

[DOI: 10.20472/IAC.2020.054.008](https://doi.org/10.20472/IAC.2020.054.008)

KOOLCHALEE CHONGCHAROEN

School of Educational Studies, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand

MULTICULTURAL LEADERSHIP AND THE ROLE OF THAI SCHOOL LEADERS

Abstract:

Today's globalized world has the direct impact on groups of people with a variety of ethnic groups, genders, and talents and so on which is known as multiculturalism. The educational design is required to meet the needs for changing the educational environment in more holistic ways so as to reach the achievement of the equality of education. Many interesting findings have been derived from much of multicultural education research in Thailand, especially in educational management. Thai school leaders are required to have multicultural leadership and play the crucial roles with the aim to effectively respond to diversity and as a result the achievement of the equality of education for all groups of people in the Thai society.

Keywords:

Multicultural, Leadership, Roles, School leaders

JEL Classification: I29, M12

1. INTRODUCTION

The transformation of the world in the 21st century in the aspects of technology and communication brings people closer together. These situations have the direct impact on groups of people with a variety of ethnic groups, genders, and talents and so on which is known as multiculturalism. The coexistence of humans in the concept of positive values causes the learning improvement of those people including the group of the students. Additionally, educational management design needs to be considered for changing the educational environment in a holistic way in order to achieve the equality of education [1], [2].

In Thailand, multicultural education has recently received more attention. This has evidently been viewed in the early 1957 onwards in which the population of many countries has been immigrating to other countries, both temporarily and permanently. It is indispensable for those migrants to learn the language, culture and lifestyle under the new law and regulations. However, they still use their own languages, culture and religion. Afterwards, there have been more concerned with the individual human rights in the Thai society and hence those migrants were more acceptable. Several editions of policies, procedures, and guidelines issued for the states parties have been established by the United Nations. This aims to take into account of raising the rights of children and providing them with the education regardless of their differences in race, culture, and religion. The findings reveal that in 1992, Thailand signed on as partner on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. To achieve this, the legislation and regulations have been created to conform to the Constitution and the law of compulsory education. Furthermore, the substantial resolution of the Cabinet on the fifth of July in 2002, has been approved as the regulations of the Ministry of Education. By law, the children who have no Thai nationality and citizenship, immigrate with their parents into Thailand, or are born in Thailand can attend any school thoroughly. In addition, internationally, the World Trade Organization (WTO) encourages free trade among its member countries. As a consequence, the markets and facilitating cross-border business transactions have been widespread. In 2005, there were some 63,000 transnational organizations around the world with 147,000 networks in their host and home countries while their business stood at one third of the world products [3]. While, regionally, the blueprint for establishing the ASEAN Economic Community by 2015 was signed aiming to signal more cross-border interactions which can lead to the transnational businesses and free trade, and naturally bring about even greater mobility of people, information, and capital.

2. MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

A consensus has been conducted among multicultural education scholars regarding to the primary goals of multicultural education. The major goals are to improve the educational experiences, reduce prejudice, and create internal understanding among students of diverse ethnic, racial, economic, gender, and cultural groups [4]. It is noticeable that the major goal of multicultural education is not only to assist the students to preserve their own language, culture, religion but also to seek the promotion of their educational achievement, particularly those who are traditionally dismissed and underserved in the education system. As far as the multicultural education rests on four broad principles, namely, [5]

“(a) cultural pluralism; (b) ideals of social justice and the end of racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice and discrimination; (c) affirmations of culture in the teaching and learning process; and (d) visions of educational equity and excellence leading to high levels of academic learning for all children and youth” (p. 173).

Moreover, multicultural education is composed of five dimensions [6]: 1) *Content integration* which means using resources and texts from various cultures as teaching tools; 2) *Knowledge construction* which means “the process relates to the extent to which teachers help students to understand, investigate, and determine how the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of references, perspectives, and biases within a discipline influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed within it” [7] (p. 14); 3) *Equity pedagogy* which means using different teaching styles to meet the diverse needs of students; 4) *Prejudice reduction* which means the way to create a more positive racial and ethnic attitudes. Primarily, this dimension has put an emphasis on the strategy for the teacher to help lessening the amount of prejudice within students; and 5) *Empowering school culture and social structure* which means using the above-mentioned four dimensions to create a safe and healthy educational environment in school activities for all students.

