EDUCATIONAL DECENTRALIZATION POLICY IN THAILAND: MACRO GOALS AND MICRO REALITIES

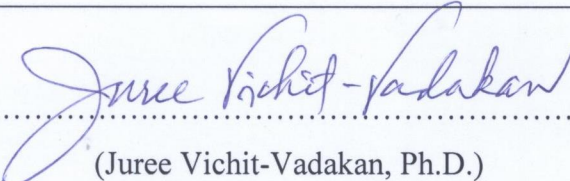**Sukree Nakyam**

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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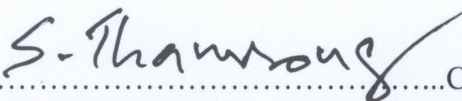
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EDUCATIONAL DECENTRALIZATION POLICY IN THAILAND:
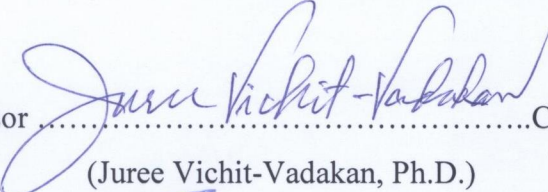## MACRO GOALS AND MICRO REALITIES

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ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation Educational Decentralization Policy in Thailand: Macro

           Goals and Micro Realities

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It has been nearly three decades since Thai basic education was affected by major changes adopted in the name of educational decentralization. A central aspect of implementing educational decentralization is shifting authority to schools. However, to date there is no literature that rigorously investigates the extent and degree of changes to reveal if decision making authority has shifted to schools. Moreover, the effects of the changes experienced by school settings have not been studied. In addressing these gaps, this study intends to: 1) To examine the extent of changes in light of the last educational decentralization implemented from 1999 onwards; 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; and 4) To reflect the primary schools' experiences drawn upon the changes adopted in the name of educational decentralization. Through document analysis, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations, various themes emerge. Document analysis revealed that the changes adopted revitalized and retained the traditional centralized administrative structure and the traditional centralized decision-making authority or authoritative relationship. 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 levels agencies to school settings. Decision-making authority remains with the higher level agencies. The semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and

field observations revealed that powerlessness is a setback for schools in pursuing educational goals. School decisions are highly subject to the higher level agencies. Most school efforts are devoted to implementing the mandates and decisions of the higher level agencies. Schools are, therefore, unable to fully pursue the goal of higher quality education. To shift authority to schools, a mechanism at school level to serve authority dispersion is needed. At the same time, the role of the Office of Primary Education Service Area has to be reconsidered. Additionally, the legal mandates and framework must be clear as to whom authority will be shifted and what areas of authority will be decentralized.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations	Equivalence
NEA	National Education Act
OBEC	Office of Basic Education Commission
ONEC	Office of National Education Commission
O-NET	Ordinary National Educational Test
ONESQA	Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment
ONPEC	Office of National Primary Education Commission
TEPC	Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Commission
TEPs	Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Sub-Commission

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The legitimacy of monopolized or centralized public service provision, which grew explosively along with the expansion of bureaucracy during the post-war period, has been questioned over recent decades on the basis that it has proven to be inefficient. These traditional styles of central government are now regarded as obstacles to development. Because of this, governments have been pressured to be more responsive and efficient. As observed by Tanzi (1995, p. 296), the 1980s and 1990s saw a swing toward more conservative attitudes, especially suspicion of powerful central governments. This call was louder within and intertwined with the arrival of the so-called "golden age of democracy" associated with the collapse of the former Soviet Union.

Over the last two decades, Thailand has introduced educational decentralization as one of several forms of public sector reform. A core principle supporting educational decentralization is that if local agencies are granted more autonomy, they will be innovative in public service provision. However, a big challenge is that implementing educational decentralization confronts a traditionally centralized structure bound by inexorable components such as centralized authorities, identities, cultures, beliefs and values. When a centralized administrative structure is introduced to new regimes or ideas for change, resistance is highly likely to arise (Khannal, 2010, p. 154). Similarly, once changes are adopted, hidden resistance can push them to go in unexpected ways which may include a return to the traditional structure.

The first chapter of this study serves as an introduction to the dissertation. After outlining the general background of the problem, the research objectives and

research questions are presented. These are followed by expositions of the scope and significance, limitations and delimitations, term definitions, and organization of the study.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The push for educational decentralization in Thailand began in the last two decades of the twentieth century. A big wave of change was launched from the mid-1990sas 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 (Section 282).

Thailand has a tradition of using education to respond to critical pressures. As mentioned, over the last two-decades the country has adopted educational decentralization 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. Implementing educational decentralization, therefore, focuses on moving the system from a highly centralized regime to a more decentralized one. Central to adopting educational decentralization is a power shift to increase school autonomy to allow schools to exercise self-management or self-determination. 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.

As part of the government's efforts to find ways out of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, education was considered from two perspectives. On one side, as one of the causal factors leading the country to crisis, education by its previous outputs had provided insufficient support for the country's human resources. On the other side, as a tool, it was seen as a major force that could be used to help the country survive the crisis and progress quickly. Based on these considerations and the mandate of the 1997 Constitution, the country's first national education law, the National Education Act (NEA) B.E. 2542 (1999), was promulgated. This is a

"master" education law in that it provides mandates and legal frameworks for several changes that require the passing of further laws. One instance is that the Act required all educational agencies, namely the Ministry of Education, Ministry of University Affairs, and the Office of the National Education Commission to be merged into the Ministry of Education, Religion and Culture. Consequently, a major wave of educational changes took place. The key mandates for change are exhibited in table 1 below.

Table 1.1 Required Changes Mandated by the National Education Act 1999

Areas of Change	Mechanisms Introduced
1) Curriculum Reform	1) A core curriculum for Basic Education has been developed.
2) Quality Assurance	
3) Profession Development	2) Establish an Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment.
4) Learning Process Reform	
5) Education Assessment and Evaluation Reform	3) Teachers and educational personnel must keep up with current developments and future trends through the system of development developed by the Ministry of Education.
6) Administration Reform	
	4) Provide instruction by using ICT, has learners centered, promoting thinking skills, promoting authentic experience-based learning, for example.
	5) Set national education standards.
	6) Merge the Ministry of Education, the Office of the National Education Commission, and the Ministry of University Affairs into a single ministry.
	7) Set up educational service areas.

The public had great expectations of the NEA as it moved to address numerous education problem agendas. The NEA's major goal is improving the quality of education. According to ONEC (2002, p. 1), the emergence of the NEA is intended to redeem the country from the downward spiral so that it will arise in the immediate future as a nation of wealth, stability and dignity, capable of competing with others in this age of globalization. Similarly, Pillay (2002, p. 5) states that the intention of the NEA is to improve the quality of education and to align it with processes that produce citizens who can contribute to and engage in a market-driven, global economy. The NEA also aims to change the locus of responsibility for individual professional development from the previous system provided by the government to ones that are responsive to market needs and generated and provided by individuals themselves.

To attain the top goal of providing high quality education, the NEA encompasses a wide range of changes developed into policy issues. This has resulted in the enactment of a range of education laws and regulations that each has its own intermediate goal as a mechanism for change. Each of these laws predetermines outcomes. Thus, it is important to observe whether the interventions they provide are consistent with educational decentralization. It is also important to explore the results or effects of the changes introduced in the name of educational decentralization.

Six major education laws were enacted pursuant to the NEA. These laws and their goals/mechanisms are as shown in table 2 below. These laws make progressive changes in a wide range of areas including the teaching profession, education standards, and the quality of education. However, a central claim of each is that it is part of educational decentralization. As concluded by Hallinger and Lee (2011, p. 140), the substantive thrusts of the NEA are to decentralize authority, engage local initiative in the management and delivery of educational services, support the integration of 'local wisdom' into the curriculum, empower teachers, create a more active learning environment for pupils, and refocus the system from quantity of graduates to quality of learning.

Table 1.2 Education Laws Subsequent to the NEA and Their Goals or Mechanisms

Laws / Legislations	Enacted to Goals / Mechanisms								
	Improve Student Learning	Control Personnel Management	Develop Profession	Make School More Accountable	Reorganize the Structure	Create New Body	Control Teaching	Promote Participaion	Create National Education Standards/Tests
1) Determining Plans and Process of Decentralization to Local Government Organization Act B.E. 2542 (1999)	X								
2) Royal Decree on the Establishment of the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (Public Organization) B.E. 2543 (2000)	X			X XXX					X
3) Administrative Organization of the Ministry of Education Act B.E. 2546 (2003)					X				

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Table 1.2 (Continued)

Laws / Legislations	Enacted to Goals / Mechanisms								
	Improve Student Learning	Control Personnel Management	Develop Profession	Make School More Accountable	Reorganize the Structure	Create New Body	Control Teaching	Promote Participaion	Create National Education Standards/Tests
4) Teachers and Educational Personnel Council Act B.E. 2546 (2003)			X				X		
5) Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Act B.E. 2547 (2004)	X					X			
6) Royal Decree on the Establishment of National Institute of Educational Testing Service (Public Organization) B.E. 2548 (2005)	XXXXX								

Each of the above laws provides an intervention in which a mechanism (such as creating a new institution or restructuring administrative procedures) is created to solve a specific education problem. These interconnect with other enactments, potentially leading to complications at school level or in the daily life of teachers and other educational staff.

Educational decentralization involves introducing changes to traditionally centralized authorities to solve problems in the education system. As mentioned, a key change to solve the problem of education failure is through an unprecedented transfer of authority from the central bureaucracy to site-based management. More specifically, the power shift resulting from educational decentralization is claimed to be an antidote for the inaccessibility, irresponsibility, and unresponsiveness of the education system. This is because, when decision-making authority is decentralized to schools, schools have the flexibility to make constituent-based decisions and change the conditions within the school to obtain the desired results through self-independence and self-determination (Gawlik, 2008, p. 786; Adamowski, Therriault, & Cavanna, 2007; Wohlstetter, Wenning, & Briggs,1995). More specifically, schools can develop or adapt choices to cope with the factors such as teacher recruitment and transfer, resource management, curriculum design and educational measurements that affect school performance and quality of education.

Before introducing any changes related to educational decentralization, the government must engage as to how the centralized administrative structure is to be restructured and authority reallocated. Only then, should the process of decentralization or authority transfer be implemented. This is to ensure that the products or outputs of the changes are not mechanisms that are created to absorb decision-making authority from schools, or compete with schools for powers, or retain a traditionally centralized system of administration. More importantly, it must be perceived that there are mechanisms created to directly link the shift or transfer of authority to schools. This condition is important to ensure that schools are the only local agents that deliver education provision to learners. Methods of delivery must be subject to schools, since it is only schools, and not the outsiders, that know or have a good understanding about the school contexts. These premises or concerns reflect the fact that the planned or desired changes are not just matters of administrative

structure; they are also matters of the transfer of authority, which should be considered as the core concept of educational decentralization.

It has been two decades since the Thai Basic Education system was restructured in name of educational decentralization. It is reasonable to expect that over this period, Basic Education would have seen marked improvements in terms of efficiency, effectiveness quality. However, many members of the public are critical of the results and raise doubts about whether improvements have been achieved.

In general, these doubts and criticisms have developed around two issues. The first area of concern is that there has been no major improvement in student achievement over this period. Students at the Basic Education level have continuously shown poor performances in various standardized tests. A comparative study of some of the most advanced national systems of school education by the Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC) reveals that the Thai education system is inferior to most others, including those of neigh boring countries (Gamage & Sooksomchitra, 2004, p. 294). According to Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results measured from 2000 to 2009 for East Asian countries, Thailand achieved a consistent score of around 400 while Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan were clustered above 500. Additionally, poor performance has been shown in national O-NET tests. The second and related area of concern is that these poor performances of students and schools call into doubt whether true educational decentralization has been achieved. This reflects a concern in the congruence between the changes adopted and the premises of educational decentralization. According to Winkler (1993, p. 66), if educational decentralization occurs, the quality of education as a goal of educational decentralization is improved. A reason is that, with the administrative structure designed with a view of empowering schools, a bottom-up-based management is created. As the increase of school authority, schools can share their authority with students, parents, teachers, local communities and related stakeholders to create participation in pursuing higher quality of education.

These problematic issues indicate a need for collecting data to examine and evaluate various dimensions of the changes such as the design or features of the

administrative structure, the agents involved, the authority exercised over the administrative structure, and their effects and results. A focus of the examination is to identify if the changes adopted in the name of educational decentralization fit the premises of educational decentralization and meet the needs of schools. In other words, the examination shall identify whether changes adopted either retain or overcome the pre-existing components that supported centralized decision-making authority.

Traditionally, according to Nelson (2002, p. 221), the authorities over the areas of budget, personnel management, and resources were in hands of provincial and district levels, not local agencies. Nelson (2002, p. 225) goes on to argue that, in Thailand, the concepts of the difference between a (horizontal) "separation of powers" and a (vertical) "division of labor", including the place of local "autonomy" in this context, and the difference between a "ministerial administration" and an "implementing administration" are not completely clear. To follow decentralization premises, power or autonomy over these areas must be transferred from the regional administration (i.e. the provincial and the district administrations) to the local governments.

Literature that provides deep explanations in which the congruence between changes in light of educational decentralization and the transfer of authorities or authority alignment are examined is not yet fully settled. Many prior studies tend to examine the policy with a discrete view in which only a macro or a micro level is addressed. At the macro level, the studies mainly focus on cultural and political domains considered to be the most powerful determinants providing deadlock or decoupling between adopted change and policy goal. In other words, these studies emphasize the socially constructed nature of institutions rather than technical considerations and real interactive practices responding to changes adopted. These views, therefore, leave the central practice in which authority alignment is central to implementing educational decentralization unexamined. In addition to being likely to yield abstract and more general results, this focus cannot provide a link between the macro explanation and the micro explanation since the intervening mechanism as a lens or framework providing this link is not focused or examined. This is similar to a situation described by Gomez. To date, according to Gomez (2006, p. 51), scholars have not paid enough attention to the issue of sequencing in decentralization policy.

Most researchers have concentrated on the political process and economic and institutional consequences of decentralization without addressing how the sequencing of decentralization, that are, the product, the timing (when), and process (how), influence these developments in the first place. As a result, regarding the entirely existing realities, only the basic inputs or components in term of policy process, such as political and economic regime, are analyzed and presented. At the micro level, site-based practice, behavior and experience have been explored or studied outside the macro framework or event. By ignoring examining the macro interventions, the micro study is like the blind men in the proverb figuring out the nature of an elephant by touching only one part. Since explanations are only developed around cutting across the outputs or effects of the policy, the micro explanations can be evident for and illuminate only one point of a given sophisticated social phenomenon. In other words, conducting micro level study without considering the predetermined interventions or mechanisms designed by the government cannot marshal evidence to develop expansive arguments or themes drawn around the relationship between the government's initial inputs and the local agents' experiences.

In relation to the reviewed evidence suggesting that the changes adopted in the name of educational decentralization have failed to generate the expected results, particularly in terms of improving educational performance and management, this study takes its initiative from proposing that examining the related changes is necessary to get better understanding about these problems. This insight provides a lens for considering the extent of changes in which the design of feature of administrative structure and the shift or realignment of decision-making authority shall be unwrapped mainly through the term of 'how.' Information derived implies that whether decision-making authority as the central object or component of educational decentralization is shifted downward. This also suggests that whether such changes conform to the principles of educational decentralization. In addition to this, since the success and/or failure of the changes can be captured from local settings, it is necessary to uncover the local agents' experiences.

In recognizing the importance of the link between macro-level and micro-level studies or analyses, this study identifies that prior studies left a challenging flaw or weakness in which there are no research findings that are drawn from such link. Thus,

this study takes a more comprehensive perspective in which both macro-level and micro-level analyses are employed to fill this gap in an exclusive analysis. These levels of analysis can provide a broader understanding in which macro-level analysis marks the extent and feature of changes claimed in name of educational decentralization, and micro-level analysis reveals the responses and effects occurring in the local settings. The macro analysis identifies the extent of changes, and in particular the resultant administrative structure and (areas of) decision-making authority, in order to provide an understanding of how these shape implementation or interventions, and responses or experiences of the local agents. The micro-level analysis is based on the view that understanding or interpreting the behaviors and experiences of the local agents within the influence of the predetermined interventions can sharpen the researcher's perspective and then create various critical themes.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The initial focus of the study is to examine certain changes introduced to Basic Education in light of educational decentralization. Then, the focus will move to the implications of the changes in term of conformity to decentralization. Finally, the results of changes and authority alignment are focused on. To serve these foci, educational laws enacted or passed in light of educational decentralization are examined. This is to reveal the mechanisms created to intervene in Basic Education. At the same time, the day-to-day practices of the agents in settings are explored to derive experience-based themes drawn from the interventions provided by the educational laws and the pursuit of educational decentralization goals. In summary, the specific objectives of this study are as follows:

1) To examine the extent of changes in light of the last educational decentralization implemented from 1999 onwards;

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; and

4) To reflect the primary schools' experiences drawn upon the changes adopted in the name of educational decentralization.

1.4 Research Questions

1) Predicated on an analysis of educational laws enacted in line with educational decentralization: what changes have emerged?

2) Are there significant changes due to educational decentralization, particularly in teacher professional management, resource allocation and curriculum? If yes, in which areas and to whom are the authorities shifted? If not, why not?

3) What are the emerging issues and lessons learned from the investigation of the effects of changes experienced and responded by the schools?

1.5 Significance of the Study

By employing both macro-level and micro-level analyses in examining changes, the findings of this study will unwrap the extent of changes to which the administrative structure is redesigned and the centralized decision-making authority is reallocated or realigned. This reveals what components of changes as part of the government's predetermined interventions conform or do not conform to the principles of educational decentralization, how, and why. Additionally, the derived information about the local agents' experiences will uncover the perceptions toward the changes, particularly in terms of their effects. Thus, the findings represent a chain of certain passages of "If P) (Policy), then I (Interventions); If I, then O (Outputs); If O, then E (Effects)." Finally, and more importantly, the findings can provide worthy lessons that will assist in tailoring the future changes to make decision-making authority really shift downward.

1.6 Limitations and Delimitations

Basically, the limitations of this study are inherent in the nature of qualitative research particularly the sources of data, the methods of data collection and analysis, and the researcher's bias or value playing a major role in data analysis and interpretation.

Regarding the macro level, these inherent limitations are compounded by the fact that data analysis is mainly based on the related laws and the changes adopted, which may involve certain unclear government intents or goals. To overcome or reduce the limitations, the central objects or components that mainly deal with educational decentralization are highlighted. This is to guide the way of interpretation. Additionally, some background of the Thai socio-political regime is provided to enhance understanding. With these, the findings of macro-level study, in which solid evidence such as the features of administrative structure and the areas of decision-making authority is represented, become more conclusive.

For the micro level, its findings are related to the experiences of the agents in the local settings, drawn around or affected by the changes as the interventions took place in Basic Education. Here, it is important to note that the findings are based on co-working of the presence of both the informants and the researcher. This opens an opportunity for the personhood and values of the informants and the researcher to put at risk the validity and reliability of findings. Therefore, the major limitation of the micro level is subjectivity. To delimit this limitation, the study follows the basis of truthfulness, thoroughness and candidness to increase validity and reliability. Concerning these, value is seen as a positive asset in which value-relevance requires the study to try to dig deeply into the research topic to provide the richness of understanding of what actually exists. In other words, a wider and deeper level of perspectives is sought to increase value-freedom. Apart from this limitation, a number of informants might induce the limitations of sufficiency and generalization such that the range of the application of findings to other contexts might be questioned. To delimit these limitations and maximize validity, the micro level study utilizes triangulation in various forms such as data collection methods and different statuses of participants. Additionally, it provides extensive detail and description of the developed themes or issues.

During the initial stage of this study, a division of the Office of Primary Education Service Area called the Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Sub-commission (TEPS), known in Thai as Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor-Khet, was a key actor playing a major role over the management of the teaching profession. This was a sub-commission of a central commission called the Teacher Civil Service and Educational

Personnel Commission (TEPC), which was dissolved by the National Council for Peace and Order during the course of the study. As this dissolution was made after there had been certain advances of this study, certain pages of this study devoted for the information about the sub-commission's role and authority are still included. Importantly, the sub-commission provides a highly valuable example in examining the authority alignment issue.

1.7 Term Definitions

The terms that are significant to this are defined below.

Authority: The right: to exercise powers; to implement and enforce laws; to exact obedience; to command; to judge (Nolan & Nolan-Haley, 1990).

Conformity: The degree of congruence or fit between the changes of administrative structure or chain of command and authority allocation adopted in the name of educational decentralization, and the increase of school authority.

Basic Education: Education provision relating to a 1-12 grade student. This covers three educational levels comprising Primary Education Level (Grades 1-6), Lower Secondary Education Level (Grades 7-9), and Upper Secondary Education Level (Grades 10-12). Among these, Primary Education Level can be found throughout the country.

Change: Alterations to the administrative structure and decision-making authority over various areas such as resource allocation and management and as experienced by the agents in settings such as curriculum, instructional strategies, and education measurements and assessments, brought about by education law enactments, or the mandates of the Office of Primary Education Service Area.

Decentralization: Shifting powers and responsibilities from top entities to bottom entities. Overloaded responsibilities of central entities encourage them to expand their structures. This tends to create rigid hierarchical structures leading to administrative problems and inefficiency. To reduce the overloaded responsibilities, authorities and responsibilities are dispersed through which local entities are given more authority to make their own decisions. Some examples of richer definitions of decentralization follow. Focusing on diffusion of decision-making power, Mitchell

(2006, p. 176) Rodriguez (1997) see decentralization as a shift in power or autonomy for decision-making over specific policy areas, and the resources to implement those powers, from central to local authorities. Similarly, Ruppert (1996, p. 21) states that a key feature of decentralization is the shifting of authority downward to the local level. Addressing the relationship between central agencies and lower agencies, Handy (1989, p. 118) observes that decentralization implies that the center delegates certain tasks or duties to the outlying bits while remaining in overall control. Weiler (1990, p. 434) adds that decentralization thus has to do with vesting power in smaller entities, more territorially restricted in their responsibilities.

1.8 Organization of the Study

This study has been organized into six chapters. This introductory chapter presents the nature of problem, the research objectives and questions, the scope and significance of the study, and the limitations and delimitations, term definition, and organization of the study.

Chapter 2 is dedicated to a review of related literature. It presents certain ideas as the essences of decentralization and examines issues or conditions of concern in implementing educational decentralization policy.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology employed in this study, focusing on qualitative methods and the design of this study.

Chapter 4 concentrates on examining the changes claimed in the name of educational decentralization or introduced at the time that educational decentralization policy was declared. The chapter addresses the extent to which the administrative structure was restructured or redesigned, and the authorities over certain areas were reallocated. This examination is made through the related educational laws and the changes adopted. Findings can indicate whether the legal frameworks and changes adopted can be justified by educational decentralization.

Chapter 5 deals with exploring the real world of educational decentralization policy, which is expected to be substantially positive for educational administration and performance. By addressing the experiences of the agents in local settings, themes or issues will emerge. Then, based on lessons learned from the responses of the on-site practitioners, conclusions and recommendations are made.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, literature that served as a basis for conducting this study is reviewed. It mainly focuses on the term (educational) decentralization. In most parts of the world, despite a long history of adopting educational decentralization policy to achieve education goals, its outcomes remain unsatisfactory. The objective of the literature review is, therefore, to emphasize the central parts of decentralization; specifically its definitions, rationales/premises, autonomy and the conditions that are necessary for educational decentralization policy to be operated so as to facilitate goal achievement.

2.1 The Term "Decentralization"

2.1.1 Meaning and Types

Decentralization is a popular reform theme of governments around the world varying in goals, strategies, and outcomes that are as different as the countries themselves (Hanson, 2006, p. 9). It is generally recognized that decentralization contributes towards democracy and administrative efficiency, and is also conducive to good governance. Not only is decentralization advocated because of the appealingly democratic implication that a government or bureaucracy closer to the people is intrinsically good, but also it is assumed by many to be instrumentally helpful in many ways (Widmalm, 2008, p. 15). Without doubt, it is a central part of many political agendas.

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, as 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 responsibly 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), when local governments are given, through legislative enactment, the authority to decide what is done in their territory (Rondinelli, McCollough, & Johnson, 1989).

Manor (1999) explains that deconcentration and devolution have different logics. According to Manor (1999, pp. 6-7, as cited in Widmalm, 2008, p. 40) Deconcentration tends to extend the scope or reach of central government and to strengthen its authority by moving executive agencies controlled by the centre down to lower levels in the political system. In other words, with deconcentration, the central government is not giving up any authority; it is simply relocating its officers at different levels or points in the national territory. Devolution has the opposite effect, since it cedes control of such agencies and resources to political actors and institutions at the lower level.

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.

2.1.2 Why Decentralization is Engaged: From Centralization to Decentralization

Over the centuries, the paradigm of state and public sector has seen many changes. The world has seen the rise of the emergence, apotheosis, and then the decline of statism and bureaucratic centralism (Argyriades, 2010, p. 276). The changes have been influenced by different ideologies in relation to the powers and functions of state. Fundamentally, ideologies are contingent on contexts. An ideology that is more relevant to the current context will emerge, only to be replaced by a better suited one if the context changes. For example, The Renaissance, Enlightenment, and The Victoria Era were prominent ideologies that led to great changes in Western societies.

Centralization was prominent in ancient states. It prevailed in diverse ideologies of ruling disciplines. Ina classical one like feudal aristocracy, centralization is characterized as the manner in which social relationship is designed and maintained by the upper class. The concepts of freedom and rights of people are defended by the ruling class. The most striking feature is the exploitative relationship between the upper class and the lower class.

In the ideology of legal centralism, centralization can be inferred from its assumptions. According to legal centralism, only the state can produce the rules for governing. Other entities can only do what is allowed by the state. Historically, according to Husa (2011, p. 252), there are three great political revolutions that were based on this ideology: England in 1688, The United States in 1776, and France in 1789. Legal centralism relies on three underlying assumptions (Husa, 2011, p. 252) 1) law must be attached exclusively to the State, 2) a single legal system can correspond only to a single geographical area, and 3) law is always the product of such official institutions as legislatures. Similarly, Addis (2004) adds an explanation of centralization by using the term statism. According to the statism doctrine, power is

monopolized by state. State sovereignty is understood to imply that the territorial unit or the state is an indivisible locus of political power. This means that the unit has power to legislate as the final authority on all matters that arise within its territorial borders. Statism assumes the validity and desirability of the conventional notion of sovereignty, where governmental bodies or officers have an unsupervised and irrevocable authority over people and resources in the particular territorial unit (Addis, 2004, p. 48).

Often, geographic conditions are responsible for the development of ideologies which lead to centralization. States with geographic locations which are sensitive to threats may consider it legitimate to centralize. Centralization is thought to be a common response to external threats to the state, as during the time of Thailand's King Rama V. Threats to the state, according to Gibler (2010, p. 519), create strong incentives for opposition forces to support the leader in power.

In discussing the conditions supportive for centralization, scholars focus on the key issues of power, safety and institutional change. According to theoretical arguments, external threats create the political conditions necessary for domestic institutional change, and prolonged salient threats help institutionalize weaker political checks against leaders, ending with the consolidation of centralized political authority in the executive (Gibler, 2010, p. 520). Threats also reinforce the strategic goals of leaders seeking more power to deal with the people, institutions, mechanisms, and protection. The public are more likely to allow leaders greater political authority when the state is directly challenged by threats. Perceived external threats to the state encourage individuals to seek safety and value conformity.

There are many examples in the literature that seek to explain why centralization becomes salient in different situations. One of those is Barzel's analysis regarding the possible evolution of despotic rule. This analysis addresses the trade-off faced by the despot between increased wealth and ruler's personal safety. As the ruler confiscates the wealth of his subjects and restricts their rights to movement and ability to create institutions that would encourage change, the ruler increases his personal safety (Barzel's, 2000, 2002, as cited in Salehi-Esfahani, 2008, p. 633). This means that allowing subjects the freedom to amass some wealth and with it some power threatens the safety of the despot.

Simultaneous with centralization, government grows in size with the expansion of bureaucratic mechanisms. "Bureaucratization …extended far beyond the public service domain reaching and touching most fields of social organization" (Argyriades, 2010, p. 277). Since the growth of bureaucratic mechanisms affects the nature of public service, human life, and the distribution of power in society, many sources in the literature seek to offer an explanation of this phenomenon. On a simplistic level, this growth is for dealing with the increased functions or responsibilities of the state. However, more specific explanation can be found in the literature. From an administrative perspective, the growth of bureaucratic mechanisms results from structural changes due to the transforming of societies through modernization and industrialization. This was particularly seen in the nineteenth century. These changes improved many people's way of life but importantly, not all people benefited from the changes. This is a critical issue that made it necessary for governments to try to restore conditions. To address the problem, governments require a large number of resources and new mechanisms. From an economic perspective, this phenomenon has been explained using two broad approaches. Classically, government is judged by its ability to provide public goods and services which meet the needs of the majority of voter. This approach, related to conventional neoclassical economic theory, claims that the growth of government is a natural consequence of changing social and market conditions (Borcherding & Lee, 2004, p. 597). The second approach (the institutional approach), posits that the growth of government mechanisms mainly results from rent-seeking activities among voter-taxpayers, interest groups, and government bureaucrats (Borcherding & Lee, 2004, p. 597).

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, the growth of the size of government began to be recognized as a critical problematic issue. Its negative effects were manifested in several ways. Emphasizing a formal and hierarchical structure mobilized power into the hands of central agents who were seen to be out of touch with the modern world. Along with this, with the increasing size of government, the share of GDP for public expenditure increased dramatically. A remarkable example is the case of OECD countries. In 1937, government expenditure was approximately 23% of GDP. This increased continuously, growing to 28% of GDP in 1960 and reaching a peak of 43% of GDP in 1980 (Borcherding & Lee, 2004, p. 597).

