



## ASEAN Journal of Education

Journal homepage: <https://so01.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/AJE>



# A Study on the Strategic Management Processes of Christian Schools in Thailand

Anthony Charles Mazzrillo\*, Pojanee Mangkang & Annop Phothisuk

*Saint Teresa International University, Nakhon Nayok, 26120 Thailand*

### Article info

#### Article history:

Received: 24 March 2024

Revised: 2 May 2024

Accepted: 9 May 2024

#### Keywords:

Strategic management process,  
Common themes, Common  
challenges, Best practices

### Abstract

This qualitative study aimed to address three objectives related to the strategic management of Christian schools in Thailand: (1) to examine the strategic management processes implemented by these schools, (2) to identify common themes, challenges, and best practices, and (3) to propose guidelines to support effective strategic management in this educational context. Twelve Christian school administrators were selected by purposive sampling based on their leadership roles and familiarity with their schools' strategic management processes, with data collected through an online pre-interview survey and in-depth interviews. Findings revealed that the administrators primarily employed strategic management practices that included regular staff meetings, data analysis, stakeholder feedback, and flexibility in addressing challenges. Spiritual health was supported through daily personal devotions, corporate chapel services, and Bible studies, with a primary emphasis on centering their schools around Jesus Christ. Identified themes included effective communication, partnership-building, adherence to Bible-based morals and ethics, and Bible integration within the curriculum. Challenges reported were hiring the right personnel, financial constraints, communication barriers, managing relationships with diverse stakeholders, and collaborating with individuals from varied backgrounds and belief systems. Best practices highlighted the importance of Christian leaders having a divine calling to work in these schools, engaging in daily personal devotions, and modeling Christian values for teachers, students, and staff. Leaders were also encouraged to align policies with Christian values while being sensitive to non-Christian stakeholders. The study proposes ten guidelines to enhance strategic management processes for Christian schools: (1) Divine Calling and Spiritual Foundation, (2) Biblical Worldview Integration, (3) Sensitivity and Inclusivity, (4) Statement of Faith and Parental Agreement, (5) Hiring Practices, (6) Accountability and Oversight, (7) Cultural Understanding and Adaptation, (8) Addressing Violations, (9) Decision-Making and Boundaries, and (10) Building Positive Partnerships with colleagues and parents.

## Introduction

### Statement of the problem

International Christian schools in Thailand often hire staff from various countries, bringing diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences. Many of these employees are unfamiliar with the Thai language and culture, which can pose integration challenges. Moreover, the transient nature of expatriates contributes to high turnover rates among administrators, teachers, and staff (Hiltibran, 2020). High teacher turnover can stem from multiple factors, including inadequate financial benefits, limited teaching resources, insufficient recognition, and excessive work hours. A lack of a supportive work environment, trust, and respect from supervisors and administrators can further exacerbate the problem. High turnover negatively impacts schools, as “schools with a high teacher turnover have a hard time developing and implementing effective curricula and also make it hard for their staff to maintain good working relationships” (Elizabeth & Katzer, 2023).

Along with the challenges listed above, Christian schools in Thailand face additional problems. Firstly, as they draw from Jesus Christ as their primary source of wisdom and knowledge to teach their students, they are confronted by spiritual warfare. This warfare is spoken of in Ephesians 6:12, 13 - “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm” (ESV, 2001).

### Objectives

This study aimed to address three objectives:

1. Examine the strategic management processes implemented by Christian schools in Thailand.
2. Identify common themes, challenges, and best practices of Christian schools in Thailand.
3. Propose appropriate guidelines for the strategic management processes of Christian schools in Thailand.

### Literature review

The apostle Paul described the “evil day” in Ephesians 6:13, and it is evident that we are currently in it. As Christian educators we need to uphold and protect our conservative values by resisting evil temptations and understand that God gives us His Armor and tools to fend off any attacks? We must also clearly convey to

our students that spiritual warfare is real and evil attacks can take many different forms, such as providing opportunities to participate in bullying, cheating, being deceived by humanism, overcome by depression or anger, or living out ungodly identities (Muehlhoff, 2023).

Spiritual warfare is a global phenomenon that produces a climate adverse to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. This adverse spiritual climate could not be more evident in Thailand, by the fact that the majority of the Thai population has rejected the Gospel of Jesus Christ for hundreds of years. This can be seen by the scores of missionaries sent to Thailand from the Presbyterian, Baptist, Catholic and Protestant churches. The low rate of conversions taken place, compared to the great efforts spent on seeing the hearts of the Thai people turn to God, is quite dismal. (Hilderbrand, 2015). The latest research statistics gathered by the Joshua Group recorded that only 2% of the Thai population identify as being Christian (Joshua Project, 2024).

