

A Comparative Study of the Efficiency and the Effectiveness of Primary Education Management between the Provincial Administrative Organisation and the Office of the Basic Education Commission: A Service User Satisfaction Survey

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Abstract

This research aims to (i) examine the effectiveness and the efficiency of primary education management with regards to the service user satisfaction within 29 primary schools in Thailand, subject under provincial administrative organization (PAO), and their counterparts, which are under the authority of the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC), (ii) to conduct a comparative study concerning the effectiveness and the efficiency generated from the selected schools by specifically handpicking, from each province, one school from the PAO and two from the OBEC, amounting to the total number of 3 schools representing each province. The selected samples can be categorized into those containing similar numbers of students and the ones with certain amounts of operating unit cost (OUC), which are essentially contributing to the sum of 87 schools. The data collection was carried out by drawing samples from the students, the parents, and the members of the concerned communities. Each group comprised 812 subjects, leading to the total number of 2,436 study subjects. The gathered data is analysed using average mean and t-test. The findings indicate that the level of user satisfaction, in general, towards the primary education management of the PAO schools, which is marked as $\bar{x} = 4.34$, is lower than those listed under the supervision of the OBEC. Such result is consistent for either cases where the sample schools contain similar students numbers ($\bar{x} = 4.41$) or the case where the amount of OUC is relatively equal ($\bar{x} = 4.41$). Upon considering and assessing each group, it was found that while the user satisfaction level, as produced from the students and the community members, did not have significant differences, on the other hand, the level of satisfaction that was generated by the parents reveals that the parents' perception towards primary education management under the PAO authority ($\bar{x} = 4.36$) was placed lower than those of OBEC, which was also applicable to both cases where similar number of students were present ($\bar{x} = 4.49$) and where the OUC was somewhat equivalent ($\bar{x} = 4.48$).

Keywords: primary education, provincial administrative organisation, office of the basic education commission, efficiency and effectiveness, service user satisfaction survey

1. Research Background and Its Significance

The development of local administrative organisation (LAO) initially emerged during the long rule of King Rama V (1853-1910), an era of significant modification and development in Thailand. During this period, where His Majesty the King had established the first sanitation district, which was followed by other types of LAO.

Over the years, many changes have continued to occur in Thailand. The 1997 and 2007 Constitutions can be considered as part of the many great advancements of Thailand. That is to say, the concerned provisions kick started the notion of decentralisation, spreading out powers from the central authority to local administrative bodies. One feature of such decentralisation can be seen in the sphere of education. With the 1999 Act of Local Administrative Organisation Decentralisation Plan and Procedure Formulation (No.1) and 2006 Act (No.2), this has led to a compulsory implementation of the concerned acts, where in 2002, it specified that all primary education schools under OBEC were to be put under the supervision of the LAOs once necessary criteria are complied and relevant assessments are carried out by the Office of the Decentralisation to the Local Government Organisation Committee (ODLOC) together with cooperation from the Ministry of Education.

The reassignment of authority and responsibility has been imposed together with the decentralisation of financial sovereignty. To elaborate, the government lays out the budget plan and distributes various sorts of budgetary allocations to local administrative agencies so that these agencies can achieve fiscal autonomy. The notion and the presence of fiscal autonomy is highly beneficial in developing countries as it enables and fosters public participation within communities, strengthens democracy, stabilises macro economic status, increases autonomy with respect to decision making, and helps reduce corruption. Nevertheless, arguments have been presented when the policy is put into practice. It is argued that there are too many rules and restrictions applying, especially when there is an issue of fiscal movement or transfer. Plus, in certain cases, concerns vis-a-vis transparency or inequality may also be an issue.

However, previous fiscal decentralisation theories still mainly focus on using fiscal decentralisation as a tool to develop and foster local democracy (Naald, 2003). Thereby, the use of fiscal decentralisation and transferring educational tasks strategy can be employed as an analytical instrument that helps determine whether local administrative authority should contain more fiscal autonomy, and should result in better management of education services for the local community could be achieved or not. The 2012 survey reports that the total number of junior students under the Department of Local Administration (DLA) is listed as 281,447. Although the evaluation results from the office for national education standards and quality assessment (ONESQA) between 2006 and 2010 on the local administration supervising schools, starting from primary years to high school years, the majority of students passed almost all ONESQA assessment criteria, unfortunately, with more detailed considerations, it is revealed that major aspects of the student quality are still deemed as being average, and are even low in certain cases (Ritcharoon, Puangsomchit, Urwongse & Utoomporn, 2011).

