

## **Educational Decentralization in Thailand: Reality of Administrative Structural Change and Authority Shift**

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### **Abstract**

It has been nearly three decades since Thai basic education was affected by major changes adopted in name of educational decentralization. Although making authority shifted to schools is central to implementing educational decentralization, there is no literature that rigorously investigates the extent and degree of changes to reveal if decision making authority is shifted to schools. By addressing this gap, this study intends: (1) to examine the extent of changes in light of the last educational decentralization; (2) to examine if the outputs conform to educational decentralization; and (3) to ascertain whether the agents' authorities in real settings, particularly the primary schools, have increased, in which areas, how, and why. Through document analysis, the study showed that the changes adopted revitalized and retained the traditional centralized administrative structure and the traditional centralized decision-making authority. Although certain aspects of the administrative structure and authoritative relationship were relocated, no mechanisms were created to serve the shift of authority from the higher-level agencies to school settings. To shift authority to schools, a mechanism at school level to serve authority dispersion is needed. Additionally, the legal mandates and framework must be clear as to whom authority will be shifted and what areas of authority will be decentralized.

**Key words:** educational decentralization, administrative structural change, authority shift

## การกระจายอำนาจทางการศึกษาในประเทศไทย: ข้อเท็จจริงเกี่ยวกับการเปลี่ยนแปลง เชิงโครงสร้างทางการบริหารและการจัดสรรงาน

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### บทคัดย่อ

เกือบสามทศวรรษที่การจัดการศึกษาขั้นพื้นฐานของไทยได้รับผลกระทบจากการเปลี่ยนแปลงที่อ้างว่าเป็นการกระจายอำนาจ โดยที่การกระจายอำนาจในการตัดสินใจให้โรงเรียนเป็นหลักปฏิบัติสำคัญในการกระจายอำนาจทางการศึกษา การศึกษาครั้งนี้จึงมีวัตถุประสงค์ เพื่อ (1) ศึกษาการเปลี่ยนแปลงที่เกิดขึ้นภายใต้การกระจายอำนาจทางการศึกษาครั้งล่าสุด (2) ศึกษาว่าการเปลี่ยนแปลงที่เกิดขึ้นเป็นการกระจายอำนาจทางการศึกษาหรือไม่ และ (3) ศึกษาว่าอำนาจในการตัดสินใจของโรงเรียนประถมศึกษา เพิ่มขึ้นหรือไม่ อย่างไร และทำไม่การศึกษาครั้งนี้เป็นการศึกษาเชิงคุณภาพ แหล่งข้อมูลหลัก คือเอกสารกฎหมาย ระเบียบและนโยบายทางการศึกษา วิเคราะห์ข้อมูล ด้วยวิเคราะห์เนื้อหาเพื่อพัฒนาประเด็นข้อค้นพบ ผลการศึกษาพบว่า การเปลี่ยนแปลงที่เกิดขึ้นยังคงมุ่งดำเนินไว้ซึ่งโครงสร้างทางการบริหารและความสัมพันธ์เชิงอำนาจดั้งเดิมที่ถูกออกแบบมาเพื่อรับการแบ่งปันอำนาจระหว่างหน่วยงานกลางและหน่วยงานภูมิภาค โดยโครงสร้างและอำนาจแบบรวมศูนย์ภายใต้โครงสร้างดังกล่าวได้รับการยักย้ายตำแหน่งแห่งหน้าและขานนามใหม่ขณะที่การออกแบบกลไกสำหรับรองรับการถ่ายโอนอำนาจจากหน่วยงานกลางสูงเรียนใหม่ ประกอบให้เห็น ข้อเสนอแนะของการศึกษาครั้งนี้ คือ จำเป็นต้องมีการออกแบบโครงสร้างทางการบริหารในปัจจุบันใหม่ เพื่อรับการกระจายอำนาจจากหน่วยงานส่วนกลางสูงเรียน นอกจากนี้ กฎหมายทางการศึกษาที่เกี่ยวข้องต้องระบุอย่างชัดเจนว่าอำนาจในการตัดสินใจด้านใดบ้างที่จะกระจายให้แก่โรงเรียน

**คำสำคัญ:** การกระจายอำนาจทางการศึกษา การเปลี่ยนแปลงโครงสร้างทางการบริหาร การจัดสรรงาน  
ในการตัดสินใจ

## Introduction

The push for educational decentralization in Thailand began in the last two decades of the twentieth century. A big wave of changes was launched from the mid-1990s as a result of several social, political transparency and economic events which threatened the progress of the country. In an effort to survive these crises, the country embarked upon major public administration reforms mandated by the new October 1997 Constitution (Fry, 2002, p. 17) which stipulated that the state shall give autonomy to the locality. The normative thought beneath this rationale is that if decision-making power is shifted with the proper balance, the education system and education provision will be more innovative and creative. Central to implementing educational decentralization involves making decision-making authority shifted to schools to promote self-management or self-determination. For this reason, educational decentralization has been adopted as an alternative to a centralized governing regime and the structural inefficiencies, poor management and lack of accountability generally perceived to be associated with it.

Based on the mandate of the 1997 Constitution, the country's first national education law, the National Education Act (NEA) B.E. 2542 (1999), was promulgated. The Act is considered as a "master" education law in that it stipulates conditions for changes adhering to educational decentralization. This led to passing other education laws. These laws raise important issues in relation to the changes concerning improving educational provision, restructuring administrative structure, and establishing new educational institutions or agencies. Whatever the motivation for such changes, they are expected to lead to improvements in the quality of education.

However, the reviewed evidence suggests that the changes adopted have failed to generate the expected results, particularly in terms of improving educational performance and management. By addressing this point, this study takes its initiative from proposing that examining the related changes is necessary to get a better understanding about the problems. Particularly, examining the extents of changes can give insight into the design of feature of administrative structure and the shift or realignment of decision-making authority. Information derived implies that whether decision-making authority as the central object or component of educational decentralization is shifted to schools. It also suggests that if the outputs of changes conform to the principles of educational decentralization.

## Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine the extent of changes in light of the last educational decentralization.
2. To examine if the outputs conform to educational decentralization.

3. To ascertain whether the agents' authorities in real settings, particularly the primary schools, have increased, in which areas, how, and why.

## Related Literature

### Concept of Decentralization

The term “decentralization” is slippery (Bird, 1995, p. 26). It is mainly subject to mechanism design influenced by politicians, policy makers, and the existing governing regime of a state. Generally, decentralization is defined as the transfer of power away from a central authority to lower levels in a territorial hierarchy (Crook & Manor, 1998). According to Brown (1994, p. 1407), it refers to devolution of authority from a higher level of government, such as a department of education, to a lower organizational level, such as individual schools.

As decentralization policy is designed in relation to goals and contexts of each society, it appears and is referred to in the literature using various terms such as political, administrative, fiscal, and market decentralization. As a result, there are overlapping definitions of types of decentralization as it applies to different societies. The need for comprehensive terms and approaches is therefore important.

