. The results found that the studied schools' committee scarcely involved in education management because of their limited knowledge in education management and restriction in recruitment process. Based on the experience from prototype school; actual and sustain participation of the community could significantly encourage school committee to discover the education goals and principles of education management and allowed them to perform more effectively. Ultimately, the recommendations derived from the research are 1) Establish the awareness of responsibility on education within each community 2) Promote experiential learning to build up the competency in team-working 3) Adopt participation approach to be carried out in the entire process 4) Sustain the continuity in co-working or collaboration and 5) Develop the competencies and traits of the institutes' administrators to be compatible with participatory approach.

Keywords: Community Participation in Education.

Introduction

Education is a learning process for both individual and societal development. Hence, educational management signifies as a systematic process which aims to achieve the goal of education. This anticipated goal is competent human resource to potentially establish stability and peace in the society. In this dynamic era, they should be able to keep up with globalisation and be equipped with knowledge to be competitive in the global wide-reaching stage. Thus, education management is required to be incessantly developed and adapted in accordance with contemporary requirement.

Recently, community participation in education management has been highlighted for the development of all levels of education. It has become one of the major goals of the second phase in Thai Education Reformation Plan. This is to assure the collaboration among all sectors; to identify the local needs and mutually carry out

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the desirable goal. The involvement of community participation is a significant tool which fulfill the weakness in public sector while strengthening the collaboration among all the sectors; especially the people (International Institute for Educational Planning [IIEP], 2009, p. 1).

Participation signifies as an act for which people mutually work together with the same goal and good intention. This act of mutually working will be efficiently completed only at the right time and right phase. The participants are expected to work together with mutuality, faith and trust (Pitakpornpanlop, 2001, p. 39). Therefore, participation is an activity which involves with mind and emotion rather than just physical activity. Participation stimulates aids, reciprocal support and promotes mutual responsibility in all activities (Wisalaporn, 2006, p. 172-173).

Promoting community participation in education management is perceived as an impetus to attain the goal of education. It is expected to reflect education curriculum to meet the needs of local people on education. Moreover, it is prospectively reassuring all stakeholders to be a part of the process; having ownership, compliance and commitment with enthusiastic (Preston, 2013, p. 415; Mongkolwanich, 2012, p. 230).

Although the concept of community participation in education management has been accepted and implemented wide-reaching; many scholars have argued that the concept has been scarcely implemented successfully (Mettagaroonjit, 2010). Intense and equal real participation between a community and a school has been limited (Kosum, 1999). And as this study aims to reinforce community participation in education management in Suphanburi province, the researcher set up the objectives of the study as follows: 1) To study the present situations and problems of community participation in education management in Suphanburi province; 2) To capture lessons-learned from an achievement of prototype school in promoting community participation in education; 3) To propose some guidelines to promote community participation in education in the research area.

Literature Review
Community participation has been an academic buzzword and terminology for development activists. It is presumably strengthening the cooperation between community constituents and public entities. It is expected to be a mechanism to fulfill the relation gap among all sectors in the society (IIEP, 2009, p. 1). In Thai society, participation has played as an important role in rural development. During the implementation of the Fifth National Economics and Development Plan, human development has been highlighted and the plan applied *Bottom-Up approach* rather than its opponent, the *Top-Down approach*. Participation is anticipated to be compatible to human development; this issue was disregarded in the previous plans.

Pitakpornpanlop C. (2001, p. 39) has defined participation as "a group of people intentionally working together to reach their common objectives". Cohen and Uphoff (1981, p. 6), participation is likely to be carried out in four aspects as follows: 1) participation on decision making of what to do and how to do; 2) collaborating and working together as agreement was made; 3) sharing the benefits which derived from the collaboration; and 4) contributing in the output evaluation.

The Significance of Community Participation in Education Management
In the recent years, Thai society has encountered a dynamic environment in the field of education development; hence, most schools' curriculum, delivery style and procedures of evaluation were adjusted to be compatible with the continuous variation by maintaining the stance for facilitating the learners to accomplish with their learning objectives from each level. However, because of the shortage support of families, communities and local authorities the learners' well-equipped daily life is scarcely attained. Based on Preston's perception, there are valuable resources which have been accumulated in each community. Notwithstanding the infrastructure, budget and socio-economic status; schools can attain any other intangible resources from the families and community members. These resources can be much supportive for the development of learners (Preston, 2013, p. 415). Because each community has been constructed on close-relationship and sharing among members; participation is likely to emerge between schools and community members which will support learning procedures of students in that community. Preston J.P. has proposed several form of community participations on educational administration; for instance, the parents and community member are volunteering tutors for the students, financially contributing for school activities, arranging some other extra-curricular activities for students, providing adult education (continuing education), providing recreational activities for community members, allocating some scholarship, participating in cultural ceremonies and charity events, etc. The resources given from the community can be in form of human resource, activities or projects, facilities, related policy on participation, budget, norms, belief and community attitude. In other words, it is everything which community can constructively apply to support more effective learning process. This participation is attuned with recent Thai Education Reformation concept where decentralisation has also been a major emphasis. Supposedly, with more decentralising decision making based on local needs; effective educational output is attained. These practices are expected to establish the resilient educational system for grassroots level. Hence, the concept of 'Education for all' will plausibly be arranged as the community taking part in both financial aspect and problem solving at the local level (Miyao, 2004, p. 1).

