

Empowerment of school administrators to enhance educational administration and drive high-performance outcomes in Thai primary schools

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how empowering school administrators can enhance educational administration and promote high-performance outcomes in Thai primary schools. A mixed-methods design was used, involving 419 teachers from 13 primary schools under the Office of the Basic Education Commission, interviews with 13 educational administrators and principals, and a focus group discussion with 11 experts in educational administration. Exploratory Factor Analysis identified five empowerment components: strategic policy and administrative management; organizational climate and environment; competency enhancement and professional development; confidence building, trust, and motivation; and evaluation efficiency and feedback. Factor loadings ranged from 0.303 to 0.820, supporting the construct validity of these dimensions. Qualitative findings showed that these components align with key dimensions of high-performance administration, including organizational leadership, planning and strategy, stakeholder support, data-driven decision-making, human resource management, and feedback and outcomes. The results indicated that empowered administrators are better able to set strategic direction, build collaborative school cultures, develop personnel capacity, foster trust and motivation, and use evaluation data for continuous improvement. The proposed framework offers practical guidance for policymakers and school leaders seeking to strengthen administration and achieve sustainable high-performance outcomes in Thai primary schools.

Keywords: Empowerment, School Administrators, Educational Administration, High-Performance Outcomes, Primary Schools

Introduction

Educational leadership and effective school management are at the heart of quality education, especially in primary schools where the foundation for lifelong learning is built. In Thailand, as in

many other countries, the role of school administrators has evolved significantly, requiring them to not only manage daily operations but also guide schools toward high-performance outcomes. School leaders must now navigate complex

challenges, including curriculum implementation, resource allocation, policy changes, and improving student outcomes. To address these demands, it is crucial to focus on the empowerment of school administrators equipping them with the necessary tools, skills, and confidence to lead effectively. This paper aims to explore the empowerment of school administrators in primary schools in Thailand, with a focus on enhancing educational administration and driving high-performance outcomes. The study identifies key components of empowerment that can strengthen school leadership and management practices. Furthermore, the paper highlights seven critical components for achieving high-performance school administration in the context of Thailand's Department of Local Administration. This comprehensive framework is designed to provide actionable guidelines for school administrators to improve their practices, manage resources efficiently, and foster an environment conducive to student success. In Thailand, educational policy has undergone significant reforms in recent years, driven by the need to improve the quality of education and the effectiveness of school management. The Thai educational leadership and effective school administration are fundamental to improving educational quality and student achievement, particularly in primary education where learners develop essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes for lifelong learning. In Thailand, school administrators play a critical role in translating educational policies into practice, managing resources, supporting teachers, engaging stakeholders, and creating learning environments that promote student success. As educational systems continue to face rapid social, economic, and technological changes,

school administrators are increasingly expected to perform not only managerial functions but also strategic leadership roles that drive organizational effectiveness and sustainable school improvement.

The Thai education system has undergone significant reform during the past two decades. The National Education Act of 1999 and its subsequent amendments emphasized decentralization, educational quality assurance, and community participation in school management. Under this framework, local educational institutions have been granted greater responsibility for decision-making and educational development (Chotikapanich, 2013). Furthermore, national initiatives such as Thailand 4.0 have highlighted the importance of innovation, leadership capacity, and data-driven management practices in educational organizations (Ministry of Education, 2019). These reforms have increased expectations for school administrators to become effective leaders capable of responding to local needs while maintaining high standards of educational performance.

Among the factors influencing administrative effectiveness, empowerment has emerged as an important concept in educational leadership. Empowerment refers to the process of enhancing individuals' authority, confidence, competence, autonomy, and capacity to make decisions and influence organizational outcomes. In educational settings, empowered administrators are more likely to demonstrate initiative, strategic thinking, collaboration, and commitment to continuous improvement. Previous studies have consistently highlighted the positive effects of empowering leadership on educational organizations. Balyer, Özcan, and Yıldız

(2017) found that school administrators play a vital role in empowering teachers through shared decision-making, trust-building, and supportive leadership practices. Similarly, Yıldız and Balyer (2022) reported that empowering leadership behaviors significantly influence teachers' organizational citizenship behaviors, encouraging them to contribute beyond their formal responsibilities. More recently, Çevik and Doğan (2025) demonstrated that empowering leadership positively affects teachers' psychological resilience, suggesting that empowerment strengthens both individual and organizational capacity in educational settings.