Today, the human secular agenda is one of the strongest opponents to Christian values and sources of spiritual warfare coming against churches and Christian schools. The Oxford Languages Dictionary definition: “sec·u·lar hu·man·ism /'sekyələr '(h)yoomə,nizəm/ *noun* humanism, with regard in particular to the belief that humanity is capable of morality and self-fulfillment without belief in God” (OxfordLanguages, 2021). The human secular agenda is responsible for many of the popular Ivy League universities in the United States to have fallen away from their conservative Christian values. At their inception, American universities emphasized Scriptural literacy, Christian moral values, redemption via Jesus Christ, and a biblical worldview. For example, Harvard College, established by Puritans in 1636, had a mission statement focused on knowing God and Jesus Christ and a motto “In Christi Gloriam” (“For the glory of Christ”). Harvard's early presidents were orthodox Puritan pastors. Similarly, Yale was founded by Orthodox Connecticut Congregationalists, Princeton by pro-Awakening New Jersey Presbyterians, Brown by devoted Rhode Island Baptists, and Dartmouth by mission-minded evangelicals. These institutions valued God's Word, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the necessity of Christian influence in society, aiming to educate clergy and professionals in commerce, law, medicine, and teaching. Prior to the 21 Century, Christian ideals played a large role in the colleges and universities of America. But as time marched on, those ideals were abandoned and their Founders’ spiritual and religious teachings were

minimized and pushed out of the center of the school and kept on the shelves in the Religious Studies Departments. Cultural elites have become increasingly antagonistic to biblical Christianity as they became more dedicated to liberalism, secularism, humanism, and statism. Faith-based institutions, according to certain modernists, are now antagonistic to the ethos of American education (Schultz, 2019).

Unlike the past, professors at these universities are being trained to keep their religious beliefs to themselves. Because of this, higher education is experiencing a dis-integration of religion. This disintegration of religion hampers the educational process. In the earliest universities, they lived up to their title: uni-verseities - ‘the unification of knowledge’ because they believed God was the Creator of everything the students were taught and learned about. But now that our modern universities no longer hold on to God to be the center of everything, these institutions have become dis-universities and break up the disciplines. Without God unifying knowledge, the disunity on these campuses foster a heightened sense of intellectual and moral relativism. When God was taken out of the equation, so was His Word and ‘revelation knowledge’ of it. Without a religious perspective, it is easy to think that only science provides the true perspective on reality. There is not even an acceptance of theology and science mutually benefiting each other. With science becoming the supreme form of knowledge, the spiritual facet of our beings are totally neglected (Ashford, 2016).

If the universities mentioned above, which have large student bodies, are financially secure, and also established in a predominantly Christian nation, can have their strong Christian faith disintegrated and subdued by human-secularism, then the same can certainly happen to a Christian school in the Buddhist Kingdom of Thailand. There was a warning given to “continue to walk in Him” (Jesus) and to not be taken “captive through philosophy and empty deception” in Colossians 2:6-10 - “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces[a] of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority” (The Holy Bible, 2011).

### **Vision and foundation**

The ACSI New School Program outlines a 7-step process for establishing Christian schools effectively:

1. Vision formation: Develop a vision from God through prayer, aligning with Proverbs 29:18 to guide the school's mission and spiritual foundation.

2. Leadership team formation: Form an administrative team of 5-10 trusted individuals to help translate the vision into reality, emphasizing delegation and task completion.

3. Legal and financial preparation: Determine the school's profit status, secure initial capital through grants or donations, and handle legal requirements and tax filings.

4. Philosophy and policy development: Define the school's educational philosophy and statement of faith, integrating them into policy manuals for clarity and alignment.

5. Facility acquisition and adaptation: Secure suitable premises, considering church buildings as viable options, ensuring compliance with safety regulations.

6. Pre-launch promotion: Market the school nine months ahead, focusing on building a quality team of Christian educators rather than maximizing initial enrollment.

7. Financial management: Establish sound financial practices, hire an accountant, and monitor budgets closely to ensure fiscal sustainability.

Each step is designed to ensure the school's foundation is solid and reflects its Christian mission, fostering a nurturing environment for students and staff alike (Association of Christian Schools International, 2014).

### **Information technology systems**

In today's digital age, educational institutions worldwide have increasingly adopted online learning platforms, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when in-person teaching was disrupted by social distancing measures. Schools without existing online systems faced significant challenges in delivering education. Therefore, alongside ACSI's New School Program, it's crucial for schools to establish robust websites and Learning Management Systems (LMS). These systems, accessible via portable devices like phones and laptops, facilitate remote learning, streamline administrative tasks, and enhance interaction between educators and students. LMS platforms automate course management, content distribution, and student assessment, ultimately improving efficiency and reducing costs (Turnbull, Chugh, & Luck, 2019; Mirzoyan, 2021).

### Christian school leadership framework

After the school's website page and Learning Management System is chosen, leaders and teachers who agree with biblical principles need to be hired. Amos 3:3 underscores the importance of shared values among leaders, emphasizing a commitment to Christ and the Holy Spirit's guidance. Teachers must embody Christian faith to effectively uphold the school's mission, as highlighted in 1 Corinthians 2:14 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17. The Christian School Leadership Framework emphasizes four core competencies: Commitment, Calling, Character, and Chemistry (Association of Christian Schools International, 2014). Leaders should exemplify servant leadership as modeled by Jesus in scriptures like Mark 10:41-45 and John 13:13-17, fostering an environment where spiritual growth and academic excellence intertwine.

### Strategic management theory

The concept of 'strategy' originates from ancient military tactics, evolving into a critical skill across various sectors including education. Originally derived from the Greek "strategos," meaning "general," strategy has historically shaped the outcomes of nations and organizations, as detailed in Sun Tzu's "The Art of War" around 400 B.C. Today, strategic planning is essential for schools as they navigate resource constraints and define organizational direction. It involves deliberate choices to create unique value and competitive advantage, as advocated by Michael Porter. Strategic planning also facilitates resource allocation, project support, problem-solving, and goal alignment, crucial for adapting to competitive educational environments (Porter, