

Educational Leadership and Management: A Review of Trends and Practices in Southeast Asia

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Abstract:

This study examines the evolving landscape of educational leadership and management in Southeast Asia, emphasizing the need for region-specific research that integrates local cultural, political, and economic contexts. While Western leadership models have significantly shaped educational practices globally, the complexities of Southeast Asia's socio-political environments require unique adaptations of these models. Through a systematic review of literature, the study highlights key trends in educational leadership, focusing on leadership styles, school effectiveness, and teacher development across countries like Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines. The findings suggest that qualitative research predominates in the region, with a strong emphasis on case studies and interviews, revealing a growing interest in understanding the lived experiences of educators and leaders. However, citation patterns indicate that Southeast Asian research still lags behind Western scholarship in terms of global impact. The study calls for further research to deepen the understanding of leadership dynamics, emphasizing the importance of examining the broader societal factors that influence leadership practices. It also advocates for increased international collaboration to enhance the global knowledge base in educational leadership and management, encouraging cross-national dialogue and the exchange of best practices to address the region's unique challenges and opportunities in education.

Keywords: Educational Leadership, Management, Southeast Asia, Leadership Styles

Introduction:

Educational leadership and management are pivotal disciplines that are continuously evolving in response to societal shifts, policy reforms, and diverse cultural contexts. The effective management of educational systems is increasingly recognized as a key factor in fostering positive educational outcomes, particularly in dynamic and complex environments.

While extensive research in this field has been developed in Western contexts, particularly in English-speaking countries, the focus has often overlooked the unique challenges and opportunities present in non-Western, developing regions such as Southeast Asia (Fullan,

2007; Hallinger, 2011). As educational landscapes become more globalized, it is crucial to expand the scope of research to encompass these diverse contexts, shedding light on the regional dynamics, leadership strategies, and management practices that shape education in these settings.

The significance of understanding educational leadership and management within Southeast Asia has become increasingly apparent as these countries strive to improve their education systems amid rapid social and economic changes. Southeast Asia faces distinct challenges in education, such as managing diverse student populations, implementing policy reforms, and navigating cultural complexities.

Recent studies emphasize the importance of adapting educational leadership and management practices to address these specific challenges (Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Cheng, 1995). Educational leaders in this region must balance global educational standards with local cultural norms, requiring a nuanced approach to leadership and decision-making that can respond to both international influences and regional priorities.

Scholarly contributions to the field of educational leadership and management from Southeast Asia have begun to emerge more prominently, yet gaps remain in understanding how these practices differ from or complement those in Western countries. Aquino, Kilag, and Valle (2023) highlight the importance of crisis management and proactive leadership strategies in turbulent environments, which is particularly relevant in the educational context where challenges can range from natural disasters to societal shifts.

Similarly, Boin, Stern, and Sundelius (2016) provide insights into leadership under pressure, which can inform strategies for managing educational crises in Southeast Asia. In this context, it is vital to examine how regional leaders implement strategies tailored to the socio-cultural and political landscapes of their countries while maintaining a focus on student outcomes.

The current study seeks to contribute to this emerging body of knowledge by exploring the trends, key topics, and research methodologies used in educational leadership and management research from Southeast Asia since the late 1990s. By examining the regional dynamics and leadership practices, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how educational leaders in Southeast Asia navigate the complexities of educational management and its impact on student outcomes. This will offer valuable insights into the broader conversation on educational leadership and management, fostering greater inclusivity and relevance in global discussions.

Literature Review:

Educational leadership and management have been central topics in Western academia for decades, with a robust body of research examining leadership styles, management practices, and their impact on educational outcomes. However, as globalization continues to influence educational systems worldwide, there is a growing recognition of the need for a more comprehensive understanding of educational leadership that incorporates diverse cultural, historical, and socio-economic contexts. Scholars have increasingly called for research that transcends the dominant Western paradigms and integrates local and culturally specific frameworks of leadership (Dimmock, 2000; Walker & Dimmock, 2002).

This shift in focus is particularly relevant for regions such as Southeast Asia, where educational systems are shaped by a complex interplay of colonial legacies, rapid economic

development, and technological change. These factors require leadership approaches that are adaptable and responsive to the specific educational and socio-cultural challenges of the region.

