Paradigm for Learning Development of Alternative Schools: A Case Study of Panyaden School, Chiang Mai Province, Thailand

■ **Yupapan Nikhom**
■ **Paratchanun Charoenarpornwattana**

Abstract: The purpose of this qualitative research are to study parents' expectations and the teaching paradigms towards the learning development of an alternative school: case study of Panyaden School, Chiang Mai province. The research methods and instruments used for this research were in-depth interviews with 30 stakeholders of the Panyaden school including 12 school parents, 6 school teachers, and 2 school directors. They were interviewed because they are the priority group that created the curriculum and developed the plans and policies. The researchers decided to use the semi-structured interviews. This research used data from interviews and manually analyzed the data. The researcher wrote the research report after the data was analyzed. The study is a descriptive one that was carried out with qualitative techniques and the described interpretations. The results show that Emotional Intelligence is the key expectation of parents for sending their children to study in the selected alternative school and the Buddhist approach is the main factor for all the parents. Moreover, the study found that these four approaches allow the teachers to use ten teaching methods, which assist, develop student learning. Eight of ten teaching approaches empower the students to obtain critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills. Furthermore, the students develop in social and cross-cultural understanding while studying in this school.

Keywords: alternative education, alternative school

Introduction

Thailand's current education system is questioning quality and efficiency. The issue of student academic achievement has been seen as downturn even though the education budget has increased in the last ten years.

Dr. Piyasakol Sakolsatayadorn of the Ministry of Public Health (2016) revealed that one-fifth of Thai young children have problems in language and small muscle developmental delays which have impacted their intelligence levels and also affected learning skills, which include reading and, writing. He estimates that 10-15% of Thai P3 and P6 are facing IQ problems, "Unable to read, write and think" causing Thailand to lose the opportunity in development compared with other countries once AEC begins and causes children's education in the future to be inadequate.. Moreover, Asst. Prof. Sasilak Khayankij stated that the study found that the early development of children in Thailand is being hustled, leading to unbalanced developmental immaturity which affects their future learning development. For example, to accelerate children in academic admission to famous elementary schools, and to have them write and read over children's work, indicates these limitations . This derives from the understanding discrepancies of parents' expectations that want their

children to do well. She also added that the school systems for Kindergarten and Primary schools focus on Rote Learning leading to opportunity loss in learning since this is a good time for their brains to be able to learn as much as possible, especially behavioral skills such as creativity skills, emotional skills, speaking and movement. When children are being developed on only one side of their brains it affects the lack of motivation in learning, making them lack the skills in working with others and lack of responsibility for themselves and others. This is a lost or limited opportunity to create skills in behavior. This can affect their attribute of education accomplishment and their future careers (Khayankij, 2015).

The weaknesses in Thailand's education system are well documented: the OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Survey, the World Bank Reports, and another set of disastrous O-Net results, in which the average score in eight out of nine subjects was below 50%, all highlight educational stagnation while neighboring countries advance (Maxwell & Kamnuansilpa, 2016).

Amid all the current problems in Thailand's Education, an alternative school is one good example of building high quality education and variation in society until many parties perceive it as one of the hopes for revamping the Thai Education System and its quality for all. This is supported by the findings of Ariratana, Pennee and Utis (2014) that alternative educational management is another alternative used to solve the problems for every group of people to have the opportunity in education based on their potentiality as well as interest.

Since children are an important human resource of the nation as a major workforce in the development of the country to prosperity and stability, high quality early childhood programs have been shown to return at least 7 percent per year for every dollar invested, paying for themselves (Children's Defend Fund, 2014). Alternative schools seem to be ahead of mainstream education and can serve as meaningful models for the renewal of mainstream education across the globe (Sliwka, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Parents who are disappointed with the Thai education system are trying to find other choices for their children's education. There are many alternative schools in Thailand to choose from according to parents' needs but usually they are expensive. Panyaden School is one of those schools that provides education to fit the needs and expectations of the parents.

Purposes of the Study
    1. To study parents' expectations towards Panyaden School, Chiang Mai province.
    2. To study the teaching paradigms towards the learning development of Panyaden School, Chiang Mai province.

