

Strategies for Improvement of Educational Quality in Educational Institutions under Secondary Educational Service Area Office in the Lower Northeastern Region

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Abstracts

Quality is a crucial element of organizational management, but often ignored by many administrators. It is also true in case of educational organizations as shown in external quality evaluation in Thailand. The objectives of this study aimed to study the states of educational quality development of educational institutions under Secondary Educational Area Office in the lower Northeastern Region in Thailand, to formulate strategies for improvement of educational quality, and to evaluate the strategies formulated. The research was conducted in three phases, firstly investigating states of quality development in target institutions, secondly formulating strategies, and finally evaluating strategies formulated. The findings included 8 strategies on developing (1) academic leadership of administrators; (2) strategic management towards educational excellence; (3) measurement and evaluation systems for sustainable educational quality development; (4) data management system for listening to students and stakeholders; (5) learning management process that focuses on learners' competencies; (6) potential of teachers and personnel on educational quality development; (7) knowledge management systems to support educational quality improvement; and (8) digital technology to enhance educational quality.

Keywords: Educational Quality in Educational Institutions; Secondary Educational Service Area Office; The Lower Northeastern Region in Thailand

Introduction

The dynamic challenge of 21st century drives numbers of changes both inside and outside of all countries in our world, including Thailand. Changes occur in many dimensions such as social structure, incomes, attitudes, beliefs, values, culture, and citizen behaviors which have been affected by globalization. These changes lead to many problems in educational management especially problems of educational equity and standards. Thailand, as a part of Asian countries and world community, Thailand has to provide education according to sustainable development goals issued by United Nation by 2030 (Sustainable Development Goals: SDGs 2030) as included in Educational Plan B.E. 2552-2559, Economic and Social Development Plan 12 (B.E. 2560-2564) and Thailand 20 Year Strategic Plan, aiming to stability, durability, and sustainability within the next 20 years (Office of the Educational Council, 2017 : 5)

The crucial issue of Thai education now was educational quality, which was not much satisfied by stakeholders. The achievement of Basic Education was lower than the average of Asian countries. The quality of manpower of graduates under 15 years of ages did not meet the

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market need or not qualified for jobs. Student enrollment of vocational sectors was lower than academic sectors. Moreover, the numbers of unemployment of graduate increased. According to the review literature, these problems were results of poor educational management. According to the research done by (Supasophon, 2013 : 11), it revealed six problems of education management, namely (1) Setting educational aim without clear and reflexed empirical fact and data, (2) School policies were not based on problems and needs, and not practical, (3) Plans were not well developed according to planning processes and not related to schools' strategies, (4) Budget allocation was not based on needs of projects and did not support instruction, (5) Plan implementation, although based on decentralized system, but now well communicated and knowledge supported, and (6) Plan evaluation, although done in all projects and activities but lack of progress follow-up and details of projects and activities. The problems cited above were confirmed by the studies done by Suwangsuriyakul (2012 : 26–38), Runchareon (2007 : 53), Kheonpanya (2011 : 116–126), and Reontong (2007 : 53)

Angsuchote and Pinyopanuwat (2018 : 182–201) reported the summary of the third round of educational quality evaluation conducted by Office of National Education Standards and Quality Assessment that only 62.04 percent of total numbers of Basic Education Schools passed minimum educational standards, and among these, 39.52 percent of them were in Northeastern part of Thailand. PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) 2018 reported that although science and mathematics scores were stable, but reading ability of Thai students declined 16 marks. PISA scores of students in lower Northeastern parts of Thailand were lower than any parts in Thailand (Institute for the Promotion of Teaching Science and Technology, 2018 : online)

The report also revealed that internal quality states in Thai institutions were not fully successful due to the lacks of personnel and stakeholders participation (Western University, 2020: Online). The report supported the important roles of the institutions to facilitate the operation of quality management through out the organizations, especially the roles of administrators (Chareonpat, W. 2002 : 24). Runchareon, (2012 : 53) added that administration decentralization, especially in form of SBM (School-base Management), which empowering local authority and participation in educational administration, would provide opportunity for coordination and participation of stakeholders.