In Southeast Asia, educational leadership is influenced by a variety of factors that distinguish it from the Western model. Colonial legacies have left a lasting imprint on educational structures and governance in many Southeast Asian countries. These systems often reflect the top-down management styles and hierarchical structures that were prevalent during colonial rule. As such, leadership practices in the region have historically been characterized by centralized control, with decision-making authority resting primarily in the hands of a few individuals at the top of the educational hierarchy.

In countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia, educational administrators and school leaders are often expected to exert significant authority in managing schools, a reflection of the broader cultural norms around authority and respect for hierarchy (Tan & Chua, 2007). Additionally, the rapid economic development experienced by many Southeast Asian countries over the past few decades has contributed to changes in the educational landscape, necessitating more dynamic and flexible leadership approaches that can respond to the evolving needs of students, teachers, and the broader society.

Despite the diversity of leadership challenges and opportunities in Southeast Asia, the scholarly literature on educational leadership and management in this region remains underdeveloped when compared to the wealth of research conducted in Western countries. Although there is a growing body of work focused on leadership in specific countries or contexts within Southeast Asia, relatively few studies take an interdisciplinary or cross-national approach to understanding the unique leadership dynamics in the region (Gamage & Pang, 2003).

The limited scope of this research reflects a broader challenge in educational leadership scholarship: the tendency to focus on Western models of leadership, with less attention given to how these models may or may not be applicable to non-Western, culturally distinct settings. This gap in the literature highlights the need for a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of educational leadership in Southeast Asia that accounts for the region's complex history, cultural traditions, and socio-economic conditions.

Some scholars, such as Hallinger (2003) and Bush (2008), have identified the tendency in much of the literature on educational leadership in Asia to emphasize leadership styles that reflect centralized control and top-down management. These styles, they argue, are deeply rooted in the hierarchical cultural norms that are prevalent in many Southeast Asian societies. In these societies, educational leadership has traditionally been viewed as an authoritative role, with school leaders expected to provide clear direction and maintain order within the school system. The role of the principal or school administrator in many Southeast Asian countries has often been akin to that of a manager or decision-maker, whose primary responsibility is to ensure the efficient functioning of the school rather than to inspire or motivate staff and students. This model of leadership aligns with the broader societal expectations of authority and respect for seniority, which are ingrained in the cultural fabric of many Southeast Asian nations.

However, recent trends in educational leadership research in the region have begun to challenge these traditional approaches and explore the potential of more progressive, participative models of leadership. One such model is transformational leadership, which

emphasizes the empowerment of teachers and students, the fostering of collaborative decision-making, and the creation of a shared vision for educational success.

Transformational leadership encourages school leaders to work alongside their staff and students to inspire change, promote innovation, and cultivate a positive school culture (Bush & Gamage, 2001). This shift towards more participative forms of leadership reflects a broader global movement toward decentralization and greater teacher autonomy, which has been seen in many Western countries in recent years. Southeast Asian scholars, such as Tan and Chua (2007), argue that the adoption of transformational leadership can help schools in the region respond to the demands of a rapidly changing educational landscape, particularly in terms of fostering creativity, critical thinking, and collaborative learning.

The increasing interest in transformational leadership in Southeast Asia is also linked to broader societal changes, including the rise of democratic governance and the growing influence of civil society organizations in educational policy and practice. As countries in the region move toward more inclusive and democratic political systems, there is a growing recognition of the need for educational leaders to engage in more participatory, transparent, and accountable decision-making processes.

In this context, school leaders are increasingly expected to involve teachers, students, and parents in the decision-making process, promoting a sense of shared responsibility for the success of the school. This participatory approach not only empowers stakeholders but also encourages a more inclusive and collaborative school culture, which is seen as essential for the development of 21st-century skills and competencies (Leithwood & Sun, 2012).

However, despite the potential benefits of transformational leadership, the implementation of such approaches in Southeast Asia is not without challenges. One of the primary obstacles to the adoption of more democratic and participative leadership models is the deeply entrenched hierarchical culture that characterizes many Southeast Asian societies. In countries such as Thailand, Vietnam, and Myanmar, school leaders may face resistance from staff and students who are accustomed to more centralized forms of leadership. The transition to a more participatory model may require significant cultural and organizational changes, which can be difficult to achieve without strong support from policymakers and educational authorities. Moreover, the emphasis on collaboration and shared decision-making may be seen as undermining the authority of school leaders, potentially leading to conflicts or confusion about roles and responsibilities within the school.