Research Questions
    1. What are the expectations that parents have in sending their children to study in Panyaden School, Chiang Mai province?
    2. How could the main teaching approaches in this school work in developing student's learning?

Literature Review

The Concept of Alternative Educational Management

The meanings of Alternative Education and Alternative schools have varied over time. Alternative school and Alternative educational programs display diverse theories and practices. Lacking a precise meaning, the term "alternative education" describes different approaches to teaching and learning other than state-provided mainstream education. They are usually public or private schools with a special, often innovative curriculum and a flexible program of study, which is based to a large extent on the individual student's interests and needs (Raywid, 1988; Koetzsch, 1997; Aron, 2003; Carnie 2003 cited in Sliwka, 2008, P.1).

According to Dictionary of Education (2016), Alternative Education is a form of education different from that offered by the state system. It may refer to radical or progressive approaches but can also be used to cover particular arrangements for learners for whom state provision is deemed, or has proved, to be unsuitable (Dictionary of Education).

Atkins and Bartuska (2010) stated that Alternative education programs are being used to serve a wide range of students in all areas of the country.

Alternative education as a variety of systems management standing on the foundation of Buddha teaching, an intellectual foundation, and a psychology foundation to develop children's growth potential based on the nature of children by focusing on happiness and peaceful coexistence. The Alternative education model corresponds to the nature of students and the learning process including learning contents.

The Concept of Alternative School

Smith (1974 cited in Atkins and Bartuska, 2010, P.14) explained that an Alternative school is any school that provides alternative learning experiences beyond those provided by the traditional schools within its community and one that is available to all students at no additional cost. However, I think most alternative schools in Thailand are quite expensive.

Thongchai (2010, cited in Jariyapan, 2012, P.20) defined an Alternative School as a place of study that is a school accredited by law that manages education within a philosophy or mission using curriculum and strict control by government. It can be divided into 4 categories: 1) Government school, 2) Local government school, 3) Private school, and 4) Private organization school. Samkosed et al. (2010, cited in Jariyapan, 2012, P.20) defined that Alternative school is a group of education management by using a new idea that disclaims the government education system, where it is believed that the government system will demolish humanity ability and learner entity. As well as, Janwit and Tanmantong (2012) defined that an alternative school is a school which focuses on a mission of education management especially concentrating on the learning by needs of the learner and learning by following a fundamental education system but the process of learning is different.

Research Design

The qualitative method was applied in this case study. The research methods and instruments used for this research were in-depth interviews and analysis of the guidelines to conducting the research.

The participants of this study were the stakeholders of the Panyaden school. They were divided into three groups: 12 school parents, 6 school teachers, and 2 school directors. They were interviewed because they are the priority group that created the curriculum and

developed the plans and policies. Therefore, the total number of participants of this study was 20 people.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

In this study, the researcher used in-depth interviews as a data collection tool.

The researchers decided to use the semi-structured interview. The data collection process was conducted from January to March 2016. The activities were in-depth interviews by using an interview guide for 45-60 minutes per participant and each interview was tape-recorded.

Twenty participants participated in this study and agreed to give detailed information about the Paradigms for the learning development of alternative schools. To answer the two research questions, the participants were divided into two groups, which were teachers of the selected alternative school, and parents who sent their children to study at this selected alternative school.

The interviews were conducted in both Thai and English. There were five teachers and eight parents that were interviewed in English, and four parents and three teachers were interviewed in Thai. Then all translations were employed into text and the Thai information data was translated into English.

To analyze the data, this research used data from interviews and manually analyzed the data. The researcher wrote the research report after the data was analyzed. The study is a descriptive one that was carried out with qualitative techniques and described the interpretations.

