

Strategies for Developing Early Childhood Educational Quality Through the Collaboration of Private Schools, Chiang Mai Province

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Abstract

This research was conducted to study the current state, problems on needs for development, and factors facilitating childhood education quality development. Data acquired was constructed and validated to study the effect of using the strategy. The research population was the administrators/personnel responsible for operational plans of 115 private childhood schools in Chiang Mai, 32 childhood education committee members, 1 expert on strategy from the Chiang Mai Primary Educational Service Area Office, 12 professionals, persons responsible for the plans, teachers, personnel, and members of parent networks of the school applying the strategy for childhood education quality development under the collaboration of 32 private schools in Chiang Mai.

The findings reveal that the aspect rated with the highest mean in each of the components was the current state of leadership, problem concerning preschool curriculum and school management, and the needs for childhood curriculum development. The educational quality assurance was found to be highly implemented in the schools. The common value which the internal factor was found to facilitate education quality development the most and had conditions as the strength the most. Socio-cultural factors were outside factors found to facilitate education quality development the most. The schools which had opportunity opening factor the most. The results from data analysis on the phase 3 external quality assessment (2011-2015) run by Office for National Education Standards

and Quality Assessment by indicator cluster reveal that large schools had higher average score than schools of other sizes. The results of the operation on childhood education quality development strategy with the collaboration of private schools in Chiang Mai in general were at the highest level.

Keywords: Quality Development Strategy, Childhood Education, Collaboration; Private Schools in Chiang Mai Province

Introduction

Education had an important role in developing the people in the nation. In the past, the socialization was carried out by family and temple. When society entered the period of learning through the school system, Thai children at school age had to receive education to fulfill their humanity through physical, emotional, mental, social, and intellectual development. Many organizations from societal sector then joined hands in promoting learning of Thai children and youths to equip them with knowledge, morality, and ethics along the national education goals and 2009-2016 National Education Plan. (Office of Education Council, 2010)

Consequently, private education had taken part in providing Thai education at all levels particularly childhood education. At this age, education was provided to promote learning and development process covering all aspects. The focuses was on child-rearing and student-centered education considering individual difference and children way of life along the context of the community, society, and culture to carry out the children comprehensive development. The focuses were also on playing and arranging the activities relevant to age including the provision of learning experience to enable them to maintain their life to assure its quality and happiness. Collaboration among family, community, and school was taken to develop the children and their readiness to further study at higher level (Bureau of Academic Affairs and Educational Standards Ministry of Education, 2004)

Chiang Mai is a big province and has high social, economic, political, and educational significance. Consequently, there had been a lot of people of various nationalities and careers to reside in it and do business. State educational provision had not been sufficient for the demand considering the number of children of all of Chiang Mai residents as well as those cross-national people residing in it. Private sector then had come to take role and function to provide education for such children. At the present, private schools in Chiang Mai offering childhood education has increased their number to 115 (The Association of Private Schools, Chiang Mai, 2015). Every school has different ways of management but aim for the same goal. That is for developing students to have quality along the national educational quality standard and become

good citizens of Thai society for the future. Childhood education was then regarded very significant education as it was the foundation for human life and had influence on livelihood in the future. Childhood development then should begin from the new born until the age of five. Educators and psychologists agreed with each other that this age was significant for the individual's brain development, particularly nervous system and brain cells. Due to all of these, the preparation for the child readiness to grow up to his or her potential through children rearing along with schooling to set up the foundation for life maintenance or what is known as Educare (Nakhonratchasima Primary Educational Service Area Office 5, 2005).

Nonetheless, in taking educational role in providing such education, it had been found that many private schools offering childhood education had been closed down for various reasons including lacking liquidity, budget for the schools development, supports of the concerned agencies, decreasing number of students, teacher's resign to be recruited as officials in the government-run schools, Parent's many children, etc. Parents with many children, in particular, were too busy in sending their kids and picking up to and from school on the school days as they were in schools of different levels. Hence, there was a need for them to send their early age children to the school that offered many levels of education including the childhood one. (Committee on Research Conduction, The Association of Private Schools, Chiang Mai, 2009).