In light of these challenges, it is crucial to understand how educational leaders in Southeast Asia navigate the tension between traditional leadership models and more progressive, participative approaches. Some scholars suggest that a hybrid model of leadership, which combines elements of both top-down and bottom-up approaches, may be the most effective way to address the diverse needs of schools in the region (Cheng, 1995). For example, school leaders may adopt a more authoritative stance when dealing with issues related to discipline, resource allocation, or policy implementation, while simultaneously fostering a more collaborative and participative environment for decision-making related to curriculum development, teaching strategies, and school culture. This balanced approach allows educational leaders to maintain their authority while also promoting a more inclusive and supportive school environment.

The literature on educational leadership and management in Southeast Asia highlights the complex interplay between traditional and modern leadership models. While there is a growing

interest in transformational leadership and participative decision-making, many schools in the region continue to rely on hierarchical, top-down management approaches that reflect the broader cultural and societal norms.

As the region continues to evolve, there is a need for more comprehensive and interdisciplinary research that examines the unique challenges and opportunities faced by educational leaders in Southeast Asia. By developing a deeper understanding of these leadership dynamics, scholars and policymakers can better support the development of educational systems that are responsive to the needs of students, teachers, and communities in this diverse and rapidly changing region.

Methodology:

This study employs a systematic review approach, focusing on research articles published between 1995 and 2023. The analysis is based on a set of carefully selected educational leadership journals that are well-regarded in the international academic community. These include the International Journal of Educational Management, Educational Management Administration & Leadership, School Leadership & Management, and Journal of Educational Administration. A systematic search was conducted across these journals to identify articles specifically addressing educational leadership and management in Southeast Asia.

The data collection process involved reading through all relevant articles and extracting key information such as the country of focus, author affiliation, research methodology, topic of study, and publication type (empirical or non-empirical). A coding scheme was developed to organize the data, which was subsequently entered into a database for statistical analysis.

To analyze the data, descriptive statistics were used to quantify trends in the volume and thematic distribution of articles, research methods employed, and regional variations. Citation impact was assessed using the h-index of each journal and individual articles, which measures the cumulative impact of scholarly work. This analysis aimed to provide insights into the trajectory of educational leadership and management research in Southeast Asia and how it compares to global trends in the field.

Findings and Discussion:

The results of this review of educational leadership and management research in Southeast Asia reveal significant trends that reflect the evolving dynamics of educational leadership in the region. The volume of research has noticeably increased since the mid-1990s, with substantial contributions from countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines. This increase in research output aligns with broader educational reforms and the growing emphasis on improving school effectiveness and leadership capacity within Southeast Asian educational systems. The following discussion highlights the key trends, themes, and methodological approaches identified in the literature, integrating insights from the reviewed studies.

Key Trends in Educational Leadership and Management Research:

The thematic focus of research in Southeast Asia reveals several important trends. One of the most prominent themes in the literature is the exploration of leadership styles and their impact on school effectiveness. Much of this research has been informed by the challenges of applying Western leadership theories to the Southeast Asian context, where cultural, political,

and economic factors shape leadership practices. As Fullan (2007) argues, leadership in educational settings must evolve to meet the demands of a changing educational landscape, which includes addressing issues like school improvement, student achievement, and teacher development.

Leadership models in Southeast Asia often reflect hierarchical cultural norms, with an emphasis on centralized control and top-down management (Kilag et al., 2023). This is consistent with earlier studies, such as those by Bryk et al. (2010), which underscore the importance of school leadership in driving systemic change, but with a recognition of the need for leadership practices that resonate with the local culture.

Despite the dominance of hierarchical leadership, there has been a noticeable shift toward more participative and transformational leadership models, particularly in countries like Singapore and Malaysia (Boin, Stern, & Sundelius, 2016). These models focus on empowering teachers and students, encouraging collaboration, and fostering a school climate that supports continuous improvement and innovation.