Empowerment is particularly important for school administrators because they operate within increasingly complex educational environments. They are expected to manage curriculum implementation, human resources, financial planning, stakeholder engagement, and educational innovation simultaneously. Without sufficient empowerment, administrators may face difficulties in making timely decisions, implementing strategic initiatives, and responding effectively to emerging challenges. Empowered administrators are more likely to foster collaborative cultures, support teacher development, and establish organizational conditions that facilitate continuous improvement. Therefore, strengthening administrator empowerment has become an essential strategy for enhancing educational administration and school effectiveness.

In addition to empowerment, educational institutions are increasingly expected to achieve high-performance outcomes. High-performance schools are characterized by effective leadership, strategic

planning, stakeholder engagement, organizational learning, continuous improvement, and measurable educational results. Research has demonstrated that leadership practices significantly influence school performance and organizational success. Nguyen and Walker (2018) emphasized that instructional and strategic leadership are critical drivers of school effectiveness in Southeast Asian educational contexts. Likewise, Sparks and Malkus (2020) found that the systematic use of data and evidence-based decision-making contributes significantly to improved instructional quality and organizational performance. These findings suggest that leadership capacity and management effectiveness are essential conditions for achieving high-performance outcomes in schools.

In Thailand, government agencies and educational organizations have increasingly promoted performance-oriented management approaches to improve educational quality. However, considerable variation remains among schools in terms of leadership effectiveness, organizational capacity, and educational outcomes. Reports from the Office of the Education Council (OEC, 2018) indicate that many school administrators continue to experience challenges related to leadership development, strategic management, and organizational improvement. These challenges are particularly evident in schools operating under resource constraints or located in geographically disadvantaged areas. Although policy reforms have encouraged decentralization and greater administrative responsibility, many school leaders still face limitations in professional development opportunities,

decision-making autonomy, and access to effective management tools.

Despite growing recognition of the importance of empowerment and leadership effectiveness, several research gaps remain. First, existing studies have often focused on empowering leadership from the perspective of teachers rather than examining empowerment as a comprehensive framework for school administrators. Second, studies addressing school performance have frequently emphasized leadership effectiveness, strategic planning, or organizational outcomes without explicitly investigating the empowerment mechanisms that enable administrators to achieve such outcomes. Third, there remains limited empirical evidence integrating empowerment dimensions with high-performance school administration within the context of Thai primary education (Panya, 2015; OEC, 2018). As a result, educational administrators and policymakers still lack a comprehensive framework that explains how administrator empowerment can contribute directly to high-performance outcomes.

Addressing these gaps is particularly important because effective educational reform requires school leaders who possess both the authority and capacity to lead change. Empowerment should not be viewed merely as the delegation of authority but as a multidimensional process involving strategic capability, organizational support, professional development, motivation, trust, and continuous feedback. Understanding these dimensions can provide practical guidance for strengthening leadership capacity and improving educational administration across diverse school contexts.

Therefore, this study aims to propose guidelines for empowering school administrators to enhance educational administration and drive high-performance outcomes in primary schools in Thailand. The study seeks to identify the key dimensions of administrator empowerment and examine their relationship with high-performance school administration. By integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence, the research develops a comprehensive framework that links empowerment components with high-performance administrative practices.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the research expands the body of knowledge on educational leadership by integrating empowerment and high-performance administration into a unified conceptual framework. Practically, the findings provide educational policymakers, local administrative organizations, and school leaders with evidence-based guidelines for strengthening leadership capacity, improving management effectiveness, enhancing stakeholder engagement, promoting data-driven decision-making, and achieving sustainable educational improvement. Ultimately, the study contributes to the development of high-performing primary schools capable of delivering quality educational outcomes and responding effectively to future educational challenges.