3. RESEARCH ON MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION IN THAILAND

Much of multicultural education research in Thailand has been conducted with the interesting findings, especially in educational management. Some of them were conducted in the fields of school administration procedures whereas the others focused on problematic factors and guidelines for educational management and the aspects of

multicultural leadership. A previous research studied the multicultural communities and school administration in Koh Mueang Pranakhon Si Ayutthaya, Thailand [8] found that the management of educational institutions should as follows: 1) enhancing awareness for the cultural identity; 2) maintaining cultural stereotypes; 3) being a learning organization; 4) being a multicultural atmosphere organization; 5) having school leaders equipped with multicultural leadership; 6) having teachers with appropriate attributes for multicultural society; 7) having a multicultural learning environment; 8) focusing on the participatory management; and 9) having a multicultural learning process. The other research also suggested that Thai educational institutions should be a unit that melts the cultural differences of ethnic groups [9]. To achieve this, they should be tolerant of cultural pluralism and to realize that cultural diversity is the truth in the society. Therefore, there is a requirement for educational institutions to use various techniques in teaching and learning responding to the differences of learners in order to help the students learn more about their interests in learning. The findings also indicated that the curriculum development and the teaching techniques using various types of media were so significant that can help learners learn in accordance with the ability and culture of each individual to achieve better academic achievement.

Moreover, one study has demonstrated the problematic factors in multicultural education for the tribal children in Thai community [10]. It indicated that teachers were still unable to conduct classroom research so as to bring the results to develop the educational quality of the tribal children. At the same time, the school was still unable to apply policies into practices which were consistent with the problems and needs of the tribal children. The guidelines for educational management were found that the schools had to develop teachers to have the knowledge and understanding of local culture and integrate them in teaching and learning. Additionally, the teachers are encouraged to cooperate with the community in carrying out various activities for success and benefits to the tribal children in the community.

In addition, a study about the multicultural leadership of school administrator [11] also revealed the findings of the multicultural leadership of school administrator under Secondary Educational Service Area in Bangkok. Five aspects of multicultural leadership considered in this study include: 1) communication proficiency; 2) multicultural acceptance; 3) resources support; 4) organizational leadership; and 5) morality. The research also indicated the problems occurring in educational management, such as the lack of the culture knowledge. Therefore, the study recommended that the school leaders should focus on the culture understanding of the team so as to enhance a strong

commitment in multicultural education management.

Besides, another research proposed that there should be the leadership challenges to public secondary school principals in the era of education reform and cultural unrest in border provinces of southern Thailand [12]. This study suggested three main characteristics of the nature of principals' leadership dealing with education reform and cultural unrest including: a) increasing participation; b) transforming visions and producing changes; and c) recognizing ethical foundations. In all, these findings of the above-mentioned research include very beneficial information for developing Thailand multicultural education administration.

4. MULTICULTURAL LEADERSHIP OF THAI SCHOOL LEADERS

Multicultural schools have exposed widespread and challenging tasks which imply new demands for school leadership. Since today's societies are becoming more and more multicultural, there is a need to increase individuals' awareness of the acceptable positive thinking and the exchange of views and experience among diverse individuals [13]. The school leaders who have to take the important roles in the multicultural education require effective management principles to gain acceptance in a variety of identities, languages, religion and culture aiming for developing the education quality in the community.

As globalization continues to influence people around the world, "Globalization has brought a paradigm shift in educational management, administration and leadership" [14] (p. 333). There is a greater requirement for leaders who are "competent in cross-cultural awareness and practice" [15] (p. 51). Leadership, especially multicultural leadership, appears to be a key component in society. Therefore, the school leaders in the multicultural communities require global leadership which involves the ability to connect with individuals from different cultures. Connecting is an actionable process that creates mutual understanding, positive feeling, and a common approach to collaborate with the various group of people to live together with happiness in the society and as a result leads to sustainable development [16], [17].