In the present age where certain contemporary ideologies, such as participation, pluralism and human rights emerge as global trends, centralized bureaucratic government is seen as a hindering influence. These ideologies have challenged and sapped the force of centralization and states that for a long time served as powerful props of bureaucratic centralism. Centralization is considered to be ineffective in response to citizens' needs, and repressive in terms of innovation. For these reasons, government mechanisms or institutions that were traditionally part of a formal and hierarchical structure are being re-examined.

Nevertheless, centralization has been seen to refresh itself over time and even grow. According to some arguments, centralization may constitute a condition of effectiveness of the control of social relationships. This might be in favour of the balance of power between autonomy, ones who have power over others, and dependence, ones who are powerless (Roscoe, Boehm, Claessen, Ember, Feinman, Johnson, & Price, 1993, p. 115). The time after French Revolution is as an example of this. Although declared in line with the liberal doctrines of the Enlightenment and Romantic Nationalism, the state nourished by these ideologies remained rather centralized, with power being mobilized into the hands of new powers such as bureaucrats and the middle class elite. As noted by Argyriades (2010, p. 276), centralized state pursuing oligarchy became apparent during the interwar years. A forceful and extreme expression of this is the well-known Fascist: All for the State, nothing against the State, nothing outside the State (Schneider, 1969; Cobban, 1969, as cited in Argyriades, 2010, p. 276).

Since both centralization and decentralization deal with power, Slater (1993, p. 175) contends that the most important and significant fact about centralization and decentralization is that they are about power and its distribution. Significantly, they are in a state of contested power distribution. When power is not in a state of balance, conflict will emerge. This conflict will be smoothed when power is reallocated. As pointed out by Weiler (1990, p. 440), decentralization, such as in a field of education, is embraced by governments in times of great educational change as a means to manage conflict, thereby allowing the "state to diffuse the sources of conflict, and to provide the additional layers of insulation between them and the rest of the system."

As such, decentralization comes with a prominent rationale to which certain decisions should be decentralized when those decisions relate particularly to local needs and which, if done centrally, would prevent or limit desirable initiative and handicap the development of effective local leadership and responsibility (Hanson, 1991, p. 32).

Over the last three decades, a growing number of governments in developing and developed countries have implemented strategies of decentralization. During this time, governments often used economic considerations as the rationale for change. Decentralization was conceived of as a means to reduce public sector expenditures, the size of governments, and the intervention of government in society (Werlin, 1992; Prud'homme, 1994; Sewell, 1996). Additionally, international institutions, as key actors in disseminating the principles of decentralization to most parts of the world, raised the point that decentralization is a key to successful implementation of structural adjustment programs designed to control fiscal deficits and begin a process of improving impoverished economies. Although many countries around the world have carried out decentralization policies as part of a process of transforming the state, the design and structural components adopted and the time involved have varied. Delegating functions to lower agencies and granting local government autonomy for decision-making by central governments have been gradual in some cases and expeditious in others (Campbell, 1993, as cited in Llanes, 1999, p. 36).

2.2 Central Concerns about Educational Decentralization

It is generally agreed that local agencies are the focal points for successful implementation of any reform policies on education. Accordingly, there has been a continued drive among stakeholders in education for greater local level participation in educational decision-making. Parents, students, principals, teachers, business leaders, and members of the local community are expressing higher levels of interest in obtaining a greater role in educational decision-making and governance (House, 1995, as cited in Kelly, 1997, p. 47). On a global scale, the trend towards self-management and decentralized decision-making at the individual school site is at the forefront of educational decentralization (Beare, 1993; Caldwell, 1989).

The literature suggests that the expected effects or outcomes of educational decentralization depend on a wide range of conditions. This section is organized around three ideas that the researcher argues are central aspects of educational decentralization. These ideas (relating to autonomy, goals and concerns in educational decentralization achievement) contribute to a better understanding of the topic.

2.2.1 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,

The term autonomy first appeared in the middle of the fifth century B.C. and was defined as the independence and self-determinant of a community in its external and internal relation (Lakoff, 1990). Among vantage points, it is also defined according to who is empowered: at a collective level (Boyne, 1993), or at an individual level (Wimpelberg & Boyd, 1990; Boyne, 1993). At the individual level, various stakeholders may achieve self-direction, such as when parents act individually to select a school for their children under a district-wide choice plan. Likewise, autonomy can exist at a collective level within a variety of social subunits, such as academic departments or an entire school faculty.

It is important to note that autonomy is multidimensional. Why and how it is perceived to increase or reduce in certain agencies is mainly influenced by the

concerns of the central government and the areas of subject. Some central agencies or governments take over local agencies' autonomy. On the other hand, some increase local agencies' autonomy by enacting policies that grant new powers or remove existing responsibilities from the local agencies (Boyne, 1993). School-based management (SBM) is one example of a policy from a higher level of government that increases school autonomy by granting new powers to schools (Wohlstetter, Wenning, & Briggs, 1995, p. 339).

Generally, certain key areas of power are under the jurisdiction of higher levels of government. However, the local agencies need to retain autonomy to regulate some of their own affairs without interference by the central agencies. As mentioned by Caldwell and Spinks (1992, p. 4), and Lakoff (1990) in discussing autonomy, although decisions at local agencies are being made within a framework of national policies, what needed to emerge from this relationship is a power-sharing arrangement fashioned by a higher level of government that defines the boundaries of authority for the local organization. Similarly, Sohn (1981, p. 5) argues that granting autonomy to an area allows the people inhabiting it to exercise direct control over important affairs of special concern to them, while allowing the larger entity, which retains certain powers over that area, to exercise those powers which are in the common interest of both entities.

For schools, a key question is why autonomy is important. According to the literature, the answers can be looked at from three perspectives: 1) the relationship between central government and schools as site-level practitioners; 2) the level of conflict between the preference of lower agencies for autonomy and any external interference; and 3) the idea of consumer sovereignty in education and accountability.

In relation to the first perspective, Wohlstetter, Wenning, and Briggs (1995, p.340) argue that a variety of national, state, or local actors are currently functioning to provide frameworks for schools that, in effect, restrain freedom by delineating what students should know and be able to do. In other words, the central government sets policy that can reduce local autonomy by removing powers of action or by imposing obligations on schools to act (Boyne, 1993). An example of this is where the central government uses professional associations to set content area standards for teachers to use in developing curriculum and instructional materials. Similarly, there is a growing

trend at the provincial or district level to develop curriculum frameworks that lay out the scope and sequence of what should be taught. Under the shadow of this type of relationship, schools bear extra pressure. They are expected to achieve their goals because they are seen to have more powers for autonomous decision making, but are subject to a variety of constraints. It is necessary to grant schools autonomy to allow them to self-manage. As autonomy increases, schools are able to reduce or remove constraints that limit their potential to achieve goals. High performance is expected to occur by "shifting more control and autonomy to the school level" (Bulkley, 1998, p. 27).

The second perspective emerges from taking a look at the level of conflict between the preference of lower agencies for autonomy and any external interference. In the view of internal preference, autonomy is defined as the freedom to exercise the choice of preference in local policy making and the capacity thereby to influence the admired state of lower agencies (Boyne, 1993, p. 88). Chubb and Moe (1988) argue that schools are legally autonomous when they are free to govern themselves as they want and to specify their own goals and programs for achieving those goals. Similarly to those of previous arguments made by Nordlinger (1981), according to this, the autonomous entity can act on preferences that are internally generated. For the external interference, Bernhardt (1981, pp. 25-26) states that autonomy includes the competence or power to handle one's own affairs without outside interference. Within the boundaries established by higher levels of government, autonomous agencies have autonomy to create their methods to achieve their goals. Without outside interference, lower agencies reach maximum motivation to attain their expected goals.

Local autonomy is total when the actions of the organization perfectly correspond with its preferences (Nordlinger, 1981). The autonomous state is characterized as subjectively independent when its preferences are largely derived from its internal characteristics and distinctive features (Nordlinger, 1981). When autonomy is not total, power may be partitioned according to particular features, attributes, and/or preferences (Lakoff, 1990). The result is self-determination over certain domains by individuals or the community over its internal operations. For example, autonomous schools are defined as those where principals have influence over personnel, curriculum, instructional methods, and disciplinary policies (Brandt, 1991; Chubb & Moe, 1988). Moreover, teachers in those schools have control over

what and how they teach, and how they maintain discipline in the classroom (Chubb & Moe, 1988). In other words, autonomy is an extension of autonomy to individuals or an entity over areas that are naturally within their jurisdiction.

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 indecision 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, 1994; Dixon, 1992; Elmore, 1993).

The third dimension of autonomy is focused more on individual behavior. Central to this is related to the idea of consumer sovereignty in education and accountability. According to West (1992, p. 419), parents are autonomous in being able to freely choose a better school and reject an inferior one. Consumer sovereignty and accountability are inextricably linked. Autonomous organizations are inevitably constrained by the need to be accountable to customers. Wilson (1989, p. 188), in his

work on bureaucracy, states that no agency head can ever achieve complete autonomy for his or her organization; politics requires accountability. In terms of performance, schools are held accountable from below, parents and students who directly experience the services of the school and are free to choose (Chubb & Moe, 1990). The effect of this accountability is to establish autonomy at several levels and among various entities, that is, the school, the parents, and the students.

For a long time, a traditional top-down administrative structure exercised power over key areas of education. More recently, local communities began to understand that decisions made at a top level cannot help them with their problems and meet their needs in terms of their cultures, preferences, and values. This has led to a bottom-up or decentralization movement that gradually gained strength alongside the areas of curriculum, resource decision, and personnel management. The decentralization movement believes that schools will improve if forced to compete for students' needs and problems. This movement also believes that when decisions are made at local level, parents have an opportunity to have a voice in curriculum, instruction, and the philosophy of education for their children (Alves & Willie, 1990; Metcalf & Tait, 1999).

In summary, the nature of the relationship between educational decentralization and school autonomy relies on how much autonomy and what areas of autonomy the schools are given. Commonly, the areas of school autonomy cover resource selection and provision, curriculum, staffing, budgeting, and school policy formulation (Brown, 1990, 1994; Dixon, 1992; Elmore, 1993). As suggested by Elmore (1993, p. 51), the central policy question should not be whether to centralize or decentralize authority, but rather what should be loosely controlled from any given level of government and what should be tightly controlled.

2.2.2 Goals

From a political perspective, decentralization can be looked at in terms of the distance between local communities and the agencies which make decisions in relation to public service provision. In this sense, when decision making is made by local agents, who are closer and more responsive to citizens than the national government, participation, accountability and democratic values are promoted since

communities have more opportunities to access policymakers and the decision making process. Additionally, the increase of citizen participation at the local level is assumed to protect private interests and, more importantly, to promote public awareness and provide social and political learning.

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'êtrein 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.

Education has been used as a tool to create a direct relationship between states and the masses for hundreds of years. As observed by Meyer and Ramirez (2000, as cited in Murphy, 2005, p. 120), from the middle of the 19th century onward, various governmental and nongovernmental actors helped disseminate the idea that mass education is an important public good and an essential component for the spread of modernization. Mass education became one of the leading ideologies of state-led economic and political modernization and (especially in fascist regimes) nation-building. This resulted in expansion of education through the creation of publicly funded education systems, particularly in most of the world's independent states. However, the institutions that states employed to exercise political control over education varied greatly, both across countries and over time (Ansell & Lindvall, 2013, p. 505).

Since the 1980s, the paradigm of public management has shifted towards decentralization, particularly in the sphere of the economy and public service provision. This new context, which arose as a result of a combination of socioeconomic and political conditions such as economic and financial crisis, highlighted the ineffectiveness of centralized education. Importantly, the context introduced new ideologies relative to global development systems, with education norms shifting to include pluralism, human rights, good governance, decentralization, education for all and privatization. As backdrops of change, these ideologies forced governments around the world contend with the tensions arising from the requirement of restructuring or readjustment of public institutions, and their functions and management, particularly in countries with more or less decentralized structures (UNESCO, 2005, p. 8). In other words, they have brought about the changes in educational goals and the patterns of control over education systems.

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 (Whitacre, 1997, p. 7, as cited 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, as cited in UNESCO, 2005, p. 10).

As educational decentralization is implemented within different cultures, political regimes and institutions, and educational objectives, the issue of the educational decentralization goal becomes important. One of key concerns is the link between macro and micro goals. According to Locke and Latham (1990, as cited in De Hass, Algera, & Tuijl, 2000, pp. 580-581), there needs to be a convergence of macro and micro goals. They argue that both approaches can be benefit from each other, because they are supplementary and not competitive. The two approaches focus on different issues. Whereas macro goals are qualitative and focus on strategic management, micro goals are typically conducted at the individual level. Additionally, De Hass, Algera, and Tuijl (2000, pp. 581-582) suggest four concepts to extend understanding of goals. First, in organizations, they argue that there are three levels of goal in which the tactical level (intermediate goals) are added to the strategic level (macro goals) and the operational level (micro goals). Second, politics is a common phenomenon in organizations since goal conflicts among different parties, particularly between individual and group goals, are the rule more than exception. Third, they warn that realizing higher goals such as strategic goals is more difficult than goals at the operational level. Consequently, those who are at the operational level require a longer time to realize macro goals. Finally, it is necessary to bear in mind that different levels of goal are surrounded by different contexts. Therefore, each level faces different turbulence. In conclusion, central to these authors' idea is

the concept of coherence. Based on this concept, the design of multilevel goals needs to accommodate vertical and horizontal dependencies. In other words, incorporating means-ends relations requires efforts to arrive at consensus among the various parties involved.

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 et al., 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).

2.2.3 When Decentralization Achieves Its Goals

Decentralization signifies a phase of transition of social systems, particularly administrative structures, by introducing changes. Form, extent and degree of change

depend on the nature of the society. A rich body of literature has developed to explain the importance of the relationships between institutions and the rules regulating a society during a time of transition. According to literature, compatibility between formal and informal rules is a key determinant of the successful development. If changes in formal rules ignore informal rules, they will not lead to the desired outcomes. When trying to implement formal rules, a tension emerges between formal and informal rules and the rules that triumph are those that lead to the lowest transaction costs. This explanation is supported by several studies conducted in developing countries. According to the studies, the lack of compatibility between formal and informal rules will cause the high transaction costs of implementing formal rules (Dauti, 2013, p. 12).

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 positive results. 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. According to Gomez (2006, p. 44), the underlying relationships may consist of institutions or less formal structures.

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 create 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 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.

Gomez (2006) also points to conditions in which the outcomes of decentralization policies result in openness or closure. As expected, open law processes or institutions should provide decentralization policies that represent a compromise between central government and local agents. However, this does not assure that central legal institutions are flexible. They are open when the laws and their associations represent the mutual interests of the center and local agents (Gomez, 2006, p. 49). Additionally, education policies may be so complicated or unwieldy that the outcomes are in hands of specialized experts.

Two key questions in developing education policy are who benefits and who is a target group? Central to these questions is the idea of the balance of power. Generally, whenever educational decentralization policy, as a new policy, is introduced, power is reallocated both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally, administrative law directly and indirectly determines the relative influence within agencies of various professionals such as lawyers, scientists, civil servants, and politicians. Vertically, administrative law directly and indirectly determines the relative influence within agencies of appointed agency heads, lower-level bureaucrats, and line personnel (Magill & Vermeule, 2010, p. 1035).

2.3 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; Thongthew, 1999, as 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. 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. 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, 2006). 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.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In dealing with policy, a policy is recognized as an interdependent phenomenon. This implies that individuals with their relative interactions and responses to the policy cannot be separated analytically from circulating ideologies and institutional norms (Warriner, 2012, p. 173). Also, one or a simple perspective cannot provide deep understanding of the phenomenon. This study, therefore, provides the convergent analyses of both macro and micro levels.

With an effort to answer the research questions, this study uses a mixture of two approaches to obtain the research data. To complement each other, the study uses both primary and secondary sources of data to offer a broader perspective on educational decentralization in Thailand. The primary source of data, as micro level study, is received through in-depth interviews administered to the directors of the Office of Primary Education Service Areas and school principals, and focus group discussions administered to teachers. The secondary source of data, as macro level study, is collected from official documents such as government reports, documents in the form of education legislation or laws, texts and articles. This approach is critical as it provides the researcher two levels of data that can make outcomes of data analysis more comprehensive. At the macro level, description and explanation are drawn from content analysis. At the micro level, they are built upon grounded theory developed around on-site practices. As noted by Bjork and Blasé (2009, p. 198), this is a way to understand the differences between policy goals and the reality of implementation as the 'implementation gap'.

By using these approaches, the study is based on qualitative methods. When qualitative approaches are introduced in qualitative research textbooks, each approach is discussed in the context of its historical and philosophical background (Speziale &

Carpenter, 2007). In other words, most policy fields struggle with meaning (Lewis, 2011, p. 36).

The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section provides an overview of the rationale of qualitative methods. The last two sections, the macro and micro analyses, explain approaches, settings, data collection, research tools, and analysis methods.

3.2 The Rationale of Qualitative Research

Creswell (1998, p. 15) defines qualitative research as, "an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). This is to understand and explain participant's meaning (Morrow & Smith, 2000).

Since a phenomenon is a product of its contexts, it is, therefore, unique and relevant. To gain deeper understanding, research that can allow a sufficiently detailed analysis is required. As a choice that goes beyond exogenously empirical perception, qualitative research allows the researcher to describe or explain phenomena broadly (Larson, 2003, p. 201), shares a broad philosophy, such as person centeredness, and a certain open-ended starting point (Holloway & Todres, 2003, as cited in Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013, p. 400). In terms of the interdependence of a phenomenon, qualitative research concerns particular meanings, variations, and experiences of the phenomenon rather than aiming at prediction of the phenomenon. Thus, it is more amenable to the diversity found when viewing multiple realities (Borg & Gall, 1989).

As each phenomenon is contingent on its contexts, prediction is often difficult in qualitative research. Furthermore, phenomenon often exists alongside factors which are not in the form of causal relationship. For these reasons, qualitative research is not guided by presuppositions or hypotheses. It has a dynamic, developmental perspective which allows researchers to capture unanticipated consequences, changes and development of the event (Patton, 1987, as cited in Hahn, 2013, p. 74). As an

interactive and interpretive approach to research (Charmaz, 2006) for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem, a qualitative approach is chosen to explore the phenomenon to which the researcher engages with participants to gain an understanding of the problem from their perspectives and to understand what the problem means to them (Creswell, 2007), while employing minimal quantitative techniques as necessary. It uses naturalistic research methods to investigate complex issues from multiple perspectives (Creswell, 2007). By these, it allows the participants to voice their experiences and perceptions.

To gain deep understanding about a phenomenon, qualitative research develops research questions that emphasize exploration. In exploration, a sophisticated phenomenon is unwrapped by factoring out aspects that interlock within the phenomenon. In doing this, qualitative methods are employed to collect and analyze data. The methods focus on visual and verbal (conceptual or thematic) rather than numerical data handling techniques to draw out the subjects' knowledge and perceptions and explore the context in terms of 'social settings' and 'culture' (Long & Godfrey, 2004, p. 83, as cited in Masue, Swai, & Anasel, 2013, pp. 211-212). The methods vary, and typically several sources of data, such as interviews, archives, questionnaires and observations, are combined throughout the collection process (Eisenhardt, 1989). Multiple sources of data are critical to enhance the validity of a study by providing evidence that the researcher has taken several points of view, both factual and subjective, on which to base findings (Yin, 2003; Miller & Crabtree, 1992; Stake, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Due to a variety of data sources, according to Ambert, Adler, Adler, and Detzner (1995), the researcher is able to gather far more in depth information from which to discover and develop theory through contextual research. Findings, therefore, are inductive and intuitive.

This study is qualitative research which aims at providing description and explanation on the phenomenon of educational decentralization in Thai Basic Education. Naturally, policies and their implementations are complicated and ill-formed since they are the products of contesting preferences and cultures. According to Floyd (1992, as cited in Larson, 2003, pp. 204-205), the process of decentralization, like every other public policy and political process, has so many different strands to it

that anyone who is doing scholarly work about the subject is necessarily going to run into a thicket of very complicated factors.

Addressing these arguments, this study explores, describes, and investigates the phenomenon of educational decentralization in terms of its emergence, components or designs and effects in order to develop a deeper understanding about the policy provided by these issues.

As qualitative research is increasingly utilized in many areas of study, some scholars (particularly social and behavioral scientists) critique on the validity of studies that employ only qualitative methodology. To resolve this question, qualitative researchers utilize various validation strategies to make their studies credible and rigorous (Creswell & Miller, 2000). For this study, credibility is achieved through validation strategies of triangulation, researcher reflexivity, and thick rich description. In relation to triangulation, the data has been collected from/in various sources/forms. These include documents, interviews, observations, reflective journal entries and texts. Thick rich description has been achieved by presenting the participants' voices in detail under various themes.

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 The Rationale of Macro and Micro Level Studies

Gilchrist and Williams (1992, p. 82) note that there are two key types of questions in doing qualitative research: structural and contrast. Structural questions extend the description of the particular area of research interest. Contrast questions ferret out changes that occur and help the researcher make comparisons between questions. To cover these perspectives, the study adopts both macro and micro study. To provide insight into the two levels of study, the study relies on qualitative methodologies of document analysis and interviews to answer the research question. Adopting an interpretive and naturalistic approach, qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

At the macro level, the researcher 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 this argument, the macro level study offers an insight into the mandates and components of laws, and the changes adopted to reveal whether these can or cannot be justified by decentralizing authority or downward authority shift. With this intent, the macro study uses descriptive and explanative approaches. At the micro level, the experiences of on-site practitioners are examined to probe the outcomes or effects of the policies which emerged from the conditions found in the macro level study.

3.3.2 Macro Level Study

Macro level study deals with a review and analysis of education legislations and changes adopted in name of educational decentralization. The methodology is descriptive and explanative. It intends to develop a deep description and explanation of themes emerging from analyzing legal frameworks that guide or offer 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 or intervened and translated into changes, the extent and degree of educational decentralization are revealed. Principally, the macro level study addresses examining a series of education legislatives or laws passed subsequent to the enactment of the National Education Act of B.E. 2542 (1999), considered as key interventions imposing the will of educational decentralization on the existing system of Basic Education. Emphasis for data collection is placed on the period from the end of the 1990s onwards as this marked the time when the idea of educational decentralization reform firstly gained wide public interest leading to policy formulation. By focusing on the more recent as opposed to distant past, the data collected is more relevant in that it encompasses the population's present lives, problems and needs.

When central components of educational decentralization are created, intervened or (re)aligned, it is important to note that these are the interventions that either conform to or compete with the principles of educational decentralization. Information received such as what components are created, intervened, or transferred, and how, why and to where, reflect the conditions that result in the extent and degree of educational decentralization. In other words, with these conditions, the educational decentralization policy can exist with a status of either determinacy or indeterminacy. The term indeterminacy refers to a state of which the educational decentralization policy is missing certain components or contains insufficient components. In the state, the policy mandates are weak and ambiguous. To uncover the existing conditions, the macro level study, examines a series of education legislations or laws enacted during the time when educational decentralization was adopted. Additionally, the changes adopted according to the mandates of the laws are presented to witness the outputs and effects of the laws. Analyzing how the components of educational decentralization are intervened will contribute to a better understanding of the nature of trends in respect to restructuring a chain of command, authority alignment and transfer reflecting the extent and degree of educational decentralization.

3.3.2.1 Data Collection

For macro level study, 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. Based on the data derived through the related laws/documents and observations, the presence of the following general concepts and themes was looked for: 1) their mandates reflecting certain components, for example agencies, mechanisms and authorities, leading to or guiding changes; 2) the changes adopted according to the mandates of the related laws; and 3) their implications for educational decentralization. To fill details into these themes, data was collected through an archival review protocol and observation form. Findings were communicated in the form of explanation and description.

3.3.2.2 Data Analysis

The researcher used content analysis 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). The goal is to bring out the essentials or point out certain typical characteristics of the data (Rosengren, 1981, p. 111).

Patton (2002, p. 453) defines content analysis as any qualitative data reduction and sense making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings. Addressing data reduction and arrangement, Weber (1990) states that content analysis provides for the reduction of the overabundance of textual material often found within historical documents into more relevant, manageable bits of data. Thus, content analysis enables the researcher to analyze and synthesize large quantities of text-based data into relational groupings of meaning, connotation, and themes (Weber, 1990). McMillan (2008, p. 60) describes the process of content analysis as a microscope that brings communication messages into focus.

Content analysis 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). Similarly, Krippendorf (2004, p. 18) observes that content analysis is a research method that generates reliable and valid inferences from written material. It allows researchers to categorize and quantify written text into pieces of data that can be further analyzed to yield answers to theoretical questions. Because content analysis was contextually-sensitive, its design must be appropriate to the context from which the data is drawn and categories must be justified in terms of what is known about the data's context (Krippendorf, 1980, p. 49). To devise a research content analysis that is both reliable and valid, researchers commonly focus on conceptualization, operationalization, and inter-coder reliability (Neuendorf, 2002, pp. 50-51). Additionally, content analysis does not ignore cultural contexts.

As an inductive approach, 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.

Using content analysis, the macro level study begins with a review of related archival data followed by the changes adopted. Then, the researcher makes brief notes in the margin when relevant information is found. This is information coding that is based on pre-established themes and aimed to identify new themes. Next, the researcher offers a list of ideas to differentiate types of information. Reading through the list of ideas, categories are developed to which they are guided by the research questions. Later, the categories are considered in terms of linkage and classified into major categories and minor categories, as themes. In this stage the data is broken up according to validated themes that appeared repeatedly in the documents gathered, and then "reassembled" according to distinct categories. This is known as the constant comparative method (Hutchinson, 1988; Strauss, 1987). All of the categories are then reviewed to ascertain whether some categories can be merged,. After that, the researcher begins the mapping and interpretation process. A series of memos are written throughout the analysis document emerging thoughts and tentative findings. Finally, the researcher searches for patterns, associations, and explanations to answer the research questions.

3.3.3 Micro Level Study

3.3.3.1 Setting and Why It Is Selected

To elicit the real effects or outcomes of educational decentralization policy in Thailand, this part of the study addresses site-based investigation. It aims to uncover different practitioners' experience-based perspectives in response to implementing the policy. In order to understand an essence of experience, Van Manen (1990, p. 163) raises several steps researchers must take once the topic of interest has

been identified. These include formulating the phenomenological question, developing an awareness of assumptions and pre-understandings, collecting data, analyzing data so as to isolate thematic statements, isolating thematic statements, and interpreting findings through conversation.

Guided by such literature, micro level study inductively utilizes data situated within the sites implementing the policy to develop grounded theory, said to be good for studying processes (Urquhart, 2013, p. 10). To fulfil the intent for contextual understanding, '…data tend to be collected in the field as opposed to laboratories or other researcher-controlled situations' (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 3). A description and explanation developed can reflect the range of the gap between macro goals and on-site practices. More specifically, findings provide deeper understanding of themes categorized into certain key areas such as resource allocation, power over personnel management, curriculum, school performance assessment and other changes.

Basically, it is necessary to understand that policy implementation in a unitary state involves a caveat to which implementation is made through a single administrative structure. In this sense, all agencies within the single administrative structure pursue policy goal(s) with the same resources and means of implementation determined by the central agency or authority. As a result, policy outcomes or effects are more likely to be common or similar. Based on this caveat, selecting settings or cases for a study is quite independent.

This study is based on data from Mahasarakam, a medium size province located in the north-eastern region of Thailand. There are two main reasons why this province is selected for the study. The first reason involves the researcher's familiarity with the area since it is the place where the researcher was born, raised and has worked in a school as a principal. There may be certain greater advantages of an insider. Surely, it can reduce the concerns of cultural shock or disorientation. Trust and rapport are likely to be enhanced. Communication is expected to be very effective. Additionally, it is likely that informants will reveal more intimate details of their daily lives or practices. The second reason is based on the experience of teachers in the area in responding to a critical past circumstance. The period 2003-2006 marked an important point of change for Thai education. As an approach educational

decentralization, efforts were made to transfer Basic Education from the Ministry of Education to the jurisdiction of local governments. This received mixed responses from teachers. A large number of primary school teachers, led by some key local actors, made a concerted action to oppose the effort. In contrast, there were some groups of teachers who welcomed the change. At the same time, other teachers made a call for an administrative dichotomy between primary education and secondary education whereby each of the two levels of education was administered and controlled by different departments. As Mahasarakam province (known as Thaka-sila-nakhon) is recognized as the center of education in north-eastern Thailand, the roles and experience of local teachers during this period of change may be specially relevant.

The National Education Act (NEA) B.E. 2542 (1999) mandated the establishment of local administrative bodies throughout Thailand to be called "Offices of Education Service Area." As a medium size province, Mahasarakham was initially serviced by two such entities: the Office of Mahasarakham Education Service Area 1 and the Office of Mahasarakham Education Service Area 2 These Offices were in charge of overseeing both primary and secondary schools in terms of implementing education services. Like all such offices throughout the country, the individual Offices of Mahasarakham Education Service Area arose from the amalgamation of five bodies of the provincial and district branches of the departmental agencies of the Ministry of Education. These comprised the Office of Provincial Primary Education, the Office of District Primary Education, the Office of Provincial General Education, the Office of Provincial Education Superintendent, and the Office of District Education Superintendent.

This initiative was later subjected to certain changes. Firstly, as a result of a nationwide reconsideration of the number of the Offices of Education Service Area in each province, an Office of Mahasarakham Education Service Area 3 was added. Secondly, according to the promulgation of the Third National Education Act B.E. 2553 (2010), the Office of Secondary Education Service Area was established to receive the secondary schools transferred from the Office of Education Service Area. This welcomed the return of a dichotomy of administration between the secondary schools and the primary schools. To adapt to this change, the Office of Education

Service Area that is in charge of overseeing primary schools was renamed 'the Office of Primary Education Service Area.'

Thus, Mahasarakham has three entities of the Office of Primary Education Service Area with a total of 679 primary schools significantly varying in sizes. Regarding the internal administrative structure, each office has nine sub-units. These comprise the Administration Group, Financial and Assets Administration Group, Policy and Planning Group, Internal Audit Unit, Promotion of Educational Provision Group, Educational Supervision Monitoring and Evaluation Group, Personnel Administration Group, Promotion of Private Education Provision Group, and Technology and Information Center for Education.

The Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1 is located in the provincial city. It exercises its jurisdiction to oversee the primary schools in four districts: Mueang District, Borabu District, Kantharawichai District, and Kae Dam District. There are 213 schools under its jurisdiction, both government and private. It has approximately 110 officials.

The Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2 is located in WapiPathum District. With approximately80 officials, it exercises its jurisdiction to oversee the primary schools in five districts: WapiPathum District, Na Dun District, Na Chueak District, Phayakkhaphum Phisai District, and Yang Sisurat District. There are 308 schools under its jurisdiction, both government and private.

The Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, is located in KosumPhisai District. With approximately 90 officials, it exercises its jurisdiction to oversee the primary schools in four districts: Kosum Phisai District, Kud Rang District, Chiang Yuen District, and Chuen Chom District. There are 158 schools under its jurisdiction, both government and private. The total number of teachers is around 1,500.

Regarding the internal administration, each office is led by the Director of the Office of Primary Education Service Area. The director has certain deputy directors, usually ranging from 4 to 8. However, only three deputy director positions are formal. The rest are appointed as remedial positions to provide for those who were once the leaders of the provincial or district bodies dismantled for the establishment of the Office of Education Service Area as mention above and detailed in chapter 4. In Thai, these deputy directors have been called rong yiewya (rong = deputy, yiewya =

given to heal a wounded mind). In addition to this, each internal unit of the Office has its own leader called phor-or klum (phor-or = director, klum = subgroup).

Three schools have been selected for this study, comprising one from each Office of Primary Education Service Area. In selecting schools, several criteria were applied. The first is that, to reflect issues and trends affected by the policy as much as possible, schools must be located in rural areas where insufficiency in many areas is expected to provide various challenges. Second, the schools must be medium or small in size. This is because smaller schools are expected to exhibit a greater diversity of interactions conditioned by their sizes and diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. According to a criterion-referenced standard of OBEC, schools are classified into three types by size: a school of no more than 120 students is considered "small"; a school of in range of 121-499 students is considered "medium"; and a school of at least 500 students is considered "large". Other criteria included school performances, active principals in engaging education provision, and the socioeconomic backgrounds of communities.

In summary, Mahasarakham has been chosen as the area of the study given that it meets the needs of the study and the connection between the researcher and the key informants which should provide for more accurate and reliable data collection. Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 30) state that selecting a setting in qualitative research involves decisions that should be directed by both the framework and the research questions. The researcher should by knowledge or expertise or through field investigations select samples that take "adequate account of local conditions, local mutual shaping, and local values" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 40). This allows the researcher to increase "the scope and range of data exposed…as well as the likelihood that the full array of multiple realities will be uncovered" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 40).

3.3.3.2 Key Informants and Methods of Data Collection

It is necessary that key informants have special knowledge and experience, important status, good communication skills, and are willing to share their knowledge and skills with the researcher. Generally, key informants are selected purposefully because of their position, knowledge, and ability to communicate on the topic under study (Larson, 2003, p. 213). Like those addressed by Creswell (1998),

knowing that enough data has been collected is critical. The goal during the data collection process is that the data gathered will fill the empty space in the researcher's emerging theory, eventually leading to theoretical saturation. In some instances, however, it becomes necessary to collect more data after the researcher begins the analysis to answer specific questions in which gaps in the emerging theory exist. The nature of qualitative research techniques requires the researcher to be flexible and anticipate the need to alter the research design based on where the data leads (Brower, Abolafia, & Carr, 2000, as cited in Banner, 2010, p. 44).

To gain a total perspective as to the richness, texture, and depth of the effects of the policy and to gain insights into on-site practitioners' thinking and perspectives, this study divides key informants into three groups. These include the directors of Office of the Primary Education Service Area, school principals and teachers.

The director of the Office of Primary Education Service Area, by virtue of his position, is rich in information. As the key implementer in exercising authority, the Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Act B.E. 2547(2004) provides him with jurisdiction over all of the matters of administration of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area under his control. He has jurisdiction over the matters of annual salary promotion of teachers, and the matter of teacher transfer as the member of TEPS (Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Sub-commission, as mentioned in Chapter 4). His interface with schools is made through official documents, meetings, and school visits on special occasions such as presiding over the opening ceremony of a new buildings and presiding over the welcoming ceremony for very important persons (VIPs). By this, taking a look at certain roles of the director of the Office of Primary Education Service Area playing over schools is important since it can reflect about which by what the roles are motivated or guided and whether or not decision making over certain areas particularly annual salary promotion of school principals should be consolidated into his hands.

Of the three schools selected, two are medium sized schools while the third is a small sized school.

Once the key informants are selected, the researcher begins to orient ideas and broad concepts. Based on the first step of the study, an interview protocol is

developed. The interview protocol is not rigidly adhered to during the interviews since it is used as a guide. The primary purposes of the interview protocol are: 1) to discover the effects of the changes adopted in name of decentralization at the school and teacher level; 2) to discover the advantages of school autonomy in light of decentralization; 3) to discover significant changes resulting from the policy; and 4) to discover constraints and advantages resulting from pursuing the policy goals.

The interview protocol contains several topics, including the following:

1) Goals of educational decentralization;

2) Concerns in resource allocation;

3) Concerns in personnel administration;

4) Present administrative structure of Basic education;

5) Concerns in curriculum;

6) Concerns in education measurements;

7) Concerns in teacher profession.

Next, data collection is implemented in which in-depth interviews and observations are the key methods. The main rationale for the use of the in-depth interview is to explore the real world of educational decentralization at site-level as experienced by practitioners or lower agents. It addresses the search for patterns and relationships through the analysis of the participants' responses. Complementary to in-depth interviews, non-participating observations are also employed when the researcher takes school site-visits. Observation is the main qualitative method in the field of human and social sciences. It allows collection of information on the subject behaviours in his/her context, reporting them in an almost direct way and avoiding reducing them to a number or an occurrence (Nicolini, 2014, p. 231).

In-depth interview is a qualitative research method that is an open−ended, and discovery−oriented. As generally recognized, it emphasizes conducting intensive individual interviews to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation. It is well suited for describing both program processes and outcomes from the perspective of the target audience or key stakeholder. According to Simons (2009), the purpose of in-depth interview is to document the interviewee's perspectives in the case engaged. Researchers carefully learn to identify and analyze issues. Recognized as a dialogue, the process of interview is inherently flexible and

able to change direction, deepens a response, and potentially uncovers the hidden issues. According to literature, additionally, in-depth interview asks open-ended questions that elicit depth of information from participants, and does not require a large number of interviewees provided the researcher is punctilious in selecting informants.

For this study, in-depth interviews comprise two forms: including individual in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Individual in-depth interviews are conducted with the three directors of the Office of the Primary Education Service Areas and the three school principals. The interviews guide the conversation by presenting a series of questions intended to probe into specific issues for the purpose of eliciting rich, detailed responses to be used in the analysis process (Lofland & Lofland, 1995; McCracken, 1988). Focus group discussions are conducted for the three groups of teachers. Each comprised 5-6 participants considered representative of each Office of the Primary Education Service Area.

Importantly, prior to the interviews, participants are advised that confidentiality is assured and agreements are made with any interviewees who request anonymity. Additionally, participants are informed that a tape recording of the interviews will be made. In conducting the interviews and focus group discussions, the researcher is always careful that the participants are never directed toward an answer.

In planning for school site-visits, the researcher took into account the two purposes: 1) to conduct interviews with the school principals and focus group discussions with the teachers: and 2) to observe the school settings. The researcher was concerned that the number of days required for undertaking each school visit had to be sufficient to serve these purposes. Finally, the researcher determined that each school visit should take two days. The first day was for face-to-face contact with the school principals to present them with a formal letter of the request for approval to conduct interviews and focus group discussions. This formal contact was made after an informal request from the researcher to the school principals had been accepted. The second day was for conducting interviews with the school principals, focus group discussions with the teachers. On each of the two days, school setting observations were also made.

Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted at the end of the school year. This time was purposely selected since it provided positive conditions for the study. At this time of year most schools planned activities have already been implemented since the academic year is nearly ended. In one instance, the schools were tutoring students for the O-NET test. In another one instance, the schools received interventions from the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area, such as school supervision, a follow-up to the Reading and Writing Literacy Project, operating school performance assessment, and a specific purposive school visit. These events stimulated the informants of the study with a wide range of experiences and opinions that they were motivated to share or express.

3.3.3.3 Data Analysis

The micro level study employs grounded analysis as an approach to inductively identify emergent themes as provided by the examination of the behaviors and reactions as on-site practitioners' experiences responding or affected by the educational decentralization policy.

Grounded theory is an approach to qualitative research that provides the researcher with an opportunity to examine processes, actions, or events that are focused on a specific goal or that produce change (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss, in their book on developing grounded theory, explain 'how the discovery of theory from data-systematically obtained and analysed... can be furthered' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, as cited in Cooney, 2010, p. 19).

According to grounded theory, the purpose of data analysis is to co-create an interpretation of the phenomenon being studied and develop theories that emerge from the data. The approach that grounded theory introduces to data analysis is less structured. It focuses on systematizing the collection, coding and analyzing qualitative data. Central to coding, researchers try to find out what is really happening (Urquhart, 2013, p. 37). The two tasks that precede the analysis involve reading the whole excerpt, trying and getting the feel of the change, and describing it to the researcher, then seeing if the researcher can get behind the lines. Charmaz (2006), advancing a grounded theory approach, suggests that grounded theory allows the researcher to study how people construct meaning related to the processes they experience and how the development of those meanings shapes their decisions and

actions that resonated with the purpose of this study. It moves past independent interpretation to a co-created interpretation (Charmaz, 2006). As such, the analysis is the interplay between researchers and data.

For the micro level study, data analysis follows an inductive approach consistent with grounded theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994). All data received from in-depth interviews and observations are transcribed. The aim of the data and their transcription is to reveal interconnecting conditions and phenomenon/context interactions as a basis for a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) emerged from or produced by grounded theory. The analysis starts when all transcribed come to be coded to illuminate and derive meaning from participants' perspectives and experiences. As summarized by Urquhart (2013, pp. 38-39), there are four approaches to coding. These include bottom-up coding, top-down coding, middle-range coding, and thematic coding. Bottom-up coding occurs at the word and sentence level. Top-down coding is generated from the literature. Middle-range coding is based on the data around commonsense categories. In thematic coding, theme is as a large category applied to a larger chunk of data than in top-down or bottom-up coding approaches. Principally, coding goes over the steps of finding themes, reorganizing the data based on the themes, and interpreting the findings. However, theory is built when coding identifies a linkage or relationship.

3.4 The Researcher's Role and Bias

In qualitative research, the researcher is likely to already have a perspective on the ideas, assumptions or presuppositions, analysis and interpretation of the results based on his/her past experiences. These can result researcher bias and adversely affect the process of qualitative research. As identified by Strauss and Corbin (1998), bias can negatively influence qualitative research when participants share a common culture and meanings are taken for granted.

This is a potential factor for this study as the sites, environments and cultures being studied are what the researcher has been embedded in over thirty years as a teacher and school principal. During this time, the researcher has perceived himself as belonging to and familiar with these issues. As a result, the researcher has had various

experiences regarding changes of educational policies and the effects of the policies including being critical of some policies and changes. These experiences are powerful enough to play a big role in conducting this study particularly in the areas of selecting data sources and participants, analyzing and interpreting data, and developing findings. In order to diminish the expected biases, the researcher tries to be as objective or neutral as possible by selecting various sources of data and methods of collecting data in order to triangulate the data to enhance the validity of interpretations (Creswell, 2008). Additionally, the participants are allowed to review transcripts to minimize the influence of the researcher's bias.

CHAPTER 4

EXAMINING ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURAL CHANGE AND AUTHORITY SHIFT

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is mainly descriptive and explanatory in that it attempts to point to the conditions determining the extent of changes when educational decentralization policy is introduced to the Thai Basic Education system. These conditions are relevant only to Thailand where central agency has held power for the educational fabric for a long time. When changes in name of decentralization are introduced, the centralized administrative system plays a major role over the extent and degree of changes. The chapter argues that the key changes introduced to primary public education are almost entirely confined to consolidation of the process of central control and relocating the existing administrative structure. In other words, changes repeatedly focus on structural conformity and the process of control instead of addressing authority shift. To advance this argument, the chapter investigates the related educational laws to see that how the traditionally centralized structure of control is aligned with the changes adopted in name of educational decentralization. This provides a background as to how the educational decentralization policy emerged. The chapter then highlights various changes mandated by the National Education Act (NEA) B.E. 2542 (1999), and considers theextent and degree to which these changes achieve the mandate of educational.

4.2 Foundation of Administrative Structure and Authority as a Lens for Understanding the Basic Problem and the Successive Changes

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 which emerged 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, Funatsu, and Kagoya (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 (evolution) 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.

Interestingly, apart from controlling Basic Education through exercising general administrative authority, in the early days there was also an initiative to

exercise control over teaching profession. In B.E. 2488, the Teacher Civil Service Act B.E. 2488 (1945) was passed to mandate the establishment of a central commission called the Teachers Council of Thailand known in Thai as kuru-sapa to act on behalf of the profession. It was required that all teachers had to be the members of Teachers Council of Thailand. This triggered an unprecedented control over the teaching profession and education sector. Initially, the council had authority over formulating general principles, guidelines and policies in relation to teachers, curriculum, educational materials and the development of education.

4.3 The Previous Days of Basic Education in the Legacy of Decentralization

Over several decades, Thai governments have pursued the vision of educational decentralization. As noted, educational decentralization is promoted as both a tool for improved governance and a means or intermediate goal to improve the quality of education. The central argument is that providing local people with accessibility and participation is a better administrative structure for delivering basic education services. Successful transfer of administrative agencies regionally or locally is predicated on the understanding that the authority of local entities must increase simultaneously. This is necessary to ensure that there is no reversion to the traditional centralized authority structure. Whenever educational decentralization is announced or adopted, governments are likely to start with debates on the existing and potential number of administrative tiers. This will determine the distance between the local branches of the central authority and schools, which in turn will reflect the ability of the local branches to control and supervise schools. Thus, creating new sub-central or regional agencies or creating a new chain of command is a product of the understanding that this helps shift authority to the local level.

Using some of the arguments mentioned above, there have been a series of efforts in which primary schools were transferred forth and back between the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Education. Once a transfer occurred, those who supported the ministry that received the transfer alluded to the defects of the administrative system of the other. The three most notable examples of primary

school transfer in an effort to improve decentralization were in B.E. 2509 (1966), 2523 (1980), and from B.E. 2543 (2000) to B.E. 2547 (2004).

4.3.1 An Experience with a So-called Decentralized Administrative Structure

Concerning the first transfer, in B.E. 2509, around 24,150 primary schools outside major urban centres were transferred from the Ministry of Education to the Provincial Administrative Organizations under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior. As claimed by the then military government, this change was part of a decentralization policy. According to the statement of the Office of the Prime Minister on March 24, B.E. 2508:

> It is necessary for the local authorities to provide general primary education. This is to lighten the obligations and responsibilities loaded by the central government. Regarding primary school transfer, the first tier was implemented in Bangkok and Thonburiin B.E. 2504 (1961). For the second tier, in B.E. 2506 (1963), the primary schools located in urban areas were transferred to the municipal authorities. Finally, it is implemented as the third tier of which the primary schools located outside the urban areas will be transferred to be under the jurisdiction of the provincial administrative organizations…This is for the national interests, not for the political interests (Office of the National Primary Education Commission, n.d.).

The Ministry of Interior had pervasive executive branches located in regional areas across the country, which mainly functioned to keep local societies in order. It was able to convince the government and the public that this administrative structure had more advanced features and was more supportive of decentralizing responsibilities and authorities to local agencies than the Ministry of Education. It was soon recognized that just branching out or changing the offices of the ministerial agency cannot capture the essence of educational decentralization. A reason is that educational decentralization requires a package of changes or reforms in which authorities over different issues or sectors such as financial resources and teacher

professional management need to be reallocated. As observed, there were no new laws passed to redefine or reallocate the authorities over financial and teacher professional management. Evidently, prior to B.E. 2523 (1980), the year of which the basic education provision was transferred back to be under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, the laws passed including the Primary Education Act B.E. 2478 (1935) and B.E. 2509 (1966), the Teacher Civil Servant Act B.E. 2488 (1945), B.E. 2495 (1952), B.E. 2509 (1966), B.E. 2519 (1976), and B.E. 2521 (1978), the Civil Servant Act B.E. 2518 (1975), and the Royal Decree on Welfare in Respect of Temporary Cost of Living Increase B.E. 2521 (1978) were mainly to deal with school-age children, teacher welfare, and the status and position of the teachers.

Without designing the package of decentralization reforms, it made little sense to claim that the school transfer was due to educational decentralization. Specifically, there were four factors which contributed to an excessively bureaucratic administrative structure and a manner of exercising authority and decision-making process that was against the principle of educational decentralization. First, the chain of command of the Ministry of Interior was tailored to serve delegating responsibilities or burdens, not for fulfilling the demand of authority shift. Second, the provincial administrative organization was the ruling unit, not the particular educational units. This implied that it was not designed to facilitate the entire work of the primary schools particularly in terms of professional and instructional development, resource provision, and performance measurement. In other words, basic education provision was not the specific responsibility of the organization. Supporting, facilitating, and supplementing the primary schools' needs depended on the extents of what listed, by this organization, as the educational services. Third, the decisions of the leaders of the provincial administrative organizations, particularly the governor, were highly subject to the Minister of Interior. Although provincial administrative organizations were run by an elected board, the governors as the chairmen of the boards were appointed by the Minister of Interior. Because of this, it was difficult for the board of each provincial administrative organization to avoid the influence of the Ministry of Interior. It was more likely that the roles of the provincial administrative organizations were oriented more towards the demands of the Minister of Interior rather than the needs of local communities and schools. In this sense, the

provincial administrative organization did not have a close liaison with the local schools. Fourth, rather than a direct educational goal, this transfer was motivated by a political goal contributing to the power of Field Marshall Prapas Charusatian, the Minister of Interior. As the branch of the Ministry of Interior, the provincial administrative organizations were able to mobilize significant additional resources, particularly the teachers.

4.3.2 In Search of New Feature and Unity of Command

The second transfer occurred in B.E. 2523, the main justification being that it provided a solution to problems arising from almost twenty years under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior. The transfer became effective after primary school teachers engaged in industrial action to demand that schools be moved from the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior. It was claimed that, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior, schools and teachers were improperly treated by the provincial and district officials. Generally, two complaints were given as evidence. The first complaint, a common story at the time, was that female teachers were required to serve meals and perform other entertainment for high ranking bureaucrats at welcome receptions or farewell parties. The second complaint was teachers felt that they had low priority in status and promotion when compared to other provincial administrative organization officials. The industrial action was triggered by the passing of a Royal Decree on Welfare in Respect of Temporary Cost of Living Increase B.E. 2521 (1978). According to the Royal Decree, while all civil servants received 200 baht per month to support their cost of living, the teachers under the jurisdiction of the provincial administrative organization did not. A reason was that the primary teachers under the jurisdiction of the provincial administrative organization, the Ministry of Interior, were not identified as the civil service. "Bureaucrat" means, according to Section 4 of the Royal Decree, the following terms:

Civil service instated and appointed to government service under the law relating to the administration of civil service, judicial official instated and appointed to government service under the law relating to the administration of judicial official, attorney official instated and appointed to government

service under the law relating to the administration of attorney official, university civil service instated and appointed to government service under the law relating to the administration of university civil service, parliament official instated and appointed to government service under the law relating to the administration of parliament official, police official instated and appointed to government service under the law relating to the administration of police official, and military official instated and appointed to government service under the law relating to the administration of military official (Royal Decree on Welfare in Respect of Temporary Cost of Living Increase, 1978, p. 43).

Apart from the problem of centralized administration, the problem of fragmentation of education service was also noticed. Prior to B.E. 2509 (1966), beginning from B.E. 2454 (1911) onwards, education provision was run by the three ministries. The Ministry of Education managed and governed the schools called Rongrien Rattaban (public school) established and funded by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Interior provided education to people in rural or local areas, and the Ministry of Metropolis provided education to urban people of Bangkok.

The two problems mentioned above presented a conflict for the government. Dealing with the problem of centralized administration required creation of new authorities or entities in order to devolve authority. In contrast, solving the problem of fragmentation of education service suggested the need for a single unified authority. The solution reflected the government potential in designing change to balance the problems or prioritize such issues.

The government began by defining the fragmentation of education services as the leading problem. Change was initially achieved through the Primary Education Commission Act B.E. 2523 and the Teacher Profession Administration Act B.E. 2523. Additional changes took place through the National Primary Education Act B.E. 2523, the Act of Transfer of Primary Education under the Jurisdiction of the Provincial Administrative Organization and of the Department of General Education to be under the Jurisdiction of the Office of National Primary Education Commission (ONPEC) B.E. 2523, and the Sixth Teacher Civil Service Act B.E. 2523. The main contents of these Acts related to the establishment of a new chain of command

claimed to provide unity in primary education administration and to serve the transfer of primary schools.

In focusing on unifying the various authorities exercised over the realms of primary school administration, a new hierarchical chain of command was created, according to the National Primary Education Commission Act B.E. 2523. This comprised three levels of formal administrative agency and one informal form (National Primary Education Commission Act, 1980, pp. 5-18). A new central authority, the Office of National Primary Education Commission (ONPEC) was established as a departmental agency under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. At the provincial level, the seventy-three-Office of Provincial Primary Education was established. At the district level, the agency established was named the Office of District Primary Education. To use the administrative structure as a tool for exercising the authority granted, each level had its own board. At the central level, the board is the National Primary Education Commission. The board of the Office of Provincial Primary Education is called the Provincial Primary Education Commission, while at the district level the board is named the District Primary Education Commission. The relationships among the three levels of board were developed around the authorities over educational policy, planning, budget and standards firstly granted to the central board. In exercising the authorities, the lower boards were delegated responsibilities and authorities to adhere to the responsibilities and authorities of the central board. Once the establishment was accomplished, the primary schools under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior by the Provincial Administration Organization, and of the Ministry of Education by the Department of General Education were transferred to be monitored and controlled under this administrative structure, according to the mandate of the Act of Transfer of Primary Education under the Jurisdiction of Provincial Administrative Organization and of the Department of General Education to be under the Jurisdiction of the Office of National Primary Education Commission (ONPEC) B.E. 2523.

It is important to observe that, according to the legal mandate, the matter of school authority was blurred. At school level, schools were required to merge into school clusters. However, the board and authority of school clusters were ambiguously mentioned. Section 29 of the Primary Education Commission Act B.E.

2523 stated that "Primary schools are required to merge into school cluster. Regarding school cluster, the number of schools within one school cluster, method used to structure the school cluster, powers and duties, and method used in relation to selecting the leader of a school cluster are as prescribed by the orders or regulations issued by the National Primary Education Commission" (National Primary Education Commission Act, 1980, p. 18). Unfortunately, the National Primary Education Commission has never clarified board structure and authority of school clusters.

In addition to the general administrative school control exercised through the administrative structure created according to the Primary Education Commission Act B.E. 2523, primary school control was strengthened through the control over a specific area. According to the Teacher Profession Administration Act B.E. 2523, the control and management of the teaching profession that in the past followed the Civil Service Act B.E. 2518 (1975) was separated from the civil servants. This separation recognized that the teacher civil service profession is different from other civil servants in terms of the nature of work and position classification (Teacher Civil Service Act, 1980, p. 73). As observed, the Act was a descendant of the Teacher Civil Service Act B.E. 2488 (1945) giving birth to Kuru-sapa. In this sense, the contents or components of the Act were adapted from or developed around the B.E. 2488 version, particularly in terms of the authority over the teaching profession and the mechanism serving the use of such authority. To fulfill the intent in relation to teacher professional control and management, the Act mandated the establishment of three layers of commission. These included the central commission called the Teacher Civil Service Commission (Gor-khor in Thai), the Department Teacher Civil Service Subcommittee (Or-Gor-khor Krom), and the Provincial/Bangkok Metropolitan Teacher Civil Service Subcommittee (Or-Gor-khor Changwat/Or-Gor-khor Krung-thep).

Once Gor-khor and its subcommittees were established, the responsibilities and authorities over personnel management were transferred from Kuru-sapa to Gor-khor committees. The traditional Kuru-sapa was granted authorities to deal with providing teacher welfare and enforcing all teachers to be the members of Kuru-sapa through the provincial and district Kuru-sapa branches. In comparison, while the authorities of the traditional Kuru-sapa included controlling and supervising the

conduct of teachers in terms of discipline and code of ethics, the authorities over personnel management of the new board emerging from the traditional Kuru-sapa were expanded to cover the terms of recruitment, appointment, transfer, and promotion.

Regarding the authoritative relationship among Gor-khor committees, it is worth noting that the responsibilities and authorities of the lower boards including Or-Gor-khor Krom, Or-Gor-khor Changwat and Or-Gor-khor Krung-thep were highly subject to the main board; Gor-khor. In practice, the main Gor-khor dealt with the matters of formulating manpower policies and issuing relevant regulations including the matters of recruitment, appointment, transfer, promotion, and certifying certifications or diplomas in relation to entering the teaching profession. Subsequently, these were imposed on Or-Gor-khor Krom for implementation. In implementation, Or-Gor-khor Krom delegated its responsibilities assigned and authorities granted to Or-Gor-khor Changwat and Or-Gor-khor Krung-thep. By delegating responsibilities through these hierarchical boards, the central authority was able to approach to the teacher professional control and management effectively.

With these changes, the system of primary school control firstly gained a full form. As seen, the changes involved the creation of control tools that covered both general administration and specific issues. Because of these, the administrative structure was unable move away from consolidation of authority through the central agency. Importantly, these means of school control actually served at the pleasure of the central agency and were, thus, far more amenable to the interests of the central agency and highly subject to political control.

4.3.3 The Currently Unfinished Transfer

The third or current event of school transfer claimed in the name of educational decentralization involved an effort to transfer both primary and secondary schools from the Ministry of Education to operate under the jurisdiction of Local Administrative Organizations. However, after being in effect for around about five years (B.E. 2543-2547), this effort led to transfer being seen as a voluntary or selective choice when the teachers were in noncompliance with the mandatory choice.

After the Constitution B.E. 2540 mandated the adoption of decentralization as a means of reforming public administration or agencies, one of the first responses was made by the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Education. As observed, the laws released to deal with educational decentralization went in two different ways, the first one paving the way for the adoption of educational decentralization in the Ministry of Interior and the second paving the way for the adoption of educational decentralization in the Ministry of Education. Specifically, the Ministry of Education released the pro-decentralization National Education Act (NEA) B.E. 2542 and Act of Administrative Organization of the Ministry of Education B.E. 2546, while the Ministry of Interior released the Determining Plans and Process of Decentralization to Local Government Organization Act B.E. 2542 to force both primary and secondary schools under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education to transfer to local government organizations. This marked the return of the contest for a better administrative structure between the two ministries, causing decentralization-based school transfers to meet with great resistance.

Among the factors causing the failure of school transfer, two issues are central. Firstly, implementing educational decentralization by means of schools transfer did not result from a general consensus. It emerged amid a political competition or power struggle between the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Education. To win the power struggle, each side shaped its legal framework and was hurry to implement it. Evidently, while the Ministry of Education was dressing up/ restructuring its administrative structure following the mandates of NEA and the Act of Administrative Organization of the Ministry of Education B.E. 2546 (changes and effects will be elaborated in the next section and chapter 5), the Ministry of Interior released the Determining Plans and Process of Decentralization to Local Government Organization Act B.E. 2542 to convince or force schools to transfer from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Interior under the local government organizations. Secondly, the future benefits of transfer claimed in name of educational decentralization were unclear and doubtful. Apart from claiming that providing education by local government organizations could enhance community participation, other components were not taken into account, particularly the paths of teacher professional progression, the process of salary promotion and teacher transfer, and

concerns about the presence or absence of school status in terms of juristic persons given previously by NEA. In general, the process of school transfer was implemented easily. The approach adopted suggested that no lessons were learned from the two previous experiences. Apart from redesigning the physical features of the administrative structure, the main thrust of educational decentralization including financial and resource allocation and personnel management was introduced by relocating authorities instead of reallocating them.

Broadly speaking, these changes made in the name of educational decentralization did little more than advance the level of school and teacher control through a more hierarchical chain of command. With this, it is likely that there is an unbalanced state between information inputs and the decision-making process. While problems and needs in terms of resource requirements and personnel management issues, as inputs, are collected at the local (school) levels, decision making is subject to higher agencies. Decisions are, therefore, made more slowly and may be irrelevant. Thus, instead of promoting authority dispersal, the sharply hierarchical chain of command promotes an institutionalized coordination for consolidating the authorities of the central agency. More importantly, such a chain of command poses a challenge to the design of the next/present round of changes. In this sense, it perpetuates rigidity in that its centralized authorities and excessive bureaucratic decision-making processes do not facilitate the acceptance of new ideas or the adoption of change. This is why the extent and degree of change is limited or conditioned. Based on the notion of the change resistance of the sharply hierarchical chain of command, the next sections are devoted to investigating the extent and degree of change adopted during the last implementation of educational decentralization.

4.4 Latest Educational Decentralization in a Plethora of Education Laws

4.4.1 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 Chuan Leekpai 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).

It was generally expected that educational decentralization would raise the accessibility and quality of the Thai education system. However, poor student performance in international tests continues to raise serious concerns. Central to these concerns is the question of how to implement changes that can overcome or weaken the traditionally centralized system of Thai education. This will involve dealing with a complicated legal framework. A detailed description of problems and/or needs must be prepared, and there must be a clear-cut identification in terms of the areas of authorities such as personnel management and resource allocation methods requiring decentralization, directions of authority dispersal (vertical or horizontal) and the process of change. According to the previous experiences, as insisted by Jones, although various utilities of decentralization reform in Thailand have been claimed, the leading change is to strengthen the potential of a nation-state (Jones, 2008, p. 437).