Research Objective

To propose guidelines for empowerment of school administrators to enhance educational administration and drive high-performance outcomes in Thai Primary Schools.

Research process

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate the empowerment of primary school administrators in Thailand. The quantitative component involved 419 teachers from 13 primary schools under the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) during the 2024 academic year. The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table and selected through multi-stage sampling across six regions: North, Central, East, West, Northeast, and South. Schools were selected via simple random sampling from OBEC Award recipients (2020–2021), and stratified random sampling was used to select teachers proportionally within each school. For the qualitative component, in-depth interviews were conducted with 13 educational administrators and school principals chosen through purposive sampling. Criteria included OBEC Award recipients and those recognized for best practices in school empowerment, selected using snowball sampling. All participants had at least five years of experience in educational administration. Additionally, a focus group discussion was conducted with 11 experts, including senior OBEC officials, award-winning administrators, and academic professionals in educational administration. These participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling and required a minimum of 10 years of experience. The methodology ensured comprehensive insights from both practitioners and experts to develop an effective empowerment framework.

Literature reviews and concept

Research on the empowerment of school administrators has highlighted its significant impact on various educational

outcomes, including teacher performance, organizational health, and student achievement. The following studies provide insights into these dynamics: Balyer, A., Özcan, K., & Yıldız, A. (2017). Teacher Empowerment: School Administrators' Roles. This study examines how school administrators empower teachers through shared decision-making, enhancing their status, and fostering trust-based relationships. Findings indicate that while administrators excel in these areas, they often fall short in supporting teachers' professional development and autonomy. The study underscores the necessity for administrators to balance empowerment strategies to boost teacher efficacy and organizational effectiveness. Çevik, M. S., & Doğan, E. (2025). Is there a significant relationship between the empowering leadership behaviors of school principals and the psychological resilience of teachers. This research explores the correlation between principals' empowering leadership behaviors and teachers' psychological resilience. Results demonstrate a positive relationship, with gender and tenure moderating this effect. Specifically, female teachers and those with longer tenures experience stronger benefits, suggesting that tailored empowerment approaches can enhance teacher resilience. ScienceDirect. Yıldız, A., & Balyer, A. (2022). The Effect of School Principals' Empowering Leadership Behaviors on Teachers' Organizational Citizenship Behaviors. This study investigates the impact of principals' empowering leadership on teachers' organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB). Findings reveal a significant positive relationship, indicating that when principals delegate authority and support teacher autonomy, teachers are more likely to engage in

behaviors that exceed their formal job requirements, thereby enhancing school effectiveness. Research on high-performance outcomes in primary schools emphasizes effective leadership, strategic planning, and stakeholder involvement. Nguyen, D., & Walker, A. (2018) explored the role of instructional leadership in achieving performance excellence in Southeast Asian primary schools, highlighting leadership as a key driver of school success. Similarly, Sparks, D., & Malkus, N. (2020) examined data-driven decision-making in primary education, finding that systematic use of performance data enhances instructional quality and student outcomes. Both studies support the integration of leadership, planning, and data utilization, components aligned with the empowerment model proposed for Thai primary schools.

Research Findings

Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) based on the questionnaire data revealed five key components after applying factor rotation to clarify the factor structure. Factor loadings representing the correlation between each variable and the extracted factor ranged from 0.303 to 0.820. A loading value of 0.30 or above is considered significant, indicating a meaningful relationship between the variable and its respective factor. Factor 1 (Loadings: 0.334 – 0.558) reflects school administrators' management abilities and leadership. This factor was named "Strategic Policy and Administrative Management. Factor 2 (Loadings: 0.315 – 0.496) represents the creation of a supportive organizational atmosphere and culture. It was labeled "Organizational Climate and Environment. Factor 3 (Loadings: 0.343 – 0.820)

