
Leadership Competency of the New School Administrators under the Primary School Office Areas in the Eastern Region of Thailand

Willard Jeff V. Pada¹, Pojanee Mangkang², Annop Phothisuk³

<https://orcid.or/0009-0006-7834-4614>¹

St Teresa International University¹²³

willardjeff022@gmail.com¹

ABSTRACT

This study examined the leadership competencies of new administrators in primary schools in Thailand's eastern region. A 71-item questionnaire measuring 14 leadership competency dimensions was administered to 119 school administrators with five years or less of experience, drawn from eight Primary Educational Service Areas under the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) in Thailand's Eastern Region. The instrument achieved excellent content validity (CVR = 1.00, CVI = 1.00, based on three expert validators) and excellent internal consistency (overall Cronbach's α = .990; dimension-level α = .865-.931). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). All 14 competency dimensions were confirmed as valid (KMO = .827-.936; Bartlett's test p < .001) and rated in the "High" range, with a grand mean of 4.48. Second-order CFA supported the overarching leadership competency construct, with standardized factor loadings ranging from 0.719 to 1.000. Despite generally high self-perceived competency, Problem Solving, Conflict Management, Decision Making, Strategic Planning, and Innovation emerged as the five highest-priority dimensions for development. These findings establish an empirical, expert-validated baseline of leadership competency needs among new administrators in the region and provide an important foundation for designing future leadership development initiatives.

Keywords: Leadership Competencies, School Administrators, Primary School

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has witnessed unprecedented transformations in educational systems worldwide, driven by globalization, technological advancements, and evolving societal expectations. Within this dynamic landscape, the role of school administrators has become increasingly complex and demanding. School leaders are no longer expected to function merely as managers; they must serve as visionary leaders, instructional guides, community liaisons, and agents of change (Hallinger & Lee, 2014).

Thailand's education system, in particular, faces significant challenges in developing competent school leaders. The Thailand 4.0 policy, launched by the Royal Thai Government,

underscores the need for educational transformation to prepare students for a knowledge-based, innovation-driven economy (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2017). However, the success of such reforms ultimately depends on the quality of school-level leadership.

Thailand's primary education system is administered by the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC), which oversees approximately 29,152 schools nationwide in 2024. The Eastern Region, comprising seven provinces: Chonburi, Rayong, Chachoengsao, Prachinburi, Sa Kaeo, Trat, and Chanthaburi, represents a critical area for educational development due to its strategic importance as part of the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC), a hub for industrial and technological growth.

Despite ongoing national reforms, a substantial leadership capacity gap persists. According to Narintarakul-Na-Ayudhaya and Siribanpitak (2019), many newly appointed administrators in Thailand lack the competencies required to lead their schools effectively. This deficiency is partly attributed to selection processes that prioritize seniority over demonstrated leadership potential, as well as to insufficient preparation and professional development systems (Piaw et al., 2013).

In today's rapidly evolving global landscape, emerging technologies and innovative pedagogies continue to transform educational systems. Traditional values and leadership approaches that guided previous generations of school administrators are often no longer adequate to address current and future challenges. This misalignment can create a disconnect between established practices and contemporary educational demands. As Badawi (2004) notes, globalization has intensified competition, compelling educational institutions to seek competent, forward-thinking leaders who can navigate complexity and drive continuous improvement. Effective leadership, therefore, often distinguishes successful schools from underperforming ones (Piaw et al., 2013) and profoundly affects teacher professional development and student achievement (Lozano, 2008).

Furthermore, Narintarakul-Na-Ayudhaya and Siribanpitak (2019) highlight that, despite numerous educational reforms driven by Thailand 4.0 and international benchmarking pressures, a significant gap remains between expected leadership competencies and those possessed by newly appointed administrators. Often selected using criteria unrelated to leadership capability, these administrators may struggle to manage and reform their institutions effectively, ultimately limiting positive impacts on student learning. This issue is particularly pronounced in Thailand's Eastern Region.

Statement of the Problem

The research aimed to identify the leadership competencies of new school administrators in Thailand's Eastern Region. Particularly, it sought answers to the main question: What are the key components and indicators of leadership competencies of new school administrators under the Primary School Office Areas in the Eastern Region of Thailand?

Scope and Delimitations

This research was conducted across all eight provincial primary school districts in Thailand's Eastern Region, targeting newly appointed school administrators with a tenure of five years or less. The study was delimited to OBEC-affiliated primary schools, excluding international schools, private institutions, and secondary schools. While the geographic focus on the Eastern Region allows for in-depth contextual understanding, it may limit the generalizability of findings to other regions with different socio-economic and cultural characteristics. Also, the focus on new administrators (≤ 5 years) excludes insights from seasoned leaders, potentially overlooking valuable experiential knowledge that could inform leadership development. The reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias, and the cross-sectional design captures competency at a single point in time rather than tracking developmental trajectories.