Thus, it is interesting to investigate and understand the changes that have taken place in the new era of decentralization, particularly in terms of what, how, and why. Based on the main rationale in which educational decentralization involves dealing with the process of making authorities and responsibilities shift or disperse away from the central agency or authority, it can be assumed that for the present era of educational decentralization to go further, changes must be mainly confined to increasing school authority and attaining quality in education, with the prime goal of education provision. Put another way, the change of administrative structure as the chain of command must serve a downward shift of authority. In this sense, the roles of the intermediate agencies must change such that they act as the coordinators or facilitators, not the providers of carrot and stick. Since any expected change is usually proposed by laws, it is necessary to investigate the related educational laws. As

mentioned by Garber, law is the primary vehicle for implementing the function (Garber, 1934, p. 38).

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

4.4.2.1 NEA's Objectives and Principles

The most recent changes in the educational sector stem from the mandates of the National Education Act 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, 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. In a broad sense, NEA guides a set of changes covering the following points:

1) Creating new or reinvention of existing schools (public and/or private, depending on the state law), thereby expanding both the number and variety of school choices;

2) Granting more autonomy and flexibility to schools and the Office of Primary Education Service Area, imposed by state laws and regulations;

3) Anticipating that the interplay between the Office of Primary Education Service Area and schools supplemented by autonomy would make education more innovative and of higher quality. (Unfortunately, this expectation underestimated the extent to which OBEC and the Offices of Primary Education Service Area control public schools in the areas of instruction and curriculum, personnel management and teacher qualifications.)

4) Guiding a path by which the subsequent laws would create the conditions that provide the combination of autonomy, innovation, and accountability to facilitate education provision that finally leads to student achievement.

In relation to specific objectives and principles, Section 9 requires that the system, structure, and process of education shall be changed to meet the following principles (ONEC, 2002, p. 4):

　　　　1) Having unity of policy and diversity in implementation;

　　　　2) Decentralizing authority to educational service areas, educational institutions, and local administration organizations;

　　　　3) Setting educational standards and implementing system of quality assurance for all levels and all types of education;

　　　　4) Raising the professional standards of teachers, faculty staff, and educational personnel, who shall be developed on a continuous basis;

　　　　5) Mobilization of resources from different sources or provision of education;

　　　　6) Partnerships with individuals, families, communities, community organizations, local administration organizations, private persons, private organizations, professional bodies, religious institutions, enterprises, and other social institutions.

If these objectives had been met by changes that truly resulted in a downward shift of authority, basic education should have moved away from the highly centralized structure left by the previous major change occurring in B.E. 2523 (1980). Additionally, the situation of continuous poor quality and performances of education should have improved. However, it remains a puzzle as to why, nearly two decades after the primary education system underwent the changes adopted in name of educational decentralization, so little has been achieved in improving the poor administration and quality of basic education. To shed light on this puzzle, addressing how the highly centralized structure and authority have been dealt with and what elements were transferred from the highly centralized structure and authority to the new forms is investigated. By examining these, the extent and degree of decentralization can be determined.

4.4.2.2 NEA's 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).The second set of mandates was implemented though 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).

1) The Creation of New Institutions

The Royal Decree on the Establishment of the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (Public Organization) B.E. 2543 (2000) (ONESQA) is enacted in accordance with Sections 47 and 49 of NEA. The mandates are expressed in very clear terms. Section 47, it states that: "There shall be a system of educational quality assurance to ensure improvement of educational quality and standards at all levels. Such a system shall be comprised of both internal and external quality assurance" (ONEC, 2002, p. 17). Section 49 stipulates that "An Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment shall be established as a public organization, responsible for development of criteria and methods of external evaluation, conducting evaluation of educational achievements in order to assess the quality of institutions, bearing in mind the objectives and principles and guidelines for each level of education as stipulated in this Act" (ONEC, 2002, p. 17). The objectives of ONESQA include the development of the criteria and methods in relation to external assessment and the assessment of the outcomes of educational provision (Royal Decree on Establishment of the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment, (ONESQA), 2000, pp. 14-16). Based on these, ONESQA's functions relate to evaluating the quality of educational institutions, taking into account the aims, principles and direction for provision of each level of education as stipulated in the National Education Act. To deal with these functions, ONESQA is granted certain authorities over developing the system, framework,

standards, criteria, and methods of external assessment. Finally, ONESQA issues standards by which schools are certified to have the external assessment.

The Royal Decree on the Establishment of the National Institute of Educational Testing Service (Public Organization) B.E. 2548 (2005) is derived from Section 4 of NEA, specifically in relation to the term of 'Educational Standards.' The term determines a desired status of education. It is defined as "specifications of educational characteristics, quality desired, and proficiency required of all educational institutions. They serve as means for equivalency for the purposes of enhancing, monitoring, checking, evaluating, and providing quality assurance in the field of education" (ONEC, 2002, p. 5).

The objective of the Institute is mainly to deal with providing educational testing services (Royal Decree on Establishment of the National Institute of Educational Testing Service, (Public Organization), 2005, pp. 19-21). As agreed by rich literature and educational thinkers, educational standards are indispensable and should be designed to be relevant to the real world. This provides for a high-quality education based on knowledge and skills that can prepare learners for success in lives and careers. The Institute is granted certain authorities to administer and operate educational testing services, and to research and implement educational testing services. In general, educational tests must be administered and scored in accordance with a standard manner.

The two agencies 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.

2) Revitalization of the Existing Authority and Administrative Structure

In examining the results of attempts to revitalize the existing authority and administrative structure, the "traditional practice" in which the new

regional agencies are committed to a hierarchical chain of command is observed. Importantly, with a hierarchical chain of command, it is expected that responsibility and authority allocation is confined to a form of delegation. This suggests a covert intent to retain top-down control over the system of basic education administration, with the regional agencies being seen as nothing but branches of the central agency.

The first initiative is brought about by the Administrative Organization of the Ministry of Education Act B.E. 2546 (2003). This Act 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 or appearance of the new regional agency to receive the resources, particularly in terms of persons or 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 shaping or 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).

Interestingly, as no creativity was observed, the words of a well-known scholar who took a leading role in this era of educational reform to the effect that the Office of Education Service Area is intended "to be the place for the congregation of the intellects" were widely quoted. The term "intellects" here is meant to reflect the provincial and district educational leaders whose positions were affected when the provincial and district educational agencies were dismantled to establish the Office.

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. 2523were 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 or latest 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, 2003, p. 3). This single commission comprises 37 members. Twenty members are from election as the representatives of the specific groups specified by the Act, eight members are

appointed by the cabinet, and nine members are Ex-officio members. 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.

An example of the key terms reflecting the central ideas of this Act includes "Profession", "Professional Educator", and "License". The term "Profession" is defined as "educational profession with the primary duty in relation to: teaching and learning process, promotion of learning among learners through various methods; responsibility for the administration of public and private educational institutions at early child, basic and undergraduate education; education administration outside educational institutions at the education service area level; and support of education support, or provision or undertaking of teaching and learning process, educational services, supervision, and education administration in various educational institutions" (Teachers and Educational Personnel Council Act, 2003, p. 2). The term "Professional Educator" means "teachers, educational institution administrators, education administrators and other educational personnel who are granted licenses to practice the "Profession" in regard to this Act" (Teachers and Educational Personnel Council Act, 2003, p. 2). The term "License" means "Licenses for practicing the 'Profession' issued for those acting in the position of teachers, educational institution administrators, education administrators and other educational personnel defined by this Act" (Teachers and Educational Personnel Council Act, 2003, p. 3).

Interestingly, these terms reflect that the traditional Kuru-sapa mainly changed with regard to expanding rather than improving its roles and responsibilities. Central to the change is the term professional standards. In general, the authorities of (new) Kuru-sapa are drawn around 1) determining professional standards, issuing and revoking licenses, supervising and monitoring for compliance with the professional standards and code of ethics, including professional development; 2) determining professional development plans and policies; and 3) seeking for coordination on education and research in this field, according to Section 8 specifying the objectives of the Teachers Council of Thailand.

Apart from a set of changes in accordance or aligned with the issues of Profession, Professional Standards, and License, the previous functions of the traditional Kuru-sapa are also revised. Based on the functions of the traditional Kuru-sapa involving teacher welfare provision, a new commission is established and named the Welfare Promotion Commission for Teachers and Educational Personnel to be responsible for operating the revised functions of Kuru-sapa. According to Section 62 of the Act, it specifies that "A Welfare Promotion Commission for Teachers and Educational Personnel shall be established to operate administration of the Office of Welfare Promotion Commission for Teachers and Educational Personnel" (Teachers and Educational Personnel Council Act, 2003, p. 20).

The authorities of the Welfare Promotion Commission are drawn from the objectives of its establishment that involve: 1) providing benefits, welfare, other interests and security for ones whose careers relate to professional educators and educational practitioners; 2) promoting unity among and maintaining honor of the professional educators and educational practitioners; 3) supporting or facilitating the Ministry of Education in relation to teaching and learning materials; and 4) promoting and supporting for doing research to develop or improve welfare provision (Teachers and Educational Personnel Council Act, 2003, p. 20).

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, 2004, p. 24). This passage is subsequent to Section 54 of 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, 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, 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-khor Changwat/Or-Gor-khor Krung-thep), were transformed into the current form.

The TEPC or Kor-Khor-Sorasa central commission known in Thai as Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor-Klang comprises thirty-one members of which the Minister of Education is chairman and the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education as vice-chairman. Twelve members are elected as the representatives of the specific groups specified by the Act, nine members are appointed by the cabinet, and eight members are Ex-officio members.

The TEPS sub-commission of the TEPC known in Thai as Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor-Khet [Khet means the Office of (Primary) Education Service Area] has ten members. Four members are qualified members defined as the experts, one of whom will be selected by each to be the head of TEPS. Two members are ex-officio members as the representative of TEPC and of Kuru-sapa, five members are elected as the representatives of teacher civil service and educational personnel, and the Director of the Office of Education Service Area acts as secretary.

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, 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 equalized or 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 it regional branches enjoy exercising their authorities to control schools or design tasks, a heavy responsibility or burden is shifted to the schools.

4.4.3 Low Priority Mandate on Educational Decentralization

The NEA's mandates simply outline what the government should do. Legal instruments as the frameworks of change must be designed to ensure that the policy is implemented. The laws enacted comprise certain elements that reflect the extents, directions and features of the expected changes.

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 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, 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, 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 or the central government. 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 or regional 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 or provincial 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 NEA's mandate in relation to educational decentralization is too broad and vague becomes clearer when 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, 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, 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, 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 cancelled. If intended to fulfil the mandate of 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 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, 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.

In summary, although 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.

4.5 Office of Primary Education Service Area: A Masterpiece of Educational Decentralization

4.5.1 Introduction

Restructuring the administrative structure or chain of command was adopted in name of educational decentralization. The stated purposes were to clean up the long lasting problem of poor administration and performance in basic education, and to allow a more proactive administrative system in dealing with the global competitive world. Implementing this change created a new administrative structure in the Ministry of Education. However, the new structure involves a hierarchical form in which lower level agencies (Offices of Primary Education Service Area) are subordinate to a single central agency (OBEC).

It can be said that whether this change is meaningful to schools depends on the roles of the Office of Education Service Area. This is because the Office of Education Service Area is an intermediate agency which, by law, has administrative jurisdiction over schools to hold them to achieve higher performance levels. The structure, function and responsibility of the Office of Education Service Area should be

designed to support and facilitate schools in managing teaching and learning activities and pursuing educational goals. Without proper functioning of the Office of Education Service Area, schools cannot successfully achieve these goals.

For the period of over a decade in which schools have been driven by the Office of Primary Education Service Area, education performance has remained poor. It is now appropriate to question different aspects of the Office of Education Service Area, in particular its roles, authority and relationship with schools. To fulfill this intent, certain key issues about the Office of Primary Education Service Area have been selected for examination. These are the manner of or method for dealing with the existing officials working in the previous provincial and district administrative bodies that were dismantled, the size of the Office of Primary Education Service Area, the board or commission of the Office of Education Service Area, and the roles of the Office of Education Service Area. This process will reflect the extent to which the changes conform to the premises for decentralization

It is important to understand that the changes examined in this section took place before the Office of Education Service Area was broken out into the two bodies (the Office of Primary Education Service Area and the Office of Secondary Education Service Area). For the purpose of this analysis, the Office of Education Service Area and the Office of Primary Education Service Area should be considered to be interchangeable when mentioned. Although the changes occurred before the demarcation, their effects have been inherited by the Office of Primary Education Service Area.

4.5.2 Dealing with the Preexisting Officials

Section 37 of NEA specifies that "The administration of the basic education shall be based on the educational service areas in which the number of schools, the number of population and other involved conditions are as the main criteria taken into consideration for the establishment of each educational service area" (National Education Act, 1999, p. 11). Educational decentralization is required to be associated with this process. According to Section 39 of NEA, "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" (National Education Act, 1999, p. 12)

To serve NEA's mandates, the Office of Education Service Area was established. As mentioned previously, each Office was amalgamated from the five provincial and district educational bodies. For each province, the number of the Office of Education Service Areas is subject to its size varying according to the number of its districts and schools. Initially, there were 175 offices throughout the country. Each office provided educational services for and control over both secondary and primary schools.

There were two important subsequent changes. First, there was a call for the number of Offices of Education Service Area within each province to be reconsidered. This resulted in an increase in the number of Office of Education Service Areas. Second, there was a call for a dichotomy of administration between secondary schools and primary schools. It was claimed that the two levels of education were naturally different in the sizes, students' age, and the nature of students. The dichotomy was made according to the Third National Education Act B.E. 2553 (2010) including its ancillary laws such as the Second Act of Administrative Organization of the Ministry of Education B.E. 2553 and the Third Act of Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel B.E. 2553. These laws resulted in the Offices of Education Service Area being broken out into two offices. The office charged with controlling secondary schools was named the Office of Secondary Education Service Area. The focus of this study, the office charged with controlling primary schools (including those providing both primary and junior secondary education known as educational opportunity expansion schools) was named the Office of Primary Education Service Area.

An unusual aspect of establishing the Offices of Primary Education Service Area was the method of dealing with the officials of the five provincial and district educational bodies combined to establish the Offices of (Primary/Secondary) Education Service Area. As will be seen later, the methods adopted indicate that it was both unplanned and unsystematic.

The directors of the Offices of Provincial Primary Education, the directors of Provincial General Education and the Provincial Superintendents were selected to be the directors of the Offices of Primary Education Service Area. Applicants wishing to be considered for these positions were required to take an examination. Only those who passed the examination would be considered for the position.

The assistant directors of the Offices of Provincial Primary Education, the chiefs of the Office of District Primary Education, the assistant chiefs of the Office of District Primary Education, the assistant directors of the Provincial General Education, the assistant superintendents of the Provincial Education, the superintendents of the District Education, and the assistant superintendents of the District Education were selected to be the deputy directors of the Offices of Primary Education Service Area. Selection involved 5 steps. First, all applicants were placed in temporary positions called "basic educational administrative officials." Second, the officials holding these temporary positions were offered positions of lecturers in Rajabhat universities, subject to the conditions that the officials held a master or doctoral degree and passed an evaluation organized by the universities. This was quite attractive to some of the officials. Third, the remaining officials were evaluated by the Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Commission (TEPC) in terms of their qualifications and experience. This led to appointment of up to three formal deputy directors for each office. Next, as there was no way that the officials who did not pass the evaluation would accept a position that was inferior to that of deputy director, the position of informal deputy director was created. Surprisingly, this position was labelled in Thai as rong yiew-ya (rong=deputy, yiew-ya= given as healing wounded mind). Finally, all of the rong yiew-ya were allowed to voluntarily transfer themselves to be the principals or directors of primary schools.

The number of rong yiew-ya varies from office to office. This depends on the number of the districts merged into each Office of Primary Education Service Area. In short, the more districts merged into the Office of Primary Education Service Area, the greater the potential number of rong yiew-ya. The maximum number of deputy directors allowed is eleven. It is said that the Office of Primary Education Service Area is the first government agency of Thailand where the number of deputy directors

can reach this number. The position of rong yiew-ya lasts until retirement. Then, this temporary position will be dissolved.

Two key implications can be drawn from the methods used to deal with the officials affected by restructuring the provincial and the district branches of the central agency to form the Office of Primary Education Service Area. Firstly, instead of being merged to pursue the key goals of higher quality education and educational decentralization, it seems that the Office of Primary Education Service Area was restructured to solve the matter of personnel rearrangement. Evidently, solving this problem took nearly three years after the emergence of the Office of (Primary) Education Service Area. Secondly, with the large number of officials in each Office of (Primary) Education Service Area, there is pressure on officials to legitimize their existence through school interventions. According to the traditional norms of practice, the documents, directives, or orders of the central agency are the tools that the officials of the regional or intermediate agencies use to please the central agency. In this sense, the officials are diligent in communicating every matter through paper reports, taking school visits without the concern for occasions, and arranging school principal meetings. This poses a heavy burden on schools. Because of these interventions, school concentration on managing their teaching and learning activities is disturbed and weakened. Based on these implications, the expansion of the number of deputy directors, particularly in terms of rong yiew-ya, do not assist in solving the chronic problem: the poor quality and administration of basic education.

Another surprising matter is that each of the Offices of Primary Education Service Area has two tiers of leaders. As mentioned above, the first tier is the director and the deputy directors. In Thai, these positions are pronounced "phor-or khet (director), rong phor-or khet (deputy director). The second tier is produced by an internal structure comprising seven internal units (the Administrative office, Internal Audit Unit, Financial and Asset Administrative Group, Effective Administration Promotion Unit, Policy and Planning Group, Educational Promotion Group, Educational Supervision, Monitoring and Evaluation Group, and Educational Service Centre). Each unit has its own leader called "director of internal unit" known in Thai as "phor-or klum (phor-or = director, klum= subgroup).These leaders were previously the leaders of internal units, known in Thai as huanafai (huana= Leader or chief, fai=

subunit), of the Office of Provincial Primary Education, the provincial branch of the previous central agency (the ONPEC).

4.5.3 The Boards of the Office of Primary Education Service Area and What They Do

Apart from being governed or led by its director, the Office of Primary Education Service Area has two other boards to which the Office has responsibilities. These are the Educational, Religious and Cultural Committee of Primary Education Service Area, and the Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Sub-commission (TEPS). While the first one emerged as a new board, the latter one is the rebirth of the previous board known as the Provincial Teacher Civil Service Subcommittee (Or-gor-khor-changwat). It is necessary to gain insight into the authorities and responsibilities of these boards to reveal for whom they work and how exercising their powers contributes to or affects schools, particularly in terms of school improvement.

4.5.3.1 The Educational, Religious and Cultural Committee of Primary Education Service Area

The Educational, Religious and Cultural Committee of Primary Education Service Area was established according to Section 38 of NEA. This Section stipulates that "the Office of Primary Education Service Area shall have its committee called the Educational, Religious and Cultural Committee of Primary Education Service Area" (National Education Act, 1999, p. 11). The authorities of the Committee affect both Basic Education and undergraduate education. In summary, they cover three areas: 1) authority to oversee education institutions; 2) authority to deal with the establishment, dissolution, amalgamation and discontinuance of educational institutions; and 3)authority to deal with promoting the roles of various parts of society in providing or/and supporting education.

It is important to note that although the duties of the Educational, Religious and Cultural Committee of Primary Education Service Area seem to be congruent with the principle of decentralization in which participation among various parts of society in supporting and improving education provision is encouraged, in

practice the Committee is seen as having little significance. This point of view is based on three factors.

Firstly, the mandate for the Committee provided in the NEA is weak. Although Section 38 outlines the composition and qualifications of Committee members, the criteria and methods of recruitment depend on ministerial regulations which, as previously stated, are low ranking laws. Section 38 specifies that members of the Committee include representatives of community, private organizations, local administration organizations, teacher professional associations, educational administration profession associations, guardian and teacher associations, and qualified members or scholars in education, religion, art and culture (National Education Act, 1999, pp. 11-12). Until recently, there has been no release of any related law to provide additional details about the components of the Committee. Because of this, the process of implementing its mandate has received little attention. According to the researcher's experience, when the question of 'Do you know who the members of the Committee are?' is introduced to certain teachers, almost all of them reply that 'I don't know' or 'I'm not sure.' Asked the question 'Why are we (the teachers) uninterested in being the members of the Committee?' most of them reply that 'It might be that there is no interest.' The significance of the Committee is observable when compared to the emergence of the Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Sub-commission (TEPS) of the Office of Primary Education Service Area, the other commission of the Office of Primary Education Service Area. Stipulated by the Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Act B.E. 2547 (2004), holding a top rank of hierarchy of law, TEPS is specific enough in terms of its members and authority. Secondly, exercising the Committee's authorities over the areas stipulated has difficulties. For example, "overseeing education institutions" and "promoting the roles of various parts of society in providing or supporting education" are highly subjective terms which are broad in scope and ambiguous in methods. As a result, the exercise of authority is voluntary or merely symbolic. A member of one Committee once reflected that, by their very nature, individual schools can play a better role in seeking participation of various parts of society in education provision. In the matter of establishment, dissolution, amalgamation or discontinuance of educational institutions, this same member reflected that these responsibilities are

rarely implemented. If there is a case, action has generally already been initiated by schools and their communities. Thirdly, taking on the responsibilities of the Committee is motivated by trust and faith, as opposed to personal interest in improving education quality. In short, these factors reflect why the role of the Committee is seen as being of little significance.

4.5.3.2 The Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Sub-commission (TEPS)

The Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Sub-commission (TEPS) of the Office of Primary Education Service Area is mandated by the Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Act B.E. 2547 (2004). According to the Section 21 of the Act, the backgrounds and qualifications of member of the commission are fixed to the following matters (Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Act, 2004, pp. 30-31):

1) Chairperson as elected from the qualified members among the members of the subcommittee;

2) Two ex-officio members, viz. a representative of the Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Committee (TEPC) and a representative of the Teacher Council which are selected from persons who have knowledge, skill or experience in personnel administration, education, law or finance;

3) Four qualified members selected from persons who have knowledge, skill or experience in personnel administration, education, law, finance and other fields which may be beneficial to personnel administration of an educational service area, one to be selected from each field;

4) Five representatives of teacher civil servants and educational personnel in the educational service area, viz. a representative of teacher civil servants providing primary education, representative of teacher civil servants providing secondary education, a representative of the administrators of educational institutions providing primary education, a representative of the administrators of educational institutions providing secondary education, and a representative of other educational personnel.

The Director of Office of Primary Education Service Area shall be a member and secretary.

The commission is granted ten authorities related to personnel issues. The first six of these deal with personnel management. According to the Section 23 of the Act, the commission is granted authority (Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Act, 2004, pp. 31-32):

1) To formulate policy on personnel administration of teacher civil service and educational personnel within its education service area, set manpower planning and position descriptions or levels, and operate redeployment in accordance with the personnel policy, rule or regulation formulated or prescribed by TEPC;

2) To give approval to the recruitment and appointment of teacher civil service and educational personnel within its education service area;

3) To give approval to the result of salary increment promotion of school principal, educational administrator, teacher civil service and educational personnel within its education service area in terms of both regular and extra salary increment promotion;

4) To consider the matters regarding discipline operation and procedure, discharge from bureaucratic official, appeal and petition as prescribed by this Act;

5) To promote and restore morale and motivation of teacher civil service and educational personnel within its education service area, promote and maintain merit system, promote welfare provision, and claim the honor for teacher civil service and educational personnel;

6) To supervise, monitor, follow up and evaluate the matters in relation to personnel administration of teacher civil service and educational personnel within the specific education service.

For this Committee to conform to the basic principle of decentralization in which adequate authority must be decentralized to lower level agencies, it must be proved that schools have an increased say in personnel management of the teaching profession. Unfortunately, it has been found that the change does not improve the long-lasting imbalance of authority relationships; schools are denied access to

decision-making in this area. The Act contains no provision for creation of a personnel commission at school level. TEPS is the lowest commission to which downward authority is shifted. This leaves authority allocation in the traditional vertical form. Thus, although responsibilities were reassigned or decentralized, schools have little relative authority to carry them out. Simply speaking, the emergence of TEPS was not invoked as a means for ensuring authority access for schools. Instead, authority allocation continues to end at the regional/provincial level. TEPS is nothing but a reincarnation of the previous Provincial Civil Service Subcommittee (Or-Gor-khor Changwat).

4.5.3.3 Manner of Exercising Authorities

TEPS has a great influence on schools and teachers, as it is charged with sole authority over the personnel management of the teaching profession. This includes determining salary increments, promotion (particularly to school principal level), and teacher transfer. Decision-making, it is a secret or closed process and discretion-driven. The Director of the Office of Primary Education Service Area plays a leading role in decision-making, so much so the entire process and results are to as being subject to phor-or khet (the Director of Office of Primary Education Service Area).

According to the rules of the TEPS, salary promotion can take place twice a year (Thai Royal Gazette, 2004, p. 40).The first promotion is made based on teacher and school principal performance in the first half of the year, ranging from October 1$^{st.}$ of the present year to March 31st of the next year. The second promotion is made based on teacher and school principal performance in the first half of the year, ranging from April 1st to September 30th. Once agreed by the TEPS, salary increments for school principals are subject to the discretion the Director of the Office of Primary Education Service Area. For teachers salary increments is subject to the discretion of the school principals.

The first promotion is based on the number of teachers in the school, with the number of teachers to receive extra salary limited to not over fifteen percent of the total number of teachers in the school. The salary for the digit after the decimal point goes to the Office of Primary Education Service Area. It is generally understood that allocating this digit is the right of the Director of the Office of Primary Education

Service Area, but questions as to how the money is managed and who gets an interest are usually met with informal or unclear answers.

The second promotion distributes 6% of the monthly total amounts of salary of all teachers in the school, less any amount that was used for salary promotion in the first half of the year. Each teacher will receive a regular salary promotion as a fixed figure varying according to his/her position or rank, with any balance used for extra salary promotion for the one(s) who take(s) a lot of responsibilities or can improve school or student performance. Usually, the teacher(s) who are promoted for extra salary at this time is the same one(s) promoted for extra salary promotion (known as song-khan) in the first half of the year. Importantly, as in the first half of the year, any left-over money goes to the Office of Primary Education Service Area and managed at the discretion of the Director of the Office of Primary Education Service Area.

In relation to (an extra) salary promotion for school principals, it is important to recognize that each Office of Primary Education Service Area is responsible for monitoring several hundred primary schools. Thus, it is very difficult for the Director of Office of Primary Education Service Area to understand the contexts, backgrounds, problems and needs of each individual school. To maintain the principle of transparency, a formal performance appraisal process is followed. Three key criteria are maintenance of discipline, personal morals and ethics, and professional conduct. Others are determined at the discretion of the TEPS. In practice, the Director of Office of Primary Education Service Area uses a school principals meeting to declare the criteria used. There are four main factors that are frequently used: 1) O-NET results. In the current year, for example, O-NET result is the single determinant and principals whose school has an average O-NET score higher than those of the primary education service area or the national level deserves an extra salary increment promotion (song-khan).In other years, O-NET results may be one of several factors; 2) The Director may announce that a school principal who will retire from work in the present year or the next year or the next two years deserves an extra salary increment promotion; 3) The Director may announce that a school principal whose school wins a prize or award at national or regional level deserves an extra salary increment promotion; 4) The Director may announce that a school principal

who is often appointed as a member of a team to operate a specific task such as doing an evaluation of "white schools" (schools that are free from drugs), and Buddhist approach schools (Rong-rien Vidhi Buddh)deserves an extra salary increment promotion .These criteria can fluctuate widely from year to year to any serve specific needs of TEPS, and in some cases to reward a list of principals who are predetermined to receive an extra salary increment promotion. As a result, some principals often receive an extra salary increment promotion.

It is interesting to note the TEPS role of the Director of the Office of Primary Education Service Area. Although the Director is just a member and secretary of TEPS, there are four factors that provide him a great influence and motivate him to play a major role in the TEPS. Firstly, by holding the top administrative role in the Office of Primary Education Service Area, it is highly likely that the Director's opinions and decisions will dominate those of other members of the TEPS, particularly the representatives of teachers. Secondly, except for the teachers' representatives, other members do not know much about individual school contexts and principals. Thus, it is more likely that decisions are made according to the Director's recommendations. Thirdly, since a result (score) of assessment has never been publicly announced, the Director is quite free from pressure in which the question of 'How much do I get?' or 'Why do I get this?' is asked. Fourthly, according to word of mouth, whenever trouble arises or an error occurs, the director can avoid taking responsibility by claiming that 'I'm just the secretary of TEPS.'

TEPS also has a great influence on schools and teachers because it is responsible for man-power planning, recruitment, appointment and retirement, and teacher transfer. As environment and location of workplace greatly affect the quality of work, lives and mental health of teachers, they face great pressure and fight eagerly to work and live their lives in the best possible environment. There are several issues that emerge from this.

First, with teacher transfer being highly competitive, each candidate is motivated to use any method that can help him / her win other rivals. One way, for example, is for candidates to either create close personal relationships with members of the TEPS, or approach others who have such a relationship, and then negotiate for the desired position.

Second, as TEPS transfer decisions are discretionary, and the process is not open to outsiders, candidates must put great effort into taking advantage of desired opportunities. Transfer results are often criticized for being the product of a process lacking transparency. Specific criticisms include three points: 1) the procedure of teacher transfer is a closed system in which participation is not provided. Schools, that know best their requirements, are excluded from the procedure; 2) the result of a teacher transfer decision is not open for discussion, and may not be congruent to a teacher's age, experience, and domicile; and 3) a decision may be made to transfer a teacher to a position or school where he/she is not certified as required by the school. In practice, before the release of final transfer results, the school that will receive a teacher will get a list of candidates to identify the certified teacher whom it requires. However, unexpected results often occur.