indicates the enhancement of personnel capacity and professional development. This factor was named "Competency Enhancement and Professional Development". Factor 4 (Loadings: 0.412 – 0.554) reflects the provision of resources that support administrative functions. It was named "Confidence Building, Trust, and Motivation. Factor 5 (Loadings: 0.303 – 0.479) concerns stimulating and motivating personnel. It was labeled "Evaluation Efficiency and Feedback. Overall, the analysis identified five principal components influencing the empowerment of school administrators. Research Findings from Focus Group Discussion with 11 experts comprising educational administrators, school principals, OBEC Award recipients, and academic scholars was conducted to integrate the five empowerment components (derived from the exploratory factor analysis) with the seven components of high-performance school administration under the Department of Local Administration. The goal was to synthesize these perspectives into a comprehensive framework for empowering school administrators to lead high-performance primary schools across Thailand. Integration of Empowerment Components with High-Performance Administration.

The five empowerment components;

- 1) Strategic policy and administrative management.
- 2) Organizational climate and environment.
- 3) Competency enhancement and professional development.
- 4) Confidence building, trust, and motivation.
- 5) Evaluation efficiency and feedback were critical. Figure 1

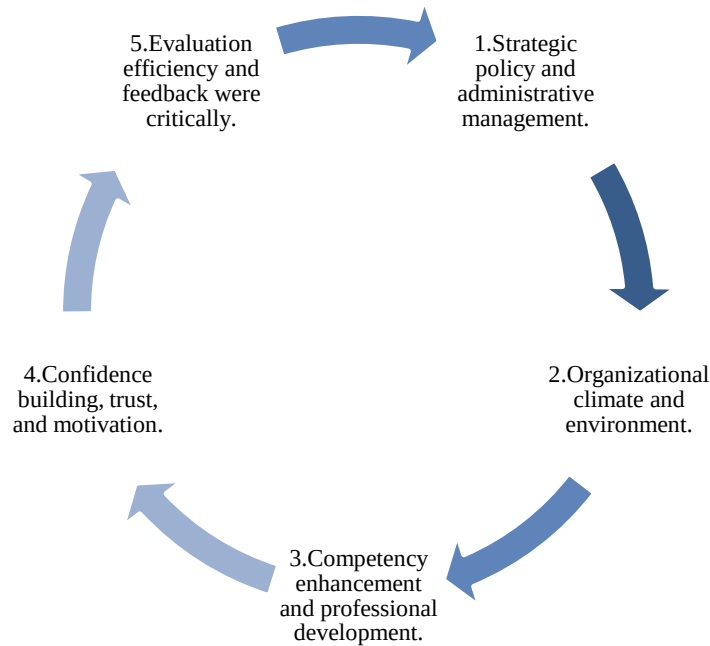


Figure 1: Empowerment Components with High-Performance Administration

The experts agreed that the empowerment framework serves as the foundation to operationalize the broader goals of high-performance administration. Each empowerment contributes to the practical implementation of strategic educational leadership.

Key findings from the focus group discussion:

1) Strategic Policy and Administrative Management / Planning and Strategy / Organizational Leadership. Four experts emphasized that empowering school leaders to formulate clear policies and align them with strategic goals is fundamental to effective school leadership. This empowerment enhances their ability to adapt to changes, manage complex systems, and implement data-informed reforms. Strategic empowerment fosters autonomy in decision-making, allowing leaders to set direction and mobilize resources to drive school improvement. The participants also emphasized that school administrators must be provided with tools to conduct needs

assessments and translate school visions into actionable strategic plans. Strategic management training and workshops tailored to regional contexts were recommended.

2) Organizational Climate and Environment to Support Stakeholders / Organizational Leadership. The organizational climate was considered a critical foundation for empowering leadership. Experts agreed that a positive environment nurtures trust and collaboration among teachers, students, parents, and the community. This environment directly supports stakeholder involvement and improves communication. School administrators need to be empowered to cultivate inclusive, democratic school cultures that value teacher input and parent collaboration. Participants suggested promoting shared values and reinforcing cultural strengths within the school community to improve morale and stakeholder satisfaction.