The situation of childhood education provision of the private schools which had been sudden, tremendous, and without certainty, had shaken the success of childhood education provision having been the case in the past. The administrators then had to have concrete guideline and use effective strategies for maintaining the school's direction, vision, mission, philosophy, and objectives. They had to use a variety of methods to lead the organization to succeed. They also had to build up the teamwork composed of quality personnel to actualize such dreams. They had to review the process and strategy to assure their effectiveness to cope with change coming up with the high competition trend at the present (Somyos Naveekarn, 2002). The researcher then would like to study current situation, problems, and factors facilitating childhood education quality development to utilize the acquired

information for setting up the strategy for childhood education quality development under the collaboration of private schools in Chiang Mai and apply it to the childhood education quality development using participatory action research (PAR) as suggested by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). The process of participatory action research includs 1) plan, 2) action, 3) observation, and, 4) reflection, to solve the problems occurring in the process on collaboration of private childhood schools in Chiang Mai anticipating the private education had quality and could effectively provide education, it should share the responsibility of providing childhood education having been taken by the government sector resulting less budgetary burden for the state in providing education.

Objectives

1. To study the current situation, problems, needs for development, and factors facilitating childhood education quality development of private schools in Chiang Mai.
2. To set up and validate the strategy for childhood education quality development based on the collaboration among private schools in Chiang Mai.
3. To study the effect of using the strategy for childhood education quality development based on the collaboration among private schools in Chiang Mai.

Research Population

1. Administrators/Responsible persons for planning and quality assurance of education provided by 115 private schools carrying out childhood education in Chiang Mai.
2. Thirty-two childhood concerned members of Chiang Mai Private School Association, and 1 expert on strategy from Chiang Mai Primary Education Service Area Office.
3. Twelve experts selected from administrators of the schools successfully managed.
4. The school personnel responsible for planning and educational quality assurance, teachers, and members of parent network, students in 32

private schools, in Chiang Mai, which utilized the childhood education quality development strategy under the collaboration of private schools in Chiang Mai.

Materials and Methods, Area Descriptions, Techniques

The researcher had operated the research utilizing the participatory action research (PAR) along the steps as follows:

Step 1: Review current conditions and problems, needs for, and factors facilitating childhood education quality development of private schools in Chiang Mai along the following steps:

1.1 Analzing the data collected through the questionnaire responded by school administrators/responsible persons on planning and quality assurance on education run by 115 private schools in Chiang Mai which offered childhood education.

1.2 Analyzing and synthesizing the data obtained from External Quality Assessment Round 3 (2011-2015) for childhood education (2-5 years old) run by 93 private schools, in Chiang Mai, that passed the verifying standards and publicized via the website of the Office of Education Standards and Quality Assessment (Public Organization).

Step 2 Creating and checking the effectiveness of the strategy for childhood education quality development via collaboration of private schools in Chiang Mai (P: Planning) along the following steps:

2.1 Organizing the workshop to present the data derived from Step 1 to members of Chiang Mai Private School Childhood Education Committee members and experts on strategy from the Office of Primary Education Service Area Office 1 to summarize the current conditions and problems, and needs for, and factors facilitating childhood education quality development using SWOT Analysis and TOWS Matrix to derive the strategy on childhood education quality development with collaboration of private schools in Chiang Mai.

2.2 Focus Group Discussion – The session was set up to check the feasibility, validity, and usefulness of drafted strategy for the administrators, childhood education quality development. The session was participated by experts including administration, education, and administrators the successful schools.

Step 3 The strategy was applied to the school for 1 semester from November, 2016 to March, 2017 before the effect of using it was studied utilizing AOR process which included 3 steps as follows:

3.1 A: Action – This step was taking action on the strategy before being evaluated by the private schools to which the strategy was applied.