Multicultural education in Thai schools has been viewed in many areas of the country. These involve urban areas, industrial zones, or business investment in which many international schools are located with the international program and most of administrators, teachers, and educational staff who are foreigners. Besides, many Thai schools were placed in the border provinces. Some of schools are of small-size which have limitations or obstacles in educational resources. Thus, the school leaders, in a multicultural setting, are required to have

multicultural competency in terms of an assessment of awareness, knowledge and skills, with expressed intention of promoting the principles of social justice in education” [18].

With these circumstances, the competency of multicultural leadership is very important for school effectiveness. Some scholars in multicultural studies showed the primary competency of school leaders within multicultural environment. Multicultural identity experiences equip global leaders with effective qualities, such as empathy, perspective-taking, and integration, which enable them to engage in actions for connecting to people across cultures [17]. More than that, the key components of multicultural leadership are understanding, respecting and recognizing the value of other cultures other than their own culture [19]. It also includes being the good strategist which can adjust the way to live together in a different cultural context, having the ability to set a network and build relationships and faith to take place in different cultural groups. The other very important multicultural leadership is to have a cultural intelligence (Cultural Intelligence Quotient - CQ), which can lead to the creation of innovation productivity, efficiency, cooperation and marketing in a multicultural society. Corresponding with [20] and [21], the emphasis has placed on the competency of multicultural leadership on cultural intelligence (CQ), which is viewed as a tool that can increase an individual's ability to interact with people outside his or her culture. As reference [20] has stated, “variations in leadership styles are due to cultural influence because people have different beliefs and assumptions about characteristics that are deemed effective for leadership” (p. 92). While a reference [22] regarded multicultural competence as the ability and flexibility to deal with the tensions of cultural differences by valuing cultural diversity, recognizing the organization's cultural identity, and gaining an insight into the cultural diversity of suppliers and customers.

Recognizing the culture is the key of the leaders' multicultural competence which helps school leaders meet the educational and welfare needs of students. In Thailand, cultural practices for Thai school leaders seem to be rooted in cultural habits. Traditionally, Thai society was built on hierarchical but reciprocal relationships among its members. Although some of Thai cultural practices are still barriers for school improvement, the other practices have a strong influence upon the administration. Buddhism has played an important role in guiding Thailand and therefore understanding Buddhism is the key to learn Thai leadership. “Rajadhamma 10” (in Thai), ten principles, which are mainly required for being the king, have been integrated into Thai society [23]. These principles are the main practices that Thai leaders need to apply in their administrations. These principles include:

“Dana” (generosity), “Sila” (morality/ ethical behavior), “Parricaga” (unselfishness/ altruism), “Ajjava” (honesty/ integrity), “Maddava” (gentleness, avoiding arrogance), “Tapa” (self-restraint/ self-control), “Akkhoda” (free from hatred/ staying calm in confusing situations), “Avihimsa” (non-violence), “Khanti” (patience/ forgiveness), and “Avirodhana” (avoiding prejudice/fairness). Such principles lead to cultural practices that Thai school leaders can use to administrate their schools. Some of these principles show characteristics of multicultural leadership such as generosity, morality/ ethical behavior, gentleness, fairness etc. which will be advantageous for administration in Thai multicultural schools.

5. THE ROLES OF SCHOOL LEADERS

Theorizing about the practice of educational administration, there should be a consideration on the values of multicultural education, advocating for cultural pluralism and honoring differences while ensuring social justice and equity among all students. The role of school leaders in a multicultural environment should be that of responding effectively to diversity [24]. A reference [25] proposed three key tasks for school leaders to respond to diversity and demonstrate their multicultural leadership. The first task is to foster new meanings about diversity. To do this, the leaders set the high expectations and provide support for diverse groups of students. There should be an attempt to institute and sustain school reform and support dialogue and discussion among groups that might be culturally different. The second task relates to promoting inclusive instructional practices within schools by supporting, facilitating, or being a catalyst for change. The leaders show instructional leadership that promotes inclusion, awareness of pedagogical practices, or concern for appropriate assessments. The third task involves the connection building between schools and communities. To achieve this, the leaders encourage parents and communities to participate in school management as well as community involvement. There should also be partnering with social service agencies for their children success.