When transfer results are challenged, a common response involves the excuse of "we (TEPS, generally by the Director of the Office of Primary Education Service Area) made it in respect of appropriateness." Others involve "you can't always get what you want" or "we have a teacher whom the school wants moved to another school according to appropriateness." These excuses are developed because of the basic right to which individual teachers submitting a transfer request can nominate three schools for prioritizing. However, there were many cases that do not follow this basic right. These types of responses and the fact that decisions are made behind the scene without transparency place an unfavourable stigma on the TEPS. It is generally said that prime schools such as those of larger size, located in town or close to transportation require transfer candidates to make several forms of effort in trying to approach or make connections with members of the TEPS. According to information received from a teacher who put much effort into submitting a transfer request, it can take three years to know that the transfer request is ineffective. Though disappointed, this teacher stayed calm and committed to the idea of 'Stop feeling disappointed about the result of the transfer request. Tolerating this result is better than paying the ones involved back for their unexpected decision.'

Chapter 4 has analytically described a series of changes in Thai Basic Education, focusing on educational decentralization. It can be summarized in three points. The first relates to the idea of consolidating powers into the central agency. It

was found that the modern, more formal basic education system was developed at a time when there was a need for the central authority to retain its capability of control over the regional areas. This administrative structure which emerged was tailored to consolidate the process of the central control as it extended throughout the country as provincial and district branches of the central agencies were established. The second point relates to the extent of basic education change when an educational decentralization policy was announced. It was found that the resulting change involved a chain of command which was sharply hierarchical. This strengthened control over schools. At the same time, there was an increase in channels or mechanisms of school control when as changes expanded into areas affecting the teaching profession. The third point relates to the idea of how educational decentralization repositioned the pre-existing authorities and redesigned the physical features of the administrative structure. This did not shift authorities downward to schools. The reason is that the authority over the main thrust of educational decentralization including financial and resource allocation and personnel management remain in hands of the central agency and the intermediate agency as its branch. Thus, implementation of the educational decentralization has simply led to illusory changes.

CHAPTER 5

THEMATIC FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of qualitative analyses of multiple data sources including interviews administered to the directors of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1-3, school principals, focus group discussions administered to teachers, field observations, and school documents relevant to the study's research questions. The information obtained is developed into various themes as text for the real world of educational decentralization in Thailand.

Instead of aiming at developing general findings, this chapter focuses on getting deep experience developed around the changes in light of educational decentralization as provided by the three agents: the Director of the Office of Primary Education Service Area, school principals, and teachers. This is to obtain a first-hand perspective on the changes and their effects. Because of the nature of the study, its settings are not large scale. Firstly, they comprise the three agents used as mechanisms for exercise of the authority of the Office of Primary Education Service Area located in Mahasarakham province. Secondly, the researcher has purposely limited the settings to three primary schools where the local agents exist.

5.2 Acquiring Familiarity with the Informants and Their Settings

Prior to commencing the interviews, the researcher intentionally held an informal discussion the school principals for the purpose of getting to know and becoming comfortable with each other.

The school under the jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1 is about 22 kilometers south of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1. It is a medium sized school with an average of 140

students of in each academic year. At that time, the total number of the staff in the school was thirteen. They existed in each of the three statuses: 1) civil service teachers (the largest); 2) government employees; and 3) school employees.

When reaching the school in the morning to conduct an interview with the school principal, the researcher observed that there were more cars than expected. When he found the school principal, the researcher saw that he was feeding a pig. When the researcher got closer, the researcher noticed that the pig was a pregnant wild boar. The school principal greeted the researcher and then invited him to take a look at the wild boar. The researcher listened to his description about certain qualifications of the wild boar. Once he said that:

> when her offspring become big enough for trade, they will be sold. The school will have money to do necessary things…. You know! This makes the students get experience in raising wild boar for sale. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

The researcher asked him why there were so many cars in the school. He replied that his school was selected to be the center for O-NET tutoring organized for the grade-six students of the cluster of nine schools in which it existed and mentioned:

> O-NET score has to increase. Otherwise, an opportunity to get extra annual salary Promotion (song-khan) is hard. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

As we were walking to the principal's room, he pointed to the roof of the building and told the researcher that it faced a big problem because pigeons use the roof as their residence. He was anxious about the problem of pigeon dung which made the roof dirty and caused damage. The principal made a longer statement to vent his frustration on this problem, at the end of which he alluded to the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1:

Other schools receive budget allocated by the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1 for repairing and maintaining dilapidated school buildings. My school does not get this budget although I previously asked for it at the time when a survey assessment of need was conducted by the Office. If I see the Deputy Director who takes responsibility of overseeing this school cluster, I will ask him about this matter. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

Finally, the school principal expressed an alternative way to solve this problem.

I will call a school board meeting to find a way for solving this problem. Perhaps, the villagers' wisdom and experience might be better than the way the school thinks. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

The school under the jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2 is about 24 kilometers south of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2. In addition, it is about 3 kilometers southeast of Phra That Na Dun, one of the most impressive stupas of Thailand. It is a medium sized school with an average of 180 students in each academic year. At that time, the total number of the staff in the school was fifteen. Like the school under the jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, the staff existed in each of the three statuses. Most of them were civil service teachers.

The school had been selected to be part of certain government projects, such as the Lab School (rongrien naiphan) initiated in B.E. 2546 (2003), Buddhism-Oriented School initiated in B.E. 2546 (2010), and Outstanding Sub-district School initiated in B.E. 2553 (2003).

The researcher arrived at the school at around 9.00 am in the morning. At that time the students were already attending classes. The sound of classroom teaching and

learning activities was spreading to every point of the school. The researcher noticed that certain buildings in the school had features which were different from those of official government building. One was small, like a cottage. This was likely to contain the school principal's room and a guest room. In high-rise concrete building, the downstairs area had been modified for multipurpose uses such as meetings. Presumably, the budget for constructing these buildings had been sourced from outsiders since no government budget is allocated for modifying existing buildings or constructing buildings with features that are different from government buildings.

As the researcher enjoyed taking a look around the school, he was notified by a female teacher that the school principal would be a little late since he was busy with planning for the annual Phra That Na Dun Festival, a major festival of the province. While walking to the school principal's room, the teacher added that her school principal was one of the committee taking responsibility in planning for the Festival.

It was around twenty minutes before the principal arrived. After he had expressed his apology for being late, a general conversation took place. When the researcher commented about the school's buildings in terms of style and features, adequacy, and sources of budget, the school principal said that:

Apart from budget received from the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2, we receive financial support from the community. This is generally made through organizing a fund mobilizing ceremony (pha-pa). (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2, personal communication, January 16, 2015)

The school under the jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3 is about 11 kilometers south of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3. The school small sized, with an average of 60 students in each academic year. At that time, the total number of the staff in the school was nine. Like those of the two schools mentioned previously, the staff belonged to all three statuses. Most of them were civil service teachers.

On the day of conducting school principal interview, the researcher arrived at the school around 08.00 am. During the informal discussion, the school principal admitted that he was excited. He had come to the school earlier than usual and wanted to lead the researcher to take a look at some of the outstanding performances of the school.

While walking around the school, the school principal narrated certain points of his background:

> The village in which I was born is in this district and is not far from this village (the village in which the school is located). I started my teaching profession at this school. The villagers were friendly and kind. The connection between the villagers and I is gradually progressing. Thus, I decided to settle down in this village, and when I passed the school principal test seven years ago, I selected this school to start this career. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

We stopped at a corner of the school field where the school principal invited the researcher to take a look at a school road that was made of concrete. According to the school principal:

> As you know, there is no government budget to support constructing school roads. Constructing this road got financial support from the community. The villagers mobilized finance through a fund mobilizing ceremony (pha-pa). Based on a good relationship, I've never been shy to ask for help from the community. I always get positive responses. Importantly, the ask for help always materializes. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

While walking on the balcony of the building in which special rooms such as a meeting room, the principal's room, and the exhibition room existed, the school

principal invited the researcher to stop by the room where various certifications and trophies were displayed. The principal said:

> These indicate our performances and successes. Although our school is small, our capability is not inferior to large schools. I have had good luck in which my partners (teachers) and I have a good understanding of each other since we have worked together for a long time. What is assigned by the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3is accepted by me, as it is also accepted by my teachers. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

Because of his school's performances and successes, the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3 provided him with different opportunities. He said:

> I am always appointed as a member of ad hoc teams for operating specific tasks such as assessment of outstanding performance of teachers, assessment of outstanding performance of school principals, assessment of standard of school in terms of teaching and learning. As it is well-known by the Office, my school is more likely to receive advantages in terms of purposive resources allocation. Because of this, at the time when my teachers and I were proposed to receive extra annual salary promotion (song-khan), it was hard for anyone to oppose.(The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

The teachers participating in focus group discussions from each school were different in age, gender, and work experience. Such diversity was intentionally included by the researcher to obtain views from teachers with different perspectives and experiences.

Those who had taught for over twenty years had gained two contextual experiences. The first was related to the time when primary education was administered under the chain of command comprising ONPEC as the departmental or central agency; the second, the present time when primary education has been under the control of OBEC and its regional branch, the Office of Primary Education Service Area. Those who had taught for fifteen years or more had experienced the period during which ONPEC and its branches were being transformed into OBEC and its regional branch, the Office of Primary Education Service Area. Those who had taught for less than fifteen years had all their experience developed around the products of the latest change: OBEC and the Office of Primary Education Service Area.

There were five participants in the focus group discussion conducted in the school under the jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1. The focus group discussion took placeon a day when their school was taking on the role as a center of O-NET tutoring. The focus group discussion was conducted after a daily O-NET tutoring had finished.

There were seven participants in the focus group discussion conducted in the school under the jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2. The focus group discussion took place on a day when their school was providing its Grade 6 students O-NET tutoring.

There were five participants in the focus group discussion conducted in the school under the jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3. Besides experiencing a climate of O-NET tutoring, the teachers had experienced a fund mobilizing ceremony (pha-pa) organized around two months previously.

5.3 Educational Decentralization in the Sense of Necessity and Goal

5.3.1 Necessity of Educational Decentralization

Investigating the necessity of educational decentralization revealed that the principals and teachers placed the state of their being powerless at the center of the need for educational decentralization. They all had experienced periods during which

they felt overwhelmed with the demands or directives of the higher agencies that many times were seen as being irrelevant to their school's problems and needs. These were stressful situations which the schools had to tolerate.

Different levels of information were provided by different groups. The school principals and the teachers provided deep information, while the directors of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area provided quite general opinions which were unspecific or unexemplified. Specifically, the opinions were confined to the focus on which decision making authority is transferred from the higher level of agency to the lower agency.

According to the directors of the Offices of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area, the existence of the higher level of agency is necessary. In their opinions, in any move towards educational decentralization the existence of an intermediate agency is as important as the transfer of decision making authority. In this sense, it was not a matter of whether the Office of Primary Education Service Area should be dismantled or restructured. What matters was that an agency that was higher than school level such as provincial or district level was needed. One director expressed his idea in accordance with this notion in the following excerpt:

In my opinion, whether the Office remains with its current structure or will be restructured to establish at the district level, decision making authority should be transferred from the central agency to the lower agency and schools. (The Director of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 5, 2015)

The necessity of educational decentralization reflected by another director stressed the role of the Office in promoting a good interaction between the Office and schools by using authority granted to it as a tool or mechanism. This director said:

Educational decentralization will make the center disengage the interaction between the Office and the schools to let the Office and the schools deal with their responsibilities that take into account their co-dependent relationships, capacities and needs….The Office responds better to the schools' problems and needs. (The Director of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 7, 2015)

One of the directors expressed an opinion based on the view that school responsibilities are now increased. As it is believed that developing various sectors in societies can be made through education, schools are pressured to provide a better education and respond to creating certain aspects of students expected by the society. Thus, many responsibilities are placed on schools to be particularly accountable for student achievement and a higher quality of education. To carry out the responsibilities, schools need to have more authority commensurate with their responsibilities. Without authority, the responsibilities just put a heavy burden on schools. However, according to the director, whereas operating school responsibilities requires a context-based decision, the authority that is needed to meet the responsibilities is outside of schools.

> According to a basic principle, education provision belongs to everybody/every part, as said 'education for all, all for education'. It is necessary to decentralize authority and duty to different parts of society, particularly schools, to allow them to manage their own responsibilities. If schools don't have authority, it's difficult for schools to operate their responsibilities. They cannot fix their choices of practice. By decentralization, education provision can respond better to the needs of society, and education quality is also better. (The Director of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2, personal communication, January 9, 2015)

However, this does not mean that authority has to be shifted solely to schools. Indeed, this opinion is based on the understanding that if the central agency decentralizes its authority, the decentralized authority will flow down the chain of command. As the branch of the central agency, it is hoped that the Office of Primary Education Service Area is the first agency that will occupy such authority. Thus, decentralizing authority from the central agency to schools also means to the Office of Primary Education Service Area.

According to the three school principals, the necessity of educational decentralization was related to increasing the authority of schools. The central idea was to allow schools to become self-reliant and able to make their own decisions. The principals believed that increasing schools' authority would enable them to learn to manage their problems and needs, and act independently.

It is important to note that in the traditional chain of command of the Thai public administrative system, authority is exerted by a central agency to which the regional agencies and small units are subject. The initiatives or policies of the central agency are transmitted down the chain of command, forcing the agencies or units act dependently to carry them out. Therefore, delegation is the most distinctive characteristic of how the agencies within such chain of command are managed or work. More importantly, the higher level agencies are explicitly allowed to intervene in the day-to-day operation of the lower level units.

One of the school principals expressed concern about how this system created a situation in which schools lacked authority. The principal's opinion implied that the higher level of agencies create a daily routine work and set a procedure of practice for schools. This creates a situation in which, as holding more authority, the higher level agencies said/destined everything through the exercise of their authority. According to the principal, if schools became more independent of the influence of the higher level of agencies, they would move their accountability from the higher level of agencies to their local communities. Accordingly, the intervention of the higher level agencies would diminish. The principal hoped that this would promote participation of local communities. He linked the idea of local participation to the idea of transparency. Because of local participation, transparency indecision-making and the operation of schools would occur. He thought that this was a condition that promoted schools to learn to manage. Schools have to strive for survival.

> What has happened is not (decentralization). Rather, it is centralization. Decision-making is centralized and still slow. As we see, operating units (known in Thai as nuay-pa-ti-bat) have a lot of things to do. We (the operating units) handle the things for the higher level of agencies. We do. There is no participation of local communities in the process of decision making. When there is no decentralization and participation, bang-pha-kin (bang =hiding oneself behind something, pha= wall, kin = eating/pursuing one's own interests) has to occur. This is why there is no transparency. For this reason, it is necessary to have decentralization. When there is decentralization, schools will care more for the participation of local communities. Don't forget that

local communities are the big sources of help of schools. If anything requires decision making, leave it to schools and local communities. They know well about it. The higher level of agencies cannot be with schools all the time. Centralization will get schools in trouble. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

As reflected by the school principals, it should be noted that the necessity of educational decentralization in terms of the transfer of decision making authority from the central agency to the lower agencies did not refer to a manner in which such authority was transferred from the central agency (OBEC) to the Office of Primary Education Service Area. In this sense, the authority was required to be directly shifted to schools. According to adhering the school principals' opinions in relation to this point, one of them explained that:

There should be no validation of the directives of the Office of Primary Education Service Area. The Office should take a role as facilitator. Its main task should involve assisting the schools to do difficult tasks, for example curriculum development, government procurement, and budget planning and implementation. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2, personal communication, January 16, 2015)

The teachers in the focus group discussions administered in the three primary schools, were perceptive and thoughtful when asked to discuss the necessity of educational decentralization. Their opinions were quite different. Generally, such opinions covered matters related to which areas of authority need to be reallocated and which agencies should have more authority and which agencies should have less. Generally, their reflections supported a practice of diffusing authority to increase school authority.

One of the three focus group discussions eagerly described the necessity of educational decentralization. Their views were based on negative attitudes developed

around centralized decisions. Although schools were subjected to unique student and school needs and problems, what schools did was tied to the orders of the higher level agencies. Thus, they believed that the shift of decision making authority from the top agencies to schools could greatly contribute to operating work.

> If the government insists on keeping authority in the center, it is hard for them to respond to the demands of schools. They (the higher level agencies) think and force schools to do what they think. Thus, schools have more burdens and obligations. You know! Schools waste much time doing things that are useless to learning and teaching. This is a reason why authority should be decentralized from the center to the schools. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2, personal communication, January 16, 2015)

> Decentralization is necessary to reduce fragmented authority and gradually reduce the layers of command. Previously, I think authority was concentrated at the center. To make operating work faster and reduce the layers of command, decision making authority should be at the bottom. Decentralization is to make the authority, duty and responsibility of the center shift to the lower level of agencies. Then the participation of communities will take place because decision making is made at schools. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

The excerpt above implied that, according to the teachers' understanding, the agency that was required to give out authority was the central agency (OBEC). It revealed that hard dominance of the central agency was not the solution. In short, what the schools did responded to what the central agency wanted instead of what the schools themselves wanted.

Interestingly, the ideas about decentralization of the teachers who entered the teacher profession after the establishment of OBEC and the Office of Primary Education Service Area were developed more around the existence of the Office of Primary Education Service Area. In general, for them the agency that was required to

give out authority was the Office of Primary Education Service Area. The quotation below reflected the passive role of the schools identified with the roles or interventions of the Office of Primary Education Service Area.

> If decentralization will really occur, I want the Office to understand that its orders placed here and there make schools go through rough stuff by responding to such orders instead of engaging in teaching. Sometimes while I am teaching, my school principal calls me to meet him and assigns me to do what the Office wants. The most common practice is to do a paper report. As far as I can recognize, I have to report about what instructional media I use or create to solve the problem of illiterate children. Once, I had to report about student weight and height a number of times. I'm not sure if the first report was lost or a new requirement was made by another internal unit of the Office. The schools want the Office not to believe that poor quality of education solely results from poor teaching methods. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

Teachers also experienced the control of schools by the orders of the Office. A teacher in one of the focus groups felt schools had less opportunity than in the past to engage in developing their choices. To motivate schools to quickly respond to its orders, the Office created the label of 'well behaved' for schools that avoided conflict and duly obliged its orders. The teacher was further concerned that if too much school time was devoted to dealing with the orders of the Office, the time spent in classrooms would be reduced. He felt that the Office should reduce school interventions to allow schools to carry out their missions. The excerpt below reflects this notion.

> Educational decentralization is to permit schools to manage, to make decisions. In a day, schools receive a lot of official documents, of which at least half tie the schools up doing paper reports. Then, the school principal will hand the documents to the individual teachers considered to be the ones

who can cope best with handling the matter in accordance with the form designed by the Office. Sometimes the teachers haggle with each other over the matter assigned. Uh….It once occurred to me that I had my own idea which was different from the form designed by the Office. I phoned the Office to ask that if I could follow my idea. The Official told me to just follow what was designed by the Office. Finally, I had to follow what was specified by the Office….I think if the assignments of the Office become fewer, teachers will be happier with teaching. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

As the present chain of command was tailored to provide a mechanism by which the Office of Primary Education Service Area is delegated responsibilities and authorities from the OBEC, the Office is obliged to intervene in schools. Accordingly, schools have to orient their actions to serve what OBEC thinks following practices designed by the Office. Occasionally, schools have authority over a specific task or matter which is passed down from OBEC and the Office. This implies that decentralizing authority to schools is at the discretion of the two higher agencies. Not surprisingly, schools become frustrated when they try to determine their own matters, including the extent to which they are allowed to do it. According to one teacher:

For buying books uh….and student uniforms, money is transferred to the school account to do this. But for other things, it is difficult to understand. As we see from repairing buildings and teacher residences, money is transferred to the Office's account. All the Office does is asking us to make a list of items required to be repaired and calculate how much money we need according to that list. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2, personal communication, January 16, 2015)

The teachers suggested that educational decentralization has to provide certainty about the areas in which authority will be decentralized, and to where the authority will go. This can assure that school interventions made by OBEC and the Office of Primary Education Service Area will be reduced.

5.3.2 Educational Decentralization in Terms of Goal

It is important to note that the work position of the goal determiner reflects the degree or distance between the goal defined and the presently existing problem. This notion is developed around data obtained through interviews and observations. When the three groups of informants were invited to share their opinions about the goal of educational decentralization, only the teachers were able to provide empirical information. Based on the teachers' experiences, various events were discussed to indicate what they thought was their desired goal. Thus, it can be said that the higher the level or position of the goal shaper, the more the goal drawn seems to rely on what is borrowed from theoretical proposition. This leaves policy implications that will be raised at the end of the section.

In addition to what has been highlighted above, it was observed that when the three groups were asked to discuss the goal of educational decentralization, the directors and school principals were active on the topic and expressed their ideas fluently, while the teachers seemed hesitant to express their opinions. In this sense, the teachers seemed quite afraid to say negative things about certain roles of the Office. Principally, the informants' opinions covered the terms of school interventions, change in decision making authority, participation, and resource allocation and management.

5.3.2.1 Directors of the Office of Primary Education Service Area

Before giving the opinions on the goal of educational decentralization, one of the directors described the need for change in order to move away from the way that decision making was traditionally made. The director reported that many matters in relation to decision making were excluded from the lower levels of agency. A significant result was that the decisions made were not relevant to the needs and problems of such agency. The excerpt below partially illustrated this notion.

> The decision making over teacher staffing, curriculum, and resource allocation has a long history. As we know, it has been made by the center. Schools, teachers, and provincial and district units are out of the decision making and just follow the result of decision. You know….we practice it even though we don't agree with the decision because we see that it is inconsistent with our

needs. Really, participating in decision making is not a difficult matter. For example, let schools select textbooks, develop curriculum, design learning assessment, and plan personnel staffing….If decision making remains centralized, it is hard to tackle the problems of education. (The Director of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 7, 2015)

Generally, the directors saw the goal of educational decentralization as being developed around the idea that it is to allow the lower level agencies to manage their choices or problems and needs. Regarding the present chain of command, the directors felt that there is no real authority at their level. In their opinion, provincial agencies are almost entirely responsible for routine administration and being tightly controlled by the central agency. All the Office can do is to implement the directives of OBEC. Although there is no real authority, the Office is forced to be both generalized, incorporating all aspects of school responsibilities and administration, and specialized in areas like finance, procurement, curriculum, and personnel management. According to one of the directors,

Every part of society believes that schools have to take over the responsibilities particularly posed by the trends of standard education agendas and intensified global competition. As school mentor and master, we have to join schools to bear the expectations of both government and society. Thus, it is necessary for us to know much about every matter of school work. First of all, we want authority to make a decision on our responsibilities. Without authority, the Office can't administer. We can't do much in responding the needs of schools. For example, the process of teacher recruitment to replace the teachers who annually retire is long and slow since it is managed by the center…. I think it's the time for the center to succumb to the demand of the practitioners to increase decision making authority of practitioners. (The Director of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 7, 2015)

The directors were somewhat ambivalent when they were invited to describe their roles played in response to the present round of educational decentralization. They accepted that they could not do much in terms of educational decentralization. As the authority of the Office is subordinate to the authority of OBEC, the Office does not have the ability to decentralize authority to schools. This makes the Office feel less involvement in educational decentralization. Instead, the Office is mainly involved in delegating the directives or initiatives of OBEC to schools.

> The goal of educational decentralization should be developed around the notion that the Office of Primary Education Service Area and schools are defined as the locus of authority. Educational decentralization is to invest the lower level agencies with the right to participate in all matters associated with their responsibilities, such as determining school goals, operating professional selection and management, and judging what and how to instruct and evaluate. (The Director of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 5, 2015)

The directors revealed that they feel additional pressure and risk associated with being tied to the authority of the central agency. To minimize this, the Office must strongly exercise its authority over schools. In this sense, everything managed was accountable to the central agency rather than the schools. Thus, although the Office was intended to be a transformational agency, it ended up retaining the status quo in which the role of the Office was to enforce what it was told to do. A key point is that the goal of educational decentralization should address tailoring the administrative structure so that educational administration is not constrained by an internal structure set by laws, rules or regulations. Rather the administrative structure should be flexible to cope well with external factors.

The goal of educational decentralization also has to address the quality of education and efficiency of administration. In this sense, the quality of education occurs within a process of administration that addresses mutual help or dependence between the Office and schools. Thus, designing the structure of the provincial or

regional agency should not duplicate the structure of the central agency. Duplicating the structure of the central agency makes the responsibilities of the Office like those of OBEC. Such responsibilities become redundant. More importantly, this is a situation that provides a mismatch between the problems and needs of the lower agency and the problems and needs of the central agency.

Additionally, to get quality education requires the participation of all stakeholders. One of the directors shared an optimistic side of which administering inside rather than administering outside or from remote agency could lead to a better quality of education.

> From my point of view, to get quality education requires that all stakeholders, especially schools and their communities participate in decision making. I think they know their problems and needs well. We can't deny that they can solve immediate problems much better….Decision from the center can't cover the problems and needs. But if the lower units have authority to make decisions, they can take care of problems by using participation. Yeah….this makes different parts be inside of the particular problems….Where the need is, it will be fulfilled. (The Director of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2, personal communication, January 9, 2015)

It is necessary to note that although the opinions of the directors of the Office revealed that increasing the authority of the Office should be accompanied by increasing the authority of schools, the directors did not give insight into how increasing the authority of the Office positively impacts on school improvement. This implies that the call for decentralizing authority is based on a short term view or their present or immediate interests. Indeed, decentralizing authority to schools is expected to support schools to be able to use their choices to deal with inward problems and needs traditionally replaced by outward work or demands. This suggests a process by which, if authority is decentralized to the Office, this allows the Office to decentralize its authority to schools to encourage and promote them to innovate.

5.3.2.2 School Principals

School principals mainly saw the goal of educational decentralization as being to increase school authority to make school administration flexible,

collaborative and authoritative in terms of decision-making to cope with new, unexpected and unfamiliar problems and challenges. Thus, school administration must be always based on school contexts, connected with the communities surrounding schools, and less controlled from distant agencies.

As the burden of pursuing a higher quality of education falls on schools, responsibility for resolution and decision making should also fall on schools. With this, schools themselves can respond to negotiate and seek resources to fulfil their demands. They would not have to accept predetermined choices set by an outside institution. According to one of the principals:

Educational decentralization has to think how to make 'nuaynue' (higher level of agency) just coordinate school responsibilities in certain areas such as teacher capacity development, curriculum development, and the provision of specialized services such as procurement processes. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

Another school principal expressed the view that, as school principals have to exercise greater discretion now than ever before because of their increase in responsibilities, their choices should not be hindered by any outside authority. He said that:

The goal of educational decentralization is to give schools authority to determine actions or inactions. I think this can help us get an appropriate choice. And we develop our thoughts and discretion since we need to make the appropriate choice. If 'nuaynue' do order us to do this/that, yes, we can do it but we might not get a good thing. Really, we're afraid of foregoing the higher units' thoughts. Even though we have a lot of responsibilities, we don't think a lot because it isn't necessary to use our discretion. To follow the guideline of the higher units is safer....For example, all processes of procurement must strictly follow the regulations. I think that less authority of schools makes us strictly follow what the higher units say. This is my sense.... I feel that my

discretion is limited by regulation of the higher units. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

More specifically, it was suggested that, as resource management and the teaching profession are the key areas of authority that allow the higher level agencies to be able to exert so much influence on or intervention in schools, decentralizing authority over these areas is critical.

I think the goal of educational decentralization is to give schools authority to decide on the matter of resources…. In a day, we do our work; we use this thing /that thing. We see a problem and we know what we want. This is important….And I think decentralization will come anytime. This is beneficial for schools….As you and me have known for a long time, it is very difficult for us in the matter of resources. We are controlled….We report about from where we get it and how we use it. If we manage resources in line with this, who can answer me about whether it's beneficial for education? (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2, personal communication, January 16, 2015)

For me, whatever, the goal of educational decentralization is to give schools authority…. uh….I'm interested in the issue of teacher professional management. I have had this concern for a long time. I think every school has experience in waiting for a teacher. Although schools face a deficit of teachers, we can't do anything about the matters of teacher transfer or teacher placement. This is why we spend so much time with the matters of teacher transfer between schools and placement of new teachers. This….really, schools should share a greater part or role in these matters. I think many of us agree with this. Especially, I think….the principal of the school that receives a teacher from transfer needs to be appointed as a member of the committee to consider the list of transfer requests. Otherwise, school requirements may not be met. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

5.3.2.3 Teachers

Many teachers did not know where the present educational decentralization has occurred. They perceived that the higher level agencies remained acting as the school controllers and school choice shapers. Thus, the desired goal of educational decentralization in the eyes of the teachers was based on their experience in schools which have been heavily intervened by the higher level agencies. Interestingly, although the idea of the transfer of decision making authority was their fundamental understanding, most of them focused on the transfer of decision making authority from the Office of Primary Education Service Area to schools.

As noted, teachers were quite careful to express their perceptions about the goal of educational decentralization. However, they were eager to share their ideas toward a discussed situation when one of them unintentionally raised a topic or issue that was considered as a challenge in their lives and professional work. One of the teachers talked about an incident that involved interaction with the Office of Primary Education Service Area. Other teachers promptly shared their experiences drawn upon the roles of the Office of Primary Education Service Area. These experiences reflected how certain roles of the Office bounded the teachers to invest their time and efforts to fulfil the requirements of the Office or how such roles limited the teachers' confidence in their own decision making. For example, the excerpts below were taken from one of focus group discussions:

> I address the transfer of decision making authority from the Office of Primary Education Service Area to schools….I have a story to share. At the time when the idea of student-centered learning began to be heavily promoted, the Office ordered schools to commit to the implementation of this idea. I once reported a classroom learning problem to an official of the Office, and was simply told that I had to engage in student-centered learning. It seemed that student-centered learning was seen as an antidote to all problems of teaching and learning. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

I also see. The goal of educational decentralization involves authority. If the higher units (nuaynue) such as OBEC or the Office of Primary Education Service Area have too much authority, schools and teachers lose their choices on problems and needs to the choices of the higher units. A reason is that the demand of the higher units occupies the first priority. As we see now, the Office orders us to do what it thinks or calls us to attend a meeting or a seminar to make us understand something or solve a problem that they have identified by the Office. Teachers are subjected to this guiding force....I am isolated from my classroom. (Another one of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

The participants of another focus group discussion expanded their talk to their ideas about the role the Office of Primary Education Service Area played in certain areas. Although these ideas covered several topics, educational assessment finally became the main focus. This reflected that the teachers were nervous about this issue:

As I heard, it was claimed that every work has been decentralized. That is a good matter. I wait for this. Really, I'm not sure what has occurred. For me, the matter of educational assessment is important. Because even though [OBEC or the Office of Primary Education Service Area] talked about the benefits of context-based teaching and learning, this success was measured by scores. It makes schools work for the scores. Every time, I'm nervous to see the score results of my school, failure or success. If this matter is decentralized, it will be good. Schools will not get pressured. Happy to think! (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2, personal communication, January 16, 2015)

Another one of the teachers described a situation in which schools had to struggle for higher score results. This reflected that the teachers have become doubtful about decentralization. It also reflected a result in which schools had to sacrifice some things.

