



## Creative leadership strategies for primary school principals to promote teachers' creativity in Guangxi, China

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### Article Info

**Article history:**

Received 29 April 2018

Revised 17 July 2018

Accepted 27 August 2018

Available online 24 September 2018

**Keywords:**

China,  
creative leadership,  
primary school principals,  
strategies,  
teachers' creativity

### Abstract

The objectives of this research were 1) to analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the creative leadership of primary school principals to promote teachers' creativity in Guangxi, China and 2) to develop creative leadership strategies for primary school principals to promote teachers' creativity in Guangxi, China. The study was mixed method research and involved a sample of 106 schools and 636 school principals and teachers. The instruments used in this study were a questionnaire and a strategic evaluation form of suitability and feasibility. The data was analyzed by average, standard deviation and PINmodified. The results showed the following: 1) the strength was the facilitating creative potential of every teacher; the weaknesses were the forming and facilitating dynamic creative teacher teams and promoting a school culture of innovation respectively. The political and government policy as the opportunity and the economic, socio-cultural and technological aspects were considered as the threats. 2) Three main strategies were developed including (i) to develop the principals' creative leadership in facilitating the team creativity of teachers to foster students' creativity; (ii) to develop principals' creative leadership in promoting an innovation culture that encourages the individual and team creativity of teachers to foster students' creativity; and (iii) to develop the principals' creative leadership in facilitating the individual creativity of every teacher to foster students' creativity.

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### Introduction

The pace of change is quickening every day. Many of the challenges that we face are being generated by information technologies and the larger population. Cultivating our natural powers of imagination, creativity and innovation is necessary to meet the challenges (Colley, 2015; Robinson, 2011). Doing so has to become one of the principal priorities of education and training everywhere (Bannerman, 2007; Robinson, 2011). Based on China's National Plan for Medium and Long Term

Education Reform and Development (2010–2020), one of the urgent tasks in basic education of China is to develop students' creativity for cultivating innovative talents (Gu, 2010). And fostering students' creativity requires teachers to be creative (Colley, 2015; Tian, 2007). In 1999, National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) (1999) reported that teachers can't develop the creative abilities of their students if their own creative potentials are suppressed.

Chen (2008) stated that only creative school principals can bring out the creative abilities of teachers to become more skilled for all students' independent innovation capability development in basic education of China (Zeng, 2012). Stoll and Temperley (2009) carried out a research involving primary school leaders to explore and develop their creative leadership in creating the conditions, culture

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Peer review under responsibility of Kasetsart University.

and structures in which teachers' creativity best thrives. Through their research study, they have demonstrated that creative leadership of primary school principals will facilitate teachers' creativity in fostering students' creative learning. [Harris \(2009\)](#) also stated that creative leadership is fundamentally about connecting different teachers to develop the capabilities and capacities of all those within the school so that creativity can be captured, supported and enhanced. In addition, [Robinson \(2011\)](#) stated the role of a creative school principal is to facilitate creativity and innovation in any school context. Therefore, primary school principals need creative leadership to be able to unlock creativity in teachers for enhancing students' creative learning.

The researchers focus on primary schools of Guangxi, because some research studies indicated that the primary school principals of Guangxi lack creativity and leadership; many teachers who work in the rural primary schools of Guangxi need to strengthen both innovation awareness and collaboration in teaching and most of the primary school students who study in backward areas of Guangxi usually fear making mistake and lack innovation spirit ([Ma, Luo, & Liang, 2014](#); [Wei, 2015](#); [Wu, Lin, & Xie, 2010](#)). In addition, there is very little related research specifically on the creative leadership strategies of primary school principals to promote teachers' creativity ([Jarvis, 2015](#); [Stoll & Temperley, 2009](#)). Therefore, this study is based on this pressing need and tried to develop creative leadership strategies for primary school principals to promote teachers' creativity in Guangxi, China. Moreover, other provincial educational institutions with similar context such as Yunnan, Guizhou can employ the strategies made from this research to develop creative principal leadership in facilitating teachers' creative teaching to foster students' creativity.