Reference [26] also stated that school leaders who have multicultural leadership can develop their schools to create a situation assessment by setting clear goals to build relationships among diverse cultural groups. The crucial guidelines for school success are suggested as follows: 1) Assessing the situation regarding to the status of the problems occurring in schools; 2) Establishing a clear vision collaboratively, with the goal of providing education among teachers, students, and parents so as to enhance participatory work in the same direction; 3) Applying the problem management approach from a variety of cultures, and narrowing social and cultural gap between

teachers and students in order to live together with happiness in the different society; 4) Reducing social inequality, particularly the differences between students, teachers, and parents in order to reach the equality of education by means of providing educational opportunities and learning; 5) Ingraining the attitude of tolerance of different cultures equally well; and 6) Building a good relationship with the community with cultural diversity.

The roles of school leaders, with multicultural leadership, are very crucial for successful school management with the demand of multicultural leadership development. Although some of studies have examined the research on Thai multicultural education administration or multicultural leadership of Thai school leaders, a search of the literature revealed that research on the guideline of multicultural leadership development is limited. A better understanding of the multicultural leadership development is important for the trend toward increasing living together in the society, leading to sustainable development. It is also found that the leaders with their high level of education and experience understand how behaviors can differ across cultures [27]. Three strategies suggested [27], [28] to develop multicultural competences of the leaders include 1) Acquiring foundational understanding. At the beginning, leaders can start to work on discovering human behavior in order to be able to explain how it can be influenced by cultural and contextual variables. To do this, they can gain the knowledge by seeking information about culture and human behavior in general so as to better understand one's behaviors; 2) Seeking multicultural experiences. The leaders can seek multicultural experiences everywhere which may involve foreign community events outside the work, social and political functions, celebrations, friendships, neighborhood groups and so forth; and 3) Consolidating learning. In this stage, the leaders need to apply the knowledge that they have acquired and learned in practice. They should adjust the knowledge and experience to set the strategies, and to create and experiment with new action plans in the field. Then, they can gain the new skills significant for developing themselves into cross-cultural communication and management.

6. CONCLUSION

To manage schools within the multicultural environments, Thai school leaders are required to have the multicultural leadership which is based on Thai cultural practices. Firstly, they need to have positive values which can lead to the learning improvement of the people in multicultural groups with the aim for the achievement of equality in education. In addition, they need to realize their accountability of assisting the students to preserve their own cultures and to seek the promotion of their

educational achievement. There is also a need to increase school leaders' awareness of the acceptable positive thinking and the exchange of views and experience among diverse individuals and the ability to connect with individuals from different cultures, such as parents, and communities. The key tasks of school leaders responding to diversity and demonstrating their multicultural leadership are crucial. These tasks are involved in fostering new meanings about diversity, promoting inclusive instructional practices within schools, and building connection between schools and communities. More than that, acquiring foundational understanding, seeking multicultural experiences, and consolidating learning can help Thai school leaders contribute more meaningful education development in any context.

REFERENCES

- [1] Mitchell, B. M. & Salsbury, R. E. (1999). *Encyclopedia of multicultural education*. Westport: Greenwood Press.
- [2] Banks, J. A. & Banks, C. A. (2003). *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- [3] Ministry of Education. (2007). *Report of the research on globalization impacts on Thai education administration in the next five years*. Bangkok: Offset Press.
- [4] Taba, H. & Wilson, H. (1946). Intergroup education through the group curriculum. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, 244, 19-25.
- [5] Bennett, C. (2001). Genres of research in multicultural education. *Review of Educational Research*, 71(2), 171-217.
- [6] Banks, J. A. (2015). *Cultural diversity and education: Foundations, curriculum, and teaching*. (6th ed.). New York: Routledge.
- [7] Banks, J. A. (2002). Teaching for diversity and unity in a democratic multicultural society. In W. C. Parker (Ed.), *Education for Democracy: Contexts, Curricula, Assessments*. Greenwich, Connecticut: Information Age Publishing.
- [8] Wongyam, K., Suksodkaew, W & Intarak, P. (2017). The multicultural communities school administration in Koh Muaeng Phranakhon Si Ayutthaya. *Suan Dusit Graduate School Academic Journal*, 3(3), 110-125.
- [9] Dechchawanakorn, K. (2016). Education management in a multicultural school: A case study of Banrongsan School, RomYen Sub-district, Chiang Kham, Phayao Province. Retrieved from