3) Competency Enhancement and Professional Development including

Human Resource Management / Effectiveness Management. The group emphasized that continuous professional development is essential for achieving excellence. Empowerment through competency development ensures that administrators and teachers are equipped with relevant skills, particularly in leadership, pedagogy, innovation, and data analysis. The experts recommended personalized learning plans for school leaders, competency-based promotion systems, and professional learning communities (PLCs). These strategies allow for sustained growth and directly support effective human resource management practices aligned with high-performance standards. Furthermore, a culture of self-reflection and self-improvement was identified as crucial. When administrators receive empowerment support, they are more likely to promote lifelong learning and skill upgrades among their staff.

4) Confidence Building, Trust, and Motivation. Organizational Leadership/Support for Stakeholders. A major insight from the focus group was that building psychological empowerment through trust, encouragement, and recognition is as important as developing technical skills. Experts noted that when leaders feel valued and supported, they are more likely to be innovative, decisive, and resilient under pressure. Empowerment strategies such as peer mentoring, recognition systems, and supportive supervision were proposed. The participants highlighted that motivated administrators influence the entire organizational culture and encourage similar attitudes among teachers and staff. These practices align with the development of strong, empathetic organizational leadership. Trust between schools and

communities was also highlighted as a critical success factor. Administrators who build trust through transparency and engagement can better mobilize community support for student learning initiatives.

5) Evaluation Efficiency and Feedback. Data-Driven Decision-Making / Feedback and Outcomes. Experts confirmed that data is an indispensable tool for high-performance administration. The empowerment component related to evaluation and feedback reflects a shift from compliance-based reporting to a learning-oriented use of data. Effective administrators must be trained to interpret performance metrics, use feedback constructively, and apply data insights to inform instructional and administrative decisions. Participants recommended integrated school data systems, training on data literacy, and the establishment of performance indicators aligned with national educational standards. In particular, they encouraged formative evaluation processes that allow for ongoing adjustments and improvements. The group also discussed the importance of using both internal and external feedback mechanisms including peer reviews, stakeholder surveys, and community feedback to guide school development. Transparency in feedback loops enhances trust and encourages broader participation in school governance.

Research discussion

Empowering Leaders for High-Performance Outcomes. The integration of empowerment and high-performance components resulted in a proposed administrative model focused on building leadership capacity through practical empowerment strategies. The model emphasizes: 1) Strategic autonomy and

decision-making capacity, 2) Inclusive and trust-based school cultures, 3) Continuous capacity development and reflective practice, 4) Motivation and psychological support mechanisms, 5) Evidence-based management and continuous feedback. Participants agreed that the empowerment of school leaders must be approached holistically combining structural, cultural, and personal dimensions. Structural empowerment includes clear policies, professional development, and access to resources. Cultural empowerment involves fostering trust, collaboration, and shared values. Personal empowerment focuses on building confidence, autonomy, and a growth mindset.

The focus group findings reinforced the notion that empowering school administrators is key to achieving high-performance outcomes in Thai primary schools. The five empowerment components are not only supportive but essential drivers for realizing the seven high-performance components endorsed by the Department of Local Administration. The proposed administrative model emphasizing strategic autonomy, inclusive school culture, continuous capacity development, motivation, and evidence-based management aligns closely with previous research on school leadership and empowerment, both in Thailand and internationally. Balyer, Özcan, and Yıldız (2017) highlight the pivotal role of school administrators in promoting teacher empowerment through collaborative decision-making and 5 supportive work environments. This directly supports the model's focus on building inclusive and trust-based school cultures, as well as establishing psychological support mechanisms that empower both leaders and staff. Similarly, Çevik and Doğan (2025) demonstrate a strong relationship between empowering leadership behaviors and teachers' psychological resilience,

affirming the model's emphasis on personal empowerment, motivation, and emotional support. By fostering resilience, school leaders can enhance overall school performance and stability, particularly under pressure or during educational reform.