3.2 O: Observation – This step was for observing and following up and was evaluated by the administrators, the personnel who were responsible for planning and quality assurance, teachers and personnel, and members of the parent network.

3.3 R: Reflection – This step was carried out by the administrators and practitioners of which the strategy was applied.

Results

The findings were along the research issues and procedural steps as follows:

1. Concerning the current situation and problems of and needs for childhood education quality development, it was found that the current situation of leadership had the highest mean ($\mu = 4.42$) followed by quality of the children ($\mu = 4.40$) and the least was on school management ($\mu = 4.24$). Every issue was actually practiced at much level. Concerning the problem, it was found that the problem of childhood education curriculum and school management had the highest mean ($\mu = 2.86$), followed by leadership ($\mu = 2.71$), and the least one was the quality of children ($\mu = 2.56$). Every issue had problems at a moderate level. Concerning the needs for development, it was found that the aspect on childhood education curriculum had the highest mean ($\mu = 4.06$), followed by teacher quality ($\mu = 3.95$) and the least was on the children's quality ($\mu = 3.78$). Every issue required development at much level. Concerning the educational quality assurance, it was found that its current situation of true practice was of 92.35%, there was some problems ($\mu = 2.67$), and there was a need for development ($\mu = 3.69$). Every issue was at much level.

2. Concerning factors facilitating childhood education quality development of private schools in Chiang Mai, the findings are as follows:

2.1 Internal factors – It was found that the issue on shared values had the highest mean ($\mu = 4.77$) followed by knowledge, and ability, skill ($\mu = 4.67$). The least mean was of the operational system ($\mu = 4.52$) and the factor found strongest was the shared values which was of 97.08% followed by the organizational strategy - 94.26%. The least one was the operational system which was of 79.30 %.

2.2 External factors – It was found that the socio-cultural factor had the highest mean ($\mu = 4.45$), followed by political and legal factors, and technology ($\mu = 4.37$). The least one was of socio-cultural factors, and economical and environmental factors ($\mu = 4.23$). The factor regarded as opportunity was socio-cultural factor which was of 87.53 % followed by technology which was of 81.04%. The least was legal factor which was of 62.02%.

3. Results of the data analysis on External Quality Assessment Round 3 (2011-2015) for childhood education (2-5 years) carried out by private schools in Chiang Mai reveal that the large school had higher mean than that of schools of other sizes at 94.97%. When considering indicators item by item, it was found that Indicator 2 - children having emotional and mental development relevant to their age had the highest mean which was of 97.60% followed by Indicator 5 – children having readiness to further their study in the next grade which was of 97.07%. The least one was of Indicator 7– effectiveness of school administration and development which was of 90.60%.

4. In creating and validating the strategy for childhood education quality development along the collaboration of private schools in Chiang Mai (P: Planning), the results were as follows:

Vision

Childhood education carried out by private schools in Chiang Mai had the quality and reached the educational quality assurance standard.

Mission

1. To develop the school curriculum to have the quality congruent to and reach the standards of 2003 childhood education curriculum.

2. To develop children to have physical, emotional-mental, social, and intellectual readiness, communication skill, morality, ethics, self-discipline, and responsibilities relevant to their age.
3. To develop and facilitate the teachers and personnel carrying out the childhood education to have academic and professional progress.
4. To develop and maintain the school network, parent network, and community network to take part in developing the quality of education.
5. To upgrade the schools internal quality assurance system to the peak of its effectiveness to support the the external quality assessment.

Goals

In order to assure the effectiveness of the operation carried out by private schools in Chiang Mai to reach the quality assurance standards, the goals were set up as follows:

1. School curriculum had been developed in term of its quality to reach the standard set by 2003 childhood education curriculum.
2. Children had physical, emotional-mental, social, and intellectual readiness and communication skill, morality, ethics, discipline, and responsibilities relevant to their age.
3. Teachers and personnel carrying out childhood education had been developed in academic and profession aspects.
4. School network had strength and satisfy the needs of and coordinating with parent and community networks.
5. Schools had effective internal quality assurance system to be prepared for the external quality assessment.