The concept of ‘the transfer of power away from a central authority to lower levels’ provides a framework to classify the types of decentralization depending on the degree of decision-making power transferred to local governments (Rondinelli, 1981; Smith, 1985; De Mattos, 1989 cited in Llanes, 1999, p. 5). Generally, the definitions of ‘administrative’ and ‘political’ decentralization are agreed upon by scholars and policymakers.

Administrative decentralization, known as deconcentration, involves the limited dispersion of responsibilities from the central government to regional and/or local branch offices, but with the central government retaining the ultimate responsibility for the delegated functions. Often the decision-making power transferred to subnational government unit is limited to that required for fulfilling their responsibilities. According to Lauglo and McLean (1985, p. 9), administrative decentralization is adopted for efficiency of goal achievement, and because it focuses on the means rather than the ends. The authors argue that administrative decentralization is employed when it is deemed that greater goal efficiency cannot be attained through centralized control.

Political decentralization, known as devolution, is based on the rationale that the arena of power can be widened or shortened with the goal of either maintaining or extending political power (Lauglo & McLean, 1985, p. 9). It occurs when the boundaries of decision-making are extended and broadened to include stakeholders not currently a part of that decision-making arena (Zimet, 1973),

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when local governments are given, through legislative enactment, the authority to decide what is done in their territory (Rondinelli et al., 1989).

Widmalm (2008, p. 41) adds that there are three aspects of decentralization: 1) geographical location; 2) legal status and area of responsibility; and 3) distribution of power. If the centre retains strict control of the institutions that are moved out from the centre, we are dealing mainly with deconcentration. Deconcentration should be used only to refer to the simple transfer of sections of the public administration to a location outside the centre. Widmalm (2008, pp. 42-43) sees legal status and area of responsibility of institutions as covering two main dimensions. Conventionally, decentralization is seen as the movement of power and responsibilities between different parts of a public bureaucracy and its internal hierarchy. But since the emergence of the democratic citizen, a distinction should be made between whether powers are moved around among the bureaucrats and the professionals, or transferred to people who are elected to serve as representatives of the citizens. In relation to distribution of power, Widmalm (2008, p. 44) recognizes the fact that giving responsibilities to a certain institution does not mean that the institution in question has the capacity to fulfil them. Neither does it mean that the institution in question has any possibility of influencing the method of implementation of the duties for which it is made responsible. When an institution is given a certain responsibility with no means of influencing the method of implementation, we are dealing with delegation.

Much literature adds delegation to the types of decentralization. Delegation is 'an easily revocable transfer of authority' (Lauglo, 1990, p. 77). It involves the transfer of decision-making authority from higher to lower hierarchical units. However, that authority must be exercised and can be withdrawn at the discretion of the delegating unit (Hanson, 2006, p. 10). Since authority still rests on the centre, the withdrawal of authority can be made without resort to legislation.

In summary, political decentralization moves decision-making authority outside of the central agencies to the local agencies whereas administrative decentralization refers to decision-making authority delegated to the subordinates of the central agencies or the central agencies' extended regional agencies.

### Key Concerns about Educational Decentralization

#### *Goals*

The claimed goals of decentralization have been echoed through various economic, fiscal, and political disciplines. The two key concerns that prompt decentralization relate to economic values and democratic values.

From an economic perspective, a traditional outlook emerged in Tiebout's influential work on the provision of public goods (1956). According to Tiebout, decentralization is presented to promote economic efficiency in which national resources are allocated in a more optimal manner. Local agents are closer to communities than central governments. They, therefore, well recognize local preferences. By this, they can tailor outputs that are more relevant to local preferences, thus raising overall efficiency. A fiscal perspective can also be developed from Tiebout's work. Decentralization results in "a general normative framework for the assignment of functions to different levels of government and the appropriate fiscal instruments for carrying out these functions" (Oates, 1999, p. 1121). According to Oates, central government deals with macroeconomic stabilization and is responsible for any necessary income redistribution. In contrast, subnational governments "have their *raison d'être* in the provision of goods and services whose consumption is limited to their own jurisdiction" (Oates, 1999, p. 1122). In summary, central government holds a principle of subsidiarity assuming that public services should be provided by the lowest level of government "encompassing, in a spatial sense, the relevant benefits and costs" (Oates, 1999, p. 1122).

From a democratic perspective, decentralization may be promoted simply because its advocates believe in equality. The motive may also be to take power away from a political adversary. However, in any case, decentralization is often promoted not because it is necessarily efficient but because it is said to lead to closeness between rulers, administrators and the general public, better bottom-up and top-down communication and, therefore, more empowered citizens (Widmalm, 2008, p. 48). Decentralization is expected to enable citizens to make demands that will effectively create a greater variety in the provision of public goods, which are tailored to better suit local populations. (Ness, 2009)

More recently, educational decentralization has been adopted as a strategy of education reforms to achieve certain goals. Generally, it has been presented as the most viable solution to combat the problems associated with centralization, which include bureaucratization, inefficient and inadequate responses to local issues and misuse of local resources (Rivas, 2008, p. 1). With regard to settings, for societies with great diversities of histories and cultures, education is expected to "function as the single most influential force for ameliorating social conflict and facilitating orderly, directed change" (Bock, 1982, 79). In developed countries, quality of education is highly concentrated goal. This can be confirmed by a comparative study by Wielemans and Roth-van-der-Werf (1995, p. 63). According to this study, educational decentralization was found to be a key part of the agendas of most European Union countries to promote quality control and greater efficiency in their education systems. In African countries, decentralization also features prominently in the policy agendas, but is often treated as a panacea to solve broader political, social, or economic

problems (SARA, 1997, p.7cited in Berkhout, 2005, pp. 314-315). For Latin America, according to Malpica's study conducted in five countries of Latin America, the states have directed education towards the goals of identity, national integration and development, sometimes benefiting certain regions out of national strategic interest (Malpica, 2003 cited in UNESCO, 2005, p. 10).

In summary, educational decentralization encompasses a wide range of goals since it is not an end, but only means to an end (Hanson, 2006, p. 9). It is generally recognized in the literature that these goals are mainly drawn from economic and political values. This means that educational decentralization goals fall into two broad approaches. First, governments choose to decentralize to pursue efficiency in the use of resources by allocating them more effectively. Second, governments and multilateral international institutions favor strengthening democracy by establishing formal and informal channels of citizen participation. By following these, decentralization is a means to “good governance” (De Renzio 1997, p. 1). The efficient and democratic operation of local governments, according to decentralization proponents, will have a positive impact on the access and quality of public services.