Chotikapanich (2013) identifies several challenges in Thai school management, including centralized control and limited decision-making power for school administrators. These findings reinforce the need for strategic autonomy and structural empowerment, as outlined in the proposed model, to enable school leaders to respond effectively to local needs and drive meaningful change. Nguyen and Walker (2018) emphasize leadership for learning in Southeast Asian contexts, advocating for continuous professional development and reflective practices. This aligns with the model's component on competency enhancement and capacity building, ensuring school administrators are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to lead effectively. Sparks and Malkus (2020) further support the model's inclusion of evidence-based management by illustrating how data-driven decisions contribute to better learning outcomes and administrative efficiency. In the Thai context, Panya (2015) critiques the limitations of decentralization efforts, which often lack full implementation. This echoes the model's call for holistic empowerment-encompassing structural, cultural, and personal dimensions—to bridge gaps between policy and practice.

Government reports from the Ministry of Education (2019) and the Office of the Education Council (2018) highlight the nation's shift toward innovation and strategic educational management. These national priorities are reflected in the model's integration of policy-driven leadership strategies, innovation, and feedback systems

aimed at performance improvement. Together, these sources reinforce the conclusion drawn from the focus group discussion: empowering school administrators across these five dimensions is not only desirable but essential for achieving the seven high-performance components outlined by the Department of Local Administration. This integrated framework offers a clear, actionable roadmap for educational reform, enabling school leaders to navigate challenges, build capacity, and deliver sustainable, high-quality outcomes in Thailand's primary schools.

Conclusion and recommendation

Conclusion

This study investigated the empowerment of school administrators and its contribution to high-performance outcomes in primary schools in Thailand. The findings identified five key dimensions of administrator empowerment: (1) strategic policy and administrative management, (2) organizational climate and environment, (3) competency enhancement and professional development, (4) confidence building, trust, and motivation, and (5) evaluation efficiency and feedback. These dimensions were validated through exploratory factor analysis and further confirmed by educational experts.

The study also revealed that the five empowerment dimensions are closely associated with seven components of high-performance school administration, namely organizational leadership, planning and strategy, stakeholder support, data-driven decision-making, human resource management, effectiveness management, and feedback and outcomes. The integration of these components resulted in a comprehensive framework that supports school leaders in improving administrative effectiveness and organizational performance.

The findings suggest that empowering school administrators is a critical factor in strengthening leadership capacity, enhancing organizational effectiveness, promoting collaborative school cultures, and supporting evidence-based decision-making. The proposed framework provides a practical foundation for improving educational administration and achieving sustainable high-performance outcomes in primary schools in Thailand.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1) Policy and Structural Support. Educational authorities should strengthen decentralization policies by providing school administrators with greater autonomy in planning, resource allocation, and decision-making. Clear policy frameworks should also support innovation and strategic leadership at the school level.

2) Professional Development. Continuous professional development programs should be designed to enhance administrators' competencies in leadership, strategic management, human resource development, digital technology, and data-driven decision-making. Training programs should be responsive to local educational contexts and emerging challenges.

3) Development of Supportive School Cultures. Schools should foster collaborative and trust-based organizational cultures that encourage shared decision-making, stakeholder participation, and professional learning communities. Such environments can strengthen motivation, commitment, and organizational effectiveness.

4) Improvement of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems. Educational organizations should promote the use of integrated data systems and performance

indicators that support evidence-based management. Regular feedback mechanisms and formative evaluation processes should be implemented to facilitate continuous improvement.

5) Professional Networking and Mentorship. Leadership networks and mentoring programs should be established to encourage knowledge sharing, peer support, and the dissemination of best practices among school administrators.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should examine the effectiveness of the proposed empowerment framework through implementation in different educational settings. Comparative studies across regions, school sizes, or educational levels may provide further insights into contextual factors influencing empowerment and high-performance outcomes. In addition, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) are recommended to validate and extend the relationships identified in this study.

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