Strategy for Childhood Education Quality Development via Collaboration of Private Schools in Chiang Mai

The strategies included the following ones:

Strategy 1 Carrying out the school curriculum development to promote childhood children's physical, emotional-mental, social, and intellectual development and communication skill

Strategy 2 Developing academic and professional competencies

Strategy 3 Developing the administrator network for managing private childhood schools to serve as the actor for developing the schools and to assure the administrative effectiveness.

Strategy 4 Developing the desirable morality, ethics, and values along other aspects of development

Strategy 5 Setting up the school internal education quality assurance system to be ready For the external quality assessment

Each statement of the verifications was rated by the experts and it was found that every aspect was suitable, feasible, valid, and useful for the practitioners/administrators at the most level.

5. The strategies were applied and the results of the operation along the process AOR (A: Action, O: Observation, R: Reflection) are as in the following table:

Table 1 Results of the Evaluation on the Strategy Used for Childhood Education Quality Development via Collaboration of Private Schools in Chiang Mai

Strategy	Project	\bar{x}	S.D.	Level of Operational Result
1	Learning School	4.63	0.52	the Most
2	Early Childhood Development	4.55	0.61	the Most
3	Using learning providing innovation (EF: Executive Functions)	4.52	0.59	the Most
4	Home-School Relationship/Parent network	4.18	0.94	Much
5	Promoting and developing the children's morality and ethics	4.79	0.41	the Most
6	Training workshop for preparing self-assessment report (SAR) along the annual educational plan of the school	4.67	0.50	the Most
Total Average		4.56	0.59	the Most
(N=32)				

Table 1 shown the results of the project assessment on strategy for developing the quality of childhood education via collaboration of private schools in Chiang Mai. It shows that the project for promoting and developing the children's morality and ethics had the highest mean ($\bar{x} = 4.79$) followed by training workshop project, self-assessment report (SAR) along the school's academic year ($\bar{x} = 4.67$). The result was at the most level for the 2 projects and home-school relationship/parent network project had the lowest mean ($\bar{x} = 4.18$) at much level of the operational result was at much level.

Discussion

In conducting the research on strategy for childhood education quality development via collaboration of private schools in Chiang Mai, the researcher found the following results:

1. Concerning current situation and problems, and needs for childhood education quality development, it was discussed that the schools had carried out the management in the aspects of childhood education curriculum, leadership, school management, teacher quality, children's quality, and the educational quality assurance on serious and continuous bases. Some problems were found on childhood education curriculum, and school management which was congruent to the needs of the schools which needed to develop childhood education curriculum the most. Concerning the educational quality assurance, it was found that there was practice at much levels. Besides, it was also found that the shared value was an internal factor that facilitated the educational quality development which was the most strength. Social and cultural aspects were the external factors that facilitated the educational quality development and was the most opening opportunity. Concerning the results of data analysis on External Quality Assessment Round 3 (2011-2015) by indicators, it was found that the large-sized schools had higher average score at 94.97% which was higher than that of other schools of smaller size. This was congruent with the result found by the external quality assessment, Round 3 (2011 - 2015) for childhood education conducted by the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (Public Organization) which had the roles in assessing and validating the school quality (Bureau of Academic Affairs

and Educational Standards, Ministry of Education , 2004) to cover the standards for providing education at each level and type of education including the standards for management, student-centered instruction, as well as the school's internal quality assurance standards.