Moreover, there has been an increasing interest in the role of leadership in promoting school effectiveness and improving student outcomes. Research in this area has explored how school leaders can create environments conducive to learning and development, addressing challenges such as resource constraints, inequities in educational access, and cultural differences. For instance, McLeod and Dulsky (2021) discuss the resilience of school leadership during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, noting how leaders had to quickly adapt to new circumstances and maintain educational continuity. This adaptability is a hallmark of effective leadership, particularly in crisis situations, which are becoming increasingly relevant in the Southeast Asian context due to natural disasters, political instability, and the ongoing challenges posed by the pandemic (Uy et al., 2023; Aquino, Kilag, & Valle, 2023).

Another recurring theme in the literature is teacher development, which is seen as a critical factor in improving educational outcomes. As Lechner, Anger, and Rammstedt (2019) emphasize, socio-emotional skills and teacher resilience are crucial components of effective teaching, particularly in challenging contexts. Southeast Asian studies have focused on how school leaders can support the professional development of teachers through mentoring, training, and creating a culture of collaborative learning.

Kilag et al. (2023) highlight the importance of integrating technology into teacher development programs, pointing out that the digital transformation of education is critical for preparing teachers for the future. This theme resonates with the broader regional emphasis on creating a "digital future" for education, where school leaders are seen as central figures in facilitating the integration of technology to enhance teaching and learning (Kilag, Miñoza, Comighud, et al., 2023).

Methodological Approaches and Data Collection:

A notable feature of the research on educational leadership in Southeast Asia is the dominance of qualitative research methodologies. Qualitative studies, particularly case studies and interviews, have been instrumental in providing in-depth insights into the leadership practices and experiences of school leaders.

These studies often focus on the lived experiences of educators, school leaders, and students, capturing the complexities of leadership in specific cultural and institutional contexts. Case studies, for example, allow researchers to explore how leadership is enacted within particular schools and educational settings, offering rich, context-specific data that can inform leadership practices in similar contexts (Kilag et al., 2023).

The qualitative dominance in this body of research reflects the importance of understanding the socio-cultural factors that influence leadership practices. As Boin et al. (2016) argue, leadership is context-dependent, and what works in one setting may not necessarily be applicable in another. Therefore, qualitative research provides the flexibility needed to explore the nuances of leadership in Southeast Asian schools, taking into account local values, traditions, and socio-political dynamics.

While qualitative studies dominate, quantitative research also plays an important role in measuring the impact of leadership on student outcomes. For instance, research that examines the relationship between leadership styles and academic achievement has been valuable in identifying patterns and trends across different schools and regions.

Quantitative studies often rely on surveys and statistical analysis to assess the effectiveness of leadership interventions and practices. However, as Fullan (2007) notes, the complexity of educational leadership often requires more than just quantitative measures of success; it demands a deeper exploration of how leadership impacts school culture, teacher development, and student engagement.

Crisis Leadership and Resilience:

A particularly significant area of research in Southeast Asia's educational leadership literature is crisis management and resilience. Studies have increasingly highlighted the role of leadership in managing crises, such as natural disasters, political unrest, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

In this regard, the work of Aquino et al. (2023) and Uy et al. (2023) is particularly relevant, as they explore the dynamics of crisis leadership and the strategies employed by school leaders to maintain stability and ensure the continuity of education in times of uncertainty. These studies emphasize the need for school leaders to be proactive, adaptive, and resilient in the face of crises, drawing on their organizational leadership skills to navigate turbulent environments (Cordova Jr, Kilag, & Ibañez, 2023).

The integration of crisis management theories into educational leadership research has also gained traction. Boin, Stern, and Sundelius (2016) offer a framework for understanding leadership under pressure, which can be applied to educational settings in times of crisis. They highlight the importance of clear communication, decision-making under stress, and the ability to mobilize resources in order to protect the interests of students and staff. In Southeast Asia, where educational systems are often subject to external pressures such as natural disasters or political instability, crisis management is a key competence for school leaders. Studies like those of Martinez, Kilag, and Macario (2023) show how organizational culture and leadership strategies can significantly influence an institution's ability to respond to crises and support recovery.