I understand the duty of the Office of Primary Education Service Area. Whenever we meet, the Office repeatedly talks about the score result, say the names of schools that succeed and fail. Schools have to pay attention to the results. Under pressure, schools have to give up something. Obviously in the second semester, additional activities, such as singing practice and traditional club don't function anymore. Time is for O-NET and NT. The Office of Primary Education Service Area emphasizes this. It's difficult for us to do what we think....we must drill our students for higher scores. And we have to compete with other schools. If our school gets higher scores, the Office of Primary Education Service Area identifies that we succeeded in this year. (Another one of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2, personal communication, January 16, 2015)

As noted, the frequency of which the three focus group discussions referred to the Office of Primary Education Service Area implied that, under educational decentralization policy, the Office of Primary Education Service Area became the main focus of teacher attention. However, they seemed to face a dilemma in understanding which roles were to actualize the educational decentralization goal, and which roles were outside educational decentralization. According to one focus group participant:

I'm not sure about what the Office of Primary Education Service Area and schools do. Where is the goal and where to go? Frankly, we have a lot of paper-work in a whole day. It's necessary for schools to follow the requirements of the Office of Primary Education Service Area.... At the time when we are going to have an inspection from the Office, we leave our classrooms to prepare a lot of papers. We prepare the papers of matters that the Office wants to inspect. Doing these, we have no time to teach. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

In theory, the goals of educational decentralization drawn from the informants can be classified into three groups. Firstly, the goal of educational decentralization is to devolve decision making authority to the lower level agencies. These include the Office of Primary Education Service Area and schools. Secondly, it involves relocating or changing the location of decision making authority to which schools are the main locations of decision making authority, not the Office of Primary Education Service Area. It is interesting to note that this view is shaped by the experience of the informants who feel that they receive poor support from the Office of Primary Education Service Area in terms of improving education quality. And thirdly, the goal of educational decentralization involves attaining a particular value or purpose such as efficiency or quality of education.

More importantly, it seems that the views toward the goal of educational decentralization in relation to the transfer of decision making authority are divided as to where the power transferred or shifted to. If both the Office of Primary Education Service Area and schools are defined as the lower level of agencies, a key question is how authority is allocated. It is necessary to rely on empirical evidence in making decisions on these issues. Who lacks the appropriate authority? Is it the Office of Primary Education Service Area or schools? And why does (do) the Office of Primary Education Service Area/schools want more authority?

5.4 Changes and Their Effects

The changes in the name of educational decentralization referred to by the school principals and teachers will reveal which changes they regard as the most important. This reflection will also reveal the effects of changes on schools. In particular, the schools' views and experiences will indicate who benefitted and who lost from the changes. This will also allow a conclusion to be drawn as to what changes conform and what changes do not conform to the principle of educational decentralization. The changes in the name of educational decentralization are for naught if it is proved that schools remain powerless. Thus, ascertaining whether decision making authority has shifted away from the traditional authority holders is central to making decisions on the value of the changes.

The participants perceived the key changes in the name of educational decentralization to be decision making in the areas of resource allocation, administrative structure and agency, and curriculum. Two points were highlighted. Firstly, among these, authority over resource allocation covering personnel management of civil service teachers is the key area in which, from past to present, there has been no legal framework that provides a mechanism to reallocate authority. The experiences of the school principals and teachers interviewed suggest that there is considerable abuse of the authority in this area for personal gains. This provides an understanding of which why such authority is cherished by the central agency or board and its branches, and has never been decentralized to schools. Secondly, little decision making authority less shifted to schools; they remain largely accountable and responsible to the higher level agencies.

5.4.1 Resource Allocation and Its Effects

Central to implementing educational decentralization is shifting authorities, over key areas from the higher unit of decision making to a lower unit of decision making. However, a simple shift of authority does not mean that true decentralization has occurred. As noted, authority might be shifted from the top unit of decision making to an intermediate unit of decision rather than school-site level. This true extent and degree of decentralization could be proved through investigating the design of the present administrative structure and layers of decision-making.

This section is devoted to investigating the participants' view toward where authorities have shifted in educational decentralization. The contents are drawn from the views of the school principals and teachers as school-site participants. In general, decision making authorities over school resources were seen to be central to findings. These included per student expenditure, discretion-based resource allocation, and teacher professional management.

Initially, it is important to note that the story of resource allocation became more complicated because resource allocation can be made in three ways: 1) OBEC (central agency) to schools, 2) OBEC (central agency) to the Office of Primary Education Service Area to schools, and 3) the Office of Primary Education Service Area to schools. The combination of these methods pushed schools into a situation in

which they had to match their decisions to the specific purposes determined by OBEC and the Office of Primary Education Service Area. In principle, these methods reflected both the degree of control over schools and implications for efficiency and equity.

      5.4.1.1 Per Student Expenditure

      The participants perceived that per student expenditure is a method of resource allocation that creates a direct relationship between the central agency (OBEC) and schools. By directly dealing with schools, OBEC transfers cash into each school's account. Thus, this kind of resource or funding reduces the role of the intermediate agency (the Office of Primary Education Service Area) in terms of intervening school decision making. Schools have full authority to make decision in regard to spending this money according to their choices.

      This method of resource allocation stems from enactment of the Thai Constitution B.E. 2550 (2007) and the subsequent National Education Act (NEA) B.E. 2542 (1999), which led firstly to the 12-year education free policy and then the 15-year education free policy, officially known as the "15 Years of Free Expenditure on Quality Education Policy." This policy adopted a new method of school resource allocation out of concern that Thailand was facing the challenges of a global economic downturn and offered poor educational opportunities to poor and disadvantaged children. Since then, operating resource allocation for schools characterized as general grant (nguen-udnhun-tuapai) has been made under the rule of 'per-student expenditure'. This was expected to be a mechanism for change in educational equity and accessibility. Through per student expenditure, grants provided for schools cover five lists of free items: tuition fees, textbooks, learning materials, school uniforms and activities for promoting quality improvement among students. These grants are directly transferred from OBEC to school accounts. These amounts involved at the various levels of formal education are as shown in table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1 Per Student Expenditure Covering Five Lists of Free Items

Level of Education	Tuition Fees (Baht)	Textbooks on Average (Baht)	Learning Materials (Baht)	School Uniforms (Baht)	Special Activities (Baht)	Total (Baht)
kindergarten level	1,700	200	200	300	430	2,830
Primary Level	1,900	764 (on average)	390	360	480	3,894
Junior High School Level	3,500	837 (on average)	420	450	880	6,087
Senior High School Level	3,800	1,210 (on average)	460	500	950	6,920

For tuition fees, the annually approved amounts are 1,700 baht per student of kindergarten level, 1,900 baht per student of primary level, 3,500 baht per student of junior high school level, and 3,800 baht per student of senior high school level.

For textbooks, the annually approved amounts are 200 baht per student of kindergarten level, 561 baht per student of Grade 1, 605 baht per student of Grade 2, 622 baht per student of Grade 3, 653 baht per student of Grade 4, 785 baht per student of Grade 5, 818 baht per student of Grade 6, 700 baht per student of Grade 7, 863 baht per student of Grade 8, 949 baht per student of Grade 9, 1,257 baht per student of Grade 10, 1,263 baht per student of Grade 11, and baht 1,110 per student of Grade 12. These represent an average of 764 baht for primary students, 837 baht for junior high school students and 1,210 baht for senior high school students.

For learning materials, the annually approved amounts are 200 baht per student of kindergarten level, 390 baht per student of primary level, 420 baht per student of junior high school level, and 460 baht per student of senior high school level.

For school uniforms, the annually approved amounts are 300 baht per student of kindergarten level, 360 baht per student of primary level, 450 baht per student of junior high school level, and 500 baht per student of senior high school level.

For activities for promoting quality improvement among students, the annually approved amounts are 430 baht per student of kindergarten level, 480 baht per student of primary level, 880 baht per student of junior high school level, and950 baht per student of senior high school level.

The participants reported that they were pleased with this method of resource allocation. A main reason was that schools were able to utilize this money as productively as possible since decision making in its use was based on the schools' problems and needs. According to two of the principals:

In operating our teaching, learning and additional activities, we have to use many things. We can use cash from per student expenditure to buy the things we want. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

I call the teachers for a meeting. In the meeting, we review the lists of books and teaching materials in catalogues. I want all teachers to participate in decision making. What will be selected are good for teaching and learning. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

The main constraints limiting school choices were seen to be the complexity of procurement procedures and insufficiency of fund granted per student.

The complexity of procurement was associated with a set of procurement documents containing a lot of pages that are required to be completed at the beginning stage of any procurement procedure. In buying materials, schools are required to strictly comply with this regulation. A major problem is that most schools do not have specialist procurement officers and teachers are not trained in this task. A key point is that, to operate in accordance with the regulation, schools were more likely to select to purchase something that most easily meets the procurement regulation, as opposed to best meeting the school's needs. According to one of the school principals:

Every time, I worry about whether my school is on the right side of procurement regulations. Sometimes, we buy a trifle on which a little money has to be spent. We buy the thing from a small vendor who has it in his hands at that time. A reason is that if this purchase is made through a procurement process, its attraction is not enough to provoke general suppliers to participate in a procurement process. But buying the thing from a small vendor has a problem. While the school wants an official procurement document as accounting evidence to show that it really bought this thing, most of the small vendors do not have this. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2, personal communication, January 16, 2015)

Interestingly, since schools do not want to bear a great risk every time they operate procurement procedure, a way out has been found; the risk is transferred to vendors. This allows schools that are trying to avoid disciplinary punishment due to violating procurement regulations and the vendors who are trying to sell their goods or services to meet each other halfway. In practice, a vendor will prepare procurement documents for a school if the school consents to buy goods or services from the vendor. When this condition is accepted, school principals and teachers simply sign the procurement documents. Unfortunately, this motivates some government officials and private persons to establish partnerships with or open shops to trade with schools.

To solve these problems, the school principals and the teachers interviewed suggested that operating procurement process of schools need to be more flexible. They claimed that in managing school activities, especially teaching and learning activities, it is difficult to predetermine what material each activity needs. Additionally, teaching and learning activities by nature require various materials ranging from small things such as brooms to big thing such as computers. Thus, procurement methods and the documentary evidence of purchase and payment required should be strictly between the school and the vendor.

The second major constraint limiting school choices was seen to be insufficiency of the government funds granted per student. While all schools have to pursue the same goal, particularly national learning standards, treating all schools in the same way leaves some schools with a gap of inputs.

On the surface, it seems logical that per student expenditure is fair; the more students a school has, the more funds the school is allocated. However, individual schools vary according to heterogeneous contexts. For example, there are many small schools in need of extra help for supporting teaching and learning activities, improving dilapidated facilities and internal school environments. When the budget used to run every school activity depends on the number of students, inequalities of opportunities among schools can occur. This implies that some schools, particularly small ones, need special support.

Experiencing insufficient funds is a great challenge that forces schools to struggle in the pursuit of national learning standards. This pressure forces small schools in particular to devote a lot of effort to seeking resources from the outside sources, the main ones being temples, communities, and school alumni. According to the principal and a teacher from the small school:

> Talking about decision making on per student expenditure [known in Thai as ngob (budget) rai-hua (per head)], schools have enough authority. But a weak point is that it makes small schools have difficulty in managing teaching and learning activities, or developing schools. Because small schools have small classes, they get a small amount of budget. This is a big problem that is now pervasive since there are a lot of small schools in the country and these numbers will be added to every year. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

> By ngobrai-hua (per student expenditure), the larger size schools have more money. They can do many things. They can buy what they want. Our school is small. There are many necessary things that our school wants to buy for making teaching and learning better. But something is expensive such as projector. We can't buy it. Some things we can buy, such as computer, but it is inadequate....About once every three years, our school organizes fund mobilizing ceremony (pha-pa). (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

The principal of a medium school commented:

I have good luck because I have some teachers who live in this community. These teachers are the representatives of our school to communicate with the community about what the school wants. And the community will be pleased to give the school help. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

From what was reported by the participants, per student expenditure brings about an uneven opportunity among schools and is counter-productive. Unintentionally, it destroys the future opportunities of some students. Because of insufficient resources or unequal inputs, (small) schools cannot fully fulfil their obligations in improving the quality of teaching and learning activities. With limited budget, they cannot provide their students with special activities. For example, it is hard for small schools to provide their students a high quality computer and hi-speed internet, or buy expensive teaching material such as microscope. Undoubtedly, the smaller the size of a school, the more difficulty it faces in providing its teachers and students higher priced things necessary for teaching and learning. Because of this, the future opportunities of the students of small schools in terms of academic, economic, social, political and professional success could become inferior to those of the students of larger schools.

As suggested by the teachers, resource allocation should be based on the understanding that the needs and problems of individual schools vary by size and social and economic status. Thus, a single factor like *size-based costs* does not reflect the real needs of individual schools. For this reason, some schools can legitimately justify uneven or special funding.

The participants wanted a fresh look to be taken at the current formula of per-student funding to fit school contexts and the present environment. Alternatives might include increasing the fund per student, readjusting per student expenditure once every five years, and allocating special fund for small or special need schools. Additionally, schools should be free from charges for basic utilities such as electricity

and water supply. The participants thought that schools were the bureaucratic entities that were less capable to generate their own income.

5.4.1.2 Discretion-Based Resource Allocation

As mentioned previously, resource allocation can be made in three ways: 1) OBEC (central agency) to schools, 2) OBEC (central agency) to the Office of Primary Education Service Area to schools, and 3) the Office of Primary Education Service Area to schools. This section is devoted to how the school principals and teachers perceive the third method to be experienced by schools based.

The resources subject to allocations from the Office of Primary Education Service Area comprise those required for capital investment on land and construction (known in Thai as ngob long-toon). Interestingly, the following experience-based reflection indicates that decision making on who will get what and how many/much may often be based on insufficient information and lack of participation. This allows discretion-based resource allocation to face criticism due to lack of transparency and cronyism.

The process of allocation begins when OBEC has its total budget approved by the government or the Ministry of Education. OBEC then informs each individual Office of Primary Education Service Area of the amount of total budget approved, and asks them to submit their budgets for approval. Generally, by thinking about the problems and needs of their schools, the Office of Primary Education Service Area estimates include an allowance for school capital expenditure. When each Office of Primary Education Service Area has its budget approved, it informs schools to submit their budget requirements. The discretion-based resource allocation occurs when the Office of Primary Education Service Area operates the process deciding which schools will be allocated a budget for constructing new school buildings or repairing the old buildings.

The school principals and teachers reported that the operating the process of this resource allocation had four main problem areas: 1) appointment of an ad hoc committee to set a budget request and select schools; 2) selection of schools; 3) temporary vendors; and 4) the limited timeframe in which schools, once informed the result of resource allocation, have to submit the documents to verify that they have appointed vendors.

According to the regulations, the committee comprises the Director of the Office of Primary Education Service Area as the head of the committee, the Deputy Director of the Office of Primary Education Service Area, representatives of schools by size or a representative of each individual cluster, and the Director of Policy and Plan Group (one of the internal units of the Office of Primary Education Service Area) as a secretary. As reported by the school principals and teachers, they knew little of this information since it has never been publicly announced. Generally, most of them simply knew that there was a committee appointed to select schools.

The participants indicated that appointment of school representatives to the ad hoc committee was subject to the discretion of the Office of Primary Education Service Area. Some participants reported that they knew the school principals who were appointed as the representatives of schools. They got this information through unofficial channels such as from the officials of the Office of Primary Education Service Area, spreading by word of mouth, or confirmation from the representatives themselves. In contrast, some participants reported that they did not know of any of the representatives of schools. However, most participants thought that the people appointed as the representatives of schools were likely to be the same persons from year to year. It was assumed that these school representatives had some kind of close relationship with the Office of Primary Education Service Area.

Although the number of years since entering the teacher profession differed, the participants reached a consensus in which the process of appointing the committee was ambiguous. They also added that this type of process was the norm in Thailand, which meant that nuay-nue (higher agency) was most likely to make decisions without school participation simply pass the results on to schools. According to one principal:

> Less participation of schools in decision making happens from time to time. There is little change to this. However, I hope that the past story in which a vendor comes to school someday to deliver a thing that nobody had ordered. All the school could do is sign a document of receipt…. I think schools have to participate in any decision making affecting schools. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

The school principals and teachers suggested that, to address the problem, this resource allocation process should be more open and systematic. At the same time, more attention should be paid to what methods are used to address equity and the real problems of schools. Initially, before setting its budget request, the Office of Primary Education Service Area should hold preliminary meetings with schools to allow them to present their problems and needs. Additionally, appointing the school principals as representatives of schools should not be subject to the discretion of the Office of Primary Education Service Area. Specifically, the Office of Primary Education Service Area should provide schools a hearing so that they could share their views in several dimensions such as the number of representatives and the methods of selecting the school representatives.

The second problem raised by school principals and teachers in relation to the operating process for capital investment resources was selection of schools. The practice of selecting schools to receive capital investment was seen as not only perverse but also difficult to predict. In terms of being perverse, it was hard to define what qualifications or factors, such as size, socioeconomic status, inadequacy of buildings, and the number or age of buildings, made a school qualify for this kind of resource. Unsurprisingly, as spread through word of mouth, there was a case in which the budget for repairing and modifying a school building was approved, even though such building had not yet been constructed. This reflected that the resource allocation process was sometimes blind and not linked to reality. In terms of being difficult to predict, the process was criticized for going on unexpected ways as it was not known that what kinds of schools were entitled to the resources or how school requirements were prioritized. The participants related their school's experiences over the last 3-4 years. Some schools had been allocated this kind of resource more than once, some had received only one allocation, and others had never had their budget requests fulfilled. The general feeling was that some of their school's requests had not been fulfilled due to resource inadequacy; because of budget constraints, the Office of Primary Education Service Area could not satisfy the demands of every school. However, some thought that, indeed, the results were subject to the discretion of the Office of Primary Education Service Area and that the allocation process was in some way compromised. The participants thought that if schools had more participation in

the resource allocation process, it would demonstrate more accountability, transparency and fairness, could reduce the resource gap currently existing among schools.

The third problem raised by school principals and teachers in relation to the operating process for capital investment resources was temporary vendors. Because of a large amount of money allocated to each Office of Primary Education Service Area for constructing and repairing or maintaining school buildings, both outsiders and insiders are attracted to electronically register themselves as vendors.

"Temporary vendors", who are often irresponsible and/or inexperienced, have a good chance of selection because they are so many of them compared to established builders.However, they pose a risk to schools as their selection often leads delays in delivering the contracted task to schools, delivering an incomplete contracted task to schools, and/or procurement regulation non-compliance. Because of these problems, schools have to resubmit procurement documents several times as those of previous submissions were incomplete or erroneous. Insiders are government officials (including the officials of the Office of Primary Education Service Area, the school principals and the teachers) who encourage others to register as vendors on their behalf in order to obtain an interest from their positions. These vendors use different strategies to win contracts based on their special relationship with the insiders. This situation has made schools wary about making decisions in relation to selecting a vendor.

To solve the problem in relation to temporary vendors, the participants suggested that the Office of Primary Education Service Area should appoint a third party to monitor the procurement process. The members of the third party should include outsiders, school principals, teachers, and officials of the Office of Primary Education Service Area. The main responsibilities of the third party should include setting out what vendors are allowed to access, and having the vendors declare whether they have special relationships with insiders.

The fourth problem raised by school principals and teachers in relation to the operating process for capital investment resources related to the limited timeframe (sometimes as short as three to five days) in which schools, once informed approval of resource allocation, have to submit the documents to verify that they have appointed vendors. This was regarded as insufficient time to take into account the qualifications of vendors or bargain with them.

Why was this timeframe so limited? According to the participants, there were two possible causes: bureaucratic procedures and supporting insiders. In relation to the first cause, the participants thought communicating through a long layer of command caused a delay in the process of resource allocation decisions. They felt that the initial delay was made by OBEC, which in formed the Office of Primary Education Service Area of its budget close to the end of the timeframe in which the resources allocated needed to be delivered. Because of this, the Office had to urge schools to complete the process of resource use as quickly as possible. Schools were not able to extend the timeframe, and had to urgently find vendors and sign contracts with them. In relation to the second cause, some delays in the process of resource allocation may have been intentionally staged to limit the time available for schools to assess potential vendors. With a limited time frame, schools are unable to fully use their discretion and may be forced to select vendors provided or suggested by insiders.

The participants suggested that to solve this problem, OBEC and the Office of Primary Education Service Area should consider how to better schedule the process of resource allocation and use. Based on their experiences, the limited time available to schools puts them at risk of overdue completion of the process. Thus, the timeframe available to schools has to be increased.

5.4.1.3 Place of Schools within the Two Key Areas of Authority

The participants thought that the areas of authority that remained highly centralized included teacher transfer and recruitment, and salary promotion of teachers and principals. Schools could do little to affect these processes. More importantly, they believed that the process in which the Office of Primary Education Service Area through its board or TEPS translated their legal authority over these areas into practice seemed to be time consuming and arbitrary. The following sections provide examples of how such discretion has been used and how the schools and teachers came to feel voiceless and powerless over their profession.

Initially, it is important to note that legal authority over the two areas relates to the design of authoritative relationship between the central board and its sub-board. While the central agency, through TEPC, formulates the policies in these areas, the Office of Primary Education Service Area, through TEPS, implements it. In the first area, the Office of Primary Education Service Area makes final decisions

about when to recruit/transfer teachers, how to recruit / transfer teachers, who will be transferred, and which schools are to receive them. In the second area, the Office of Primary Education Service Area makes final decisions about the methods used to conduct the annual salary promotion of school principals, how to legitimize such the methods, and who will be promoted. By having discretion over these responsibilities, the Office of Primary Education Service Area has a great influence over schools.

1) Authority over Teacher Transfer and Recruitment

As reflected through the Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Act B.E. 2547 (2004), mentioned in chapter 4, the authority over teaching profession management in terms of recruitment and transfer is exercised by the two boards, the Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Commission (TEPC) known in Thai as Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor(-Klang: center) and the Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Sub-commission (TEPS) of the Office of Primary Education Service Area known in Thai as Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor-Khet (Khet means the Office of Primary Education Service Area and later this sub-commission was dissolved by the Order No. 10/2559 of the National Council for Peace and Order: NCPO).As the final decision making process in relation to teacher recruitment and transfer is in hands of Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor-Khet, thus, Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor-Khetis the key player.

Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor-Khet, which has authority over teacher recruitment and transfer, is not the agent who is directly affected by the policy. It is an intermediate agent created as a means of policy implementation. This is because theTeacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Act B.E. 2547 (2004) did not provide a specific scope of responsibility for Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor-Khet. Because of this, Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor-Khetis afforded flexibility and discretion in exercising the authority. A key point is that, as reflected and experienced by the participants, all is subject to the final decision of Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor-Khet.

In contrast, the roles of schools in teacher recruitment and transfer were downgraded. The extent to which school principals play a role in staffing is at the discretion of Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor-Khet. According to one of the principals:

In the matters of teacher recruitment and transfer, the Office of Primary Education Service Area by Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor-Khet routinely gives schools a chance to reportabout teacher vacancies and identify the required teacher qualifications. Or in other opportunities, school principals may participate in conducting interviews. But schools cannot access the whole process. So the result depends on the final decision of Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor-Khet. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

Regarding the result of recruitment and/or transfer, the participants reported that although a school may identify their preferred candidate from all teachers who ranked the school as a preference, the final decision is subject to Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor-Khet. Thus, the school might receive a different teacher to the one previously determined by the school. This has given Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor-Khet the stigma of lack of transparency. The term 'ving-ten' (run to or approach) was used by participants to denote 'lack of transparency.' By ving-ten, the candidates who strongly want a particular transfer opportunity have to devote a lot of effort to finding and implementing a way to ensure or increase their chances. For example, a candidate might directly approach members of TEPS. It was said that, generally, individual members of TEPS would not allow a transfer candidate to meet face-to-face. This was to suggest that the TEPS member was sincere to ensure that the transfer process was transparent. However, it was also assumed to be a ruse to conceal behind the scenes dealings, such as where transfer candidates have a representative approach and possibly negotiate with a specific TEPS member on their behalf.

It was suggested that the transfer candidates who applied ving-ten methods usually won their desired positions. However, it is interesting to note that requesting a transfer could have two other outcomes. Firstly, a teacher could miss their priority and be transferred to a school other than their first choice. Second, especially for candidates who failed to use ving-ten methods, failure to get transferred. Nevertheless, some teachers were optimistic about the final decisions of Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor-Khet and thought that the final decision was on the basis of the balancing the school's requirement with the personal qualifications, seniority or experience of the teachers. According to a teacher who experienced a transfer:

Actually, I did not rank my present school as my preference. I identified another school as my preference. I think why I did not receive my choice is that my work experience is less than my candidate's experience. But I love my present school. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

The participants suggested that, instead of being downgraded, schools' roles should be magnified. Schools that will receive teachers or have teacher vacancies should be able to fully participate in the process of recruitment and transfer. This would make the process more transparent.

2) Authority over Salary Promotion of Teachers and Principals

It was observed that the actors who played a major role in the salary promotion process of principals and teachers were Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor-Khet and the director of the Office of Primary Education Service Area. The role of the director of the Office of Primary Education Service Area is duplicated. Firstly, as director of the Office of Primary Education Service Area, he / she is granted authority over salary promotion of principals and teachers. In practice, his/her authority includes discretion in determining the means used to determine the principals and teachers who would be promoted for extra salary promotion (known in Thai as song-khan). Secondly, as a member of Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor-Khet, he/she plays a role in giving approval to the salary increment promotion of school principals and teachers. Here, a key point was that he/she has considerable flexibility in using discretion since there are no regulations to narrow his/her authority.

The participants reported concerns about three matters that were central to process of salary promotion of principals and teachers: appointing an ad hoc team to assess the performances of school principals, creating methods and criteria used to assess the performances of school principals, and competing for the right to manage.

Regarding the first matter, it was felt that having an ad hoc team to assess the performances of school principals provided the Office of Primary Education Service Area a great influence on schools. As there was serious

competition among school principals for extra salary promotion, they controlled their behavior to match the norms or requirements of the Office of Primary Education Service Area. Any comment or action considered by school principals likely to harm their extra salary promotion chances was never voiced or taken. For example, although school principals had a set of questions in terms of the background to appointing the present ad hoc team, they kept them to themself, or shared them among themselves, but never formally raised them.

The members of each ad hoc team usually included a deputy director of the Office of Primary Education Service Area, one or two supervisors, and one or two school principals. Selection of the school principals was subject to the discretion of the Office of Primary Education Service Area. It was believed that the ones who were selected won the position through one of two means; 1) outstanding performance or personal qualification; or 2) having good personal relationships with (any officials of) the Office of Primary Education Service Area. It was also believed that being a member of the ad hoc team increased the opportunity for the school principals to be promoted for extra salary promotion. This was evidenced by the fact that general school principals were promoted for extra salary promotion once every 4-5 years, whereas principals who were often appointed to do extra tasks designed by the Office of Primary Education Service Area were promoted for extra salary promotion once every 2-3 years. Motivated by this, school principals competed with each other to be appointed as one of the members of ad hoc team. According to one of the school principals:

A school principal who would be appointed (as a member of ad hoc team to assess the performances of school principals) is the one who has a good relationship with the Office of Primary Education Service Area. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

A second area of concern was in relation to the methods and criteria used to assess the performances of school principals. For example, the composition of the assessment team has been seen to change from year to year. Usually, the members

of the team included a deputy director of the Office of Primary Education Service Area, supervisor(s) who is (are) assigned to oversee the school cluster being assessed, and school principals whose schools were located in the cluster. However, in some years, assessment is conducted by a team in which all the members come from outside. Moreover, the result received from the assessment team might not be the only thing used in a final decision. In some years, a second assessment team is established, purportedly to screen the results of the first team and consider other dimensions that were not assessed by the first team. Interestingly, it was assumed that these were simply claims used to legitimize a predetermined final decision. Because of this, it was unclear where, and by and for whom the final decision was made. In summary, according to the school principals, it was unnecessary for the schools to do a lot of extra work because decisions on extra salary promotion were based on ad hoc information that was too general and too flexible.

Although the initial appraisal form applied to performance assessment of school principals comprised three assessed aspects (discipline and corrective action, personal morals and ethics, and professional code of conduct), the final ones were subject to the discretion of the director of the Office of Primary Education Service Area. Usually, there were four additional criteria declared that greatly influenced a final decision. Examples of these are better than average O-NET scores, receipt of a prize or award at national level, proximity to retirement, appointment by the Office of Primary Education Service Area to undertake special tasks such as operating an evaluation of White School Project (the schools that are free from drugs) or operating an evaluation of Buddhist Approach School Project (Rong-rienVidhi Buddh), or simply where you stand in the promotion for extra salary increment queue. It was noted that although the concept an extra salary increment queue was traditional, change is underway and this may soon be seen as no longer a factor for promotion.

O-NET scores, according to some principals, were becoming the biggest single factor used to indicate the success or performance of schools. Thus, schools were motivated to use many resources to conduct activities or adopt strategies to pursue higher O-Net scores. Activities (and even lessons) that were seen not help O-NET results overlooked. By doing this, schools sacrifice other learning goals. Additionally, students whose previous learning performances were poor are often

classified as the 'LD' (learning disability)so that their scores are excluded from calculating mean O-NET scores.