As goals are means, not ends, they drive educational decentralization and provide frameworks to determine mechanisms. However, having goals does not assure that they are automatically realized. To pursue specific goals, government needs to design deliberate policies with their mechanisms targeting certain points based on problems and needs such as accessing and providing quality of public services (Llanes, 1999, p. 6). In conducting a study of educational decentralization, it is necessary to articulate various levels of analyses. According to Darnon, Dompnier, and Poortvliet (2012, p. 761), the focus covers four levels: 1) individual (focusing on individual differences); 2) interpersonal (focusing on social relations with peers); 3) positional (focusing on group status differences); and4) ideological (focusing on cultural contexts, values and norms). As a result, researches that bridge different levels of administrative hierarchies are particularly crucial in understanding the outcomes of educational decentralization (Bjork, 2006, p. 2).

Researches and literature on educational decentralization indicate that the design of the decentralization process (which includes the pace of transference, the areas that are transferred, the layers of relations interconnected within the administrative structure, and the responsibilities/functions assigned to each layer of government) is crucial for goal attainment scales. If designed and implemented well, decentralization has the potential to improve service delivery and education quality (Winkler & Yeo, 2007, p. 2).

The literature also suggests that, in addition to appropriate policy initiatives, effective educational decentralization requires the cooperation of and compromise between administrative

mechanisms. Gomez (2006) offers horizontal and ex-post vertical relationships as a mechanism or approach to explain the shortcomings of decentralization policy in both its birth and implementation stages.

Horizontal relationships occur at an executive level (such as prime minister, political parties and bureaucrats) and are responsible for creating decentralization policy. Therefore, a policy is a product of their interactions.

Problems emerge if a state's administrative mechanisms for check-balance powers do not exist or are not designed to compromise. When this happens, the central agencies tend to delegate a great load of responsibilities to lower agents without providing them with sufficient autonomy. As pointed out by Winkler and Yeo (2007, p. 3), the central government and the ministers are the two key central agencies who impose responsibilities on schools. The government creates the mandates, goals, laws and performance expectations. The ministers and education leaders specify the requirements in terms of norms, standards, resources and specific goals. With the great load of responsibilities delegated to them, schools feel accountable to the central agencies instead of their local communities or students' parents. Without autonomy, they may not have the capacity to carry out their delegated functions. This could lead to them failing to take serious action when the policy is implemented. Educational decentralization without appropriate check-balance systems leads to confusion over education management, causing conflicting decisions or failure to carry out functions, with adverse effects on quality and efficiency (Winkler & Yeo, 2007, pp. 1-2). In other words, the policy has difficulty in creating change or achieving its goals.

Educational decentralization policy emerged with a state of indeterminacy regarding restructuring or sharing power relationships between the centre and the periphery; it is often an amalgamation of decentralization and conceals centralization measures (Berkhout, 2005, p. 316). This confirms the view of Weiler (1990, p. 50) who argues that the notion of decentralization as redistribution of power seems largely incompatible with the manifest interests of the modern state in maintaining effective control and in discharging some of its key functions with regard to the system of economic production and capital accumulation.

For the ex-post vertical relationships, Gomez (2006, pp. 45-46) discussed two processes to explain the conditions in which decentralization policy can achieve its goal. These are executive-led processes and subnational-led processes.

In executive-led processes, two mechanisms are used to deal with decentralization policy: corrective reintegration and recentralization. These are used when the executive realizes that decentralization policy is implemented too quickly, and that the institutions needed to regulate and enforce policy are not properly installed. Changes are made to the internal bureaucratic structure of

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decentralized administrative branches by pulling back certain responsibilities from the local agencies to the central government.

Subnational-led processes occur when the local agencies approach the center because they disagree with the policies developed by the executive-led processes. In approaching the center, the two mechanisms termed accommodation and adjustment take place in order to reach agreement. Gomez (2006, p. 48) gives the examples of Brazil and China, where subnational governments resisted the initial design of decentralization policies and approached the center after realizing that they cannot afford to adhere to newly imposed fiscal and expenditure requirements. They required more time for the policies to be accommodated and adjusted.

### *Autonomy*

Educational decentralization policy involves delegating a certain extent of autonomy from the central to other educational stakeholders, particularly schools. A central element of school autonomy is that it addresses “both the internal operations of the organization and its external relations, and at the same time, it encompasses both decentralization and deregulation issues” (Wohlstetter, Wenning, & Briggs, 1995, p. 339). Granted autonomy allows schools the ability to make decisions that can be more accountable to students’ needs and more responsive to changes. It is observable as to which schools have autonomy to self-decide matters related to educational goals, personnel, resource allocation, curriculum, finance and student recruitment (Wong Lai-ngok, 2004, p. 58). It is assumed that the delegation of power in education inevitably causes an expansion of school autonomy over those areas (Chapman, 1987; Caldwell, 1990a, 1990b, 1997). However, it is important to note that state educational law can enhance or limit the amount of autonomy granted to each school.

In education literature, the central areas of autonomy focused on are very similar. Bulkley and Fisler (2002) list four main areas of autonomy over which schools may have control. These are educational framework (comprising mission, curriculum, assessment, and professional development), fiscal policies, personnel hiring and school governance. Caldwell and Spinks (1992), and Davies and Hentschke (1994) identify specific areas over which schools should be able to make decisions. According to these researchers, schools need to have control over personnel, including decisions about who to hire and how faculty is compensated. Caldwell and Spinks (1992) further suggested that schools should be able to make their own decisions about professional development. Decisions related to fiscal policies, such as how schools allocate monies and how they raise additional resources, are also common autonomy issues for schools. Autonomy in decision making about curriculum and instructional issues is also considered important. Schools, according to Caldwell and Spinks (1992), and Davies and Hentschke (1994), should have the autonomy to make decisions

related to curriculum and how students will learn. Such autonomy would also allow schools to decide how materials and how the delivery of educational services are organized and operated, including how much time is allocated. Finally, both taxonomies suggest that self-managing or autonomous schools should be able to design their own mission, which would include decisions about what business to be in and which students to serve. In summary, the areas of school autonomy commonly cover resource selection and provision, curriculum, staffing, budgeting, and school policy formulation (Brown, 1990 and 1994; Dixon, 1992; Elmore, 1993).

### Related Literature in the Thai Contexts

Many reviews of related literature indicate that it was the economic crisis of 1997 that fired the Thai government with the ambition to introduce decentralization reform to its public administration. At the same time, it was recognized that then system of education was inadequate to enable the country to compete in the global marketplace. A particular concern was the poor performance of Thai students in international tests, particularly in the subjects of science and mathematics. The country was alarmed by the poor state of its education system (Jones, 2008, p. 435). It was recognized that if Thailand continued an education system that relied on the traditional methods of administration and teaching and learning practices, the development and the expected growth of the country in social and economic sectors, for example, would be impeded (Hallinger, 2004; ONEC, 1999; Pennington, 1999; Thongthew, 1999 cited in Hallinger& Lee, 2011, p. 139). Educational decentralization began to be promoted as a means for multigoal-based attainment of quality, accessibility and efficiency in education delivery.