## Literature Reviews

Theoretical concepts applied in this research are as follows:

### Concept of Creative Leadership

The concept of creative leadership focuses on the roles of primary school principals' leadership in fostering teachers' creativity to foster students' creativity. [Stoll and Temperley \(2009\)](#) have clearly stated in their research that the creative primary school leaders promote and nurture creativity in teachers by 1) promoting individual teacher' creative thinking; 2) enhancing collaborative creative thinking and design in teachers 3) improving teachers time and space to facilitate creative practicalities. [Basadur \(2004\)](#), [Levesque \(2011\)](#) and [Robinson \(2011\)](#) also suggested that there are several roles creative leaders can take to maximize their colleagues' creative contributions to the organization such as: 1) recognize and develop different creative individuals; 2) engage and motivate them in creative work; 3) build their teams to include diverse talents; 4) give them time to express their thoughts and feeling; 5) provide the personal space they need to be most creative; and 6) nurture the culture and

environment that brings out their creative strengths. The researchers synthesized the roles of creative leadership based on the theories of the above scholars and researchers, which involve three areas of focus: personal, group and culture. The roles of creative leadership include (1) facilitating the creative abilities of every teacher of the school (2) forming and facilitating dynamic creative teacher teams and (3) promoting a school culture of innovation.

### Concept of Teachers' Creativity

A creative teacher is not there just to pass on received information, but what creative teachers also do is to mentor, stimulate, provoke, and engage students' passion, energies, and spirits that can help students to discover their creative talents and develop the skills of their independent creative work as a result ([Robinson, 2011](#)). In 1999, NACCCE reported that teachers' creativity means that teachers are creative in finding new and exciting ways of teaching to foster students' creativity. The report also stated that there are three related skills in creative teaching of a teacher including 1) encouraging students' creativity, 2) identifying students' creativity and 3) developing students' creativity. [Robinson \(2011\)](#) also mentioned these three skills in facilitating students' creative learning for a teacher. Moreover, [Desailey \(2015\)](#) described the fourth key skill that a teacher needs to teach both creatively and to foster students' creativity is modeling creative working processes.

### Concept of Strategies

The proactive approach used in creative leadership for primary school principals to promote teachers' creativity. The concept has been synthesized to carry out three steps for developing strategies based on the theories of [Certo and Peter \(1991\)](#) and [Siribanpitak \(2009\)](#) which included 1) Analyzing the external and internal environment of Guangxi by conducting SWOT analysis and using the PNI-modified, 2) Developing strategies using TOWS Matrix, 3) Adjusting strategies as suggested by specialists and stakeholders.

## Methods

This research study on creative leadership strategies for primary school principals to promote teachers' creativity in Guangxi, China used a mixed methods design of quantitative and qualitative analysis. The research process is designed based on the research purpose. The purposes of the study are 1) to analyze strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the creative leadership of primary school principals to promote teachers' creativity in Guangxi, China; 2) to develop creative leadership strategies for primary school principals to promote teachers' creativity in Guangxi, China which includes two steps as appear in [Figure 1](#) below.