The school principals suggested that the process of assessment had to be seriously and frankly operated to provide a fair result. To serve this, school clusters should be the main agent in operating the process of assessment. By addressing the role of school clusters, individual school scould participate more in the process. This would bring the contexts of individual schools more into the assessment process. In this sense, a single method or criterion would not dominated decisions.

The third area of concern was associated with an idea of competing for 'right to manage.' As mentioned previously regarding teacher salary promotion, the Office of Primary Education Service Area and TEPS claim to have the right to manage any "left over" salary promotion budget after rounding off per capita allocations to principals and teachers. According to the school principals, this claim for 'right to manage' is characterized as yon-hin-thamthang (to test the responses of school clusters). There is no law or regulation to make clear to where or whom it should go. The actor who played a major role in this game and often wins it is the director of the Office. A reason is that, since school principals do not want to miss an opportunity to get promoted for extra salary increment or song-khan, they generally control their actions to conform to the needs of the Office. If a school principal with ideas that do not conform to the needs of the Office, were to speak up, such school principal would be considered as a brave one.

Once in a meeting room, a school principal dared to share his ideas with the Office of Primary Education Service Area in the matter of extra salary promotion (song-khan) of teachers. He said that he disagreed with the Office of Primary Education Service Area on a claim for which, after managed by each school, the rest of the percent of both fifteen percent base of the number of teachers in the school and six percent base of a monthly total amount of salary of all teachers in a school would be collected into the Office of Primary Education Service Area for its management. I think he dared because he will retire soon. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

When the participants were asked for their opinions on the extent to which the Office of Primary Education Service Area had the right to manage the rest of this resource, the response was: 'I hear that….' However, it was assumed that the interest might belong to the officials of the Office of Primary Education Service Area.

The participants insisted that this resource had to be managed by school cluster for two reasons. Firstly, the resource was meant for schools, so it should be retained and used by and for schools. Or put another way, decisions on how it is spent should be made by the school cluster. Secondly, as the legal ownership was unclear, it sounded unfair for the Office to be the only one who had a full right to manage this resource.

5.4.2 The Office of Primary Education Service Area: Its Roles and Effects on Schools

In the previous section, the participants shared their ideas about authority over resource allocation and management and the extent and degree of authority shift as a result of educational decentralization. To add value to these findings, the participants were also invited to share their ideas about changes to the administrative structure and the chain of command. Generally, authority shift was in parallel with the change of administrative structure to realign it with new chain of command. The chain of command reflects who supervises whom, and how. The participants' experiences should reflect whether the change of administrative structure and the manner in which it exercises authority conforms to educational decentralization.

Most of the participants, particularly those who had been in the profession for over a decade, reported the change in which the central agency (ONPEC) was transformed into OBEC, and the Office of Primary Education Service Area (the provincial or regional branch of OBEC) emerged from amalgamation of the five provincial and district educational bodies as the main chain of command. However, the Office of Primary Education Service Area was seen as the focal point of this change. Central to the participants' perceptions toward this agency were its size and its roles and effects on schools.

5.4.2.1 Size

The three directors of the Office of Primary Education Service Area 1-3 were asked for their opinions about the 'size' of the Office of Primary Education Service Area. Later, this issue was also discussed with school principals and teachers. Interestingly, the opinions of the three groups were consistent with each other in agreeing that it was too large.

The perception that it is 'large' is understandable, given that the Office of Primary Education Service Area was established by merging five pre-existing provincial and district educational bodies. This transition remained clear in the participants' minds.

The directors of the Offices of Primary Education Service Area accepted that, because of the larger size, face-to-face communication between the Office and schools was difficult. Thus, any decision in relation to schools was most likely to be based on second hand information; documents/ papers, not the direct visual perception-based information. Here, it was interesting to note that their knowledge of schools was based on the facts interpreted through school documents or reports. This could be observed through the following excerpts.

I accept that the Office of Primary Education Service Area is big. It is difficult for me to know every school well. For me, I really want to visit every school but I can't. I used to be a teacher so I know about the problems of schools…I have every school visited, especially schools that have a specific problem. I told the ones who were appointed to visit schools and report to me about what they saw. (The Director of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 5, 2015)

Today, there is no local or district agency to deal with schools. I think this makes us not have a mechanism to get to know enough about schools. Although we have school clusters, this is informal because there is no law to serve this….I think we now stay at a greater distance. By this, we (schools and the Office of Primary Education Service Area) cannot know each other well.(The Director of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 7, 2015)

As noted, these perceptions were drawn from comparisons between the present and past administrative structures. One of the school principals added that the present administrative structure could not compete with the last one. He thought that the previous administrative structure was superior in terms of the degree of decentralization and the proximity and interaction between schools and the higher level of agencies.

> Even though this is called decentralization, I trust in the last one (the last administrative structure). I consider the distance between schools and the Office of Primary Education Service Area. One Office has many districts….Now we don't have a district agency. As I have perceived, we don't know all of the teachers who work in the same district with us. Although we have a chance to know the ones who work in other districts, we don't know the ones who stay close up to us….The Office of Primary Education Service Area just knows some teachers who are close to it. I'm not sure. This would rather be centralization. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

In addition to the matter of centralized decisions, the participants raised the subject of the change of administrative structure since emergence of the Office of Primary Education Service Area. This implies that they associated the change with 'administration' rather than 'decentralization.' In relation to administration, certain values or goals including quality of education, comfort and efficiency of administration and control were referred to. Participants believe that the establishment of the Office of Primary Education Service Area was to create a center of educational professionals who would be the key drivers of the pursuit of these values. It could be said that their view was: 'let decisions be made by the so-called professionals.' With the bigger size and educational professionals, the Office of Primary Education Service Area was expected to more effectively run all of its responsibilities.

Because he (the government) wants   many parties to help schools in different matters….sees that schools have a lot of work such as teaching, budgeting, and documents. The birth of the Office of Primary Education Service Area is to mobilize the officials of different educational agencies into the same place. These officials have experience about the work of schools. When they work together, they can help schools in different matters, especially the matters of budget, documentation and procurement. (The Director of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2, personal communication, January 9, 2015)

Although some improvements were observed, particularly in strengthening school control, it was agreed that the general administration of the Office of Primary Education Service Area had not met expectations. Teachers also felt "cut off" in that considerable travel time and budget is spent when face-to-face contact between schools and the Office of Primary Education Service Area are required.

Additionally, the participants perceived that the Office was unable to know school contexts well, particularly schools' problems and needs. A key effect was that they felt that the Office did not provide schools equal care. Some resources, especially those related to school building construction and maintenance in which authority over allocation was granted to the Office of Primary Education Service Area, were thought to be almost randomly allocated. This motivated schools to compete with each other to take advantage of resource allocation opportunities. In doing so, principals sought or created strategies to introduce themselves or their schools to the Office. Examples include inviting officials of the Office to visit schools, offering Office officials (particularly the heads of internal units) special opportunities, activities or items such as meals and special occasion gifts.

It should be noted that inviting officials to visit schools is consistent with North-eastern Thai culture. It is believed that if a person holding a higher social rank visits one's private place or land, good things or auspicious opportunities would come to its owner. This is reflected in a well-known proverb: chang-yieb-na- phaya-yieb-mueang (chang = elephant, yieb = visit, na = land, phaya = a higher social rank person, mueang = house or place).

When schools receive visits from the Office officials, their environments such as classrooms, roads and trees are urgently improved. Interestingly, if there is a component that schools lack, they will borrow it from a neighboring school. This is often found in the case of trees and flowers, and characterized as dokmai-chuay-ratchakan (flowers borrowed for a special occasion).

Schools principals often work hard to develop close relationships with the Office, generally known in Thai as 'khon-khong-khet' (the person of the Office). Based on this relationship, they can expect special support, treatment or opportunities. One example is access to information that is not publically available on things such as resource allocation, teacher transfer, and the result of extra salary promotion. Another example is their appointment as a member of an ad hoc team operating a specific task. A key point of concern raised by the participants was that different degrees of the relationship between schools and the Office of Primary Education Service Area could lead to unequal practices. According to one of the principals:

Other schools receive budget allocated by the Office for repairing and maintaining dilapidated school buildings. My school does not get this budget, although I previously asked for it at the time when a survey assessment of need was conducted by the Office. If I see the Deputy Director who has responsibility for overseeing this school cluster, I will ask him about this matter. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

5.4.2.2 Exercising Discretionary Authority to Pursue Various Goals

In discussing the roles of the Office of Primary Education Service Area with participants, the topic of discretion-based decision-making emerged.

As mentioned previously, the organization of the Office of Primary Education Service Area is structured to conform to the structure and responsibilities of the central agency (OBEC). Thus, the Office is obliged to perform certain administrative and ritualistic tasks of OBEC. It occupies an important position in ensuring that OBEC can exercise control over schools. In this sense, the Office

functions as a regulator, making sure that schools focus on following the rules instead of providing support to help them improve the process of delivering education services. It could be said that the Office exists to address the responsibilities of OBEC as opposed to the management of school problems and needs. A key point is that, as OBEC and the Office are above schools in the chain of command, schools have no choice but to be accountable to them.

According to one director of the Office of Primary Education Service Area, although his Office must support schools in creating quality classroom learning activities, it must also require them to do well in pursuing other goals. Thus, while quality of education is the most important goal, schools have no right to sacrifice other goals.

> Although we (the Office of Primary Education Service Area) exist, we have to follow the framework of OBEC. It is necessary for us to meet the mandate of OBEC. We are here to do this. We help schools do what assigned by nuay-nue (the central agency). It is necessary to accept that the present structure has already predetermined what the Office of Primary Education Service Area and schools have to do. (The Director of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 7, 2015)

There appears to be an interesting rationale in the intentional action of OBEC to pass some of its responsibilities down to the Office. OBEC, as the central administrative agency, is responsible for implementing government policy. In many areas, OBEC also creates its own policies where the laws and regulations it operates under are not specific enough. It then requires each Office to make discretion-based decisions to implement them. The method or means of delivering these responsibilities is largely left to the discretion of the Offices. This results in two factors which indicate why daily school practices or activities are heavily intervened by the discretion-based decisions of the Office.

Firstly, schools receive an excessive flux of policies, projects and responsibilities presented in a top-down manner. As the Office exists to fulfil or be accountable for the responsibilities of OBEC, it cannot take on the role of questioning whether any initiative of OBEC is necessary or beneficial for its schools. Rather,

based on the Office's discretion-based decision-making, the initiative is translated into a means of practice and imposed on schools. This reflects that the pursuit of different goals is not only a heavy burden on the Office, but also passed on schools.

Secondly, the internal structure of the Office has many goals to pursue. The quality of education and students, as the ultimate educational goal, is not its foremost or single goal. Importantly, when these goals, including the methods of pursuing them, are imposed on schools, school management is tied to the general administrative or technical work. According to one of the directors of the Office of Primary Education Service Area:

> As known, the Office of Primary Education Service Area is strictly sub-divided into various groups such as Finance and Assets Group, and Personnel Management Group. Each group has its own goal varying according to its responsibility. It works to master its administrative problems rather than instructional administration and educational missions. Thus, decision making within this structure comes to mean the management of the responsibility of the individual internal groups, not educational goals. (The Director of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2, personal communication, January 9, 2015)

Pursuing too many goals has two key effects. Firstly, it decreases school motivation because they were frustrated in trying to both satisfy the requirements of the Office and provide high quality education. For example, rather than cooperating with schools to improve the quality of lesson/curriculum-based teaching and learning and solve the problem of inadequate inputs or resource scarcity, an Office may impose measures to address resource control or information management, or implement additional activities or projects such as Democratic Promoting Schools, Buddhist-oriented Schools, and occasionally tree-planting projects. Put another way, school effort and resources that should be spent improving teaching and learning activities are shared with activities adopted to pursue multi-goal attainment. A principal observed that every two weeks there was at least one teacher from his school taken away from school to attend a meeting or workshop provided by the Office,

usually taking place at the meeting room of a hotel, restaurant or the Office. As reported by one of the teachers:

> Schools have to run to perform this activity inside the curriculum and that activity outside the curriculum. This makes schools unable to seriously concentrate on performing teaching and learning. I think the curriculum comprehensively provides students the opportunities to learn and perform activities about cultures, sports, religions, arts, music, politics, and others. It is sometimes unnecessary to think about the activities outside the curriculum. For example, in a matter of different projects created to promote democracy, the curriculum has already provided the contents and activities in relation to democracy…. I am unsure if this is known by the Office of Primary Education Service Area or others involved. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

Additional activities rarely emerge as part of schools' needs, particularly in terms of fulfilling something the present curriculum did not provide. They usually emerge according to the requirement of top actors such as the government, the Minister of Education, OBEC and the Office of Primary Education Service Area. It can be assumed that this is motivated by personal interests or preferences in which these actors want to legitimize or manifest their positions. For example, the Minister of Education or a top executive of OBEC might be motivated to formulate a new policy or initiate a project to show that he / she is fit for the position and thereby secures his/ her tenure. Unsurprisingly, additional activities or projects became abundant. There have been over sixty additional activities or projects imposed on and now implemented by schools. Some instances included Democratic Promoting School, Buddhist-oriented School, Excellent Model School, Purposive Leading Mainstreaming School, One Tambon One School, Drug-Free School (White School), Lab school Project, and Health Promoting School. These additional activities or projects not only place a large burden on schools, but also re-implement what already exists in the curriculum. Importantly, when the additional activities are imposed on

schools, considerable extra work is necessary to have the information to prepare an assessment or report whenever it is asked for.

To ensure that schools implement the additional activities, projects or tasks assigned, the Office requires that schools show evidence of implementation. The most popular forms of evidence include a paper report, photograph, CD, or portfolio. Whenever the word 'shall' or 'must' is used by the Office, there are two points that guide the action of schools. Firstly, there is usually no choice available to schools as to how the requested action is done. In this sense, schools do not need to waste time thinking or creating their own way of doing it. Secondly, the responses of schools are required by a specified date. Schools have to develop the habit of punctuality in dealing with any assignment. Overdue responses will have adverse effects such as 'having a negative image', 'naming and shaming at a meeting', or loss of extra salary promotion by the principal.

In Thai culture, putting the names of schools making a delayed response onto a blacklist is taken seriously. Information about this was provided by a general service officer of the Office. In doing this, the officer simply listed the name of each school into one of the two categories: "response has been already made" or "response has not been made." Then, this piece of information was submitted to the director or the deputy director of the Office. According to two of the school principals:

> I think that many things that schools should do or think about by themselves are thought them for by the Office of Primary Education Service Area. I think what the Office of Primary Education Service Area should do to help schools is the develop teachers. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2, personal communication, January 16, 2015)

> What and what has to be reported. For example, we submitted a paper report attached with photographs after we had organized an activity of anti-drug campaign. Or in managing tree planting activities on the occasion of the Buddhist Lent Day, we submitted a paper report and CDs to the Office of Primary Education Service Area. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

One of the teachers added:

In a day, schools receive a lot of official documents, at least half of which are documents ordering schools to do paper reports. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

In answer to the question: "Why do paper reports, photographs, CDs, or portfolios matter so much?" the explanation provided by the school principals and the teachers was based on the two views. Firstly, they believed that these tools of school control were good enough in terms of empirical evidence. Thus, the Office could witness that every task or responsibility assigned to the schools was completed. Additionally, they are an uncomplicated form. Even a lower official or a fresh official of the Office could deal with them in terms of issuing and checking the action taken by schools. According to one of school principals,

We have to do everything in accordance with the given form. The official of the Office of Primary Education Service Area will not accept what we submit if there is even a little error. Once, she (an official of the Office of Primary Education Service Area) did not accept my task (paper report). Actually, it was a little matter. I just did not attach photographs to the paper report. And once again, I did not identify the source of budget used in the activity of a waste elimination campaign. I did this (not identify the source of budget) because the activity did not needs to use a budget. An official told me to write anything so that this column (budget) was not omitted. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

The second view was that, since there were many schools under the jurisdiction of each Office, it was difficult for the Office to identify what is really done by schools. Simply communicating that schools completed the work assigned was sufficient. In this sense, the concern with quantity was more important than

quality. For this reason, paper reports, photographs, CDs, or portfolios have become the popular forms of school responses.

Another one of the hallmarks of exercising the discretion of the Office of Primary Education Service Area involves arranging 'meetings.' Generally, meetings are accepted as an effective fixture in communicating the directives or any initiative of OBEC or the Office. Office director/principal meeting take place at least once per month, usually shortly after the day of the monthly meeting that OBEC conducts with all directors. These meetings address what schools have to know and/ or do, and participants are overwhelmed with information about the nuts and bolt sof implementing any new OBEC/Office directives, policies or initiatives.

Generally, as indicated by the school principals and teachers, most of these meetings exhibit one or more of three characteristics. Firstly, on some occasions, meeting topics are seen as not very useful because they are not relevant to the needs and problems of schools. The main topics are set for the purpose of elucidating the policies, programs/projects, regulation, or orders of OBEC and the Office. In the meeting, school principals are introduced to a new policy or project released by OBEC and told to prepare to implement it. This session is commonly held by the director of the Office and, as one principal reflected, while the director of the Office is presenting his topics, many school principals are only pretending to listen. Sometimes, a school principal might turn to the one sitting beside him /her and whisper 'ah-rai-ah-rai-kor-rongrien' (everything takes it out on schools). Secondly, the meetings can be uninteresting or tedious because they are full of extravagant topics. Apart from the topics in relation to the policy or initiatives of the central agency, every internal unit of the Office is required to raise certain topics in accordance with their responsibilities. According to the school principals, they have to be patient. Some of the topics are easy for the schools to understand without a presentation, and others are already available on the Office website. Thirdly, meetings are characterized by one-way communication and proceed without interaction between school principals and the Office director. In a meeting, the director firstly checks the name of each principal to see if they are present or absent, and then provides an update on any new policies, programs/projects, regulations, or orders from OBEC or the Office. Later, the deputy directors, the director of each internal

unit, and other officials as the owners of topics cover each page of the meeting document, which had previously been delivered to the principals. Around two or three days later, the Office director has the school principals who were absent from the meeting orally or documentarily present their reasons for being absent. It is generally felt that too much school time is wasted by the meetings. According to two of the school principals:

> In the meeting room, school principals have to keep themselves as good listeners, sitting through over three hours listening to the director of the Office of Primary Education Service Area talking about the different educational policies of the Ministry of Education or OBEC and other officials reading a meeting document. Everything is what schools have to do.…Although school principals are invited to ask questions at the end of the meeting, they don't want to say anything. I think that is because the time for this is limited and the climate did not promote interaction. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

> I want a meeting that has an informal climate. Let school principals present their problems. Everything about the meeting (such as climate and meeting agendas) should not create alienation between schools and the Office. (The School Principal under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2, personal communication, January 16, 2015)

As can be seen, the Office focuses on different efficiency goals such as correctness (itmust be done in accordance with the form given), punctuality, and comprehensiveness (every school has to comply). In summary, the Office uses its discretionary powers as a means of 1) translating policy, rule, or law into a means of implementation; 2) giving schools substantive content of the policy and a means of implementation; 3) enabling or enforcing schools to deal with a means of implementation; 4) providing a yardstick of implementation; 5) following policy implementation or what assigned; and 6) providing schools with certain terms such as carrot and stick.

It is important to note that the use of discretion of the Office of Primary Education Service Area is permissive, not mandatory. The Office is granted discretion-based decision-making power by OBEC through administrative delegation. The purpose is to implement administrative laws such as NEA regulations for personnel management of the teaching profession and salary promotion of school principals. Thus, the Office has the right to make reasonable decisions to select a better or acceptable alternative way to perform these duties. The use of this discretion forces schools to get on the path of implementing or following specific OBEC or government policies, projects and areas of concern.

Importantly, it was found that the use of discretion was largely unfettered. There were three factors that witness this. Firstly, as the policies, laws, rules, regulations, and orders as the source of a given prescriptive area of responsibility do not always provide a means or tool of implementation, the manner of exercising discretion is flexible. In this sense, in exercising discretion, the Office is not tied to a particular method. Secondly, since the duties or responsibilities of the Office are unique, sophisticated and require to be dealt with by experts or professionals, it is hard for outsiders, particularly schools, to have the use of discretion checked. Thus, the Office has to put little effort in avoiding discretion-based decisions that are made without relevant information. Thirdly, improper use of discretion can be achieved through the hierarchical chain of command. In this sense, the present chain of command does not allow discretion to be delegated to schools. Without a mechanism linking to an authority from the Office or from the central agency, delegating discretion to schools is rarely possible. Even a small thing, such as a change to the format of an official document, is required to be reported or submitted to the Office. These conditions allow officials of the Office to use discretion without concern about or paying much attention to whether the outputs strengthened or weakened school capability in pursuing a higher quality of education. A key point is that if discretion is used without good reason, impartiality, and avoiding oppression and personal interests, the outputs of that discretion will cause a loss of school trust and create a situation in which teachers lack motivation to pursue educational goals or to increase their effort in improving school performance.

5.4.3 Change of Curriculum

Based on the three focus groups, the matter of curriculum is a more attractive discussion topic for teachers. The discussions focused heavily on the two latest versions of the Thai Basic Education Core Curriculum: the B.E. 2544 (2001) version and the B.E. 2551 (2008) version. Primarily, the teachers experience is that although the national curriculum has gone through several forms of change, little priority has been given to teacher participation in the process. Without participation, the development of curriculum ignored many problem areas such as under-qualified teachers, inexperienced teachers, under-resourced schools and school capability to deal with the required number of subjects. Thus, the curriculum does not satisfy a large number of school contexts. Indeed, it embodies or fulfils the values and preferences of the central agency. This has resulted in a gap between the teachers' required changes and the intended changes of the curriculum.

The teachers found it hard to understand the rationale behind some aspects of the present curriculum, and feel little motivation to embrace some of its components. This inhibits successful curriculum management.

5.4.3.1 Rhetorical Terms

The teachers discussed some of the rhetorical terms or concepts that are used to symbolize different aspects of the latest curriculum. They repeatedly referred to the terms learner-centered learning, change of learning and teaching methods (known in Thai as prab-vithi-rien-plien-vithi-sorn) and lesson plan. Implementation of these terms can be looked at from a number of different perspectives.

According to the teachers, the people of the Office of Primary Education Service Area, characterized as the ones who just 'think and say', introduced these terms to schools as 'new words with new meanings'. They stated that the teachers needed to have a clear understanding of the terms to contribute to translating them into practice. Thus, they created rules or ways for accessing the meanings of these terms. Generally, these included organizing tours for school visits and organizing the meetings.

For the teachers, the terms were considered to be 'new words with the old meanings'. They did not believe that the terms represented a significant change in teaching methods. As previously indicated, the terms were introduced to schools

without discussion as to how their arrival could mitigate what they considered to be more important external challenges such as resource insufficiency, poor teacher knowledge and skills, and overload teaching. All the teachers could do was 'listen and do.' From what the teachers could see, the new terms are based on cursory thoughts or analysis and have been borrowed from books or literature without regard to the Thai classroom context. According to the teachers, curriculum changes should be developed from a "bottom-up" perspective, with teachers playing a role in creating any new methods, systems and procedures. The teachers further argued that unless some of the external challenges were addressed, teachers would not have the time or inclination to move away from traditional methods. Specifically, because of the external challenges, teachers already struggle to deliver the required number of lessons according to the subject hours allocated by the national curriculum. However, the teachers insisted that they could do more to maximize educational outcomes if the implementation process for the terms was set out in a more concrete way and accompanied by the resources and support to deal with the external challenges. In the current situation, the teachers feel frustrated and dismayed that they are required to make themselves familiar with and implement the terms.

The teachers felt perplexed and oppressed when the term 'learner-centered learning' (in Thai yud-phurien-pen-soonklang) was introduced to schools. They believed that it was defined by people in higher agencies who were unfamiliar with the term and whose teaching never conformed to its principle. With this constructed perception, the teachers needed help in terms of interpreting the term and translating it into practice. One teacher said that:

> Initially, we were convinced to embrace and implement the concept 'yud-phurien-pen-soonklang' (learner-centered learning) in operating classroom learning and teaching. A short time later, this term was repealed because of the implication inherent in the words that learners were surrounded by teachers. Thus, a new concept of 'yud-phurien-pen-samkan'(learner-centeredlearning) came to solve this problem. We are told that from now on, you have to say'yud-phurien-pen-samkan'….Let me ask how they (the two concepts/terms) are different from each other. How could this (an inference that the learners

are surrounded by teachers) become a concern? Nobody understands this. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2, personal communication, January 16, 2015)

Teachers recognized the importance of implementing the term yud-phurien-pen-samkan' as it was the collaborative responsibility of OBEC and the Office of Primary Education Service Area. OBEC built up the change of term to be a big issue, and the Office created rules and guidelines of practice. This forced the teachers to comply, in some cases unwillingly. A key point was that this ignored the teachers' character, contexts and choices. One of the teacherssaid that:

It is a good matter in which 'yud-phurien-pen-samkan' is the core of teaching and learning. Because teachers will be alert and improve their teaching. But whenever I am running my classroom learning and teaching, I worry about whether what I do is 'yud-phurien-pen-samkan'. I don't know what the Office of Primary Education Service Area will say if it sees my teaching…I heard that teachers should avoid using much chalk and talk. Really, I don't want to use much explanation in my classroom. But sometimes it's necessary. I think sometimes explanation makes my students understand their lesson better. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

However, some teachers thought that it was good to encourage teachers to show so much concern in creatively designing their classroom activities. They argued that operating classroom activities had to be shifted from focusing on teaching styles to focusing on learning styles. According to the teachers, this concern underlined the rationale which continuous professional development of teachers was expected to prescribe.

Unfortunately, the Office of Primary Education Service Area could not provide teachers with a clear understanding of the difference between learner–

centered learning and the teacher–centered approach. For teachers, the differences between the two approaches was not clear. Accordingly, they could not translate the term yud-phurien-pen-samkan (learner-centered learning) into familiar terms such as flexible learning, experience-based learning and readiness-based learning. This made implementing the term yud-phurien-pen-samkan very difficult.

Another problem occurred when a change brought about a new concept called 'phaen-kan-jadkan-rienroo' (lesson plan) to replace an existing one known in Thai as 'phaen-kan-sorn' (lesson plan). Part of the problem was related to a title of lesson plan in Thai, but the intrinsic content of the two lesson plans was also a problematic issue.

The term "phaen-kan-sorn" (lesson plan) has traditionally been used to communicate among teachers, supervisors and others involved in the world of education in Thailand. Phaen-kan-sorn was written as the title of a lesson plan when a teacher composed his/her plan of teaching. It contained certain set sub-topics including learning standards and goals, activities, teaching and learning process, teaching aids and assessments. Later, this term was repealed in accordance with a new version of the national curriculum called the Thai Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2544 (2001), released to develop learners in terms of potential, careers and further education. This mandated the shifting of teaching styles from a teacher-centered approach to learner-centered approach. Based on this, the Ministry of Education including OBEC required that the term 'phaen-kan-sorn' be replaced by the term 'phaen-kan-jadkan-rienroo.' As claimed, while the term "phaen-kan-sorn" implied that classroom teaching and learning was "teacher-centered learning" oriented, the term "phaen-kan-jadkan-rienroo" implied that classroom teaching and learning was "learner-centered learning" oriented.

The teachers thought that there was no major difference between the old term and the new one. According to the teachers, the term "phaen-kan-jadkan-rienroo" did not provide them a great change in the methods of classroom learning and teaching. Like phaen-kan-sorn,the details of learning standards and goals, activities, teaching and learning process, teaching aids and assessments were still required. Thus, the teachers did not want to devote their time and any kind of effort to becoming familiar with the term. One of the teachers said that:

Really, there is no significant difference between "phaen-kan-sorn" and "phaen-kan-jadkan-rienroo." The difference is just the name. The various subtopics (of 'phaen-kan-sorn/phaen-kan-jadkan-rienroo') are already familiar to us. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

The Office did not realize thatteachers saw this preoccupation with terms as being unimportant. If a teacher wrote 'phaen-kan-sorn'as a title of his/her lesson plan, such teacher had to spend a certain portion of his/her time listening to a detailed explanation of the terms from a senior official of the Office. The excerpt below reflects the feeling of one of the teachers towards this point.