However, although initial efforts identified the need for changes at policy level, conveying this to the public and designing the desired changes experienced unintended outcomes. From reviewing the related literature, it is found that the traditional centralized governing system of Thailand influenced the degree of decentralization that took place. The strong top-down or vertical administrative structure of the system of educational administration in Thailand did not facilitate problem-based means and goal setting to deal with the areas that lag behind other countries (Fry, 1999, pp. 6-7). According to Mansrisuk's theoretical perspective, in which a functionalist-base is central to the explanation of institutional reform or change, it was noted that because the need for decentralization reform appears to be generally accepted and irresistible, central agencies or bureaucrats are motivated to protect their existing interests or preferences (2012, p. 73). This results in distortion of the implementation process to avoid drastic changes and frustrate the expected goals (Mansrisuk, 2012, pp. 73, 75). Capturing the idea of preference or interest requires that the functions or rules set to operate and sustain an institution or structure are also the intended goals or interests

of the institution's actors. Accordingly, when the existing institution is undergoing reform or change, the actors begin to calculate how much they gain and/or lose in terms of costs and benefits. Jones, focusing on the ideas of decentralization reform utility and the existing interests provided by the centralized system, argued that decentralization as a contemporary reform in Thailand has been moved to the centralized system again since it is planned without the need for achieving utility of any new reforms or changes (2008, p. 437). These perspectives shed light on the actions of institutional or structural designers, providing an understanding why such form of change is a choice and the degrees of change which take place.

It is likely that many past studies were conducted with an incomplete understanding of the foundation of Thailand's public administration as a unitary state, in which the administrative structure was designed to serve delegating responsibilities and authorities from the central agencies to the local or regional agencies. In a sense, the studies were paying attention to phenomena that did not exist or were too young to be studied. This researcher's observation is supported by the extent to which the idea of school-based management (SBM) was found to be a popular research topic of prior studies. Theoretically, SBM is operated in the presence of a decentralization system in which schools and their communities have already possessed decision-making authority. Importantly, schools exercise such authority to govern and manage the schools in the manners that are suitable to or meet the schools' needs and problems. As mentioned by Caldwell (2005, p. 1), SBM is decentralizing authority to school level to support schools to make decisions on any significant matters to school development and performance such as goals, curriculum, educational standards and accountability. Similarly, Wohlstetter and Mohrman (1996, p. 4) argued that SBM reconfigures authority relationship between the central agency and schools to make schools more responsive to improvements and the needs of local communities, students and parents. Thus, SBM in a centralized educational system is still a novel idea or in a novice stage in which its presence will come whenever decision-making authority is really shifted to schools. Since it is conditioned by the traditional centralized administration, a change declared as SBM requires a very long time to reach advanced form or manifest the expected extent and degree of change.

On the other hand, there were certain studies that defined the intermediate or regional agency, particularly the Office of Primary Education Service Area, as the locus of the authority shifted from the central agency. According to the executive summary of the research conducted by the Office of the Education Council, it was suggested that "the Ministry of Education should seriously take action on issuing a law in relation to decentralizing Education Administration and Management Authority to the Office of Primary Education Service Area" (Office of the Education Council, 2549, p. k). In fact, within the unitary state, the intermediate agency established as the branch of the central

agency is assured to have adequate decision-making authority. For example, this progresses from its head or director, board, and supervisors. If the struggle for the increase of decision-making authority of the intermediate agency is incessant, an opportunity for the shift of authority from the central agency to school settings is threatened. For this reason, the findings of the studies cannot add a great deal of value to educational decentralization since they called for a vertical form of decentralization in which decision-making authority is intended to be shared down the hierarchy of the chain of command. Based on the reviews of related literature, in conducting this study it is considered necessary to analyze and understand the macro structural changes prior to getting deeper understanding of the effects of the changes on local settings.

### Methodology

This study is qualitative research which aims at providing description and explanation on the phenomenon of educational decentralization in Thai Basic Education. When qualitative approaches are introduced in qualitative research textbooks, each approach is discussed in the context of its historical and philosophical background (Streubert and Carpenter, 2007). In other words, most policy fields struggle with meaning (Lewis, 2011, p. 36).

The study argues that educational decentralization policy emerging from a series of education laws enacted to introduce decentralization to Basic Education is able to be in a state of determinacy or indeterminacy. Since a law enacted comprises its mandates or requirements and components guiding the expected changes, it can align or compete with the principles of educational decentralization. Specific to the term indeterminacy of educational decentralization law or policy, nothing is educational decentralization if the related laws have no clarity in terms of determining the areas of authority required to shift downward and guiding the features of administrative structure to serve downward authority shift.

Based on the point of view mentioned above, the study deals with a review and analysis of education legislations and changes adopted in name of educational decentralization. The methodology is descriptive and explanatory. It intends to develop a deep description and explanation of themes emerging from analyzing legal frameworks that guide the trends and patterns of changes. To satisfy this intent, the central components of educational decentralization such as the features of administrative structure or mechanism, authority, and changes adopted are examined. By addressing how these are realigned, intervened, or translated into changes, the extent and degree of educational decentralization are revealed.

Data was collected through archival documents. Archival documents mainly referred to education legislation or laws. At the same time, various sources of data including texts, articles,

newspaper, and documents recorded by agencies or institutions were also employed. Additionally, to add value to the data collected through archival documents and other documents, the changes adopted according to the mandates of the related laws were also observed.

For data analysis, content analysis was used to analyze the data received from legal documents. Content analysis can be used for analyzing public documents and contacts between actors (Bandelow, 2006, p. 767). It provides deconstruction and reconstruction processes that facilitate the emergence of recurrent and generalizable themes gaining valid inferences from deconstructing and reconstructing text (Weber, 1990, p. 12). According to Weber, the purpose of content analysis is to identify emerging themes and patterns. Themes identified from content classification of data facilitate the presentation of the data for discussion in a logical, organized manner (Weber, 1985). As such, content analysis goes beyond an analytic explanation of the themes that are mainly relative to country-specific idiosyncratic conditions, and/or the social, political, economic, and historical perspectives. The approach involves coding documents and other written forms into conceptual categories based on specific rules of coding. Thus, content analysis follows a hermeneutic approach – identifying the meaning of words and phrases in the documents under study. It brings to bear the criterion of validity and reliability. This is because it involves replicable and valid methods for making inferences from observed communications to their context.

## Findings and Discussions

### Foundation of Administrative Structure and Authority

In the Kingdom of Siam prior to the reign of King Chulalongkorn, formal education was seen as only being relevant for special classes. Education of the masses relied on voluntarism and was not systematically organized. Because of this, education existed without the characteristics of either centralization or decentralization. It was subject to the circumstances of individual families. Generally, its function was to preserve the culture and serve the needs of local communities, in which Buddhist monasteries played a major role.

