Principals' Perceptions of the Impact of School Library on Student Academic Achievement in Rural Thailand and Factors Driving Their Perceptions

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School libraries in rural Thailand have faced a serious long-term problem in developing effective libraries, and could not achieve a minimum criteria of school library standard. Key people who influences in supporting and contributing an effective library are school principals because they have authorities in directing and administration the facilitation of change in the schools. Therefore, school principals require to understand the values and impacts of school library on students' academic achievement. The principals' perceptions about the impact of school library on students' academic achievement not only present their awareness of the value of school library on student's academic achievement, but also reflect their attention on contributing effective libraries. This paper presents the principals' perceptions of small public primary school in rural Thailand and the factors that drive their perceptions about the impact of school library on students' academic achievement, which is one part of the study of school libraries and their roles in rural Thailand. These perceptions meaningfully presented the understanding and awareness of school principals about the library values on increasing students' academic achievement, and revealed the factors influencing those principals' perceptions. This information was further integrated with rural school libraries' characteristics and situations to clarify their scenarios and local context, which is important to understand the causes making these libraries struggle to be effective, how to manage with school library issues and develop effective school libraries in rural Thailand.

Keywords: *School libraries, Rural school libraries, School librarians, Teacher librarians, Teacher-librarians, School principals, School administration School library standards, Thailand.*

INTRODUCTION

S chools in rural Thailand have continued facing the problem of developing effective libraries for very long time (Ponpaiboon, 2011). Before the 21st century, most schools in rural Thailand had no libraries. Now, the number of school libraries in rural areas has been increased approximately 90% (Chavalit, 1989; Cheunwattana, 1999; Cheunwattana & Fitzgibbons, 1999; Wimolsittichai, 2017; Rukumnuaykit & Palakawong-na-ayudhya, 2015). However, most of them could not reach the minimum criteria of school library standard, and hardly develop effective libraries because of a lack of sufficient resources including library collections, funding and qualified staff (Anonymous, 2017; TK park, 2011).

Rural schools library problems are challenging, which may need specialised management. Essential keys empowering and contributing an effective school library include school principals, qualified librarians, teachers and ICT (Wimolsittichai, 2017). In particular, school principals are essential people in supporting and contributing an effective library because they have power in directing and managing the school learning resources development. Moreover, principals perceptions related to the roles and values of school library are important in reflecting their awareness and understanding of the impacts of school library on students' academic achievement and education success; such perceptions can be linked to the principals' attention and their potentiality to contribute to effective school libraries.

In Thailand, the studies related to small public primary school libraries in rural areas and school principals' perceptions of the impact of school library on students' academic achievement are very limited. Moreover, it is necessary to clarify the situation of those libraries, particulary their local context before seeking for the ways to improve the libraries. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the school principals' perceptions and the factors that drive their perceptions related to the impacts of school library on increasing students' academic achievement in rural Thailand, which is one part of the study for clarifying the characteristics of small public primary school libraries and their roles in rural Thailand, as perceived by principals. The benefit of this research is to contribute to knowledge related to the much-needed basis for identifying the components of an effective library for a small public primary school in rural Thailand.

STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The results of this paper are one part of the research which identifies public primary school libraries' characteristics in rural Thailand and their roles in increasing students' academic achievement through the perception of school principals. The research question examining the perceptions of principals about the impact of school library on student academic achievement was addressed as RQ3: How do school principals perceive the impact of the school library on students' academic achievement? The results of this question were gathered with other research questions related to school and school library demographic in rural Thailand. Consequently, the results of this study identify 1) the current scenario of small public primary school libraries in rural Thailand, 2) the principals' perception of the impact of school library on student academic achievement and 3) the impacts driving the principals' perceptions in order to provide necessary foundations for improving and developing effective school libraries in rural Thailand.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Principals

School principals play an essential role in establishing an effective school library (Van Hamersveld, 2007). In particular, supportive principals who realised the roles and values of school library programs and teacher-librarians, influenced the school libraries success (Buchanan, 1982; Campbell, 1991; Henri, Hay & Oberg, 2002a; Kolencik, 2001; Oberg, 1996; Pearson, 1989). Libraries with supportive principals were more likely to received sufficient funding, facilities, collections and staff, which made a positive impact on students' academic achievement (Baughman, 2002; Hartzell, 2002c; Hay & Henri, 1995; Kachel & Graduate Students, 2011; Lance, Rodney & Hamilton-Pennell, 2005; Lance & Schwarz, 2012).