2. Concerning the creation and validation of the strategy for childhood education quality development via collaboration of private schools in Chiang Mai (P: Planning), the research discussion are as follows:

2.1 The researcher had obtained the data from analyzing current situation and problems, and needs for the development and factors facilitating childhood education quality development using SWOT Analysis and TOWs Matrix to set up vision, missions, and goals and strategy aiming at developing childhood education carried out by private schools in Chiang Mai to reach the expected quality and satisfy the educational quality assurance standards of 2003 childhood education to equip the students with physical, emotional-mental, social, and intellectual readiness with communication skill, morality, ethics, discipline, and responsibilities relevant to their age. The practice would facilitate the teachers and personnel carrying out the childhood education to have academic and professional progresses. It would also enable the school network, parent network, and community network to participate in developing educational quality and school internal assessment to the peak of their capacity to get set for the external quality assessment. The strategy for childhood education quality development had the goal to respond to the vision, missions, and goals through the collaboration of private schools in Chiang Mai. This was congruent with Prayoon Akaraboworn., etal. (2010) who had described the guideline for the participatory management as the operational model taken part by the concerned individuals on a friendly basis sharing the same goals, focusing on collective thinking and working of various sides opening for sharing information, experiences both within school and outside. Meanwhile, from birth to 5 years old, the child's development depended solely on child rearing. Learning occurred through the natural process and individual differences within social and cultural context in which the child lived along with love, care, and understanding of every surrounding persons. The process built up the foundation of life quality for the child to become a perfect human

being adding up value to him/herself and the society (Ministry of Education, 2004) Meanwhile, the 2003 Childhood Education Curriculum had pointed out that the childhood developing agent that had quality and standard had to put into practice the curriculum to provide appropriate learning environments. The 2003 childhood education curriculum was created to serve as the guideline for providing learning experience for the concerned sides to utilize for developing the children in an appropriate and effective way based on certain standard (Ministry of Education, 2004) as did the 1999 National Education Act, 2001 basic education curriculum, and standards for External Quality Assessment Round 3 (2011 - 2015) for childhood education.

2.2 The results of evaluating the strategy for childhood education quality development via the collaboration of private schools in Chiang Mai by experts reveal that every item was appropriate, feasible, valid, and useful for the practitioners/administrators at the most level. The strategy was found to be congruent to the vision, missions, and goals covering the school curriculum development that facilitated the child's development in all of the 4 aspects, communication skill for children, competence development for the teachers, academic personnel, and professional personnel, the development of a private childhood school administrative network to serve as an organizational support for the school development to assure effective administration, the promotion and development on morality and ethics, desirable values, along with other aspects of development onto the children including the school internal education quality assurance system to be ready for the external quality assessment. This was congruent with Mintzberg (1994) who conceived that strategy was composed of: 1) operational plan to set direction and guidelines for the future operation, 2) behavioural model, 3) setting up roles and duties of the personnel, 4) the real conditions of the organization, 5) process or method for competing with other organizations. Concerning this, Pasu Decharin (2010) had suggested that the strategy was set up to use the information and knowledge acquired to set up the direction of the organization. The organization's internal and external factors were analyzed to create the strategy at various levels and of various forms. There would be an evaluation to select the strategy that best fitted the organization.

In a way, the process could help answer the question, how the administrators could lead the organization to the goal. In relating to this, there was a consensus of the Cabinet approval to push forward the 2017-2036 National Education Plan (Kamol Rodklai, 2017) under the vision that foresees every Thai to obtain education and maintain life-long learning with quality and happiness congruent with the sufficiency philosophy and the 21st century trend (2017-2036 National Education Plan). The aim was to develop the system and process of setting up and carrying out the quality and effective education to make Thais good citizens with characteristics, skills, and competences as prescribed by National Education Act, with morality and ethics, and to keep unity to lead the country to yield sustainable development.