Based on states and problems mentioned above, the researchers believed that if school management was run with good strategies might lead to better results as some academics suggested. Keawjumnon (2012 : 54) pointed out problems on educational quality in Thailand might be solved or at least decreased if all sectors cooperated and strategic plans should be laid and implemented. Strategic plans developed by participation of stakeholders would lead to being hosted and cooperation. Preeyakorn (2010 : 44) suggested that strategies for quality development were tools to assist schools in mobilize school quality toward development goals. However, according to the researchers' literature review found out there were not any research done on the issue in low Northeastern part of Thailand. Therefore, the research reckoned the importance of searching and proposing strategies for improvement of educational quality in educational institutions under Secondary Educational Area Office in the lower Northeastern Region according to the following objectives.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this research were (1) to study the states of educational quality development of educational institutions under Secondary Educational Area Office in the lower Northeastern Region in Thailand, (2) to formulate strategies for improvement of educational quality in educational institutions, and (3) to evaluate formulated strategies for improvement of educational quality in educational institutions.

Literature Review

Two main variables related to this study were concepts on strategy and educational quality. Literature review on the subjects were summarized as follows.

1. Strategy and Strategic Formulation

The studies on strategy and strategy formulation were either based on strategy policy, or strategy planning, or strategy management. This research focused on strategy planning, a tool aimed to improve the quality of education, which was the final output of the research.

Different authors might define strategy or strategic planning differently, but most of them were defined as follows.

Steiner (as cited in Kummerdsing, 2012 : online) defined Strategic Planning as what an organization chose to react or response to the adaptation or movement of other organizations in market competition in order to gain advantages or win the situation.

Wattana (2000 : 1–12) summarized the definition of strategy as action plans that united personnel efforts to achieve goals. Strategy was a complex decision making on the association between goals or objectives and means or ways to achieve goals.

Shermerhorn (2002 : 6) defined strategy as an organization's master plan and action plan that defined what to do in the future and used the organizational resources to overcome the competitors.

From the aforementioned definitions, it could be summarized that strategy or strategic planning was to set the organizational goals and choose means or methods to achieve goals by mobilizing all resources and efforts to win the competitors.

Strategic formulation was the main focus of this study, so the researchers reviewed how strategies were formulated and what was the format of strategy presented. Most of the literatures guided similar activities, which were (1) analyzing situations, (2) analyzing competition advantage, (3) defining direction intention, (4) choosing organizational strategies, and (5) implementing the strategies (Pearce II & Robinson, 2005 : 4 ; Phonprasert, 2011 : 54 ; Porter, 1996 : 61–78; Shermerhorn, 2002 : 4 ; Wattana, 2002 : 1–12), and the format of strategy presentation included (1) Vision, (2) Mission, (3) Goal, and (4) Strategy Issue, and (5) Indicators (Choptham, 2019 : 22–75; Hunger & Whellen, 2012 : 6 ; Intr-Rug, 2017 : 1503–1517 ; Kotter & Heskett, 1992 : 2 ; Pearce & Robinson, 2011 : 75 ; Sukhothai Thammathirat University, 2003 : 32).

2. Educational Quality and Improvement

Quality is top priority of all management including educational management, but how shall the quality properly be done is much of work to plan and implement. Juran (1999 : 20–37) explained quality as features of products which met the needs of customers and satisfied consumers. Quality also signified no deficiencies or errors. Both definitions meant more work and more cost.

Hoy et al. (2000 : 1) pointed out that quality was closely linked with purpose. If the organization could satisfy the customers, it could be said that the organization quality was high. Quality exhibited the excellence of the product, and it made difference from competitors.

Luepong (2005 : 2) said that the definition of quality at present differed from it used to be. Recently, the definition of quality tied with good or product features. If the products met the standards set, they were considered as good quality. Tongpuang (2013 : 121–134) summarized from his study that quality was due to doing according to the standards or specification with low costs, which would satisfy the customers.