The supportive principals not only significantly influence the administration of school libraries, they are crucial on building collaboration among school library stakeholders including teachers, teacher-librarians, students' parents, local community people, public and private organisations and

library networks, which empowers school capacities to establish effective libraries (Buaraphan, 2013; Dheeranond, 2014; Lance, Rodney & Russel, 2007; Oberg, 1996; Pradit, 2006).

Principals' perceptions of school library's roles

Internationally, extensive studies found that school principals had limited awareness and understanding of the roles and values of school libraries and librarians (Dorrell & Lawson, 1995; Hartzell, 2002c; Van Hamersveld, 2007). Most principals considered the role of school libraries as book warehouses, and perceived the role of librarians as book keepers and circulators (Dorrell & Lawson, 1995; Kolencik, 2001). Consequently, such school libraries were abandoned. The librarians worked in isolation, and did not play an essential role in library instruction programs, which can contribute to develop various skills benefiting students' academic performances and life-long learning skills such as information, computer, and digital literacy skills, creative thinking and problem solving (Hughes, 2013; Lau, 2005; Ranaweera, 2008; Rodney, Lance, & Hamilton-Pennell, 2002; Siqueira, 2015). Unsurprisingly, many schools did not even provide and integrate the instructional library programs into their school curriculum (Hartzell, 1994, 2000c).

In contrary, many studies in US. found that schools with better performing had principals who understood the roles of school library programs and paid attention on the collaboration with librarians and committees, particularly in libraries activities, in-service training and school curriculum design (Campbell, 1991; Henri & Hay, 1995; Haycock, 2003; Hartzel, 2002c; Lance, Rodney & Russel, 2007; Pearson, 1989). In the same vein, a study of China showed that the principals who realised the roles and values of school libraries, believed that school library can enhance students' academic achievement leading to students' academic success, which affected their school reputation (Warning & Henri, 2012).

In Thailand, few studies provided the principals' perceptions of the roles and values of school libraries and the library supports of them. Most studies compared the level of principals' supports classifying by the size of schools, which showed that principals of small schools gave less support and administrate on libraries than in other types of schools (Nganlert, Sirisanglert & Nakfon, 2016; Sermvitoon, Techataweewan & Wajiraprechapong, 2011). Moreover, some studies provided that principals had both awareness and unawareness of the impact of school library on students' information literacy and learning (Sacchanand, 2011; Sangkharat, 2013; Singh, and others, 2005).

Source of school principals' perceptions

Many scholars indicated that principals' perceptions related to the importance of school library depended on many factors, such as the existing content about the roles of school libraries in the principal preparation courses, updating the principals' knowledge related to library and information fields, and the principal working and learning experiences (Hafsteinsdottir, 1997; Pearson, 1989; Veltze, 1992; Wilson & MacNeil, 1999).

In the cases of the principals' perceptions related to the role of school librarians influencing students' learning, Church (2007) found that a majority of principals in Virginia elementary schools perceived the roles of school library media specialist as the instructional partner from their working experiences. This is similar to the later study in Virginia secondary schools, Church (2010) also found that the principals perceived the intructional roles of school library media specialist from their working experiences. In particular the working experiences with the school library media specialists who work as teachers or administrators.

Hartzell's study (2002a) provided that 2 factors significantly influenced the principals' percptions were the occupational invisibility of school librarians, and the occupational socialisation of school principals. School librarians are more likely to imperceptible from their occupations because of isolating work, playing a small role in teaching, and having a low profile in education literature. Moreover, school principals realised the roles of school librarians from their learning and teaching experiences. The awareness was different based on the personal professional level, education level and working experience (Alexander, Smith, & Carey, 2003; Naylor and Jenkins, 1988).

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a survey research method which collected data from 375 school principals of small public primary school across 6 regions in Thailand. The data was collected through hard copy and online surveys. The survey included 3 main sections. The first section sought the

demographics of principals, schools and school libraries through the close-ended and open-ended questions. The descriptive and cluster analysis were used to analyse the quantitative data. The second section investigated the strengths, weakness, opportunities and challenges of those school libraries through the open-ended questions. The thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. The last section examined the principals' perceptions of the impacts of school library on increasing students' academic achievement from a seven-point semantic differential scale between weak and strong perceptions.

In particular, the rating scale questions contained 25 questions; grouped into 6 groups that related to the potential of library components that can increase students' academic achievement. The 6 groups of library potentials included 1) overall potential 2) library's administration 3) library's physical facilities 4) library collections and activities 5) library services, and library staff. The descriptive analysis was used to analyse data from this section. However, the data from the survey section 1 and 3 were integrated together, and then were analysed by using the multiple regression analysis in order to seek the factors that drive those principals' perceptions.