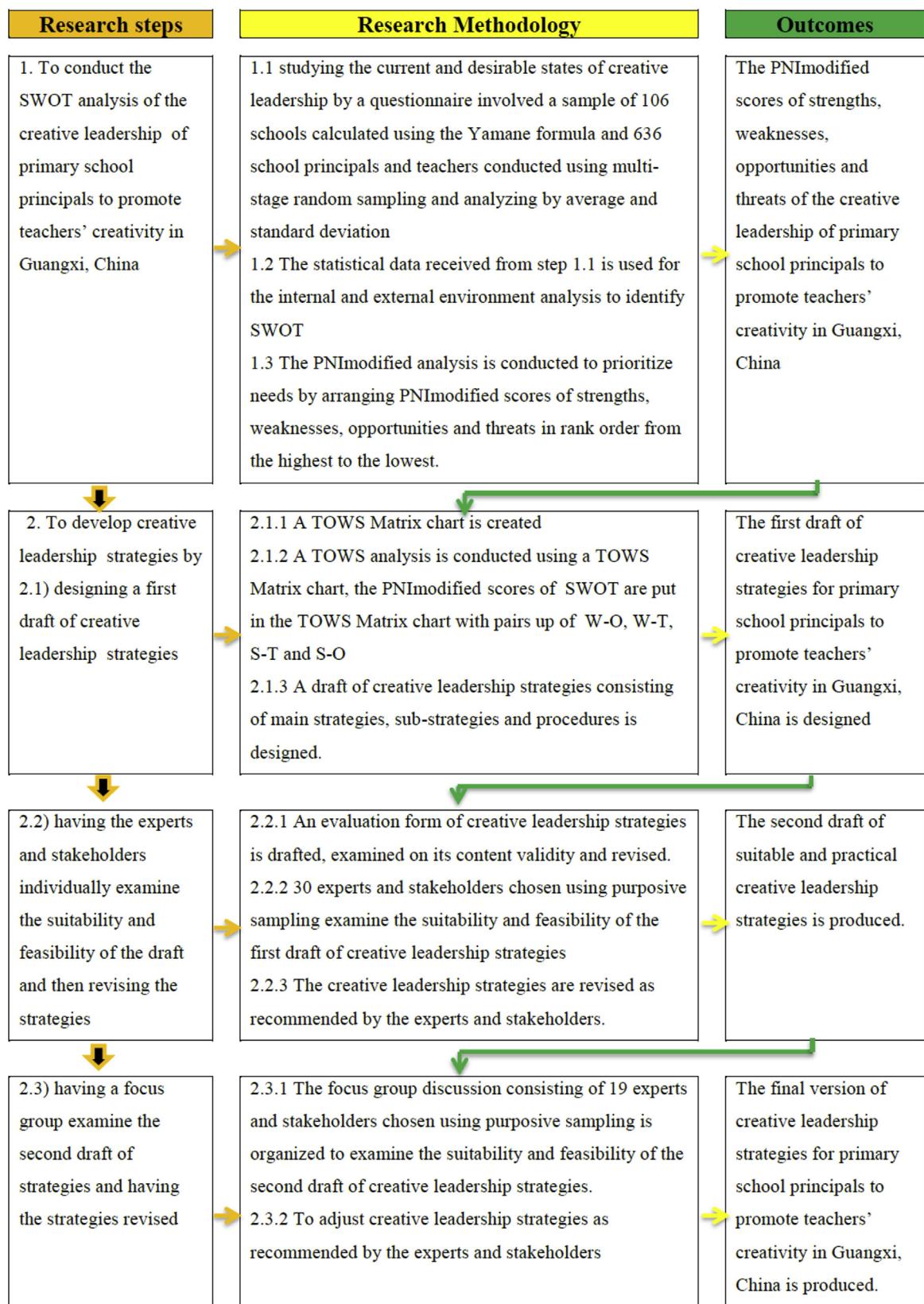


Figure 1 Research process

## Results

### *The Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats to the Creative Leadership of Primary School Principals to Promote Teachers' Creativity in Guangxi, China*

1. The strengths of the creative leadership of primary school principals to promote teachers' creativity in Guangxi, China include facilitating creative ability of every teacher obtaining the PNImodified, 0.409 with three strong subcomponents consisting of engaging every teacher using their creative potential in teaching obtaining the PNImodified, 0.396, providing every teacher learning opportunities to enhance creativity in teaching obtaining the PNImodified, 0.405 and energizing every teacher's imagination for teaching obtaining the PNImodified, 0.420.
2. The weaknesses of the creative leadership of primary school principals to promote teachers' creativity in Guangxi, China include forming and facilitating dynamic creative teacher teams obtaining the PNImodified, 0.440 with a weak subcomponent of offering time for teacher teams to work on their passion obtaining the highest PNImodified, 0.472. Then promoting a school culture of innovation obtaining the PNImodified, 0.436 with a weak subcomponent of creating creative school workspaces obtaining the PNImodified, 0.458.
3. The opportunity of the creative leadership of primary school principals to promote teachers' creativity in Guangxi, China includes the political and government policy aspect obtaining the PNImodified, 0.434.
4. The threats of the creative leadership of primary school principals to promote teachers' creativity in Guangxi, China include the economic aspect obtaining the PNImodified, 0.462, then socio-cultural aspect obtaining the PNImodified, 0.456 and the technological aspect obtaining the PNImodified, 0.453, respectively.

### *Creative Leadership Strategies for Primary School Principals to Promote Teachers' Creativity in Guangxi, China*

Based on the research findings, the researchers developed three main strategies and nine sub-strategies for creative leadership development of primary school principals to promote teachers' creativity in Guangxi, China. These creative leadership strategies are named TCI strategies. TCI, which is short for Team, Culture and Individual, consists of three main strategies. The detailed information of TCI strategies is displayed in [Figure 2](#):