With respect to educational achievement of the students in primary schools, which are subject under DLA, it is found that local studies conducted by foreign researchers indicate that educational budgeting for local schools correlates with educational achievements (Akai, Sakata & Tanaka, 2007). As long as LAOs still lack the capacity to sufficiently self-fund themselves, the central government is still required to financially support these agencies. For Thailand, LAOs can be funded through 3 types of intergovernmental transfers, namely, general transfer, special transfer, and the one transfer set up to be used for the purposes of work transferring. Different calculating formulas are applied to these 3 intergovernmental funds depending on the capacity to generate revenue of each local administrative authority. None the less, financial responsibility is regarded as one of the key elements that signifies the transferring of powers to the LAOs. Provided that the local administrative bodies can function well after having been granted sovereignty, this would be likely to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the organisations. Noted that such target requires sufficient budget, either it is generated from earning revenue or receiving sponsorships, fiscal autonomy must always be ensured (The World Bank Group, 2001).

Following the theory on intergovernmental transfer, the purposes of such a scheme is to have central government provide funding to local administrative agencies so as to make up for any fiscal discrepancies or inequality between the government and the local administrations. This is to bridge any gaps between the two parties and to encourage local administrations to comply with the central government policy. There are 2 categories of intergovernmental transfers, which are (i) unconditional grants, which do not stipulate any conditions upon budget spending, and (ii) conditional grants, such as block grant, project grant, or matching grants. It can be said that each transfer effects the LAOs differently. Yet, the unconditional grant is described as the sum which the local administrations can spend on any area; hence, this particular type of transfer contains the greatest distinct features of decentralisation. This is because such an event portrays freedom and autonomy of the local administrative agencies in budgeting where they can freely choose to allocate the money so as to fit the demands of the community, which would essentially lead to the satisfaction of the community members (Shah, 2007).

In the the case of member states, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2012) has placed special emphasis on two education management principles, namely, equity and quality. Nevertheless, it should be highlighted that these two principles are different from each other. In other words, an equally

distributed budgeting per person is an implementation of the rule of equality whereas helping students in need to gain proper education concerns the principle of quality (Mann, 2014).

Upon allocating resources for Thailand's education aspect, its features involve distributing spending on each person within the special category and transferring grants which are deemed to fall under the conditional grant category. On the contrary, the local administrative government can freely manage and allocate the general transfers or the budgets generated from its revenue for the purposes of spending these funds on its local education needs. In a Brazilian case study, with regards to the effects the transfers have on education achievement and poverty, the research reveals that when more transfers are allocated, effects can be witnessed on education achievements. To elaborate, class attendance rose by 7% and literacy rate increased by 4%, whilst there was a 4% reduction in poverty (Stephan & Litschig, 2013). Moreover, the study showed that the impact of budget spending from the unconditional transfers had a positive correlation towards an increase of revenues earned by local members within the community. Also, a such practice is a part of ensuring and safeguarding fiscal autonomy of the local administrative agencies as well as providing better welfare for the local community (Arvate, Mattos & Rocha, 2013).

There is a question of the coherence between fiscal and educational autonomy of the LAOs, under the damage which can occur by centralisation of powers assessment strategy. Considerations are prompted upon the effectiveness of educational management. In such regard, at the very least, taking from an aspect of service user's satisfaction (Nilsson & Følstad, 2012: 20), by the PAO that oversees primary school management across 29 provinces, when looking at comparison with the schools listed under OBEC. The question of whether or not which party could procure greater effectiveness and efficiency is addressed so as to trigger the process of analysing the power relations that are relevant to the educational duty and authority, which can offer appropriate courses of action between the responsibilities held by the central government and the local government in the future.