FINDINGS

Principals' perceptions of the potential impacts of school library on students' academic achievement

The perceptions were derived from 350 principals who had a library in their schools. Most principals perceived that the school library had an extremely strong impact on increasing students' academic achievement (47.6%), followed by very strong impact (39.5%). Notwithstanding, few principals perceived that the school library had extremely weak impact on increasing students' academic achievement (0.5%).

In terms of the overall potential impact, a majority of principals perceived that the school library had an extremely strong impact on increasing students' literacy levels (43.1%), followed by a very strong impact on raising students' academic grades (40.3%). Meanwhile, some principal (12.6%) perceived that the school library program had neither, slightly, very and extremely weak impact on students' academic achievement.

For the library's administration potential impact, most principals perceived that the library had an extremely strong impact on increasing students' academic achievement when it had a sufficient library budget (48.3%), followed by a very strong impact when it had implemented a policy into the school curriculum (45.7%)

In terms of the library's physical facilities potential impact, 48.9% of principals percieved that the library had an extremely strong impact on increasing students' academic achievement, followed by very strong (36.0%), and slightly strong impact (12.0%).

The library's collections and activities potential impact, nearly half of principals (47.1%) percieved that the quality and variation of the school library activities had an extremely strong impact on increasing students' academic achievement, followed by the quality and quantity of library collections (47.1%), and the continuation of the library activities for all users (44.3%)

For the library services potential impact, 40.9% of principals perceived that providing proactive service had an extremely strong impact on increasing students' academic achievement, followed by the flexible scheduling (41.7%), and the quality of library services (37.4%) had a very strong impact on raising students' academic achievement.

In terms of the Library staff potential impact, over half of principals percieved that the dedicated time of librarian (53.1%) had an extremely strong impact on increasing students' academic achievement, followed by 38.9% of principals perceived that the collaboration between school library and other libraries had a very strong impact on raising students' academic achievement.

The datails of the levels of principals' perceptions of each potential impacts of the school libraries on increasing students' academic achievement are presented in the appendix 1.

Factors influence the principals' perceptions about the potential impacts of school library on students' academic achievement

In order to seek the factors influencing the principals' perceptions related to the impact of school library on students' academic achievement, five predictors were used to test seven hypothesises

of this research. The five predictors included principals' age, highest academic qualification, years of experience as a school principal, years of experience as a school principal at present location, and school budget. The 7 hypothesises include;

- *H₁:* Overall potential contribution of school library program can increase students' academic achievement

- *H₂:* Library administration potential can increase students' academic achievement

- *H₃:* Library's physical facilities can increase students' academic achievement

- *H₄:* Library collections and activities can increase students' academic achievement

- *H₅:* Library services potential can increase students' academic achievement

- *H₆:* Library staff potential can increase students' academic achievement

- *H₇:* Overall potential's criteria of school library can increase students' academic achievement

The analysis revealed that only the principals' ages negatively and significantly correlated with the 7 hypothesises. This means that the principals who were younger than 51 years old are more likely to enhance the positive perceptions about the libraries impacting students' academic achievement. Meanwhile, the other 4 factors had no correlation with the principals' perceptions.

DISCUSSION

Most principals of small public primary schools in rural Thailand understood very well the roles and value of school libraries and teacher-librarians on students' academic achievement, especially in enhancing students' literacy levels. However, the findings of principals' perceptions varied from this research to the studies of Akkawatthanangkoon (2013) and Sermvithoon, Techataweewan & Wajiraprechapong (2011). Those studied noted that school principals lacked understanding about the role of library, in particular the principals of small schools lacked attention for supporting libraries than large and medium-sizes schools. The studies also provided that the barriers making rural schools hardly developed effective libraries were from insufficient budget and staff, and a lack of priority for enhancing school library qualities.

In contrast the findings of this research supported the studies of Moya (2004), Chaisena (2014) and Nganlert, Sirisanglert and Nakfon (2016), that principals of rural schools had a good understanding about the role of school library impacting students' academic achievement. They also provided that the challenges making rural schools struggled to develop an effective library were from inefficient administration, insufficient library physical facilities and lack of staff.

This research also investigated the challenges making rural schools struggle to develop effective libraries through the survey section 1 and 2. The principals reflected that their libraries were unable to achieve the minimum school library standard because of administration, staff and library's physical facilities subjects. Noticeably, most principals gave priority for developing school libraries on facilities, staff and building, but did not focus on library activities and services, particularly integrating ICT capabilities into all library tasks such as library collections, information literacy program and library administration.