Review of Related Literature

Educational Leadership

The term educational leadership refers to an idea that goes beyond mere management and involves encouraging people, developing a vision, and creating a supportive school atmosphere. Leaders lead according to their views on intervention strategies, such as professional learning communities, and their approach to instruction can contribute to school improvement under certain conditions. School leaders are critical in determining not only teacher efficiency but also student performance. They are required to take part in activities such as strategic planning, creating a friendly environment, community engagement, and promoting high-quality instruction, which are especially important in the era of "accountability" reforms such as the "Every Student Succeeds Act". In Thai educational reforms, leadership is essential to addressing the challenges of decentralization, increased school autonomy, and accountability; however, gaps remain between reform goals and their implementation. Cultural sensitivity, including strong traditions of authority and hierarchical subordination, may hinder the development of a democratic leadership style, which requires reform approaches that consider local culture.

Leadership Competencies for School Administrators

Leadership competencies can be defined as the traits, skills, and knowledge an individual possesses that qualify him or her to be a competent leader. The competencies are vital in managing the workforce and succession planning, although different circumstances require different sets of competencies. Good leaders ensure team performance, create a positive workplace environment, and improve employee engagement. Competencies offer motivation, inspiration, decision-making skills, and change management skills (Towler, 2020; Siam et al, 2021; Reis, 2023).

Leading self combines self-management, emotional intelligence, integrity, and organizational ability. Self-management is a conscious, systematic effort to plan and control one's life to achieve goals without wasting time, energy, or available resources. Emotional intelligence can be considered a capability to monitor one's feelings and to discriminate among them. It can also involve knowing how others feel and distinguishing between the two. Integrity is a fundamental quality of a leader that demonstrates honesty, truthfulness, and dependability.

Organizational ability is a skill that is important in making plans of work so that required materials can be used properly (Opatha, 2010; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Valentino, 2023)

Leading the organization is a combination of problem-solving skills, decision-making, change management, strategic planning, innovation, and conflict management. Problem-solving skills can be defined as the ability to solve problems effectively with minimal negative impact and maximum positive impact on the outcome. Decision-making is a process by which an individual, group, or organization reaches conclusions about which future actions to pursue, given a set of objectives and limits on available resources. Change management is a structured approach to transitioning individuals, teams, and organizations from the current state into a desirable future state. Strategic planning is an essential process that enables educational institutions to set long-term goals, deploy resources efficiently, and maximize overall performance. Innovation deals with the ability to inspire productive action in yourself and others during times of creation, invention, uncertainty, ambiguity, and risk. Conflict management seeks to resolve disagreement or conflict with positive outcomes that satisfy all individuals involved or benefit the group (Russo, 2014; Cheng, 2021; Ronquillo et al., 2023).

Leading others has two aspects: interpersonal skills and team building. School principals' interpersonal skills play a crucial role in optimizing school climate (Tahir et al., 2023). Team building is the process of helping a group of people work together, regardless of background, as effectively as possible, especially through activities and events designed to increase motivation and promote cooperation among coworkers or colleagues.

Communication can be divided into communicating and influencing others. Communication is the process of creating meaning and assigning it. Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree on what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individuals and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives (Giffin & Patten, 1976; Yukl, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

This study used five theoretical frameworks. Transformational Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1997) justified a pre-assessment to create a disorienting dilemma that motivates a change in perspective. Collaborative Leadership Theory (LaFasto & Larson, 2001) informed stakeholder involvement structures across all competency modules. Systems Thinking (Senge, 1990) underpinned root-cause analysis tools such as the Five Whys and the Fishbone Diagram. Reflective Practice (Schön, 1983) justified the After-Action Review process embedded in each development cycle. Distributed Leadership Theory (Spillane, 2006) supported shared leadership structures adapted to Thai cultural norms.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the study's research framework. This framework analyzes 14 leadership competencies of the new primary school administrators. These competencies will be evaluated to determine their leadership level and inform their professional development.

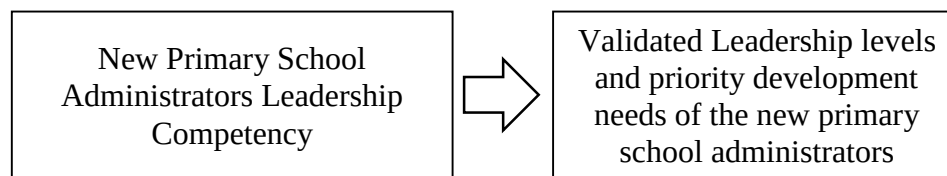


Figure 1. Research Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative research method wherein the responses were gathered, tabulated, and analyzed to examine current leadership competency levels and identify priority development gaps among new school administrators.