Education came to be seen as a state function during the reign of King Chulalongkorn. As the country was increasingly being threatened by colonialism, Siam adopted modernization as a tool to help retain its independence. As part of introducing a modern style of state administration that met the needs of local conditions and responded to the challenges presented by the West, a fundamental system of basic education was established (Wyatt, 1969, p. 384). This was accomplished through new state agencies, particularly the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Education which were established in B.E. 2435 (1892). From this time onward, basic education was expanded through a policy of mass education.

It is important to note that the initial architecture of the administrative structure was guided by a framework of a unitary state and characterized by efforts of the central authority to retain its control over local communities. The fundamental features of the administrative structure were designed to consolidate the process of the central control. All decision-making was concentrated in the central agency, which held ultimate legislative authority.

In the later days of its development, basic education was expanded in parallel with the growth of the central government which saw the establishment of a formal system of state agencies or institutions characterized by the overall objective of consolidating the process of the central control. The process of control was supported by the related laws released to form local entities. These laws included the Administrative Act of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2476 (1933) giving birth to three layers in Thai administrative structure; the central or national administration, the provincial administration, and the local administration, the Thesaban Act (Municipal Administration Act) B.E. 2476 (1933), the Bangkok Metropolitan Municipality Act B.E. 2479 (1936), the Provincial Organization Administration Act B.E. 2498 (1955), and the Order of the Ministry of Interior No. 222/2499 (1956) giving birth to the Tambon Council. Subsequently, provincial and district halls became the hub of the branches of the central government or authority. A rigid chain of command existed within the resultant administrative structure, in which the ultimate authority was held by the central agency. This relationship made local agencies susceptible to the monitors, sanctions/penalties, and rewards of the central government.

Prior to the 1990s, the development of local entities appeared a setback in authority reallocation. According to Nagai, Mektrairat, &Funatsu(2008, pp. 1-2), although Thailand had various types of local administrative authority (LAO) including 1) Thesaban (municipalities), the basic LAO unit in urban areas, 2) the sanitary district (Sukhaphiban) in semi-urban areas, 3) the Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO) in rural areas, 4) the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA), and 5) the City of Pattaya, such evolution did not imply a positive affinity of the central authority with the local entities. When considered through the lens of authority allocation or reallocation, this was in many ways nothing but an aggregation of the branch offices of the central ministries and departments (Nagai,Mektrairat, &Funatsu,2008, p. 5).

Central control over basic education was maintained in two ways. Firstly, the preferences or initiatives of the central authority were seen to be dominant over the perceived needs of local schools and communities. The central authority created administrative orders, directives, or rules to manifest its control. Regarding implementation, the local branches carried only the responsibility and exercised the authority selectively delegated by the central authority. More importantly, schools were only given responsibility for routine administrative tasks as delegated by the branches of the

central authority. Secondly, the traditional educational decision-making power of local schools and communities was eliminated. Having formal authority, the centre had a right to intervene in and control any aspect of schools.

## Latest Educational Decentralization

### Background

The atmosphere of political turmoil and instability in Thailand after the Black May protests of 1992 brought to the issue of decentralization to the fore. The first concrete step was taken when the government of Prime Minister ChuanLeekpai declared its intention of boosting the efficiency and capacity of local government. This led to establishing a committee to analytically review the system of local government (Mansrisuk, 2012, p. 80). Educational decentralization became a distinctive topic in own right when the issue of decentralization reached its climax in the second half of 1997 sparked by Asian economic crisis. Concerns were raised that reliance on the traditional methods of Thai education had impeded the nation's social and economic development (Hallinger, 2004; ONEC, 1999; Thongthew, 1999 as cited in Hallinger& Lee, 2011, p. 139).

### Changes Mandated by the National Education Act (NEA) B.E. 2542 (1999)

#### *Objectives*

The most recent changes in the educational sector stem from the mandates of the National Education Act (NEA) B.E. 2542 (1999). The reasons for enacting the NEA include a desire to realize an alternative vision of schooling, to serve a specific population, and to grant autonomy to local agencies (National Education Act B.E. 2542, 116, 74 A, 19 August 1999, p. 23). To address these, a broad range of changes were introduced in the educational sector including principles of lifelong education for all, guidelines for participation and administration of the educational system, educational standards, educational quality assurance, and contemplation of their being hosts of educational providers.

#### *Mandates and Implementation*

The NEA was promulgated in accordance with the Constitution B.E. 2540 (1997) as part of moves toward widespread government decentralization, and contains laws which introduce sweeping changes to the Thai education system. It contains two main sets of mandates: those that create new institutions or areas of authority in terms of school control, and those dealing with the existing areas of authority and administrative structure.

The first set of mandates was implemented through the Royal Decree on Establishment of the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (Public Organization) B.E. 2543 (2000) and the Royal Decree on Establishment of the National Institute of Educational Testing Service

(Public Organization) B.E. 2548 (2505). Interestingly, the two new institutions have uniqueness, in that each is a single agency and served by a single power. They are central agencies existing without branches or lower levels, and their authorities are not shared with other agencies. In this sense, there are no external mechanisms to control their powers. All decisions are based on their ideologies. They exist as the experts in their fields, and presumably any policy or requirement issued by them is not a product of a process of persuasion or compromise. All educational agencies involved, particularly schools and the Offices of Primary Education Service Area, are required to implement the policies and requirements of the two agencies. In the sense of educational decentralization, this single power over the areas of external educational assessment and educational testing eliminate the schools' authority in dealing with these problems and needs.

The two agencies represent a serious initial action to improve the quality of Thai education to be more in line with international standards. However, they also limit schools' context-based decision making. What they declare or require has to be rigorously implemented, and it is possible that the agencies could misalign powers and elements involved in the realm of external assessment and educational testing standards. For instance, methods of assessment and tools that are unsystematic, unfair and inflexible have been aligned with the process of implementing external assessment and educational tests. It could be argued that based on different school and student contexts, schools and students should not be forced to get ready at the same time for taking external assessment and national standards tests or to accept the same assessment tools or methods. In another instance, instead of being used as the basis for giving out purposive rewards and sanctions to convince and motivate schools to increase their effort, the results of assessment and tests have been used to blame schools and put pressure on them to accept culpability for their poor performances. These examples demonstrate that the two agencies provide some external school assessment and educational testing standards that may not lead to school improvement in appropriate ways. Additionally, the roles of the two agencies may be compromised by the discretionary powers of the Office of Primary Education Service Area. For example, while the two agencies may create tools or material tests and determine initial methods for school assessment, the detail as to how to implement them is left to the discretion of Office of Primary Education Service Area. This is one of various channels whereby the Office can increase school intervention. In short, the roles of the two agencies come with conditions that force schools to be held more accountable to the two agencies and the Office instead of to the local communities.