As the region faces increasing environmental and social challenges, research on crisis leadership in Southeast Asia will continue to grow in importance. The ability of school leaders

to navigate crises while ensuring that educational quality remains intact is a critical aspect of their role. This underscores the need for leadership development programs that emphasize crisis management and resilience-building, preparing leaders to respond effectively to emergencies and disruptions (Sasan & Kilag, 2023; Monternel, Kilag, & Restauero, 2023).

The Impact of Organizational Culture on Leadership:

Finally, the impact of organizational culture on leadership practices has been an important theme in the literature. Studies have consistently shown that the organizational culture of schools plays a crucial role in shaping leadership strategies and outcomes. As Cameron (2008) suggests, changing an organization's culture is a complex process that requires leaders to engage with the values, beliefs, and norms that define the organization. In the context of Southeast Asia, where schools often operate within strong cultural frameworks, the alignment between leadership strategies and the underlying culture is essential for effective school management and improvement.

Kilag et al. (2023) argue that leaders in Southeast Asian schools must understand and navigate the unique cultural dynamics of their institutions in order to implement change successfully. Whether it's addressing conflicts, promoting collaboration, or fostering innovation, understanding the organizational culture is a key factor in determining the success of leadership initiatives. Moreover, Zaccaro (2001) emphasizes that leadership in such contexts requires not only technical competence but also social intelligence—an ability to understand and manage the complex interpersonal dynamics within the school.

The research on educational leadership and management in Southeast Asia reveals a rich and diverse landscape, shaped by the region's unique cultural, political, and economic contexts. The themes of leadership styles, school effectiveness, teacher development, and crisis management have emerged as central topics in the literature, reflecting the evolving needs and challenges of Southeast Asian educational systems.

The dominance of qualitative research methodologies highlights the importance of understanding leadership practices in context, while quantitative studies have contributed valuable insights into the relationship between leadership and student outcomes. As the region continues to face new challenges, particularly in the areas of crisis management and resilience, it is clear that educational leadership in Southeast Asia will remain a dynamic and critical field of study. The growing recognition of Southeast Asia's contributions to global educational leadership research promises to enrich the broader discourse on leadership and management in education.

Conclusion:

This study emphasizes the critical need to expand the knowledge base of educational leadership and management by incorporating diverse cultural and regional perspectives. Southeast Asia, with its unique socio-political and educational complexities, offers a valuable context for understanding how educational leaders navigate local challenges while simultaneously adapting global leadership models.

The findings highlight that the existing literature in this region is underdeveloped, particularly in terms of systematically addressing the nuances of leadership practices. There is an evident gap that requires further research to comprehensively understand the dynamics of leadership

in Southeast Asia, especially as it intersects with regional challenges such as rapid urbanization, economic disparities, and cultural diversity.

As Southeast Asian educational systems continue to evolve and respond to both global and local demands, the importance of examining how educational leadership adapts to these changing landscapes cannot be overstated. The study reveals that current research tends to focus predominantly on leadership practices in isolation, often neglecting the broader societal factors that significantly influence these practices.

Factors such as political climates, cultural traditions, and socio-economic conditions play pivotal roles in shaping the leadership strategies and approaches adopted by educational leaders in the region. This underscores the necessity for future research to look beyond individual leadership styles and examine how external elements such as national policy, community engagement, and even global educational trends influence leadership in Southeast Asia.

Given the complexity of these issues, it is clear that more rigorous and nuanced research is essential to fully grasp the dynamics of educational leadership in this region. Future studies must refine existing methodologies to account for the diverse educational environments within Southeast Asia. The growing body of research should not only seek to explore new questions but also delve deeper into how leadership practices in Southeast Asia can contribute to a more global understanding of educational leadership. Researchers should focus on cross-national comparisons, considering how local leadership models can be informed by international theories while remaining rooted in the specific cultural and institutional contexts of each country.

Lastly, fostering international collaboration will be instrumental in advancing the global knowledge base on educational leadership. By facilitating dialogue and sharing best practices across borders, Southeast Asian countries can learn from one another and from international counterparts. Such collaboration could strengthen educational leadership frameworks and create opportunities for shared learning and innovation. This will not only improve the leadership capabilities of educational leaders in Southeast Asia but also contribute to the global effort to enhance educational outcomes across diverse socio-political contexts.

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