Research Design

The study used a purposive sampling strategy to select new primary school administrators with five years or less of service from eight Primary Educational Service Areas under the Office of the Basic Education Commission in Thailand's Eastern Region, appointed between 2020 and 2025.

Research Steps

This study carried out the following steps. First, the 14 leadership competency dimensions were summarized from the literature and existing frameworks. Second, a 71-item questionnaire measuring these dimensions was developed and refined based on expert review. Third, three experts established the instrument's content validity and reliability. Fourth, the questionnaire was distributed to the new administrators across all eight Primary Educational Service Areas in the Eastern Region of Thailand using purposive sampling. Fifth, the completed responses were gathered, tabulated, and analyzed using descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis to determine the level of competency. Lastly, the results were interpreted to identify the leadership competency dimensions of the highest priority for future development efforts.

Data Collection and Sample Selection

This study was conducted among new administrators of primary schools in the OBEC Eastern Region of Thailand who were appointed in 2020-2025. Because each Primary Educational Service Area Office recorded individual personnel data, the total number was unknown. Hence, purposive sampling was conducted.

The study gathered 119 responses for analysis, submitted by respondents in Chachoengsao, Chanthaburi, Chonburi, Nakhon Nayok, Prachinburi, Rayong, Sa Kaeo, and

Trat. The sample size was considered adequate based on the research objective and statistical requirements.

Using a 71-item questionnaire with three sections: 1) demographic information, 2) a 5-point Likert scale (1.00-1.49 = Very low, 1.50-2.49 = Low, 2.50-3.49 = Moderate, 3.50-4.49 = High, 4.50-5.00 = Very high) measuring 14 leadership competencies, and 3) a ranking to determine the 5 lowest competencies. Three experts validated the instrument (CVR = 1.00, CVI = 1.00), and it demonstrated excellent reliability (overall Cronbach's α = 0.982).

Data Analysis Methods

Basic descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) for respondents' ratings were first computed using SPSS and interpreted using the five-point scale. The factor analysis was assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure, which is required to exceed 0.50, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, which is required to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$); both were computed for the overall instrument and for each of the 14 competency dimensions.

We conducted exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to examine the underlying structure of each competency dimension. Factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.00 were retained (Kaiser, 1960), with a cumulative variance explained of at least 60% considered satisfactory (Hair et al., 2010). Items were expected to demonstrate communalities of at least .40 (Osborne et al., 2008). Factor loadings were also examined to ensure adequate association between the items and their respective factors. Subsequently, second-order confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to validate the overall construct, with the 14 competency dimensions specified as first-order factors loading onto a higher-order Leadership Competency construct (Marsh & Hocevar, 1985).

Research Hypotheses and Validation

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the level of leadership competency among new primary school administrators in the Eastern Region of Thailand across the 14 identified competency dimensions.

The results showed that the data strongly supported all 14 leadership competencies. Average scores ranged from 4.35 to 4.60, while the CFA results confirmed that all dimensions were valid and significant. H₀₁ was therefore rejected. Among the competencies, Problem Solving, Conflict Management, Decision Making, Strategic Planning, and Innovation emerged as the main areas needing further development.

Study Limitations and Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to ethical protocols by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, and allowing participants to withdraw at any time. Ethical considerations also included the imperative to portray participants' views respectfully in the final analysis and reporting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Factor Analysis and Construct Validity

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Test and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were conducted to determine the data's suitability for factor analysis. KMO values across the 14 competency dimensions ranged from 0.827 (Interpersonal Skills) to 0.936 (Organizational Ability), with an overall KMO of 0.840, which is above the acceptable threshold of 0.50. Bartlett's Test was significant for all dimensions ($p < 0.001$), confirming that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix and that meaningful relationships existed among the variables. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) confirmed the validity of all 14 dimensions: eigenvalues for all dimensions exceeded 1.00, cumulative variance explained ranged from 65.04% (Problem Solving) to 77.71% (Integrity), exceeding the 60% threshold recommended for social science research (Hair et al., 2010), and factor loadings ranged from 0.772 to 0.905, with 94.4% of items loading at 0.800 or higher, demonstrating strong construct validity.