Moreover, as acknowledged experts with single power, any decisions of these agencies receive much public attention. Because of this, public interest is deviated from tracking the implementation of educational decentralization and the progress of decentralization is hindered accordingly.

The second set of mandates was implemented through three main laws: the Administrative Organization of the Ministry of Education Act B.E. 2546 (2003), the Teachers and Educational Personnel Council Act B.E. 2546 (2003), and Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Act B.E. 2547 (2004). Importantly, these Acts revitalize the existing authority and administrative structure.

According to the Administrative Organization of the Ministry of Education Act B.E. 2546, it marks the creation of a new structure for the Ministry of Education in which decentralizing the structure and administration of education is declared. These are witnessed by the two Sections of NEA including Section 37 and 39. Section 37 stipulates that: “The administration and management of basic education shall be based on the educational service areas, taking into consideration the number of educational institutions, the number of population and cultural background as the main criteria as well as other appropriate conditions, with the exception of the provision of basic education stipulated in the vocational education legislations...” (ONEC, 2002, p.13). Section 39 specifies that: “The Ministry of Education shall decentralize powers in educational administration and management regarding academic matters, budget, personnel and general administration to the commission, the Offices of Education Service Area and the educational institutions in the areas. Criteria and procedures for such decentralization shall be as stipulated in the ministerial regulations” (ONEC, 2002, p. 14). To satisfy the mandates, all Ministries providing education services, namely the Ministry of Education, the Office of the National Education Commission, and the Ministry of University Affairs were merged into a new single Ministry entitled Ministry of Education.

In dealing with the existing internal structure of the Ministry of Education, three Departments, namely the Office of the National Primary Education Commission (ONPEC), the Department of General Education, and the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development are integrated into the new Department titled the Office of Basic Education Commission (OBEC).

At the regional level, there was a key change in which the existing regional or intermediate agencies were transformed. However, instead of considering the weaknesses and strengths of the existing regional agencies to improve their roles, connections with schools and decision-making process, the change focused on unifying the various provincial and district educational agencies into a single entity. Thus, the change mainly dealt with designing the physical feature of the new regional agency to receive the resources, particularly in terms of officials and materials, that would be transferred from the existing provincial and district educational agencies. These were the factors that played a major role in constituting the figure, components and roles of the new regional agency, initially named the Office of Education Service Area.

The Office of Education Service Area is amalgamated from the five educational bodies located in provinces and districts as branches of the departmental agencies. These comprised two

branches of the Office of National Primary Education Commission (the Office of Provincial Primary Education and the Office of District Primary Education), two branches of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development (the Office of Provincial Education Superintendent and the Office of District Education Superintendent) and a branch of the Department of General Education (the Office of Provincial General Education).

The Office of Education Service Area was located in all provinces. Initially, there were 175 Offices throughout the country. Existing in the hierarchical chain of command as branches of the central agency, these Offices were granted administrative authorities to monitor and supervise both primary and secondary schools. However, further change came shortly after when the Third National Education Act B.E. 2553 (2010) provided a dichotomy of administration between secondary and primary schools. The existing 175 offices were renamed as the Office of Primary Education Service Area to monitor and run primary education, and new offices were established named the Office of Secondary Education Service Area to run that level of education.

In addition to the changes mentioned above, the NEA also mandates changes to the areas of school and teacher control. The two traditional hierarchical commissions or boards including *Kuru-sapa* (Teachers Council of Thailand) emerging from the Teacher Act B.E. 2488 (1945) and *Kor-khor* given birth by the Teacher Profession Administration Act B.E. 2523 were transformed into new bodies. However, it was observed that the change was made without taking into account the previous lessons drawn from the roles of such traditional commissions. This was particularly associated with the issues of the loss and gain of schools and teachers caused by the roles of such traditional commissions, and costs or benefits occurring in the process of personnel management. Unsurprisingly, the properties of the traditional commissions such as responsibility or duty and authority were retained as much as possible. This observation can be witnessed by extent to which the hierarchical form of the traditional commissions was inherited by the new one. For this reason, based on this form, the authorities remain shared between the central commissions and their regional sub-commissions. While decisions of the regional sub-commissions are made to respond to the responsibilities and authorities delegated by the central commissions, key or final decisions on all matters of teacher professional management and welfare remain made by the central commission.

The roles and functions of the traditional *Kuru-sapa* granted authority to deal with teacher welfare were revised through the Teachers and Educational Personnel Council Act B.E. 2546 (2003). For the traditional *Kor-khor* having authority on the matter of personnel management of teacher profession, its roles and functions were revised through the Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Act B.E. 2547 (2004).

Section 7 of the Teachers and Educational Personnel Council Act B.E. 2546 (2003), it stipulates that: “A teacher and educational personnel council shall be established named the Teachers Council of Thailand (new Kuru-sapa, as a single board or commission) with objectives, powers granted and duties as specified in this Act, and shall be a legal entity under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education” (Teachers and Educational Personnel Council Act B.E. 2546, 120, 52 A, 11 June 2003, p. 3). Importantly, by this Act, the field of teaching shall be declared to be a specific profession. This means that only those who have qualifications defined by this Act can be licensed to enter or practice the profession.

Changes in the area of personnel management of the teaching profession have been challenged by forces wishing to maintain a traditional hierarchical structure. It is well known that this traditional form of operation makes the process of personnel management in the teaching profession very slow, particularly in relation to recruitment and transfer. Issuing regulations and orders, and creating methods and criteria in relation to teacher recruitment and transfer is not only monopolized but also concealed. The progress or extent of change can be considered through the process by which the centralized authority has been reallocated or shifted.

Section 7 of the Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Act B.E. 2547 (2004) stipulates that: “There shall be a personnel administration commission of teacher civil service and educational personnel called “Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Commission” or TEPC (Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Act B.E. 2547, 121, 79 A, 23 December 2004, p. 24). This passage is subsequent to Section 54 of the NEA stipulating that “There shall be a central affair of teacher civil service and educational personnel, responsible for a field of personnel management of teacher civil service and educational personnel....” (National Education Act B.E. 2542, 116, 74 A, 19 August 1999, p. 5). Additionally, Section 21 of the Act 2004 stipulates the establishment of a sub-commission of the TEPC called the Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Sub-commission or TEPS (Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Act B.E. 2547, 121, 79 A, 23 December 2004, pp. 30-31). To fulfil these mandates, three traditional hierarchical commissions, the Teacher Civil Service Commission (Gor-khor), the Departmental Teacher Civil Service Subcommittee (Or-Gor-khorKrom), and the Provincial/Bangkok Metropolitan Civil Service Subcommittee (Or-Gor-khorChangwat/Or-Gor-khor Krung-thep), were transformed into the current form.

It is important to note that the Act simply mandated change in terms of the presence of the commission of teacher professional management and its responsibility and authority. As reflected through Section 19 (4),(7), (10),(12), and (13) of the Act 2004, authority over all matters in relation to personnel management of the teaching profession, such as man-power planning, recruitment,

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appointment, transfer, promotion, discipline and degree accreditation, is in hands of the two layers of commission (the TEPC and TEPS).

Authority is exercised following the traditional norms of rigorous control in which decision-making follows a top-down approach flowing from TEPC to TEPS. In this sense, TEPC deliberately delegates its authority and responsibility to the sub-commission. By this, operating the process of personnel management of teacher profession is accountable to the needs of TEPC or TEPS instead of schools. For example, the TEPC and TEPS have never raised the issue of whether the formula of teacher-student ratio is appropriate to the Thai context. In another example, the delay and unpredictability certain processes such as teacher retirement, recruitment, placement and transfer have never been recognized. Because of this, their potential effects on teacher motivation and the matter of dealing with teacher shortages have not been evaluated.

Thus, although the personnel management of the teaching profession seen far reaching changes, it can be seen that there has been no apparent intent and to weaken the traditionally centralized authority. As observed, there are no requirements in the Act that demand reallocating the authority or improving the role of the commission. Based on the hierarchical form of commission, authority distribution or allocation cannot be balanced.

In summary, in these two important changes (the administrative structure in moving from the ONPEC to OBEC and the commissions of personnel management of the teaching profession moving from Kor-Khor to TEPC), authority distribution and allocation is still controlled through a highly centralized structure. As has been the case in the past, authority distribution and allocation is characterized by a hierarchical (verticality)-based approach in which there is no mechanism to link authority from higher layers to schools. With the hierarchical structures and chains of command of both general and routine administration and the specific areas of administration, a high degree of school and teacher control still occurs. Schools are mandated to by the central and regional agencies. This makes decision-making move more slowly, and is likely to result in an imbalance between authority and responsibility. While the central authorities and its regional branches enjoy exercising their authorities to control schools or design tasks, a heavy responsibility or burden is shifted to the schools.

#### Low Priority Mandate on Educational Decentralization

Although the NEA expresses a requirement for educational decentralization in several places, the rate of advance in implementing such change is affected the fact that the mandate is not clear enough.

Through the NEA and the subsequent laws, there are two conditions that make educational decentralization policy indeterminate. The first condition is that the educational decentralization mandate is too broad and vague. This is evidenced by Section 9 stipulating that: "In organizing the system, structure, and process of education provision, the following principles shall be addressed: 1) Unity of policy and diversity in implementation; and 2) Decentralization of authorities to education services areas, educational institutions, and local administration organizations...." (National Education Act B.E. 2542, 116, 74 A, 19 August 1999, p. 4), and Section 39 stipulating that: "The Ministry of Education shall decentralize powers in educational administration and management regarding academic matters, budget, personnel and general administration to the commission, the Offices of Education Service Area and the educational institutions in the areas" (National Education Act B.E. 2542, 116, 74 A, 19 August 1999, p. 12).

The absence of explicit reference to educational decentralization in which the issues of the areas of authority required to be reallocated and the method or direction of authority shift (vertical or horizontal approach) are communicated makes the NEA's mandate capable of being distorted by interpretation or interpreted too broadly.

With regard to ambiguity of the NEA's mandate, educational decentralization is found to embody an indeterminate status in which certain conditions or elements are not referred to. Firstly, a duration that specifies a minimum or maximum period for decentralizing authorities is not determined. By this, educational decentralization can be frozen. Secondly, the initial extent or degree of decentralization regarding the four areas expected to be decentralized (academic matters, budget, personnel management and general administration) are not defined. There are no guidelines as to what must be done implementing educational decentralization, what preliminary elements shall be aligned with the initiative and how to achieve these. Thus, the progress of educational decentralization implementation is highly subject to the will or interpretation of policy stakeholders. Thirdly, the entities that will receive the authorities expected to be decentralized is not identified specifically enough. Without a clear-cut definition, a wrong problem was solved. Evidently, the regional or provincial agencies traditionally granted considerable authority were intentionally defined as the entities that lacked authority. With this, a traditional method of authority allocation in which authority was allocated only between the central agency and its regional branches established in accordance with a chain of command was repeated.

Here, it is important to understand that the increase of authority of the intermediate agency, (the Office of Education Service Area), does not automatically lead to or mean the increase of authority for schools. This is like apples and oranges. Authority cannot shift unless a mechanism is available. Without a mechanism created to serve authority shift at school level, authority could not

really shift to schools. Only the commission or board of departmental or central agency and its provincial and district branches legally established were granted authority. Authority allocation was, thus, ended at the provincial (or district) level where the branches of the central agency were located. In a sense the provincial agencies are the branches of the central agency, not the representatives of the schools or local communities. Educational decentralization only meant the decentralization of authorities to the regional agencies. For this reason, it is necessary to establish a mechanism at school level to balance or improve the extent and degree of authority between the regional / provincial agencies and the schools.

The extent to which the NEA's mandate in relation to educational decentralization is too broad and vague becomes clearer when the NEA's mandates in other areas are considered. Many of those mandates are found to be clear in terms of preliminary initiative, direction and responsibilities. Good examples include those of Section 49, 53 and 54. Section 49 stipulates that: "There shall be the establishment of an Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment as a public organization, responsible for developing criteria and methods of external assessment..." (National Education Act B.E. 2542, 116, 74 A, 19 August 1999, p. 14). Section 53 declares that: "There shall be a Profession Organization of Teachers, Educational Institution Administrators, and Educational Administrators. The Organization shall be an independent entity administered by a professional council under supervision of the Ministry of Education. The Organization shall have the powers and duties for setting professional standards, issuing and withdrawal of profession licenses..." (National Education Act B.E. 2542, 116, 74 A, 19 August 1999, p. 15). Section 54 stipulates that: "There shall be a central affair of teacher civil service and educational personnel, responsible for a field of personnel management of teacher civil service and educational personnel...." (National Education Act B.E. 2542, 116, 74 A, 19 August 1999, p. 15)

Surprisingly, the end of Section 39 leaves educational decentralization with the condition that: "criteria and procedures for such decentralization shall be as stipulated in the ministerial regulation of the Ministry of Education." Here, it is important to understand that the ministerial regulation is the lowest level in the hierarchy of law. This means that the regulations can easily be ignored, changed, replaced, modified, or canceled. If intended to fulfil the mandate of the NEA, the regulations in relation to educational decentralization have to be clear and specific enough assure that educational decentralization implementation is more likely. It is illustrative to follow the ministerial regulations to see what elements were aligned with educational decentralization and how educational decentralization is to be carried out.