Moreover, the finding of this research showed that principals who were younger than 51 years old tended to increase the positive perceptions of the libraries impacting students' academic achievement. The findings connected to the emerging of student-centred learning concept in 1999 in Thailand. Consequently, the principals who had worked in schools or started studying in Education Science and Teacher Training since 1999, might have more understanding and awareness related to learning resources impacting students' academic achievement. Meanwhile, the principals who aged over 50 years old might retain the concept of a teacher-centred approach until now, which influenced their perceptions about the impact of library on students' academic achievement.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This research clearly showed that most principals of rural small public primary schools in Thailand well understood the impact of school library on increasing students' academic achievement, especially students' literacy levels. However, the challenges making them unable to develop effective libraries were from inefficient administration, insufficient staff and library physical facilities. Moreover, the concept of student-centred learning since 1999 influencing the principals'

perceptions about the impact of library on students' academic achievement. Therefore, the principals who had worked or studied during that period had more awareness about the roles and values of school libraries more than others.

In light of this, the findings were different from some studies pointing out that the principals lacked awareness about the roles of library and lacked library supports (Akkawatthanangkoon, 2013; Sermvithoon, Techataweewan & Wajiraprechapong, 2011). The implication is that Thai government should support the development of rural school libraries in terms of providing a clear policy for rural school libraries to empower the provision of a school library program. This will benefit those principals and their schools to support and develop effective libraries.

The results of these principals' perceptions were intergrated into the main study, which contributed the necessary needed for rural school library development. Consequently, the school libraries' stakeholders and the Thai government may increase their attention and priority to develop effective libraries, which not only link to students' academic success but also connect to education success in Thailand.

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Appendix 1: The principals' perceptions about the potential impacts of the school libraries on students' academic achievement

Statements	Extremely strong	Very strong	Slightly strong	Neither	Slightly weak	Very weak	Extremely weak	
	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
Overall potential contribution of school library program can increase students' achievement through the following criteria								
1. Academic grades	22.6% (79)	40.3% (141)	24.6% (86)	5.7% (20)	4.3% (15)	2.6% 19	0.0% (0)	
2.Standardised test scores	21.4% (75)	34.6% (121)	27.7% (97)	6.6% (23)	6.0% (21)	2.9% (10)	0.9% (3)	
3.Students' literacy levels	43.1% (151)	36.6% (128)	14.9% (52)	2.6% (9)	1.4% (5)	1.4% (5)	0.0% (0)	
4.Students' information literacy levels	29.4% (103)	35.4% (124)	21.7% (76)	8.6% (30)	2.9% (10)	1.4% (5)	0.6% (2)	

Statements	Extremely strong	Very strong	Slightly strong	Neither	Slightly weak	Very weak	Extremely weak	
	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
5.Amount of time students spend reading during school	29.7% (104)	38.6% (135)	24.0% (84)	4.0% (14)	2.0% (7)	1.4% (5)	0.3% (1)	
6.Amount of time students spend reading outside school	22.9% (80)	35.7% (125)	22.9% (80)	11.4% (40)	4.6% (16)	2.3% (8)	0.3% (1)	
7.Amount of time students spend reading for pleasure	18.6% (65)	36.9% (129)	27.4% (126)	9.4% (33)	4.6% (16)	2.6% (9)	0.6% (2)	

Library,s administration potential can increase students, academic achievement through the following criteria

Statements	Extremely strong	Very strong	Slightly strong	Neither	Slightly weak	Very weak	Extremely weak	
8.The implementation of library policy in the school curriculum	31.7% (111)	45.7% (160)	15.7% (55)	3.7% (13)	1.7% (6)	1.4% (5)	0.0% (0)	
9.Practically and clearly library policy	32.3% (113)	45.1% (158)	16.6% (58)	4.0% (14)	1.1% (4)	0.9% (3)	0.0% (0)	