Table 1: Demographic of the Participants (Parents)

Participant	Gender	Age	Nationality	Education	Profession
P09	Female	46	American	Master Degree	Forensic Scientist
P10	Female	36	Thai	Bachelor Degree	Graphic Supervisor
P11	Female	35	Thai	Master Degree	Private Business
P12	Male	40	British	Master Degree	Private Business
P13	Female	25	Thai	Master Degree	Private Business
P14	Male	45	Hungarian	High school	Software Developer
P15	Male	42	Venezuelan	Master Degree	Consultant
P16	Male	39	Thai	Master Degree	Engineer
P17	Male	39	Thai	Master Degree	Private Business
P18	Female	39	Thai	Master Degree	Dentist
P19	Male	37	German	PhD. in Agriculture	Managing Director
P20	Female	45	Thai	Bachelor Degree	Government Officer

* P = Parents participant

Table 2: Demographic of the Participants (Teachers)

Participant*	Sex	Nationality	Education	Teaching service years	Years at this school	Current Position**
T01	Male	British	Master Degree in Development	5	5	School Director
T02	Male	Canadian	Master Degree in Education Administration	25	5	Head Teacher
T03	Male	American	Bachelor Degree in Education	22	3	Homeroom Teacher P3
T04	Female	Thai	Bachelor Degree in English	4	3	Homeroom Teacher P5
T05	Female	Thai	Master Degree in Information Management	15	4	Class Teacher P1
T06	Female	Thai	Bachelor Degree in Education	1	4	Class Teacher P6
T07	Male	American	Master Degree in Education	9	3	Homeroom Teacher P2
T08	Female	Canadian	Bachelor Degree in Teaching	4	1	Homeroom Teacher P6

* T = Teacher participants

** P = Level in primary education

Findings and Discussion

Response to Research Question One: *"What are the expectations that parents have in sending their children to study in the Panyaden school?"*

In discussing the findings relating to the first research question, the study found that the Emotional Intelligence is the key expectation of parents in sending their kids to study in the selected alternative school. In addition, the study shows that the Buddhist approach is the first factor for all parents. It can be implied that they believed in the school philosophy and concept that led them to make the decision to send their children to that school. Most of the parents strongly expected that their children would gain Buddhist virtues and principles through the school teaching method. Parents required the school to assist in the practice of their children's thinking skills by teaching them mindfulness; the way to deal with a difficult situation including controlling your mind in your happy times and the middle path for happiness, as they strongly believed that the Buddhist teaching could develop their children's abilities and thinking skills. Some parents expect their children to be content with himself or herself, and to be a good person and be optimistic.

Moreover, some parents described their expectations as an assertion that expressed feelings, and the need to be direct, appropriate, and respectful. Some parents expect confidence in facing problems and the ability to fight for their own goals.

It might be seen that all parents expected their children to have Emotional Intelligence when they studied in the selected school and believed that Buddhist teachings would develop learning skills and knowledge.

Response to Research Question Two: *"How could the main teaching approaches in this school work in developing students' learning?"*

In response to this research question, the study found that there are four main approaches that have been applied in teaching at the selected alternative school. These four approaches allow teachers to teach ten methods, which assist the development of the student's learning.

This study shows that students have obtained critical thinking skills from the eight teaching approaches as indicated below paragraph. This can be implied that the selected alternative school focuses on student's thinking development. Therefore, the Buddhist principles not only guide student behavior but also help develop their thinking skills and bring the best outcome when making decisions or solving problems in both learning in society, at school and also at home.

By using Buddhist teachings, the school provides a tool to help students understand their thinking process; the school set 12 Wise Habits to guide student's behavior. Students have to specify various types of attributes as appropriate to the situation and they have to apply it by using it to solve different kinds of problems by themselves.

Project-based learning enables students to utilize their thinking to decide which friends and projects they are interested in. Then, gather information in order to design it, review it with the teacher and finally present it to friends.

Learning through hands on activities might make students enjoy it, as if they are playing while they are learning. This method helps develop their thinking processes.

Learning by doing or experiencing, according to one of the teachers who shared, "we can learn better when we are doing it." This method helps to develop the brain and thinking skills as thinking processes occur while doing things by themselves and experiencing doing causes more understanding.

Learning through field trips and community engagement gives students educational experiences apart from their regular school environment, also help students to develop their life skills, critical thinking skills, and problem-solving skills.

Learning by listening and sharing in a group, to set students in groups and have discussions allows their thinking processes to work as they have a chance to exchange ideas with friends, and it would reflect their thinking processes with those activities.

Inquiry based learning, by asking open-ended questions to encourage students to think and imagine the big picture and students could find the answers by themselves.