Asawapoom (2009 : 3) concluded that quality fell into one of the two types of concepts, namely absolute quality and comparative quality. Absolute quality depended on the customers' preference. Whatever the customer like, they perceived them as having quality. On the other hand, comparative quality suggested that the product or service would be considered having quality only if it met the standard of the product or service. The quality used in this research was defined as what was done to meet the standards set for that product or service. So educational quality referred to the operation that met the standards of what was considered having quality. And the improvement of educational quality referred to the operation that met the standard of 8 components of educational quality, namely, administrators' leadership, curriculum and learning management, students and stakeholders, teachers and personnel, administration strategy, knowledge management, technology and information systems, and measurement and evaluation.

In summary, the conceptual framework used in this study could be concluded as follow.

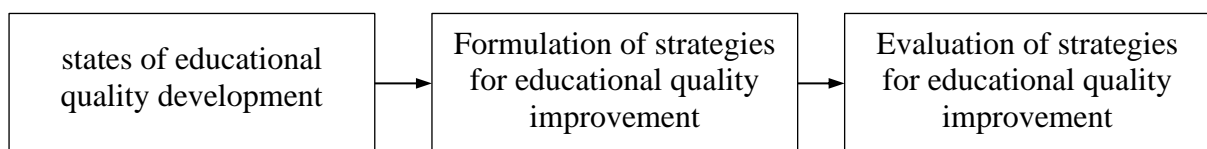


Figure 1: Research conceptual framework

Research Methodology

This research was conducted in three phases: (1) gathering fundamental data for strategy formulation, (2) strategy formulation, and (3) strategy evaluation.

In the first phase, four steps were conducted as follows. Firstly, documentary research was done on strategy and on educational improvement. Secondly, conducting a survey on the state of educational improvement. The sample used in this step consisted of 163 schools and two informants from each school were the administrators and teacher who was responsible for quality improvement, totally 326 subjects. Means and standard division were applied for data analysis. Thirdly, multiple case-study on how best practice schools improved their educational quality. And finally, SWOT and TOWS Matrix had been conducted.

The second phase was carried out in three steps: drafting strategies for educational quality improvement, focus group technique was used to gather opinions and suggestions from 13 experts, and revising the strategies by using the information obtained from the focus group activity.

The third phase, 20 experts were invited to evaluate the strategies in three aspects, the appropriateness, the feasibility, and utility. Finally, the strategies were revised again according to an evaluation report.

Research Findings

The research findings were reported in three parts: the report on fundamental data, the revised strategies, and the strategy evaluation result.

1. Fundamental Data

The first part of fundamental data found that the strategy was presented in 5 components: vision, mission, goals, strategy issues, and indicators. In addition, educational quality consisted of 8 components: administrator's leadership, curriculum and learning management, students and stakeholders, teachers and personnel, administration strategy, knowledge management, technology and information system, and measurement and evaluation.

The survey on state of quality improvement revealed that all aspects of educational quality were perceived at a high level; however, the aspects and items that received the lower mean scores were taken into consideration for further improvement, which were used as basic data for SWOT analysis.

Important findings of the multiple case-study are as follows.

(1) Administrator leadership led on defining educational vision and goals, supporting teachers, creating organizational climate.

(2) Curriculum and learning management should focus on linking the curriculum with school vision, cooperate all personnel towards goals, and align curriculum to connect local to global need.

(3) Students and stakeholders should be supported and facilitated to learning achievement of individual interests, parents and community should be empowered to participate in education, and active learning was implemented.

(4) Teachers and personnel should be developed to full competence, growth, and function effectively.

(5) Management strategy should be focused on educational quality, participation on planning and implementing plans, and integrating quality plan along with fundamental plans.

(6) Knowledge Management focused on using knowledge to improve educational quality, using PLC (Professional Learning Community), and creating innovation.

(7) Technology and Information should support and connect educational quality activities to other activities, were used for instruction improvement, and used for school management.

(8) Measurement and Evaluation should be done in congruence with quality goals, used the results for quality improvement, and applied authentic evaluation.

During the last phase, SWOT analysis and TOWS Matrix provided sufficient information for strategy formulation, which were described in the next section.

2. Strategy Formulation

The strategies formulated in this research were reported in 5 components: vision, mission, goals, strategy issues, and indicators.