2. Purposes of the Study

This research purports first to study the level of effectiveness and efficiency of primary school management with regards to service users' satisfaction aspect perceived by students, parents, and community members towards the performance of all 29 PAO schools and the OBEC schools within the same provinces. Secondly, to compare the differences of effectiveness and efficiency between the concerned PAO and OBEC schools.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Sampling Subject

The subjects of this research are the service users which consist of students, parents, and members of the community, all of which are related to the 29 PAO primary schools and OBEC schools within the same provinces. The research team selected specifically 1 PAO school and 2 OBEC schools from each province. The 2 OBEC schools are comprised of 1 school with a similar number of students and another school with similar OUC to their counterpart PAO school, all of which amounts to the total of 87 primary schools. The researcher sets the sample size for each group, which contains 812 subjects each. The groups are drawn from the PAO schools (14 examples), from OBEC schools with similar number of students (7 examples), and from OBEC schools with similar OUC (7 examples), aggregating to a total sample size of 2,436 examples.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher collected the data from all 3 groups of service users using a list of questionnaires which had been drafted upon information based on literature reviews between the months of June to November 2015. Analysis was then conducted using an average mean and t-test, with significant statistic value of 0.5.

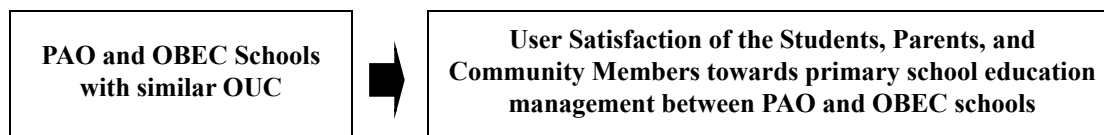
3.3 Conceptual Framework

As this study is purported to emphasize the analysis of the effectiveness and the efficiency, the conceptual framework of this research can be established into 2 types so as to be consonant with this study's methodology.

1) PAO schools and OBEC schools within the same province and containing similar numbers of students, which can represent the comparative satisfactory effectiveness.



2) PAO schools and OBEC schools within the same province and contain similar OUC, which can represent the comparative satisfactory efficiency.



4. Research Results

4.1 Difference Levels of User's Satisfaction towards Primary School Management between PAO Schools and OBEC Schools

From analysing the data using average mean, it is found that, overall, the service users are very satisfied with the PAO primary schools management ($\bar{x} = 4.34$). When reviewing each group specifically, it was discovered that the students ($\bar{x} = 4.38$), the parents ($\bar{x} = 4.36$), and the community members ($\bar{x} = 4.27$) were all similarly content with the management. Also, it should be noted that the PAO schools in the North Eastern region are regarded, as viewed from its service users, as containing the highest level of satisfaction ($\bar{x} = 4.58$), whilst their peers in the South ($\bar{x} = 4.26$) were placed at the lowest rank.

Table 1. Comparison of user's satisfaction towards primary school management between PAO schools and OBEC schools, as regionally assessed.

School	User	Region						Total
		North	Central	N/E	East	West	South	
Under PAO	Student	4.34	4.54	4.61	4.50	4.28	4.19	4.38
	Parent	4.32	4.28	4.68	4.49	4.43	4.28	4.36
	Community Member	4.24	4.17	4.43	4.39	4.21	4.31	4.27
	Total	4.29	4.33	4.58	4.46	4.30	4.26	4.34
Under OBEC with similar students number	Student	4.39	4.28	4.59	4.21	4.46	4.57	4.42
	Parent	4.50	4.65	4.71	4.53	4.50	4.26	4.49
	Community Member	4.24	4.22	4.21	4.19	4.34	4.51	4.31
	Total	4.37	4.38	4.51	4.31	4.44	4.45	4.41
Under OBEC with similar OUC	Student	4.22	4.49	4.73	4.40	4.38	4.39	4.40
	Parent	4.47	4.56	4.67	4.45	4.23	4.44	4.48
	Community Member	4.24	4.39	4.46	4.16	4.34	4.40	4.34
	Total	4.31	4.48	4.62	4.34	4.32	4.41	4.41

With respect to the OBEC schools across the same province with a similar number of students to the relevant PAO schools, it reveals that, in general, the users are very satisfied with the services ($\bar{x} = 4.41$); and when assessing each group, it is found that both the students ($\bar{x} = 4.42$), the parents ($\bar{x} = 4.49$), and the community members ($\bar{x} = 4.31$) are all equally satisfied. In the North East, the overall satisfaction evaluation from the users is placed at highest ($\bar{x} = 4.51$) whereas the East ($\bar{x} = 4.31$) was the region with the lowest ranking.