Interest-based learning makes students want to learn, enables them to transfer their knowledge to new contexts, and develops their thinking skills.

The school finds the tools to help students develop their thinking skills to enable them to make decisions, solve problems and make them to be content with their life.

Moreover, the findings addressing the second research question have shown that there were certain matches between what student gained from the teaching approaches and parents' expectations to sending their kid to the selected alternative school. The parents' expectations are as follows:

1. Happiness and Optimistic, mindfulness match with Buddhist teaching

The Buddhist teaching approach at school is Buddhist principles and 12 Wise habits as explained in chapter 2 in more detail. These have been cultivated and integrated into course learning units. It could be that kids would become a good child and happy.

2. Assertiveness is the way to handle difficult situations, control critical thinking skills, decision-making skills and problem-solving skills. The finding from chapter 4, indicates that the Buddhist teaching enhances students to acquire six skills, and the three skills are critical thinking, decision making, and problem solving were the same point that parent's expectations in sending their kids to study at this school.

Recommendations for Further Research

For parents whose kid is studying at the selected alternative school and parents who are looking for an alternative school: The findings from this study may assist parents' understanding of the teaching approaches used at school as some parents worry about what children are doing or learning while they are at school and how the school teaches children. This study allows parents to seek whether their expectations align with the school's approach in order to shift their misunderstanding on that.

For the selected alternative school: While most parents agreed that this school is mostly perfect for younger children, some parents were concerned about academic issues when their children get older. It be seen that this uncertainty creates worries for many parents. Schools should have a chance to discuss with the parent and also build their confidence or educate them about their school's teaching methods and ensure them in school Buddhist teaching.

For the educators: For further studies, a different direction of replacing research purposes and methodology might discover new findings. An observation case study based on the present findings will be able to examine. The future study is recommended to vary in nationality of parental participants in order to obtain more information about parent's expectations. A relevant study can be conducted in different alternative schools in the same location or other regular schools in order to gain better knowledge concerning alternative schools.

References

Ariratana, W., Pennee, N., & Utis, S. (2014). An educational management of alternative schools in Northeastern Thailand: Multi-cases Study. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 116*(21), 1001-1005.

Aron, L. Y. (2003). *Towards a typology of alternative education programs: A compilation of elements from the literature*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

Atkins, T., & Bartuska, J. (2010). *Considerations for the placement of youth with EBD in alternative education programs*. Retrieved from http://amywagner.wiki.westga.edu/file/view/considerations+-+alternative+placements.pdf (September 20, 2016)

Carnie, F. (2003). *Alternatives in education - A guide.* London: Routledge Falmer.

Children's Defend Fund. (2014). *Investing in early childhood development and learning is key to the success of our children and our nation's long-term economic growth.* Retrieved from http://www.childrensdefense.org/library/data/early-childhood-short.pdf (September 20, 2016)

Dictionary of Education. (2016). Alternative Education. Retrieved from http://www.dictionaryofeducation.co.uk/a/a/alternative-education (August 15, 2016)

Janwit, P., & Tanmantong, S. (2012). A*lternative schools, alternative for education*.
Retrieved from http://www.debsirinalumni.org/download.php?url=boa
rd/2012021714524798678.pdf. (August 15, 2015)

Jariyapan, N. (2012). *A study of the instructional management and the effectiveness of
alternative schools*. Retrieved from http://libdcms.nida.ac.th/thesis6/2555/b176603.
pdf

(August 15, 2015)

Khayankij, S. (2015). *Preschool: Fundamental importance of human
resource   development*. Retrieved from http://www.qlf.or.th/Mobile/
Details?contentId=1009 (September 29, 2016)

Koetzsch, R. (1997). *The parents' guide to alternative education*. Boston: Shambala.

Maxwell, D., & Kamnuansilpa, P. (2016). *Declare education in a state of emergencys.*
Retrieved from http://cola.kku.ac.th/main/page.php?id=140?&lang=en(Date
(September 20, 2016)

Raywid, M. A. (1988). Alternative schools: What makes them alternative?. *The Education
Digest, 54*(3), 11-12.

Sliwka, A. (2008). *The contribution of alternative education*. Retrieved from   http://
dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264047983-6-en (August 20, 2016)