2.1 The vision committed on learning management towards students' competencies by quality management.

2.2 The missions of quality management were the operation of education systematically, efficiently, and effectively; and learning management focusing on facilitating students' learning by doing in order to acquire crucial competencies needed for living.

2.3 The strategies embedded 8 goals as follows.

(1) Administrators demonstrated leadership on educational management leading to educational quality.

(2) Schools implemented strategic management to improve educational quality to excellence.

(3) Schools measured and evaluated learning achievement with accountability and satisfaction of stakeholders.

(4) Schools developed efficient management information system.

(5) Schools used competency-based curriculum, applied learning management and supports to mobile the curriculum.

(6) Schools empowered teachers and personnel according to quality improvement plans.

(7) Teachers and personnel exercised knowledge management and learning innovation.

(8) Teachers and personnel used digital technology on educational improvement activities efficiently and effectively.

2.4 Strategy issues and indicators were reported accordingly after sub-strategies were presented as follows.

(1) Develop administrators' leadership by revising the effectiveness of quality communication, enforcing teachers and personnel to compete their job according to commitment, and empowering academic leadership to subordinates. The indicators were percentage of achievement of each sub-strategy.

(2) Develop strategic management to educational excellence by planning quality plans according to school direction, enforcing effective plan implementation, monitoring and evaluating quality plans accordingly, and developing systems to cope with emergency of quality plans. The indicators were percentage of activities and operations of each sub-strategy.

(3) Develop measurement and evaluation system for quality improvement by embedding student and stakeholder participation, adapting quality indicators and target values based on data, and revising method and instruments of measurement and evaluation. The indicator for the first sub-strategy was stakeholders' satisfaction, the other two indicators were the percentage of achievement level.

(4) Develop data collection and analysis from students and stakeholders by revising questionnaires based on students and stakeholders' suggestions, enforcing the utilization of management information system for work improvement, and building participation of stakeholders in quality improvement activities. The indicator of sub-strategy one was the quality of data obtained from students and stakeholders, the second one was the students and stakeholders' satisfaction, and the last one was the percentage of quality related project and activities that stakeholder participated.

(5) Develop learning management processes to competency-based education by revising school curriculum using competency-based concept, enforcing implementation of learning by doing, developing supportive system that facilitated competency learning of students, and revising standards of safety system. The indicators of sub-strategy one was the level of curriculum quality, number two was percentage of teachers who use the concept in learning management, and the last two sub-strategies were satisfaction of stakeholders and students.

(6) Develop teachers and personnel's competencies by revising personnel plan to competency-based education, revising performance evaluation using competency-based concept, developing teachers and personnel on competency-based education, enforcing empowerment system to support teachers' work leading to quality, and building good relationship and professional commitment. The indicator of the first sub-strategy was the ratio

of teachers and personnel to student heads, the second was percentage of teachers and personnel's work satisfaction, the third was percentage of teachers and personnel who understood competency-based concept, the fourth was percentage of teachers and personnel's satisfaction towards empowerment system.

(7) Develop knowledge management activities leading to sustainable improvement of schools by enforcing knowledge management on innovations or best practices, enforcing network-building on professional learning community, and adding more channels for knowledge distribution. The indicator for the first sub-strategy was percentage of teachers and personnel's innovations or best practices, the second one was percentage of teachers and personnel who participated in professional learning community activities, and the last one was numbers of distributions of innovations or best practices that reflexed quality improvement.

(8) Develop digital technology for quality improvement by developing digital technology infrastructure for education quality improvement, enforcing the improvement of management information system to link quality system, developing teachers and personnel's competencies on using digital technology for educational quality improvement, and developing service and maintenance system of digital technology for future changes. The indicators of sub-strategy one, two, and four were satisfactions of involved participants, and sub-strategy three was percentage of teachers and personnel who had digital competencies for educational quality improvement.

3. Strategy Evaluation

The results of strategy evaluation found that the overall and all individual aspects, namely the appropriateness, the feasibility, and the utility, of the strategies were at high level.