The Office of Primary Education Service Area (its officials) makes this matter (the name) important. It is a responsibility of the Office of Primary Education Service Area. Every time we meet, either in a meeting or at a school visit, the Office says 'use phaen-kan-jadkan-rienroo'…. Whenever a supervisor asks to see a lesson plan, its title is inspected first." If we write phaen-kan-sorn, the supervisor tells us to change it into phaen-kan-jadkan-rienroo. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2, personal communication, January 16, 2015)

The teachers believe that even if a lesson plan has not been prepared, they can walk into a classroom to deliver a good lesson. They know what to teach and how to teach it very well. They believe that the decision as whether a lesson plan is needed should be a context-based discretion in the hands of teachers. In this sense, a blend of teacher-directed or context-based and learner-centered lessons could make lessons planning more flexible. However, this is not accepted by the Office. The Office requires that teachers compose lesson plans in a full format before teaching. The Office thinks that the more a lesson plan follows a given format or has details, the better the teaching will be. According to two teachers:

I accept that a lesson plan that has full format can make teaching easy if many elements written in the lesson plan can be prepared. But this uses a lot of time and budget. Writing it uses a lot of time. And preparing teaching materials that are specified in the lesson plan requires budget. As teachers know well, when we write a lesson plan, good teaching materials must be specified to please the readers (the principals and/or the supervisors). Think! When an individual teacher wants a budget, a problem is that the school does not have enough. Thus, it should be that lesson planning is by and for the teachers. Lesson plans should remain the teachers' discretion to design and write. I think the teachers know best about what suits their classrooms. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2, personal communication, January 16, 2015)

For my classroom lesson, I know what I will teach. Even though I don't write it, what I have to put in it if I write it is in my mind. It is less different from the format given. It's better to not spend much time to write it. The format should be up to the teacher. (Another one of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2, personal communication, January 16, 2015)

The teachers claim that from their supervisors' standpoints, lesson plan format and lesson plan provision has become a key component in school monitoring. Whenever schools receive a monitoring visit, the first concern that schools have to fulfil is whether an individual teacher provided his/her lesson plans. Providing lesson plans is a key indicator used to indicate which schools should have a monitoring visit. The Office sees lesson plans as a key piece of evidence to show that classroom teaching and learning really occurred, was effective, and addressed higher quality performances. The Office regards it as a serious problem for a school if this requirement (regularlywriting lesson plans in full and in the required format) is met. According to two teachers:

A supervisor is pleased when (the supervisor) sees that a teacher writes lesson plans in a full format. This might show that teaching is well prepared and that the teacher is a good planner. But do not hurry to conclude that the teaching of a teacher who does not have lesson plans must be ineffective. Thoroughly look at the teaching of that teacher, and then judge that it's either effective or ineffective. What is more important is that the supervisors and the teachers collaborate with each other on different ways to support learning goal attainment. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

Whenever I am informed that my school will receive a visit from the Office of Primary Education Service Area, I worry about lesson plans. Because the first thing that the Office of Primary Education Service Area orders the teachers to prepare is lesson plans. What I do is write it as quickly possible or seek it from anywhere. The way is unimportant. Just have it for checking. (Another one of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

According to the teachers, it is unfortunate that the issue of lesson plans has caused other issues that should be looked at during school visits to be overlooked. An example was given where, while supervisors were spending a lot of time inspecting lesson plan in terms of format, details, language, etc., all the teachers in the school were gathered in a meeting room waiting for an explanation of lesson plan concepts. This caused the school visit to become very formal, and the supervisors and teachers were unable to relate freely. Without one-to-one meetings (between supervisors and teachers), the classroom problems of individual teacher cannot be discussed. Importantly, this reflects that supervisors see their key task as discipline, rather than being a counsellor who helps teachers deal with their instructional problems. Unsurprisingly, the teachers seemed to agree with this conclusion. According to two teachers:

Yes. Supervisors should give the teachers a general suggestion such as what should be the core element of lesson plans. Tell us that you write what you can practice. I think everything is clear in teachers' minds, both students and the contents of lesson…. Believe that teachers have a good understanding of these. So, teachers can design (our) teaching by using data from the present one-on-one interaction and the sudden event. Both teacher and learner-centered should be used. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

I want to see this. It is good if the people of the Office of Primary Education Service Area accept that teachers can present teaching that can serve the various learning needs and problems of their students. (Another one of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

The teachers also expressed concern about the number of subjects that individual teachers must take into account when providing lesson plans. A big problem, particularly in small schools which comprise the largest number of schools in Thailand, is that the teacher of each classroom (grade level) is responsible for teaching in all eight subjects. Thus, if each subject requires a lesson plan, a large amount of the teachers' time and effort is spent on lesson plans, a non-living document, instead of preparing the right things for use in a classroom.

The teachers added that when they asked the Office suggestions on how to solve this problem, the answer was perfunctory. The teachers assumed that this might be because the officials themselves did not really have an answer. Thus, the teachers remained frustrated and feeling under great pressure. The following excerpts reflected the circumstances which evolved around this issue.

I write (lesson plans) for two subjects. This is the best I can do. It is very unlikely I can write all subjects. I try to not think or care about how many (you want). That is better for me. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

I used to ask about this. One of supervisors told me that it was best if I could write lesson plans for all subjects. This did not satisfy me. I kept this answer in my mind waiting for clarity. When I had other chances, I asked other officials of the Office of Primary Education Service Area. Their answers did not match each other. Some said that this was subject to the individual teacher. The least number is one. Some said that, in principle, teachers had to write lesson plan for all subjects they teach. Who can give me a clear answer? For me, I write one subject. (One of the Teachers in the school under the jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2, personal communication, January 16, 2015)

I think the requirement has to be reasonable, not to decide who writes too many, who writes too little few, and not to use this to reward or punish teachers. Indeed, every teacher teaches when they do not have a lesson plan. Teaching a good or bad lesson is subject to the individual and many factors. (Another one of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 2, personal communication, January 16, 2015)

5.4.3.2 School-Based Curriculum

The requirement for school-based curriculums or additional courses was mandated by Section 27 of NEA. According to this section, schools have to take responsibility in prescribing curricular substance relating to needs of the community and the society, local wisdom and attributes of desirable members of the family, community, society, and nation. By this mandate, the two following versions of national curriculum including the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2544 (2001) and the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (2008) prescribed schools to develop their own additional courses.

All participants had experienced implementation of both the 2001 and 2008 curriculum versions. Interestingly, they all had the common perception that changes to the national curriculum are never made with teacher participation through seminars, workshops, etc. This was evidenced by the change in which the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (2008) was released to replace the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2544 (2001). With no participation, the teachers initially felt uncomfortable with the new responsibilities and experiences brought by curriculum change. Additionally, they wondered why (a new) change was introduced before sufficient time for implementing the previous version elapsed. More importantly, because there was no participation, implementing the new version did not encounter much teacher readiness or support.

I knew the curriculum would come to change things as I was informed by the Office of Primary Education Service Area. In this way it had no teacher participation. And I asked myself what schools had to do and what benefits schools would get from this change. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

In developing a school-based curriculum or additional courses, the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (2008) prescribes that not more than 40 hours are allocated for each grade of Primary Education Level. Participants indicated that there were two main issues that became problematic in developing school-based curriculum: the complexity of the components of the curriculum and resource limitation.

The national curriculum addressed standards and was aligned with knowledge and skills for both academic and career purposes. The participants reported that three factors led to complexity when trying to build a school-based curriculum that was consistent with it. Firstly, to conform to the national curriculum standards, the school-based curriculum template comprised a lot of headings that needed to be addressed. Generally, the headings included school background, school vision, principles, curriculum goals, learners' key competencies, desired characteristics,

learning standards, and indicators. In order to complete this information, teachers had to have a deep understanding of their meanings and concepts. A key point was that some were very abstract or general such as Principles of Curriculum and Learners' Key Competencies. This caused teacher concern as to whether what they wrote was adequate or appropriate. Secondly, material completed under each heading had to be consistent with and relevant to other headings. One concern that was experienced by all participants was the relationship between learning standards and indicators. Thirdly, in completing the required documents, formal or academic language was required. The teachers reported that they had limited capacity to deal with these factors.

> I think that standards are where managing teaching and learning activities has to get to. For indicators, I think that they talk about the knowledge and practices of students that have to attain the standards. But when I have to write out, it is hard for me to translate standards into indicators. I am not sure whether what I wrote made them relevant to each other. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

The concerns on the issue of resource limitation were based on the fact that in developing school-based curricula, all schools were mandated to follow the same standards. The teachers claimed that OBEC and the Office of Primary Education Service Area paid no attention to what and how many/how much resources needed to be devoted to this duty. Small schools faced many difficulties as they did not have enough teachers or budget to deliver all the required classes. In one example, a school was forced to use a portion of the limited money received from per-student expenditure allocation to develop the school-based curriculum. This caused a follow-up problem as it was hard for the school to meet other budget costs. In another example, a school was limited in its success in a developing school-based curriculum because it only had five teachers, some of whom were not very strong in such matters.

In order to avoid problems in developing a school-based curriculum, small schools faced two main choices: copying the curriculum of another school or

buying a sample one that was provided in a CD. A key point was that such curriculums were implemented with less motivation. It was a correct looking curriculum, but for the purpose of giving something to the Office as opposed to use by the school.

In general, the teachers agreed on some arguments for developing school-based curricula. They accepted that school-based curricula could provide schools with an opportunity to prescribe the schools' needs and problems and make their lessons appropriate to their school contexts. Additionally, the teachers thought that they could develop a curriculum that was crowded with activities and real experiences instead of with content. Moreover, the teachers agreed that it was right to allow curricular experts to deal with complicated aspects of the national curriculum, such as concepts and definitions. However, for anything relating to school-based curriculum, the teachers required more participation. They thought that if they had more participation in designing the elements of the school-based curriculum, the elements selected would be easy to fulfil or manage. They argued that this would increase teacher motivation in developing school-based curricula.

5.4.3.3 Number of Subjects

The participants reported that one of the changes brought about by the two latest versions of the national curriculum involved an increase in the number of subjects called Substance by the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2544 (2001) and Learning Area by the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (2008). The two versions prescribed eight subjects: Thai Language, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Religion and Culture, Health and Physical Education, Art, Careers (by the B.E. 2544 version)/Occupations (by the B.E. 2551 version) and Technology, and Foreign Language.

According to the participants, the increase of the number of subjects became a major challenge as schools had to put more effort and resources into developing school-based curricula and implementing different subjects. Importantly, there were two points that reflected the real world of curriculum implementation: the extent and quality of teaching and learning in implementing the subjects, and the waste of resources on free textbooks.

The effectiveness of implementation subject to school sizes. Larger schools were at an advantage in they had sufficient teachers to deal well with the

different subjects. Importantly, they could assign teachers to teach subjects for which they had specialized training. By this means, teachers taught the same subject to around 3-5 classes per day. The students of each class stayed in their classroom all day, with only the teacher changing rooms.

In contrast, a major concern for small schools was how to solve the problem of insufficient teachers. Generally, a small school had around 4-7 teachers to deal with eight classrooms made up of two kindergarten classes and six classes at primary level. Thus, some teachers had to be the class teacher for two classrooms. The problem was compounded by having insufficient teacher specialization to deal with the eight subjects. Interestingly, one of the causes of insufficient teacher specialization was the process of teacher recruitment and placement. In the past this process was operated by higher agencies, and schools were not asked what teacher qualifications they wanted. As a result, the schools found that they had some teachers whose specializations or major subjects did not meet their needs. It was found that senior teachers in small schools were most likely to have a major in Social Studies, Agricultural Science, Health Education, or Physical Education, while there was a shortage of teachers with a major in Science, Mathematics, Art or Music. As a result of these problems, small schools were unable to implement all of the eight subjects or to fully and effectively implement them. In practice, the eight-subject implementation was handled in different ways. One method was to focus only on the subjects that were considered as top priority (such as Thai and Mathematics), while leaving out some subjects (notably English) for reasons of no specialization or no time. Another was to try to deliver the full contents and activities of the curriculum in a reduced way to fit the needs and capacities of the teachers. For example, in the hour of Health and Physical Education class, this week the teachers might assign the students to play football in the school field and play a game in next week. Similarly, in the hour of Art class, the teachers might assign students to draw a picture varying according to individual student's need. These methods all affected the quality of implementing the new curriculum. According to one teacher:

The books of some Learning Areas, such as the book on Art, are new because students hardly open them. Whenever the Art class comes, a teacher orders the students to draw a picture…. Knowledge of Art is difficult for the teacher who does not have a major in Art. I think in a small school or a medium school, it is hard to find a teacher who has a major in Art. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

The waste of money on free textbooks was related to the first problem. The participants reported that the problems of insufficient teachers and teacher specialization meant that the free textbooks funded by the 15-year free basic education policy were not fully used. The teachers argued that continuous funding for free textbooks wastes the government budget.

When the teachers were asked for a way to solve this problem, they suggested two matters that should be set as national agendas for discussion. Firstly, the national curriculum needs to be revised in terms of the number of subjects. General suggestion took place as to the process of reducing the number of subjects. One method suggested was for some learning areas or subjects to be integrated in a way that takes into account student contexts. Another was to develop a curriculum based on 'experience', which reflected students' needs and interests and builds on knowledge and skills that exist outside the normal classroom. The teachers believed that there was no logical necessity for having a set number of subjects. Students should not be swamped with knowledge or subjects that are unable to accommodate their lives. Secondly, it was necessary to have a clear way for solving the problem of small schools in relation to the matter of insufficient teachers. The teachers thought that if this problem was solved, all subjects created by the national curriculum could be implemented or delivered. However, they stressed that more details of and specific alternatives for the two matters needed to be considered.

5.4.3.4 Assessments

Regarding the matter of assessment, it was found that schools were intervened by several forms and levels of assessments each year. For example, from the national level, schools implemented managing O-NET for grade 6 and NT for

grade 3.Atthe regional level, students in grade 2 and 5 took an assessment called LAS (Local Assessment System) designed by the Office of Primary Education Service Area. Additionally, in certain situations, schools implemented their own assessments for specific purposes such as to provider literacy and numeracy feedback. Having experienced implementing these assessments, the teachers raised two points. First, schools were forced to pursue the same standards while the inputs provided to schools were unequal. Secondly, assessments lacked variety in terms of the methods used to reflect or access the real knowledge and skills of students.

The first point reflects the fact that the assessments ignore differing school contexts and needs. In this sense, the assessments simply allow the government or the higher agencies to shine a light on overall poor education quality, overlooking factors such as school size and relative funding. The teachers complained bitterly about how schools organized and students were required to take too many standard tests, the results of which were of little benefit. According to a teacher from a small school:

I want to tell that during the time when we prepare our students for O-NET, the teachers sacrifice many things such as using our cars to take our students to get tutoring from a school that is more ready….Really, there are other things we would like to do but we have to give O-NET tutoring the first importance. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 1, personal communication, January 14, 2015)

The second point relates to the fact that these kinds of assessment totally ignore and therefore do not reflect wider knowledge and skills of students. The assessments are mostly presented in form of multiple-choice test in which students' responses are confined to a list of choices. This determines the types of knowledge and skills that can be evaluated by the multiple choice test. Importantly, only lower-order critical skills were assessed. Higher-order critical skills such as problem solving are not assessed. Additionally, regardless of being able to read or unable to read, students have an opportunity to guess the answers. Thus, national standardized tests

do not require students to construct their responses. Accordingly, the assessments are irrelevant to students' experiences and lives. For this reason, students should not be forced to take unfair assessments that do not give them the opportunity to demonstrate their real knowledge and skills. At the same time, these irrelevance-based student assessments should not be used to make decisions on student achievement and school performance. According to one of the teachers:

> I accept that O-NET and NT are the standards. If students can make higher scores, they are really talented. But they are very difficult for most students. And unfortunately, we teach a lot, but small knowledge is tested….For my conclusion, the assessments from the center (suan-klang) do not show a complete picture of students. (One of the Teachers in the School under the Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Education Service Area 3, personal communication, January 12, 2015)

Unfortunately, the pursuit of higher scores in the various standard assessments forces many schools to use superficial methods that are expected to help improve their student test scores. A common way is for schools to provide intensive internal tutoring for their students. Additionally, for the subjects in which schools have no specialization, such as mathematics or English, schools might take their students to other schools for tutoring. "Rich" schools may even employ outside tutors. Generally, tutoring is organized in the second semester. During the tutoring season, other activities and lessons that are out of O-NET or NT or other assessments prescribed by the central agency are left out.

When the teachers were asked the question: "How are the results of the assessments meaningful to schools", they insisted that there is no evidence that the increase of testing times and their results improve inputs and the processes of learning and teaching. Instead, they are used as a purported measure of school performance, leading to rewards or sanctions. They are becoming a key factor that influences final decision-making in various matters such as teacher transfer and salary promotion. The teachers argued that, by not taking into account school contexts and the lack of variety in the tests, the results of the assessments became poor indicators of the real academic capacities or performances of schools. Thus, it is unfair to use these assessments to

judge school performances. The teachers suggested that the results of the assessments should be used as information to facilitate teaching and learning processes and reduce the gap between the poor and the rich schools. Additionally, the issues in which the assessments were redundant, uncoordinated or not aligned to each other and irrelevant to school contexts were the big problems that needed to be solved urgently.

In conclusion, curriculum changes remain a manner of centralization in which the components such as subjects, hours, goals, learning standards and assessment are determined by the central agency. In other words, decisions as to what schools wanted and how to achieve them were dictated by the higher agencies. Because of the top-down approach to decisions, the changes do not fulfil schools' needs and contexts. Thus, when they were introduced to schools, the teachers perceived them as being the same as the previous ones which contained unchallenged tasks the teachers were required to perform, such as lesson plan construction, school-based curriculum development and subject implementation. This resulted in teachers being dissatisfied with the new version of curriculum.

5.5 Conclusion

The objectives of this study include: 1) To examine the extent of changes in light of the last educational decentralization implemented from 1999 onwards; 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; and 4) To reflect the primary schools' experiences drawn upon the changes adopted in the name of educational decentralization.

Guided by these objectives, the findings of the study were divided into two parts in chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 investigated changes in the Thai basic education system: chapter 5 focused on the participants' experiences in relation to the changes.

As authority is the key factor in implementing educational decentralization, examining whether and to where authority was shifted was the focus of investigation. Chapter 4 addressed the two principal changes that affected the profile of primary education in terms of administrative structure and areas of authority. These comprised

the first change occurring in B.E. 2523 (1980), and the last one introduced by the National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999) (NEA).

The first part of the chapter was devoted to briefly investigating the formation of the public administrative structure of the Thai state. From this foundation, the chapter went on to present the general changes to the structure and authority exercised over it. Then, the remaining sections highlighted the consecutive changes to Thai basic education which were declared to rely on principles of decentralization.

In a big picture, the findings reveal two basic sets of changes. The first set of changes involved restructuring the administrative agency, resulting in change for its personnel or officials. This was mainly to deal with administrative responsibilities or routine work. The second set of changes involved the establishment of hierarchical boards granted the authority to control specific areas, particularly teacher profession management. The new administrative structure took the first steps to set up a system of control by consolidating the traditional, fragmented and informal powers into the center. This followed the pattern of the Thai public administrative system, which is defined as a highly centralized structure. Later, to strengthen the control, the highly centralized structure was developed through the establishment of regional agencies as the branches of the central agency. At the same time, central boards were established to make the hierarchical structure function better and take firm control over specific key areas. Interestingly, schools found themselves controlled in two ways; through the regional offices to which they report and through the central boards. This provides a lens for the understanding where centralization is located and where decision making authority is decentralized.

The first set of changes marked a period in which the Thai basic education developed both formal administrative structure and areas of control. For the formal administrative structure, the three tiers of educational agencies comprising the Office of National Primary Education Commission (ONPEC; the central agency), the Office of Provincial Primary Education, and the Office of District Primary Education were established, according to the mandate of the Primary Education Commission Act B.E. 2523 (1980). At the same time, the three hierarchical boards including the National Primary Education Commission, the Provincial Primary Education Commission, and the District Primary Education Commission were set to drive these three tiers. For the

area of control, the Teacher Profession Administration Act B.E. 2523 (1980) prescribed the establishment of the three layers of commission including the Teacher Civil Service Commission (Gor-khorin Thai; the top board), the Department Teacher Civil Service Subcommittee (Or-Gor-khorKrom), and the Provincial/Bangkok Metropolitan Civil Service Subcommittee (Or-Gor-khor Changwat/Or-Gor-khorKrung-thep) to deal with all matters in relation to teacher profession management.

A key point is that these changes mark departure from decentralization as they include certain features that strengthened the control over Thai basic education. The three hierarchical tiers of agencies and the three hierarchical administrative boards represented a flat or horizontal control system, not a vertical or downward authority shift. Within these mechanisms, decision making authority was delegated flowing from the central agency to its branches or lower tiers. These created authoritative relationships in which the regional agency and board absorbed decision making authority for themselves rather than delivered it to schools. Thus, it was apparent that the middle tier took a role for the central agency, not for schools.

The two channels of authority provided for comprehensive and rigorous school control. Schools were accountable to the higher level agencies and school decisions and courses of actions were guided by or highly subject to them. For these reasons, schools could not fully deal with their problems and needs.

The second main changes began in B.E. 2542 (1999), prescribed by a set of educational laws lead by the NEA. These changes were claimed to implement educational decentralization as a key reform strategy to improve the quality of the Thai basic education. Unfortunately, findings reveal that these changes do not achieve educational decentralization. This argument is supported by two pieces of evidence. Firstly, the legal framework as to which decision making authority would be decentralized, to whom and how, is too general and vague and there have been no moves to review the current position. Moreover, there are two critical areas in which authority remains highly centralized: teaching profession management and resource allocation. Secondly, the focus of implementing educational decentralization appears confused. This became the case when the Office of Primary Education Area and schools were declared as the two entities to which decision making authority would be shifted. A key point is that this declaration seems to conceal the fact that, from past

to present, the regional agencies including the provincial and district levels do not lack decision-making authority. Administrative structure or mechanisms are traditionally designed to support the regional branches of the central agency to absorb the authority shifted from the central agency. Thus, if meaningful educational decentralization is expected, it is necessary that the existing administrative structure is redesigned. This is to make the regional agencies and their boards more autonomous, or to split its authoritative relationship from the central agency. Then, a formal mechanism to serve the shift of authority from the Office of Primary Education Service Area to schools is created. As long as the regional agency (the Office of Primary Education Service Area) is united in an authoritative relationship with the central agency (OBEC), and there is no mechanism to serve the shift of authority from the higher levels to schools, it is highly unlikely that decentralization can occur.

Instead of solving the problem of top-down decision making, the set of changes addressed areas that retained a highly centralized system. These include restructuring the administrative structure or the chain of command, creating new institutions of control, particularly in relation to teacher profession and standards educational tests, and revitalizing the old authorities of control over other areas, particularly teacher profession management and resource allocation. In restructuring the administrative structure, the Office of Primary Education Service Area has emerged as a bigger agency, crowded with officials who were affected by the transformation. To legitimize their existence, these officials are activated to design tasks or responsibilities for schools and/or to translate policies, orders, and regulations of the central agency into means of practice before imposing them on schools. A key effect is that schools are greatly intervened as they have to implement such directives.

In short, the extent and degree of changes has not overcome the highly centralized system that is the foundation of the Thai public administrative structure. The changes made are superficial ones in which the administrative structure and chain of command have been redesigned to retain exercising decision making authority for the central agency and its regional branch. Thus, the administrative system of Thai basic education remains in a constant state in terms of authority shift.

Chapter 5 analytically reflects the real world of implementers and practitioners in settings that have witnessed the changes supposedly made in light of educational decentralization. Its conclusions are made according to the sequence of thematic findings presented in the chapter. The first findings relate to the extent to which educational decentralization and its goals are necessary for and understandable to the participants. Later findings are based on the themes emerging from the changes and how the Office of Primary Education Service Area dealt with them.

First and foremost, it is necessary to understand that some themes or issues emerging from the participants' experience partly result from issues discussed in chapter 4. Specifically, if there is an emerging theme that requires more detail or background, this will be found in chapter 4. This is not only to make the two chapters relevant to each other but also to provide the readers a better understanding.

The participants' opinions on the necessity for educational decentralization reflect their basic understanding of what educational decentralization means. This is confined to the idea that decision making authority is required to shift from the higher agency to the lower agency. The capacity for solving problems relies on having decision making authority. Within this common idea, some differences are observed in relation to which agency authority should shift from and to which agency it should be shifted to. According to the directors of the Office of Primary Education Service Area, authority should shift from the central agency to the Office of Primary Education Service Area and then onto schools. While some of the principals and teachers agree with the views of the directors, most of them express opinions reflecting that the Office of Primary Education Service Area is the location of authority. For them, decision making authority has to shift from the Office of Primary Education Service Area to schools.

The goals of educational decentralization can be classified on three levels: a higher level, an intermediate level, and the lower level. The higher and intermediate levels were given by the directors of the Office of Primary Education Service Area, and the lower level was given by the school principals and the teachers. At the lower level, it is as a means to increase decision making authority of the owners of problems and needs. At the intermediate level, it is as a means to increase management efficiency. At the higher level, it is as a means to increase the quality of education. It

is interesting to note that the goal of educational decentralization as understood by the principals and the teachers is based on making sense of a lack of authority. According to their reflections, all the things schools have to do in education provision are associated with decision making authority.

The participants perceive the matters of resource allocation, administrative structure, and curriculum as the main changes. Within each area of change, additional elements were reported. Moreover, the principals and teachers reported experiencing a lot of pressure and frustration when the changes cause interventions that are inconsistent to schools' problems and needs and/or difficult to integrate into the schools' old ways of practice. This results in part from not being involved in the process of change, and not having the meanings, values, and contributions of the changes properly communicated to them.

The school principals and teachers felt that the most important resource allocation and management issues were per student expenditure, discretion-based resource allocation, teacher transfer and recruitment, and teacher salary promotion. The agencies that exercise authority in implementing these allocations are OBEC and the Office of Primary Education Service Area. For per student expenditure, authority over allocation is held by OBEC. This resource is directly transferred to schools. Its spending is subject to the discretion of schools, and schools are pleased that they have full authority over it. For the other categories of resource, authorities over allocation are granted to the Office of Primary Education Service Area and its board known as the Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Sub-commission (TEPS) of the Office of Primary Education Service Area (known in Thai as Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor-Khet). Discretion-based resource allocation is a budget that OBEC allocates to each Office of Primary Education Service Area for repairing or maintaining school buildings. When the Office of Primary Education Service Area receives its budget, allocation is made at the discretion of the Office of Primary Education Service Area. Teacher transfer and recruitment and teacher salary promotion are in hands of Orh-Kor-Khor-Sor-Khet.

As reported by the school principals and the teachers, discretion-based resource allocation, teacher transfer and recruitment, and teacher salary promotion are the areas over which authorities remain centralized. As decision-making is a closed,

discretionary process, questions arise about transparency, arbitrary choice and prejudice. Additionally, since these areas are key factors influencing school performances, individual schools compete with each other. To take advantage, various strategies are used. For instance, some schools try to form a special relationship with the Office of Primary Education Service Area and/or its boards. This increases the influence of the Office of Primary Education Service Area and its boards.

The emergence of the Office of Primary Education Service Area was reported as one of the main changes. The unique features of the Office are associated with the issues of structure, size, and the manner exercising authorities. Regarding the issue of structure, as a link in the chain of command, its structure is designed to receive responsibilities and authorities delegated by OBEC. These are to oversee and control schools. Importantly, because exists as an intermediate agency and works under the mandate of OBEC, it absorbs authorities shifted from OBEC. On the issue of size, as it emerged from amalgamating the existing provincial and district educational agencies, the Office has a large staff and covers a wide geographic area. Specifically, it comprises approximately eight internal units and has a lot of officials. Apart from general officials, the Office has many senior administrative positions including a Director, around 6-8 Deputy Directors, and a director for each internal unit. Because its area of control is so large, the Office is unable to know about every school's unique contexts, problems and needs. This allows discretion and randomization to play a major role in responding to school needs and problems. The Office translates the mandates and assignments of OBEC using delegated authorities that are often exercised on a discretionary basis. Based on these features and its discretion, schools are greatly intervened. As a result, schools cannot fully or seriously pursue their goal of providing a high quality of education.

Curriculum was seen as the last of the main changes. The thematic issues raised by principals and teachers were rhetoric terms, school-based curriculum, number of subjects, and assessments. The locus of these issues is indicative of nothing new or challenging. The main point is that, because of the top-down way in which the changes were designed, they are not considered to be consistent with the schools' problems and needs. Thus, the teachers are reluctant to implement the changes.

5.6 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 or regional 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 or approved 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 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.

5.7 Future Research

With regard to the effect of stronger school control and greater school intervention of the Office of Primary Education Service Area, one important avenue of future research would be to address the role of the Office. This research would raise the question of: 'What roles of the Office of Primary Education Service Area could best help schools improve school performance?'Additionally, 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?'

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APPENDICE

INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol for the Director of the Office of Mahasarakham Primary Educational Service Area (1-3)

1. Why has educational decentralization come to be necessary in the Thai contexts?
_____

2. How do you define the goals of educational decentralization?
_____

3. From your perspective, what is / are the key change (s) initiated by educational decentralization?
_____

4. Regarding the current principal-agent relationship among the three entities associated with the basic education provision including Office of The Basic Education Commission, Office of Primary Educational Service Area, and schools, how would you describe the following terms?
Consistency between the structure and educational decentralization goals:
_____

Decentralization in decision making:
_____

Strengths and limitations:
_____ _

5. How would you describe the Office of Primary Education Service Area regarding the following terms?
Its Size: _____
Role/Function in terms of an interface with schools:
_____

Areas of authority granted:
_____

Strengths: _____

_____

Limitations and what proposed to deal with the limitations:

_____

6. At present, what are key challenges or problems you face as the Director of the Office of Primary Education Service Area?:

_____

7. How would you describe your key concerns in terms of overseeing the schools under the jurisdiction of the Office of Primary Education Service Area?:

_____

8. From your perspective, what are some positive factors needed to happen to ensure real educational decentralization?:

_____

Interview Protocol for School Principals under the
Jurisdiction of the Office of Mahasarakham
Primary Educational Service Area

1. Why has educational decentralization come to be necessary in the Thai contexts?
    _____

2. How do you define the goals of educational decentralization?
    _____

3. From your perspective, what is/are the key change (s) initiated by educational decentralization?
    _____

4. Would you describe the changes conformed to educational decentralization? :
    _____

5. What change (s) has/have greatly impacted on you and your school? And how?
    _____

6. Would you describe about the areas you have and do not have decision making authority?
    _____

7. To what area you do not have decision making authority, to whom does such authority go? And how would you describe your experience to which how is such authority used?:
    _____

8. From your perspective, what is the key role or function of the Office of Primary Education Service Area?
    _____

9. How has the present role of the Office of Primary Education Service Area impacted your school?
    _____

10. How would you propose the expected role of the Office of Primary Education Service Area?

_____

11. In your views, what should be addressed in regard to educational decentralization? Why?

_____

Focus Group Discussion Protocol for Teachers

1. Why has educational decentralization come to be necessary in the Thai contexts?
_____

2. How do you define the goals of educational decentralization?
_____

3. From your perspective, what is / are the key change (s) initiated by educational decentralization?
_____

4. How has/have such change (s) impacted on your school and instructional practice?:
_____

5. Would you describe about the subjects where your school has and do not have decision making authority?
_____

6. From your perspective, what is the key role or function of the Office of Primary Education Service Area?
_____

7. What are the roles of the Office of Primary Education Service Area that support your instructional practice? And how?
_____

8. What are the roles of the Office of Primary Education Service Area that hinder your instructional practice? And how?
_____

9. How would you propose the ways to solve these problems?
_____

10. How would you propose the expected roles/responsibilities of the Office of Primary Education Service Area?
_____

11. In your views, what should be addressed in regard to educational decentralization? Why?
_____

BIOGRAPHY

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