Additionally, community participation in education management is beneficial for community in many aspects. It allows each school to provide innovative form of activities which is fascinated by the community members and volunteers. Moreover, learners or students are given the opportunities to understand well their actual economic and their own society of the community. There are research results which suggested that direct experience occurs when combining the real problem-solving from their community with the theoretical content. It could cultivate the sense of civic and the awareness of citizenship for students (Billig, Root, & Jesse, 2007).

This collaboration between community and schools is not only positively influencing to healthiness, attitude and the behaviors of students but also includes their work opportunity after finishing the high-school level. Foley R. (2001) claimed that community-based learning and apprenticeship are the major mechanisms for social capital. The relationship between students and community would have been initiated. This high level of social capital, eventually, provides more job opportunity and career options for the graduates.

The Levels of Participation in Education Management
There are different levels of participation in educational management. Kosum S. (1999) has categorized the level of participation in educational administration into three levels.

1. Marginal Participation
It is the first level of participation. It signifies limited collaboration between the community and the school. This limitation possibly occurs due to the imbalanced of power-relations where one of the two has power over to the counterpart. A player of the two could perceive itself as an 'inferior' in term of power; for instance, being a less-educated person and having less confidence to participate in the activities arranged. This form of participation is less intense and most activities are arranged by the school side. For examples; parents attending the school meeting or donating some money or tools to support the school activities. It is apparent that in this form of participation the school almost entirely makes decision with slight opinions from the parents.

2. Partial Participation
It allows higher level of participation from the community than the marginal participation. Regularly, this form of participation implies the involvement from the school committee. The school committee may involve in some important activities which complies with the educational policy of the school, especially the one which aims to legitimize the education management. Moreover, the school committee may take part in initiating some school activities, donating some money or tools to support the school activities as same as in Marginal participation. Additionally, partial participation allows the community to give their opinion and take part in the process of decision making; however, the opinion may not be strong enough to change the final decision made by the school. Hence, it is obvious that most of activities have been established by the school which allows the community and school committee to participate in except the process of delivery the lecture.

3. Full Participation
It is the form of participation where the school and the community are equally and intensely involved in the school activities. Both players have equal and mutual influence on the school activities as well as allowing all stakeholders to have full participation. Generally, these forms of participation are from the elite groups of each community; for instance, the reverend abbot, community leader, the president of the parents group or association, etc. Apparently, these groups of people are normally influential in the community.

The Policy and Implementation of Participation in Education Management in Thailand
There is a diverse level of society where participatory approach can be applied; family, school or educational institutes, community, organization and country. Any level of participation is likely to establish ownership, compliance and commitment (Mongkolwanich, 2012, p. 230). Thus, the recent education management emphasizes the participation from the citizens, communities, and society. In Thailand, the Thai

National Education Act 1999, second edition (2002) has clearly stated the significance of participation in the section 8 (2) "the society should take part in the education management". This section is complied with the section 58 of Thai Constitution 2007. It is stated "A person shall have the right to participate in the decision-making process of state official in the performance of administrative functions which affect or may affect his rights and liberties, as provided by law". This section reinforces all educational institutes to apply this national policy of participation. Local people and community are consent to participate in education management. It is expected that participation would drive the education managements in the direction required by the community and the parents. Additionally, participation is expected to create trust from the community to the school and the community would appreciate the existence of the school and enthusiastically support the school and eagerly involve the school activities (Banlangpattama, 2008, p. 1). Moreover, participation allows mutual learning process. All stakeholders have equal opportunity to express their opinion, plan and carry out the activities, solve any emerging problems, as well as control, monitor and evaluate the activities. Thus, the goal of education is attainable.

The Challenges for Participation in Education Management
Although participation ostensibly reduces some challenges for education management in the community, there are at least two critical issues which must be discussed. Firstly, the arranged education management is incompatible with the local context and the local needs. Secondly there are slightly less collaboration for the local constituents. However, Wisalaporn also indicated five issues having some challenges of participation in education management of a community (2006, p. 200-203). The five issues are as the followings:

1. Unclear Objective of The Participation
If the objective of the participation is unclear and ambiguous; this will cause some misunderstanding to the group of participants. As a result, it will influence the form and style of the collaboration. Therefore, the assigned authorities should be clear in the following elements: who should participate, which activities should they participate, and what are the roles of the participants. With the clear objectives of the participation; the goal of these participatory activities can be accomplished. People will be able to contribute their knowledge, skills, expertise and their resource for the development of education management. However, this participation should not include those who have inherent benefits or concealed individual needs.