Leadership Competency Levels

All 14 competency dimensions were rated from "High" to "Very High," with a grand mean of 4.48, indicating that new administrators possess generally suitable self-perceived competency across all areas. Integrity received the highest rating (4.60), while Problem Solving Skills received the lowest (4.35). Despite this overall strength, the highest-priority dimensions were Problem Solving Skills (4.35), Conflict Management (4.38), Decision Making (4.41), Strategic Planning (4.43), and Innovation (4.43), which emerged as the areas most in need of development. The findings show that Conflict Management, Problem Solving, and Decision Making were among the key areas requiring further development among newly appointed school administrators, highlighting the need for targeted leadership development in these competencies.

Table 1. Summary of Leadership Competency Assessment

Competency	Mean	SD	Rank	Interpretation	Priority Level
Integrity	4.60	.015	1	Very High	Lower Priority
Team Building	4.57	.038	2	Very High	Lower Priority
Interpersonal Skills	4.56	.008	3	Very High	Lower Priority
Emotional Intelligence	4.52	.058	4	Very High	Lower Priority
Organizational Ability	4.52	.039	4	Very High	Lower Priority
Change Management	4.49	.077	6	High	Moderate Priority
Self-Management	4.49	.051	6	High	Moderate Priority
Communication	4.47	.073	8	High	Moderate Priority
Influencing Others	4.45	.036	9	High	Moderate Priority
Innovation	4.43	.036	10	High	High Priority
Strategic Planning	4.43	.044	11	High	High Priority
Decision Making	4.41	.052	11	High	High Priority
Conflict Management	4.37	.068	13	High	Highest Priority
Problem Solving	4.35	.051	14	High	Highest Priority
Grand Mean	4.48	.074		High	

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

A second-order Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to validate the structure of the leadership competency construct. The model showed a strong fit, with

standardized factor loadings for the 14 domains ranging from 0.719 to 1.000 ($p < 0.05$ for most), confirming that they are significant and robust dimensions of the overarching leadership competency construct. Self-Management demonstrated the highest loading ($\beta = 1.000$), followed by Interpersonal Skill ($\beta = 0.983$) and Organizational Ability ($\beta = 0.966$).

Table 2. Standardized Factor Loadings and Parameter Estimates of the Leadership Competency Domains

Factor	Standardized Factor Loading	Factor Loading	SE	<i>t</i>	Sig.
A. Problem Solving	0.719	1.036	0.233	4.447*	0.000
B. Conflict Management	0.751	1.139	0.218	5.223*	0.000
C. Decision Making	0.822	1.442	0.314	4.591*	0.000
D. Change Management	0.955	3.212	1.143	2.811*	0.005
E. Interpersonal Skill	0.983	5.407	5.506	0.982	0.326
F. Emotional Intelligence	0.936	2.666	0.802	3.324*	0.001
G. Self-Management	1.000	40.806	6.283	6.495*	0.000
H. Organizational Ability	0.966	3.735	1.136	3.289*	0.001
I. Integrity	0.879	1.846	0.342	5.393*	0.000
J. Team Building	0.934	2.623	0.951	2.758*	0.006
K. Communication	0.915	2.263	0.559	4.051*	0.000
L. Influencing Others	0.912	2.222	0.515	4.315*	0.000
M. Strategic Planning	0.876	1.815	0.337	5.387*	0.000
N. Innovation	0.877	1.825	0.345	5.284*	0.000