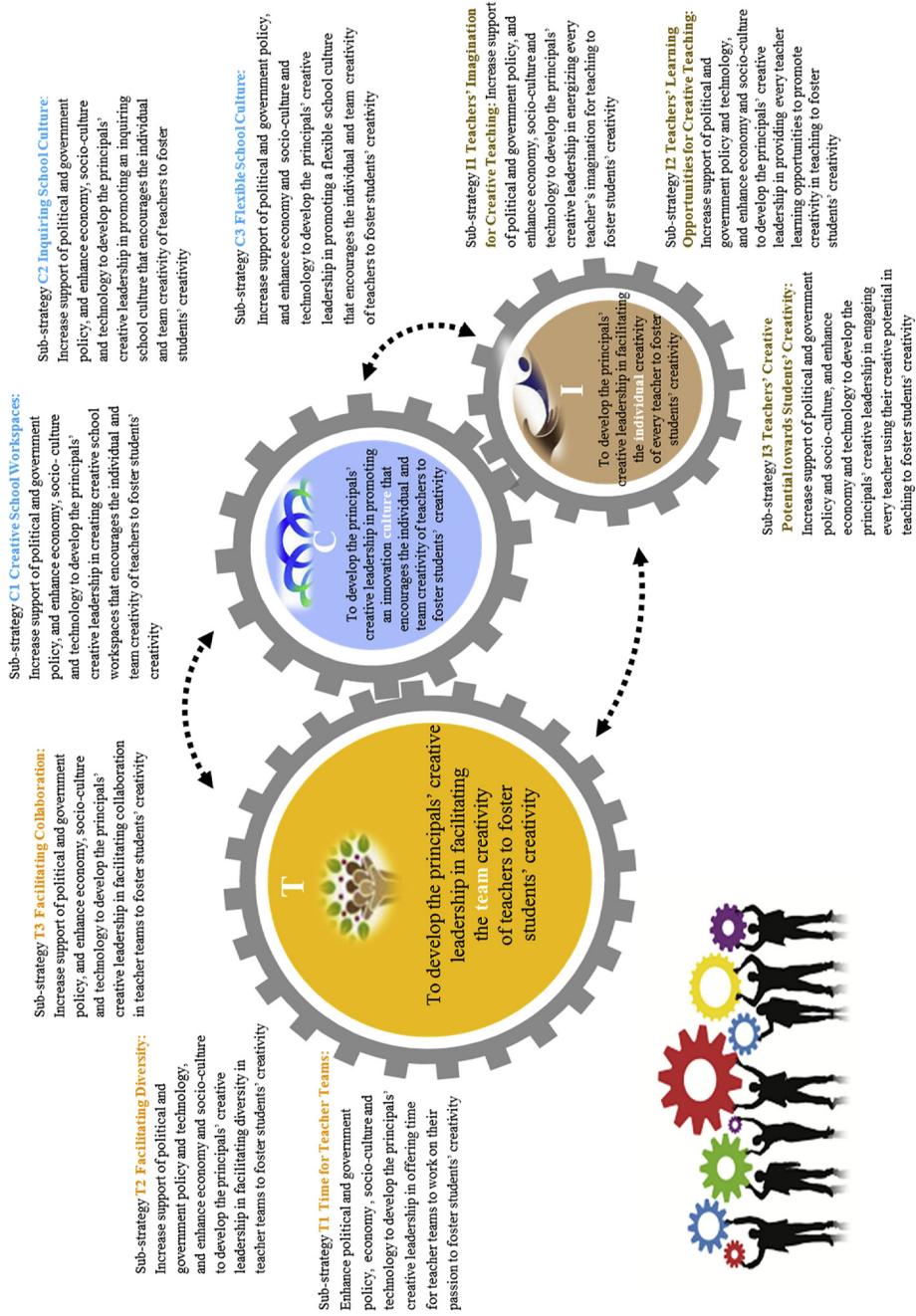
## Discussion

### *Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of the Creative Leadership of Primary School Principals to Promote Teachers' Creativity in Guangxi, China*

1. The research findings indicate that the strength of the creative leadership for primary school principals to promote teachers' creativity in Guangxi, China includes facilitating creative ability of every teacher of school

with three subcomponents which are found to be strengths that are interrelated. When the school principals involve every teacher in creative teaching to foster students' creativity, they energize every teacher' imagination for teaching because innovation is a child of imagination ([Robinson, 2011](#)). Additionally, being creative requires skills and techniques, thus the school principals give teachers opportunities to learn creativity skills for ensuring every teacher in the school is playing to their creative strengths ([Desai, 2015](#)).