2. The Right Person to Participate
The selection of participant has been crucial for participation. Education management is time-consuming process; thus, the participants should be those who are able to contribute their time. Normally, the prospective knowledgeable participants have been occupied with other tasks. As a result, selecting a participant needs a balance between the ideal skillful participant or the one who contribute their time to the school. Wisalaporn S. (2006, p. 203) also has suggested several criteria for this selection. First, the participant should be knowledgeable and skillful for the identified activity.

Secondly, the participant should be enthusiastic and willing to involve in the activities. Finally, this participant should have time to participate in the activity. However, several issues should also be considered; for instance, if an executive of a school is responsible for the selection of participants, it is possible that an executive will only choose the ones who are compatible with him or her notwithstanding the qualification of the selected participants. Thus, the selection is strongly recommended to be completed by a committee so that the participation is more effective.

3. The Right Activity to Be Participated

There is also another crucial issue whether the participation will be carried out for the right opportunity or event. Each task or activity is required different qualified participant. A person who is appropriate to participate in one activity may not be compatible with another. Therefore, considering the 'issue or event' for participation is also important to be considered. Some events or activities may not require participation.

4. How to Participate

The form and method of participation is also important. However, rules and regulations of the public entities (local government) constantly define participation in the form of *committee* only. Hence, there is a problematic issue since the proportion of local people selected to be in the committee is likely to be a minority. As a result, people's opinion is slightly being overheard and this means the people ineffectively perform as participants.

5. Level of Participation

How much or which level of participation is appropriate for a person to participate? This has been a crucial issue. Wisalaporn has noted the *pseudo-participation*. This includes the way that a member of a committee does not attend a meeting or attending a meeting without expressing any opinion, and dominating the meeting, etc. The level of participation could become ineffective.

Methodology

This research adopted qualitative research methodology. The targeted unit of analysis is the stakeholders of education managements in Suphanburi province. The stakeholders are; basic education committees, school executives, teachers, parents, and local people. The key informants are divided into two main groups. The first group was the in-depth interviewees who could reflect on the recent challenges and opportunities of the participation on education management. Another group was the key informants who provide further information on the lessons-learned from the prototype school where they adopted participation in education management in Suphanburi province. The researcher applied in-depth interview and focus group discussion. Later, content analysis and constant comparison were applied as data analysis tools. Both set of questions have been validated the content validity by three expert scholars in the field of education and participation.

Research Findings

The Opportunities and Challenges of Participation in Education Management
Based on the parents' perspective, participation in education management is expressing their opinion in regard with the teaching and the school administration while implementing the development process belongs to the school. If we considered at the individual level, the group of parents has more opportunity in participation than local people. On the contrary, if we considered based on community level, rural school where the existence of kinship and collectivism remained; would have more participation from the parents than the schools in the urban area. Conversely, the Office of the Basic Education Commission has launch a policy which reinforced each school to select at least a representative from local people and assign him or her to be a member of the school committee. This representative is required to take part in the school administration. Therefore, this is an official practice which was carried out to promote participation in education management.

Based on the perspective of school administrator, the expected role of the school committee is providing information on local needs to the school as well as being a media for the school to inform the community in regard with the school administration. Additionally, the committee should support the school in terms of financing and other resources. However, the committee is being less anticipated to partake in the education management since each member has diverse level of education and knowledge. This was related to the committee selection process which the school may not have the entire authority. Thus, this led to the limitation of individual understanding on education management of each member of the committee.

In case of Suphanburi province, the committees scarcely recognized and understood their role and tasks as a committee. They rarely took part in the process of education management but frequently participate in those activities to support the development of students, other cultural activities or recreation which were organized by the schools.

The Success Lesson-Learned on Participation in Education Management
Based on the experience of the prototype school, apparently, real participation in education management in all procedures initiated the experiential learning for all participants. Besides, if the participation is carried out along with effective working system; the mutual continuous learning cycle has emerged. This result allowed the school committee to understand the purpose and the concept of education management. The committee can be very supportive and becoming the effective media between the school and community. The success has created ownership and incentivizing the continuous participation and this could encourage them to be more dedicative to the school management.

Although the success of this prototype school is from the management skills of the administrator, the continuous collaboration has more effective result. The school committee will be strengthening and be able to direct the administration of the school by themselves. Working equally together with respect establishes smooth working process and the committee will perform their duty without expecting any return.