For the OBEC schools from the same province, with relatively similar OUC to the particular PAO schools, it shows that the level of satisfaction purported by the users was ranked as High as ($\bar{x} = 4.41$). Upon considering

each group, this reveals that the students ($\bar{x} = 4.40$), the parents ($\bar{x} = 4.48$), and the members of the community ($\bar{x} = 4.34$) were all highly satisfied with the services, similar to those of the PAO schools and those OBEC schools with similar students numbers. Noted that the North East was still viewed and ranked as the Highest ($\bar{x} = 4.62$) while the North, on the other hand, was placed as the Lowest ($\bar{x} = 4.31$).

4.2 A Comparison of Users' Satisfaction towards Primary School Management between PAO Schools and OBEC Schools, with Similar Students Numbers

From the analysis using the t-test method, it reveals that the users satisfaction towards primary school management by PAO and OBEC with similar amounts of students within the same province of the PAO school in question contained a considerable statistical value of .01. The service users were more content with the management of the OBEC ($\bar{x} = 4.41$) than those subjects under the PAO ($\bar{x} = 4.34$). Using group by group assessment, it showed that while the students and the community members are, in general, equally pleased with the management performed by the PAO and the OBEC, the parents, on the contrary, are more satisfied with the management done by the OBEC ($\bar{x} = 4.49$) comparing to those of the PAO ($\bar{x} = 4.36$), presenting a significant statistic value of .01.

Table 2. Comparison of user's satisfaction towards primary school management between PAO schools and OBEC schools, with similar student numbers

Service User	Org.	No.	Mean	SD	t	p-value
Student	PAO	406	4.38	.42	-1.25	.21
	OBEC	203	4.42	.39		
Parent	PAO	406	4.36	.46	-3.21	.01**
	OBEC	203	4.49	.46		
Community Member	PAO	406	4.27	.45	-1.00	.32
	OBEC	203	4.31	.45		
Total	PAO	1,218	4.34	.28	-3.02	.01**
	OBEC	609	4.41	.24		

4.3 A Comparison of User's Satisfaction towards Primary School Management between PAO Schools and OBEC Schools, with Similar Student Numbers

Similar to the schools under the supervision of PAO and OBEC with relatively equal OUC, the level of users satisfaction differed considerably with statistic value of .01. That is to say, the service users are more satisfied with the management by the OBEC ($\bar{x} = 4.41$) than those run by the PAO ($\bar{x} = 4.34$). Upon group assessment, it was found that the students and the members of the community held an equal level of satisfaction towards the management either by the PAO or the OBEC. However, the parents had a higher satisfaction level towards the OBEC schools management ($\bar{x} = 4.48$) to those of the PAO ($\bar{x} = 4.36$), with significant statistic value of .01.

Table 3. Comparison of user's satisfaction towards primary school management between PAO schools and OBEC schools, with relative OUC

Service User	Org.	No.	Mean	SD	t	p-value
Student	PAO	406	4.38	.42	-.71	.48
	OBEC	203	4.40	.41		

Parent	PAO	406	4.36	.46	-3.10	.01**
	OBEC	203	4.48	.42		
Community Member	PAO	406	4.27	.45	-1.77	.08
	OBEC	203	4.34	.43		
Total	PAO	1,218	4.34	.28	-2.99	.01**
	OBEC	609	4.41	.26		

5. Discussion

If we take 2005 as the starting point of primary schools management by the local administrative governments, the research titled 'Opinions of the school administrators under Pattani Educational Service Area 2 regarding the readiness in transferring of basic educational institutions to the local administrative organisations' by Nuyprim (2008: 40-41) indicates that, at the very least, the perceptions of certain executives see that the LAOs are ready to have the students transferred from OBEC, although the overall view is placed at low. This is in consistent with the results of 2007 National Test (NT) undertaken by students in 3rd grade, of which all PAO students' performances are under the overall national standards of all education institutions (Office of the Educational Council, 2010: 49).