2. The research findings reveal that forming and facilitating dynamic creative teacher teams is the weakest. When considering each aspect, offering time for teacher teams to work on their passion has the highest PNImodified. This is probably because there are many teaching tasks and workloads to handle every day for the teachers, especially the teachers in rural schools, who have to teach several subjects due to lack of the teaching staff. In addition, most primary school teachers in Guangxi are female teachers, who have to go home immediately after work hours to take care of their families because the values and responsibilities of Chinese family are particularly strong, especially for married women ([Zhang & Zhang, 2011](#)). Moreover, the school principals may lack skills in time management. All this has probably been challenging for school principals in order to organize the teachers to communicate and share the experiences of creative teaching together for fostering students' creativity.
3. The research findings indicate that the opportunity of the creative leadership of primary school principals to promote teachers' creativity in Guangxi, China is the political and government policy aspect. It implies that the Chinese government and Educational Departments value the development of principals' leadership in promoting teachers' creativity to foster students' creativity. [Robinson \(2011\)](#) has stated that, "*Creating a culture of innovation will only work if the initiative is led from the top of the organization. The endorsement and involvement of leaders means everything, if the environment is to change.*" The policy of developing principals' creative leadership from the Ministry of Education will provide supportive conditions for the school principals to promote teachers' creativity in fostering students' creativity and guide the school principals to achieve the school goals.
4. The research findings indicate that the economic aspect is the greatest threat. The economic aspect which is found as threat to the creative leadership of school principals is accorded with the research study on the state and problem of management and basic education provision of schools in the less developed areas by [Glewwe, Hanushek, Humpage, and Ravina \(2011\)](#) and [Zeng \(2012\)](#). According to their research study, many school principals mentioned that insufficient budget, staff and learning materials are found to be problems for the school management. The responses on the survey questionnaire and the focus group also described the challenges of the school management including the insufficient budget, the lack of community involvement and the level of substance abuse around the school's neighborhood.



**Figure 2** TCI strategies for primary school principals to promote teachers' creativity in Guangxi, China

## Creative Leadership Strategies for Primary School Principals to Promote Teachers' Creativity in Guangxi, China

1. Based on the research findings, forming and facilitating dynamic creative teacher teams to foster students' creativity is found to be the greatest weakness. The strategy to develop the principals' creative leadership in facilitating the team creativity of teachers to foster students' creativity should be implemented as soon as possible. When considering each aspect, offering time for teacher teams to work on their passion has the highest PNImodified, therefore, the sub-strategy should focus on providing time for teacher teams to work together for fostering students' creativity first. [Levesque \(2011\)](#) stated that time is crucial importance for strengthening creativity in team. He stressed that facilitating a creative team requires the leaders to provide time for them to reflect. Taking time to reflect can avoid making the same mistakes over and over again. [Robinson \(2011\)](#) also stated that creative insight can take time to develop, and creative organizations need to offer staff discretionary time to work on their own ideas. The best-known example is Google, where engineer teams can use 20 percent of their time to pursue any interest they like. Since 2005, 5 percent of all products that have been launched by Google were developed in the 20 percent discretionary time. Therefore, the primary school leaders need to be sure that the teacher teams have time and freedom to do what they are most passionate about ([Basadur, 2004](#)).
2. Based on the research findings, promoting a school culture of innovation to promote teachers' creativity is found to be the weakness in second place. The strategy focusing on developing the principals' creative leadership in promoting an innovation culture must be strengthened further because the quality of the creative work of individuals and of teams is deeply enmeshed in the general culture of the school as a whole. When considering each aspect, creating creative workspaces has the highest PNImodified. The sub-strategy should give a high priority on creating creative workspaces for teachers ([Goodman & Dingli, 2017](#)).
3. Although facilitating creative ability of every teacher has become a strength, it should also maintain the quality by using the external opportunities and avoiding the external threats. Cultivating students' creativity is a long-term task. Teacher confidence and motivation in exploring creative teaching may increase, when teachers feel their teaching creativity practices are valued and supported by their leaders. Moreover, these three main

strategies are not linear steps; they are organic processes that should feed into each other in a continuous cycle of mutual enrichment.

## Recommendations

### Recommendations for Implementing the Research Findings

1. The Ministry of Education should establish and accelerate the detailed policy of developing primary school principals' creative leadership in promoting teachers' creativity to foster students' creativity and guide, monitor and evaluate the implementation of the educational department in Guangxi.
2. Guangxi Government and Education Departments should immediately allocate adequate budgets and teaching staff to primary schools. Additionally, they should supervise the implementation of the Prefectural Government and Education Bureaus and encourage them to seek support of funding and resources from local businesses.
3. The primary school leaders in Guangxi should support teachers to work and think creatively together and reschedule the school time for the teachers working together on their passion.
4. The primary school principals of Guangxi should improve working environment where teachers' creative potential can be unleashed and promote an inquiring and flexible school culture that encourages the individual and team creativity of teachers to foster students' creative learning.

### Recommendations for the Future Research Studies

1. Future research may be conducted on the impact of the creative leadership on teachers' creativity after the implementation of the creative leadership strategies for primary school principals in Guangxi, China.
2. Future research should also be conducted on developing success indicators for practices on each role of creative leadership.
3. Future research should study the strategies of academic management of primary schools to enhance students' creativity in Guangxi, China.

## Acknowledgments

This research study was supported by "The 90th Anniversary of Chulalongkorn University Fund (Ratchadaphiseksomphot Endowment Fund)".

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