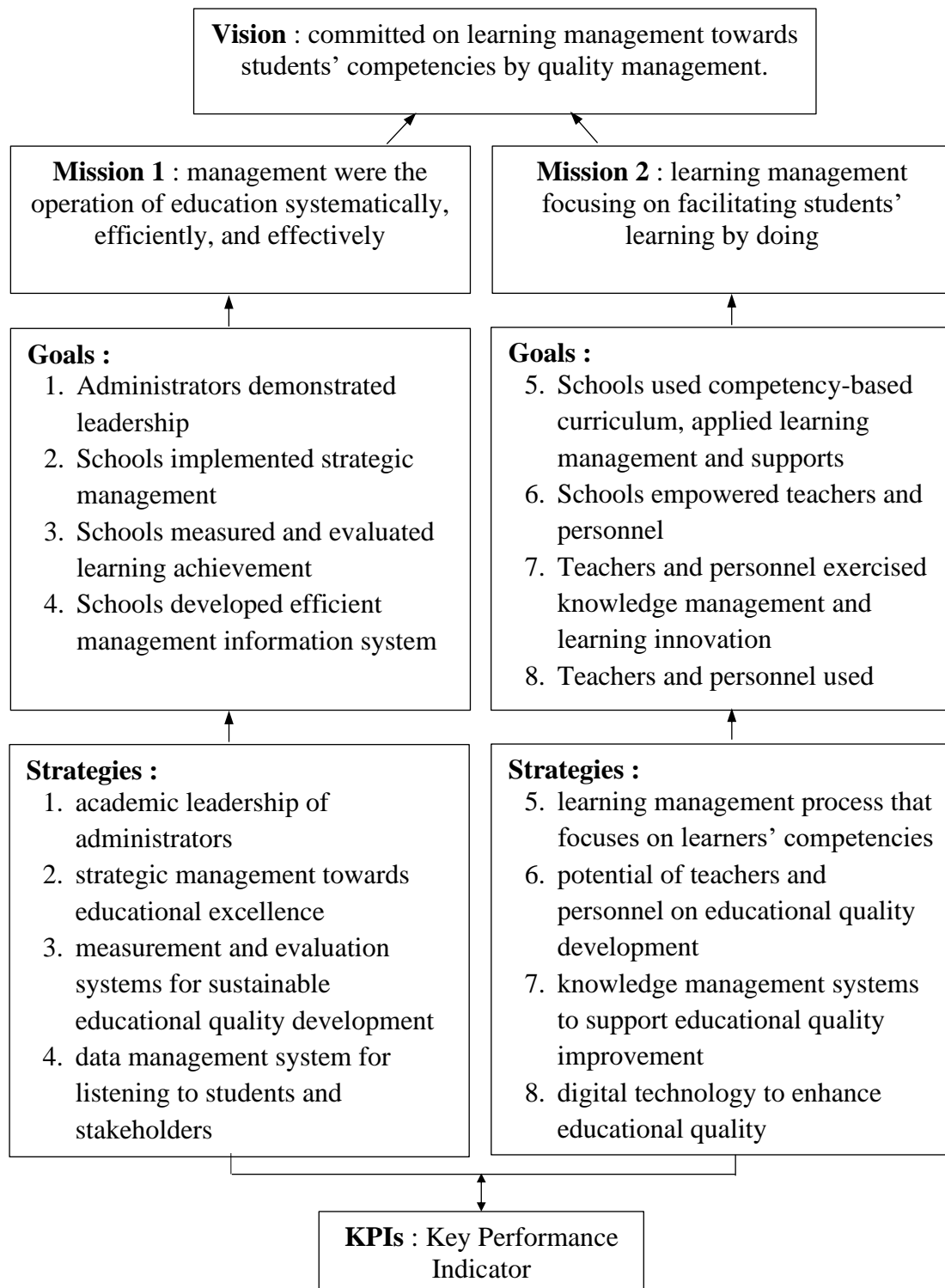


Figure 2: Synthesize the overall finding as diagram

Conclusion

From the research findings presented above, they could be summarized that the states of educational quality of the schools under investigation found to be at the high levels, both overall and in individual aspects. The vision of strategies for quality improvement focused the commitment on learning management towards students' competencies by quality management, consisted of three important intentions. Two missions of the strategies were to achieve quality vision were the operation of education systematically, efficiently, and effectively; and to focus on facilitating students' learning by doing in order to acquire crucial competencies needed for living.

