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Guidelines for the Development of Learning Activities in Non-formal Education in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

Sub-district non-formal education has played a significant role of lifelong learning of Thai people since it was established in 2009 in all sub-districts throughout the country. During the operation process, some problems of learning activities management have occurred. Thus, this paper presents the findings on two main research purposes that aimed to: 1) explore the situation of learning activity management, and 2) find guidelines for the development of learning activity to promote thinking skills of learners of sub-district non-formal education in Thailand. Research areas were eight provinces in the central part of the country where sub-district non-formal education institutions located. The samples and key informants were composed of twelve administrators of sub-district non-formal educational officers, and twenty-two key informants: administrators, teachers, and academics, and representative of communities. An interview and focus group discussion were used to collect the data and analyzed by content analysis. The findings revealed the situation of learning activity management of sub-district non-formal education that each teacher was a principal manager. Teachers used the core curricula designed by the government. Evaluation process was conducted through the exams and work pieces. The problems of learning activity management were found that teacher taught several subjects to different groups and some of them lacked of teaching experiences. Thus, the guidelines for the development of learning activities were including the development teaching abilities for teacher, curricula revision, and the evaluation methods.

Keywords: learning activity, non-formal education, facilitator, thinking skill, Thailand

Introduction

Education in Thailand is divided into three systems called formal, informal, and non-formal education. Formal education is a free basic education of twelve years. This system offers an early year education, basic education, vocational education, and higher education. This system has a certain curriculum, studying place, and duration of study. Informal education aims to develop learning society and promote the idea that learning can also take place outside the formal space of classroom. Meanwhile non-formal has given priority to adult and non-formal education as a means of providing lifelong learning opportunities to the out of-school population. Initially aimed at literacy and primary levels, non-formal education services have expanded significantly into secondary and vocational levels. Strategies include: developing a range of life skills through distance learning, establishing workplace and community learning centers and promoting the joint sharing of resources with the formal school sector (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Sub-district non-formal education centers established during 2009-2011 throughout the country and played significant roles as an information center, opportunity center, learning center, and community center. This system of education has been developed for over ten years, however, some problems of learning activity and its management have occurred (Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education, 2009, 2013). Currently, non-formal education centers aim to improve learning abilities and thinking skill for learners in order to apply to their living. According to the importance of non-formal education, roles of sub-district non-formal education, and the problems of educational management, and the needs of thinking skill, the researchers were interested in studying learning situation and the ways to improve learning activity in non-formal education in Thailand.

Research purpose

The purposes of the study on “Development of learning activities model of sub-district non-formal education facilitators in the Western Region to develop learners’ thinking skills were to: 1) explore the situation of learning activity management of sub-district non-formal education, 2) create a model of learning activities to develop thinking skills for learners, and 3) find guidelines for the development of learning activities to promote thinking skills of learners of sub-district non-formal education in the western.

This paper presents the findings on two research purposes: situation of learning activity management, and guidelines for the development of learning activity to promote thinking skills of learners of sub-district non-formal education in Thailand.

Literature Review

This research was based on the principal of non-formal education that giving the opportunity to all to learn within flexible learning activity (Office of Non-Formal Education Administration, 2004). It was also based on the concept of adult learning stated by Knowles (1980) that adults would learn anything that was life-centered, so the management of learning activities had to apply authentic situations as learning content. It was related to the concept of creative learning which offer the learners various alternatives according to their interest and different environment (Piaget, 1972). The concept of efficiency economy which had the practice according to the principles of moderation, reason, good immunity based on knowledge and virtues (Sumet Tantiwechakul, 2006; Udomporn Amorntham, 2006; Office of National Economic and Social Development. (2007), and the concept of happiness that was positive feelings, satisfaction, pride, self-appreciation, and could exist well in the society (Royal Academy, 1999; Diener, 2010) were also applied this study.

Research Methodology

Triangulation technique using an in-depth interview and focus group discussion were used to : 1) explore the situation of learning activity management of sub-district non-formal education, and 2) find guidelines for the development of learning activities to promote thinking skills of learners of non-formal education in the western region of Thailand. Key informants of the study on these two research purposes were administrators and stakeholders. An in-depth interview and focus group discussion were use to collect data during October 2014-June 2015. Twelve administrators of district non-formal educational offices were interviewed and the twenty-two stakeholders including administers, teachers, and academics were joined focus groups discussion in two areas. The collected qualitative data were analyzed by content analysis.

Findings and Discussion

The findings on two research purposes revealed that:

1. The situation of the learning activity management of sub-district non-formal education in the western region or in the central part of the country indicated that each facilitator was the principal manager of the instruction in all elementary, junior secondary, and senior secondary levels. Facilitator used the core curricula designed by the center focusing on the learners' participation in teamwork and practice. Then the evaluation was conducted through the exams and work pieces.



Picture 1-2 Learning activities of non-formal education in Suphan Buri



Picture 3-4 Learning activities of non-formal education in Prajuab Kirikhan.



Picture 5-6 Learning places of non-formal education

The findings also revealed the problems of learning activity management in non-formal education in Thailand such as teachers taught several subjects to different groups of learner. Some of them lacked teaching experiences. Moreover, the curriculum was composed of many subjects, and the achievement tests were too difficult for learners. In addition, the findings from interviewed showed that some learners could not attend their classes due to their jobs. The findings were consistent with the concept of learning of Knowles (1980), stating that teachers should consider the differences between individuals. Clearly students of non-formal education were different in terms of seniority, working and learning experiences. Thus, teachers should integrate the content of curriculum and support learning opportunity of learners by allowing them to practice or work corresponding to their needs and interest. This was agreed with the Office of Non-Formal Education (2013: 1-3) which stated that learning activity should be based on ability, aptitude, skills and interests of each person. The findings were also consistent with the principle of work and career that a factor affected success related to a person's ability, interest and aptitude. In addition, it was consistent with the concept of happiness in workplace stated by Diener, (2010) that happiness was needed by everyone, which was obviously including learners in non-formal education.

2. The guidelines for the development of learning activity of sub-district non-formal education teachers included the development of teaching abilities for teachers, curricula revision, and evaluation methods, to be in consistent with learners' needs and differences. The results of the study focused on how to improve thinking skills of learners which teachers in non-formal education should design learning activities to improve learners' learning and critical thinking skills. This was consistent with the concept of learning in the 21st century which Surasak Pahe (2013) stated that teachers should arrange learning environment to encourage learners to practice and improve their critical and creative thinking skills, such as created their work pieces, and applied to their sufficient economy living following the philosophy of sufficiency economy stated by the King Bhumibol of Thailand (Sumet Tantiwechakul, 2006). Learners should have the opportunity to access media and technology. It was important that teachers needed to be improved their abilities on teaching design by having some training courses. In addition, to develop learning activities, it needs cooperation among academics, administrators, and communities.



Picture 7-8 Planning for teaching, and training on teaching design

Conclusion

The results of this study pointed out very clearly that teachers in non-formal education in Thailand had faced many problems in their teaching. These problems were related to teaching experience, curriculum, learner, and learning activity. Thus, various developments need to be done in order to improve learning ability and thinking skill of learner, such as more learning facilities including learning materials must be sufficient provided. The curriculum should be revised for the appropriate subjects and content. There should be some training courses and time available for improving teaching skill and teaching design for teachers. In addition, evaluation methods should be various for learners, and be consist with their sufficient living in community.

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