- <http://www.multied.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/1.pdf>
- [10] Intarak, C. (2014). Educational management in multicultural society for mountain students of primary school at northern marginal area. *Silpakorn Educational Research Journal*, 6(1), 7-14.
- [11] Mangklasiri, N. (2016). *The multicultural leadership of school administrator under Secondary Educational Service Area in Bangkok*. (Master's thesis). Dhurakij Pundit University, Bangkok, Thailand.
- [12] Sungtong, E. (2007). *Leadership challenges to public secondary school principals in the era of education reform and cultural unrest in border provinces of southern Thailand*. (Doctoral dissertation) University of Missouri-Columbia, U.S.A.
- [13] Rozkwitalska, M. & Basinska, B. A. (2015). Job satisfaction in the multicultural environment of multinational corporations: Using the positive approach to empower organizational success. *Baltic Journal of Management*, 10(3), 366-387.
- [14] Lee, J. C. K. & Pang, N. K. (2011). Educational leadership in China: Contexts and issues. *Frontiers of Education in China*, 6(3), 331-341.
- [15] Kumar, R., Anjum, B. & Sinha, A. (2011). Cross-cultural interactions and leadership behavior. *Journal of Arts, Science and Commerce*, 2(3), 151-160.
- [16] Karuna, P. (2018). Multicultural education administration with two Religions in the school. *Graduate School Conference 2018 of Suan Disit Rajabhat University*, 2(1), 352-361.
- [17] Shakir, F. Y. & Lee, Y. (2017). Connecting across cultures: An empirical examination of multicultural individuals as global leaders. *Advances in Global Leadership*, 10, 89-116.
- [18] St. Clairs, S. O. (2008). Multicultural competence: Diversity training from within. *Issues in Higher Education*, 25(19), 25.
- [19] Wedel, C. (2017). *Traits of exceptional multicultural leaders*. Retrieved from <https://www.ellevatenetwork.com/articles/7748-traits-of-exceptional-multicultural-leaders>
- [20] Pauliene, R. (2012). Transforming leadership styles and knowledge sharing in a multicultural context. *Multicultural Leadership Competence*, 10(1), 91-109.
- [21] Aldaheri, A. (2017). Cultural intelligence and leadership style in the education sector. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 31(6), 718-735.
- [22] Canen, A.G. and Canen, A. (2004). Multicultural competence and trust: a new road for logistics management? *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal*, 11(3), 38-53.
- [23] Roongrerngsuke, S. & Liefoghe, A. P. (2012). *Unlocking leadership in Thailand*. Bangkok, Thailand: Nation news Network.
- [24] Thomas, R.R. & Woodruff, M. I. (1999). *Building a house for diversity*. New York: AMACOM.
- [25] Riehl, C. (2000). The principal's role in creating inclusive schools for diverse students: A review of normative, empirical, and critical literature on the practice of educational administration. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(1), 55-81.
- [26] Banks, J. A. (1997). Multicultural education: Characteristics and goals. In J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks, (Eds.). *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* (3rd ed., pp. 3-31). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- [27] Steers, R. M., Nardon, L. & Sanchez-Runde, C. J. (2013). Developing multicultural competences. *The European Business Review*, Retrieved from <http://www.europeanbusinessreview.com/?p=1386>.
- [28] Sue, D. W., Arredondo, P. & Mcdavis, R. J. (1992). Multicultural counseling competencies and standards: A call to the profession. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 70, 477- 486.