Guidelines for Promoting Community Participation in Education Management
The research has suggested that community participation is an important impetus for education management. The participation could response to the local needs. There are several guidelines for promoting community participation in education management in the research area and are as the followings.

(1) The education management stakeholders should create the public awareness on the unofficial education administration in the community. This can be continuously completed through public relations and internal public communication.

(2) Moreover, they should strengthen the learning process from the direct experience which can build up competency in team working of the school committee. This working process is performed under friendly environment which everyone can express their opinion and mutually and equally making any decision.

(3) Additionally, real participatory working process should be carried out. It is expected that the ownership and commitment could encourage the continuous and intensive participation.

(4) The stakeholders should sustain the team working environment to maintain the ownership and the sense of belongings to the group. Thus, the continuous working system should be maintained and being strengthened.

(5) The competencies and the characteristics of the school directors should be developed in participatory approach. The school directors should understand the concept and purpose of participation in education management. They should be able to transfer the concept to the real implementation. And the last competency which they should build up is in school administration. Moreover, the characteristics that they should build up are having good human relationship, being generous and be open minded to listen to other people's opinions. They should be honest and responsible for the objectives of the school which aim to benefit the students and community. Finally, they should build up trust from their communities.

Discussion
The research results have pointed out that the parents are highly valued in official educational system. They perceive the official educational system as an important tool to develop their children and the juveniles. The parents' satisfactions have always influenced the school's reputation. Therefore, most schools have always prioritised the opinions given by the parents and develop their school in accordance with the parents' requirement. However; the purpose of education management could not only have specified to the individual's need. The development should include the wider context of each school and extend to the society. The quality of people is the most important for the society (Wesaras, 2013, p. 1). Therefore, it is necessary that all schools should allow the community to participate in education management. This practice would reflect the linkages between the local needs and the desired characteristics from the community members. Additionally, it is supportive to the real participation between the community and the school. One common situation in every school in Thailand is the shortage of financial support and other non-financial resources. Hence, the education management with community participation is likely to resolve this limitation efficiently and sustain the 'Prosperity' for that school. (Preston, 2013, p. 415).

The findings from this research are relevant to the research conducted by Wisalaporn S. in 2006. The research also indicated that even though there is a national policy and the enforcement on establishing school committee at every school, the implementation still varies by the administrators' competencies. The school management depends on the capability of the administrator's management who would be able to solve the problematic issues in the administration as well as some challenges from the committee. In addition to the similar findings, this research found that if any schools have a deep understanding about their own community and could combine the academic concepts with the real skills and local wisdom from the community; the harmony of their way of life could emerge.

All in all, the capability of the administrator's management is the most influential element to attain the goal of the education management (Wesarush, 2013). This argument has been quite apparent as shown in the prototype school. It has re-confirmed that sincerity and open-minded are the keys of success for collaboration.

The research also found that individual characteristics, community conditions, external and internal environment are influential to the participation between the community and the school. Hence, promoting the community participation could not perceive the organized activities as an only important indicator for participation. It is suggested to include other positive elements which could enhance and sustain the community participation. Moreover, the context of each community and school must be considered. The level of understanding and the readiness to work together between the school and community are also varied. Therefore, community participation cannot be a panacea for the success. There are various approaches which could be adopted to implement along with participation. To emphasize, the lesson-learned from the prototype school is one of the shortcuts for other schools to learn to efficiently and effectively develop themselves.

The community participation on education management not only benefits the school as a catalyst of 'Education for Local' but also strengthening their own community. The case of the prototype school shows that one of an important outcome of the collaboration is creating the stronger innovative socialization. The constituents in the community have better relationship and they have reciprocally assisted one another not only in the aspect of education. This phenomenon has confirmed the research result of Nakorntub et al (2008). The prototype school in this research is a tangible and visible example of what Nakorntub et al. has researched on. Nakorntub et al. argued that socialization in the community could create 'Community Power' which benefits the community. In this situation where the modern day educational system is highly official and has less relationship with the community; most school activities normally were organized in accordance with the needs of school not people (Namthep, 1994). On the contrary, this situation is changing and transfer to the concept of 'Education for Local'. The schools have valued local wisdom more and allow the communities take part in the education management.

Conclusion
The research has unpacked the real challenges and opportunities of education management and community participation. It allows the stakeholders of the school to understand and realized the real problematic issues of the school. It has recommended

some guidelines based on the experience of the selected prototype school. The National Basic Education Committee can adopt the guidelines for future education policy indication and implementation. Moreover, the schools (basic education institutes) can also control, monitor and evaluate their schools based on the recommended guidelines to improve their capabilities and develop more positive conditions to their community and the community participation.

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