Yet, the studies of the evaluation on PAO education management over the past decade all direct to positive potentials and possibilities. Uthumporn (2013: 25) points out that after the transfer from the OBEC, in general, the overall academic directions are deemed to have improved to a certain extent, ranging from a small improvement to a substantial improvement. Plus, more and more students have enrolled each year. Nevertheless, the effectiveness evaluation of those schools which are transferred to PAO of Chiang Mai province, reported by Vasuwattanaset and Kamnuansilpa (2012: 1264-1265) highlights that the evaluations of (i) academic management, (ii) budget management, (iii) human resource management, (iv) general management, and (v) the community including the parents, are all improved, with only one downfall presented with the students aspect which illustrates that, for certain schools, the effectiveness of the study still falls short of the standards. However, certain factors also signify and confirm that despite its downfall, such an incident still possesses higher standards compared with prior transfers.

This is consistent with the evaluation results of the people's satisfactions towards the PAO education management, presented by Chulalongkorn University, Faculty of Political Science, (2013: 17-4), by Kreuthep under the research project on the study of follow-up and results assessment of Thailand's powers decentralisation, which has been put forward to the ODLOC, Office of the Permanent Secretary, Prime Minister Office. The study demonstrates that the overall perception is placed between average to good, even with the case of PAO Nakhon Ratchasima province where 58 schools were transferred from the central government. Also, it was revealed that almost all the executives who have been transferred deem that 'PAO is not professional' when compared with the management conducted by the central management agency (Samranwong and Ratchakul, 2014: 156-157). Such disadvantages with regards to the organisation structure designed to facilitate this particular task accordingly affect the quality of education generated from the PAO schools (Samranwong and Ratchakul, 2014: 160).

This results of the satisfactory survey ultimately show us the implied development of PAO vis-a-vis its educational challenges, for the very least, in primary education, stating that within roughly a decade after the transfer had been carried out, the local administrative agencies, which were viewed as still not ready and had a lack of suitable structural framework, could turn out to be successful upon schools management and helped make users satisfied with their services just the same as those with specialised management backgrounds.

Ultimately, the educational management by PAO within the eastern region shows it provided higher user satisfaction as a whole than those under the care of OBEC, despite the considerations of the efficiency and effective, whilst the PAO responsible for the north eastern region could generate more satisfaction for users than the efficiency-related management of the OBEC. Upon individual consideration into groups of service users, it was discovered that PAO generated greater satisfaction for the parents than did its OBEC counterpart. This resembles the event where, taking effectiveness aspect into account, PAO in the central region could create

higher satisfaction for the students than the OBEC, both in terms of effective and efficiency aspects.

The results from the comparative examination of levels of satisfaction towards primary schools management also act as an assurance confirming that the transferring of powers from the central government to local administrative agencies which are ready to perform and carry out the tasks is a suitable direction that Thailand needs to follow through and with which to continue. With only a period of 10 years, looking from the provincial basis, the local administrative organisations reveal that they fall short of specialisation compared to those possessed by the OBEC. Also, there were certain aspects that have not been taken into account in this analysis, that is to say, the level of schools' quality before the transfers. The findings from such event, such as the collection of interviews, which point out that almost all of the schools across the authority of OBEC contain below-standard results when it comes to the efficiency results. Several schools are being shut down due to an insufficient number of attending students. Yet, despite what has been said earlier, OBEC can provide educational services to 2 out of 3 user groups, which contain similar levels of satisfaction to their counterparts. Still, with respect to the group of parents, upon assessing each region, it was found that PAO in the southern part of Thailand could produce higher satisfaction, including higher results vis-a-vis the efficiency aspect. The same can be said to be true with PAO in the North East, the East, and the West, all of which could produce more satisfaction basing on the efficiency results.

6. Recommendations

Apart from rechecks and reassessments that are aimed to highlight the dynamics of the responsive capability of the PAO and OBEC towards the service users expectations, a comparative survey to the analysis and finding the appropriate size of local administrative government that could best manage the primary as well as the secondary schools system is an intriguing quest that would prove to be highly beneficial towards the issue of public policy, particularly for the aspect of decentralisation of powers, which would essentially lead to sustainable policy development in the future.

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