According to the ministerial regulation of the Ministry of Education titled Ministerial Regulation of Determining Criteria and Methods for Decentralizing Education Administration and

Provision B.E. 2550 (2007) issued subsequently and with regard to Section 39 of the NEA, it contemplates decentralization in the four foci of academic matters, budget, personnel management and general administration. Unfortunately, each of these areas is followed by general phrases with no details. There is no specification as to whose authorities, between the schools and the Office of Education Service Area, are to increase through decentralizing the authorities over a specific area. For example, decentralization in the area of personnel management is followed by a list of the names of areas expected to be decentralized: “Man Power Planning, Recruitment and Appointment, Transfer, Promotion and Remuneration, Performance Appraisal, Leaves, Discipline...” (Ministerial Regulation of Determining Criteria and Methods for Decentralizing Education Administration and Provision B.E. 2550, 124, 24 A, 16 May 2007, p. 31).

A second issue is that prime priority for change was given to restructuring the layers of the chain of command (administrative structure) and the commissions. In the light of decentralization, restructuring the administrative institution or body without reallocating authority brought about an incomplete change. This is because the change was seen as being required to find efficient ways or means of control to solve problems in relation to administrative routine such as the absence or delay of schools in implementing the policies or the directives of the central agency. Thus, the change was responsible for strengthening the process of operating administrative routine and teacher control. Importantly, it could have achieved only an intermediate goal in which such process were expected to be more efficient.

Additionally, although the changes cited public interest as the key benefits of change, they also created big problems. In the restructure process, the components or elements, particularly the officials and their positions of the two areas, were reset to zero. Because of this, much effort and many resources of the government, particularly in terms of time and budget, were devoted to relocating or repositioning the bodies and officials affected by the restructuring. This particularly applied to the cases of transforming ONPEC into OBEC and Gor-khor into Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor, and this observation will be expanded in the next section.

## Conclusion

In summary, although the NEA triggers a mandate for educational decentralization, it contains no guidelines for the change. With no rules for where decision-making authority is to be redistributed and concentrated, the NEA is highly unlikely to create a mechanism to serve downward authority shift. Specifically, simply saying that the Office of (Primary/Secondary) Education Service Area shall be established and granted authority does not go far enough. Implementing such a change can and has resulted in a situation where the mandate has been satisfied but the main elements of

the existing chain of command have been retained. In other words, implementing the change has simply transferred components of the existing chain of command into the new chain of command. Decentralizing authority to schools that exist outside the present mechanism of authority allocation is voluntary and not part of the mandatory process.

It is interesting to note that this manner of change can be characterized by the terms getting restructured, readjusted, relocated or reauthorized. More importantly, the implications of the change can be considered through certain insights. Firstly, the change cannot disperse decision-making authority because it retains the traditional centralized control over general administrative authority and the personnel management of the teaching profession. Secondly, with no authority, schools' needs / problems and solutions are identified by the outsiders. School resourcing and management is based on the perceptions of the higher levels of agency. Additionally, schools' responsibilities outweigh their authority. The final lesson from all this is that for the educational decentralization mandate of any related law to achieve the desired result, it must be specific enough as to what area of authority shall be decentralized and to whom. This is imperative for decision-making authority to be reallocated and the chain of command to be redesigned. Central to this is the need to have a feature that serves to transfer authority from the central agency to schools.

### **Recommendations**

By investigating changes to see if they conform to educational decentralization and to explicate to where authorities go, the study found that although educational decentralization has been declared as a strategy of educational reform for some decades, the changes in light of educational decentralization are incomplete. The process of restructuring or redesigning an administrative structure seldom results in authority reallocation. Rather, authority reallocation is an iterative process. In Thai educational reform, the traditional administrative structure and traditional powers were subject to superficial changes in which they are merely relocated or renamed and reauthorized. Because of this, the authority shift and authority allocation end at the intermediate agency. Thus, authorities are not decentralized to schools. The initial effect was that the changes are inconsistent with the problems and needs of schools, and have altered school environments. Additionally, schools are heavily intervened since most things or activities performed at school level are created by the higher level agencies. Importantly, because schools lack decision-making authority and are heavily intervened, they have little opportunity to develop the capacity for effective pursuit of the goal of higher quality of education. Thus, if changes are expected to conform to educational decentralization, the following issues will need to be addressed.

1) Redesigning the administrative structure: The first step of introducing educational decentralization to Thai basic education needs to be for the central agency or government to recognize that all decisions made over educational responsibilities are concentrated at the central agency (OBEC) and its provincial branches (Office of Primary Education Service Area). Allowing decision-making authority to spread over these two higher agencies generates a highly bureaucratic educational administration that holds schools highly accountable for their mandates and decisions. More importantly, it impedes schools in coming up with creative or innovative ways to deal with their problems and needs. For this reason, it is necessary to redesign the administrative structure to balance or harmonize the centralized responsibilities and authorities. Central to this is that an administrative tier or agency has to be established at the school level to which decision-making authority can be dispersed or decentralized from the central agency to schools.

2) Readjusting/Reconsidering the role or the existence of the Office of Primary Education Service Area: This study raises the questions: 'How does the role of the Office of Primary Education Service Area support school improvement?' and 'Can the central agency and schools function without the Office of Primary Education Service Area?' As the Office emerged by duplicating the structure of the central agency, what the central agency has and does is also what the Office has and does. For this reason, the Office shares a large part of school control. Its main responsibilities relate to routine administrative tasks delegated by the central agency. This creates a relationship that permits decision-making authority to spread over the two higher agencies. Interestingly, it is argued that this relationship is an output of educational decentralization since authority has shifted from the central agency to regional one. Because of this claim or understanding, the government is blind to the fact that the most important policy issue is decentralizing authority to schools. Schools are unavoidably affected every time a responsibility, no matter how unimportant, is implemented by the Office. Every time this happens, schools become a tool for achieving the Office's goals. This demonstrates how the Office can exert a dominant influence on or intervene in schools. A key point is that the Office is as an outsider away from schools, and should not have discretion over key decisions directly relating to schools such as teacher transfer and salary promotion. Thus, it is necessary to balance the authority of the Office by increasing school authority. Initially, to fulfil this, the administrative tier has to be spread to the school level.

3) Determining the sectors or areas which need to be decentralized to schools: Spreading the administrative tier to schools needs to be accompanied by a dispersal or shifting authority over specific areas to schools. A meaningful change will never occur if there is no a clear-cut definition of the set of responsibilities and authorities that should be decentralized to schools. Based on the findings of this study, decision-making authority in the areas of teacher personnel management,

resource allocation and management, and teacher salary promotion exert a great influence on schools. To ensure the success of decentralizing authority over such key areas to schools, any educational decentralization law must have a passage indicating what authority shall be decentralized, and to whom and where the decentralized authority goes. This needs to be followed by a basic layout of procedural details.

## Future Research

This study raises the concern that decision-making authority cannot presently shift to schools since there is no mechanism to serve authority shift. Thus, another point for future research could build upon a question: 'How to develop a mechanism to serve an authority shift from or decentralized by the higher agencies?'

### เอกสารอ้างอิง

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