3. Applying strategy and studying the effects of using the strategy for childhood education quality development via AOR (A: Action, O: Observation, R: Reflection) process. The results of the operation reveal that the whole project operation was at the most level. This included the provision of learning resources for the children to learn from the practice both inside and outside school. There were projects to develop the children in all of the 4 aspects, enable the teachers and personnel to acquire knowledge and competency in using innovation to develop the children's brain skills EF: Executive Functions), to build up relationships between school parents using the activities to promote participation between school and parents, helping and developing the children to have morality and ethics relevant to their age. The projects also enabled the administrators, teachers, and personnel to prepare the self-assessment report (SAR) along the annual operational plan for the academic year of the school. Meanwhile, Certo and Peter (1991) had defined strategy as the operational method to expect that following the strategy would lead to the goals or achieve the organization's long-term goals. wheelmen and Hunger (2004) had suggested that the strategic management should be composed of 4 administrative processes: 1) checking the environments, 2) setting up the strategy, 3) applying the strategy, and, 4) evaluating and controlling the strategy. The process was along the same direction of meeting to present the results of using strategic planning and reflecting on the results (R: Reflection) in the project in putting into practice the strategy. On April, 11, 2017, at the

meeting room of childhood program at KowitThamrong Chiang Mai School, the administrators and practitioners of the 32 schools who put the strategy into practice had met. It was found that the school had operated along the strategic plan by selecting a project from the strategic plan to operate for one semester during November, 2016 to March, 2017. The projects included were 1) Learning School Project, 2) Early Childhood Development Project 3) Learning Providing Innovation Project (EF: Executive Functions), 4) Home-School Relationship Building/Parent Network Project, 5) Project to Promote and Develop Morality and Ethics onto the Children, 6) Training Workshop Project on Self-Assessment Report (SAR) Preparing Project along the school's academic year annual operational plan. In general, it was found that there were some reflective conclusions that could be put into practice (Notes on the meeting to present the results of using strategic plans and reflection, on April 11, 2017). The details are as follows:

1. Using integrated activities to facilitate learning and using technology to organize learning in various forms to enable the children to learn about their surroundings, setting environments to facilitate the children to learn, and using the process to facilitate the children to have self-responsibility and offer help to others.

2. Setting up integrated activities to promote the 4 aspects of development along with the development on IQ, EQ, MQ, & AQ utilizing educational innovation such as multiple intelligences, STEM Educationn, Brain-based Learning (BBL), and, Active Learning, for example. In organizing learning activities, SDQ proposed by the Department of Mental Health had been adopted to fit the children's age. In the process, teachers and parents would work together in observing and noting the child's development. Classroom action research was recommended for the teachers to solve the children development problems.

3. Developing the children to obtain significant skills of Executive Function (EF) in all the 9 aspects of it on continuous basis and fit the age. Teachers coordinated with the parents to design the activities for building up responsibilities onto the children when they were at home while doing homework, reading books, playing music, for example.

4. Organizing the activities to invite the parents to participate and take roles such as stage acting, setting up exhibitions, annual fairs, serving as the resource person for providing specific piece of knowledge, for example. The students should also be enabled to serve as the medium for the collaboration between the parents and teachers in setting up school activities.

5. Using the school's philosophy and slogans as the guideline for organizing the activities to promote morality and ethics to the children having teachers and parents participating in operating along PDCA process. Setting up the learning activities by inserting morality and ethics onto the learning unit or activities set for the children to put into practice on regular basis.

6. Facilitating the teachers and personnel to have knowledge and understanding on PDCA process for carrying out the internal quality assurance and being able to prepare the report along the quality assurance standards to build up the public confidence in the school curriculum and educational standards.

Conclusion

Putting strategy into practice to achieve the objectives by using set strategy as the guideline for carrying out the activities, plan, or project to be operated, the components included operational plan, operational duration, operators or responsible persons, budget, success indicators, etc. The operators needed to set up the activity types, operational system, technology, for example, to put the strategy into practice. All these required collaboration among personnel of all the concerned sectors. The success of putting strategy into practice to achieve the set goals depended on 2 factors, namely, organization's good and effective managing system and personnel with relevant knowledge and ability.

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