The quality goals included one goal for the development of school administrators, four goals for the development of school in general, and two goals aimed to develop teachers and personnel. Leadership of the administrators were starting point of quality improvement. Administrators of each school cooperated by teachers and personnel and participated by students and stakeholders had to work together to mobilize educational quality to meet school vision. Teachers and personnel were key component of quality improvement achievement. So, cooperation and participation were very important for quality management in the new era

Quality strategies found in this study consisted of 8 strategy issues and 29 sub-strategies as follows. Administrator leadership consisted of 3 sub-strategies; Strategic management, 4 sub-strategies; Measurement and evaluation, 3 sub-strategies; Data collection and analysis, 3 sub-strategies; Learning management process, 4 sub-strategies; Teachers and personnel's competencies, 5 sub-strategies; Knowledge Management, 3 sub-strategies, and Digital technology, 4 sub-strategies. Each sub-strategy was accompanied with indicators for evaluation.

The results of strategy evaluation found that both overall and each component of the strategy were evaluated as high levels

Discussion

The discussion of research findings would be presented in three parts, the state of quality management, strategy formulation, and the evaluation of the strategy formulation.

The states of quality development in Thailand found to be at high levels both as a whole and in individual aspects might be because educational quality had been on spotlight and change in Thailand since the Education Act 1999 was effective (Education Act 1999, 1999 : 4) and Office of Nation Education Standards and Quality Assessment was founded in 2000 (Office of Nation Education Standards and Quality Assessment, 2000 : 5). The report on educational quality assessment present in seminar after quality standard and assessment were officially implemented in Thailand for 9 years found to be the good start (ONESQA, 2010 : 6). Although the mean scores of all aspects and items were perceived as high levels, however the aspects and items that bore the lower mean scores would be assumed for improvement recommendations, which were used as basic data for SWOT analysis. In addition, the studies conducted by Runchareon (2003 : 7) reported that schools could not implement policy efficiently and effectively because most schools worked by adopting the ministry policies rather than school-based policies.

Strategies for quality improvement found in this research could be summarized and discussed in the following points.

1. The vision of quality development strategies mentioned above was congruent with the vision declared by Department of General Education, the Ministry of Education (2002 : 8) and the policy issued by the Ministry of Education in 2018 (2018 : 9) which stated that quality

vision should focus on the quality of students and school management. The finding and the policy were similar maybe because quality was the main focus since the Educational Act 1999 (Education Act 1999, 1999 : 4) was implemented and most schools were highly aware of the policy.

2. Two missions of quality development strategies found in this research were congruent with Chooliwan and Kerdtip's (2017 : 36–47) study which stated that strategic management should develop students' potentials according to global standards, benchmark the curriculum to world standards, and also manage school quality to meet international quality.

3. The quality goals related to the formulated strategies were congruent with quality award standards run by Office of Basic Education Commission (2010 : 10) in the way that organizational leading, strategy formulation, and strategy implementation should invite all participation and be well-aware of students and stakeholders' voices.

4. Quality strategies found in this study consisted of 8 strategy issues and 29 sub-strategies, as presented above, were evaluated at high levels in all categories, suitability, feasibility, and utility because there were practical and could be good means for schools to implement.

For the results of strategy evaluations, which were evaluated as high levels which suggested that the strategies found and proposed in this study could be used as a guideline for quality improvement in secondary schools, especially in those schools in the area used as research focus. As the evaluations were perceived as high levels because the strategies were based on the survey of quality development states and formulated with expert focus group under the experience thesis advisors.

Suggestions

The key implications of the research findings were as follow:

1. Application of the research findings

1.1 Schools could apply the strategies from this research to enhance the quality improvement both internal and external quality achievement.

1.2 Schools might use the process of strategy formulation used in this study for the development of their quality strategies.

2. Further research suggestions

2.1 The strategies found in this study might lead to a model development of quality management in secondary schools.

2.2 It might be very useful if there would be researches on factors affecting educational quality improvement in secondary schools.

2.3 It might also be useful if someone might conduct a research on how to apply Knowledge Management (KM) to support quality improvement in secondary schools.

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