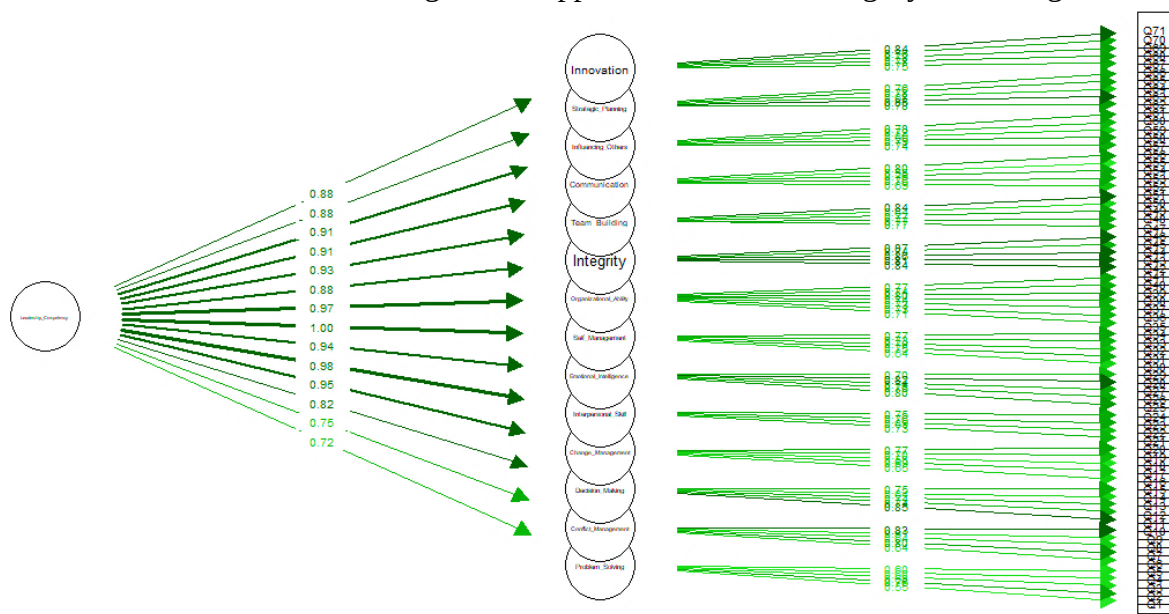
*Significant

Figure 2. Second-Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis Model of Leadership Competencies

Discussion

The findings show that the new administrators rate themselves highest on personal and relational competencies such as Integrity, Team Building, Interpersonal Skills, Emotional Intelligence, and Organizational Ability, while they rate themselves lowest on managerial skills such as Problem Solving, Conflict Management, Decision Making, Strategic Planning, and Innovation. One possible reason for this trend is that the former set of competencies requires qualities and interpersonal skills many administrators have already gained during their years of teaching, while the latter relies on situational judgment and decision-making experience that comes only after becoming an administrator. This finding is in line with Narintarangkul-Na-Ayudhaya and Siribanpitak's (2019) study, in which new Thai administrators felt the least prepared to meet just these requirements, and also with Suriyabutr and Williams (2021), who similarly highlighted competency-related challenges within Thai education, particularly the need to strengthen educators' knowledge and skills for addressing complex, integrated learning situations.

Second-order CFA findings also support this understanding by validating the tool's



theoretical construct. The fact that all 14 dimensions load significantly on a single higher-order Leadership Competency factor (factor loadings ranging from 0.719 to 1.000) indicates that these factors, although different in nature, serve as interconnected elements of the same ability rather than separate skills. On the other hand, the high factor loading, along with a non-significant t-value ($p = .326$) for Interpersonal Skills, indicates some problems with measuring it.

The findings corroborate those of Pada and Doctor (2020), who similarly identified communication and organizational competencies as areas requiring development among Thai school leaders, reinforcing the relevance of these competencies in the Eastern Region context.

SUMMARY

This study used a quantitative survey design to examine the leadership competencies of new school administrators in Eastern Thailand's primary education offices. Data were collected from 119 school administrators and vice-administrators with five years or less of experience across eight Primary Educational Service Areas in the Eastern Region. The 71-item instrument demonstrated excellent content validity (CVR = 1.00, CVI = 1.00) and reliability (overall α = .990). Factor analysis confirmed the validity of the 14 leadership competency dimensions (overall KMO = .840; Bartlett's $p < .001$), all rated in the "High" range with a grand mean of 4.48. Five dimensions, Problem Solving, Conflict Management, Decision Making, Strategic Planning, and Innovation, were identified as priority areas for development. Second-order CFA validated the overarching construct, with standardized factor loadings ranging from 0.719 to 1.000.

CONCLUSIONS

New school administrators in the Eastern Region of Thailand, primary education offices possess generally suitable self-perceived leadership competencies across all 14 dimensions, with a grand mean in the High range. However, significant differences exist among dimensions, with Problem Solving, Conflict Management, Decision Making, Strategic Planning, and Innovation representing the most critical development needs. The 14-dimension structure was statistically validated through EFA and second-order CFA, confirming that these competencies form a coherent, multidimensional construct. Together, these findings establish an empirical, expert-validated baseline of leadership competency needs that can guide targeted professional development efforts and inform the design of future interventions for this population.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the priority leadership competencies that have been established through this study, training programs for OBEC and school leadership in the Eastern Region should focus on problem-solving skills, conflict resolution, decision-making, strategic planning, and innovation among the newly appointed administrators. The results from the study will be important for designing and validating a leadership competency development model that can focus on these priority areas as well as evaluation of such a model for its effectiveness in implementation. Future research in this area should take into consideration a longitudinal and comparative approach as well.

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AI DECLARATION STATEMENT

AI-supported tools helped with grammar and structure in creating this article. No AI tools were used to collect, analyze, or interpret data; all authors are credited for their academic contributions.

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