Statements	Extremely strong	Very strong	Slightly strong	Neither	Slightly weak	Very weak	Extremely weak	
	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
10.Sufficient school library budget	48.3% (169)	30.3% (106)	13.7% (48)	3.7% (13)	1.7% (6)	2.0% (7)	0.3% (1)	
11.Collaboration in library administration among school library's stakeholder	34.6% (121)	38.9% (136)	16.3% (57)	5.7% (20)	2.6% (9)	1.7% (6)	0.3% (1)	
Library's physical facilities potential can increase students' academic achievement through the following criterion								
12.Quality of indoor and outdoor environment, zoning and easy to access	48.9% (171)	36.0% (126)	12.0% (42)	2.0% (7)	0.9% (3)	0.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	
Library collections and activities potential can increase students' academic achievement through the following criteria								
13.Quality and quantity of school library collections	47.1% (165)	38.0% (133)	11.4% (40)	2.3% (8)	0.9% (3)	0.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	

Statements	Extremely strong	Very strong	Slightly strong	Neither	Slightly weak	Very weak	Extremely weak	
	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
14.Quality and variation of school library activities	48.3% (169)	36.3% (127)	12.6% (44)	2.0% (7)	0.6% (2)	0.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	
15.Continuation of library activities for all users	44.3% (155)	37.7% (132)	13.4% (47)	3.4% (12)	0.9% (3)	0.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	
Library services potential can increase students' academic achievement through the following criteria								
16.Providing proactive services	40.9% (143)	39.4% (138)	14.6% (51)	2.6% (9)	1.4% (5)	1.1% (4)	0.0% (0)	
17.Quality of library services	37.4% (131)	42.3% (148)	16.0% (56)	2.0% (7)	1.4% (5)	0.9% (3)	0.0% (0)	
					0.9% (3)	0.9% (3)	0.3% (1)	
Library staff potential can increase students' academic achievement through the following criteria								

Statements	Extremely strong	Very strong	Slightly strong	Neither	Slightly weak	Very weak	Extremely weak	
	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
19. Supportive school principals	52.0% (182)	36.6% (128)	10.0% (35)	0.9% (3)	0.6% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	182 128 35 3 2
20.Collaboration between librarians and school principals	49.7% (174)	37.1% (130)	11.7% (41)	0.6% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.6% (2)	0.3% (1)	174 130 41 2 2 1
21.Collaboration between librarians and teachers	49.4% (173)	38.0% (133)	10.6% (37)	0.9% (3)	0.3% (1)	0.9% (3)	0.0% (0)	173 133 37 3 1 3
22.Collaboration between school libraries and other libraries (public library/school library/academic library)	27.7% (97)	38.9% (136)	20.0% (70)	8.0% (28)	2.0% (7)	2.6% (9)	0.9% (3)	97 136 70 28 7 9 3
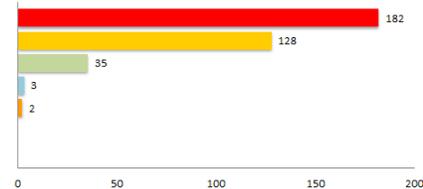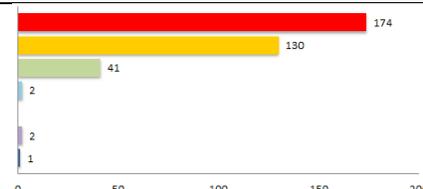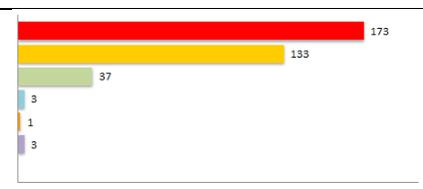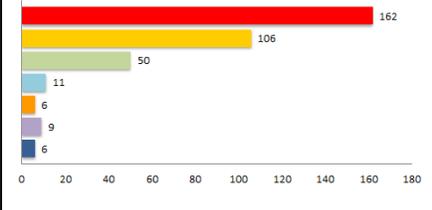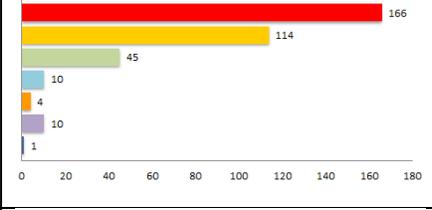
Statements	Extremely strong	Very strong	Slightly strong	Neither	Slightly weak	Very weak	Extremely weak	
	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
23.Certified librarian	46.3% (162)	30.3% (106)	14.3% (50)	3.1% (11)	1.7% (6)	2.6% (9)	1.7% (6)	
24.Full-time librarian	47.4% (166)	32.6% (114)	12.9% (45)	2.9% (10)	1.1% (4)	2.9% (10)	0.3% (1)	
25.Dedicated time of librarian	53.1% (186)	31.4% (110)	10.0% (35)	2.6% (9)	0.9% (3)	1.7% (6)	0.3% (1)	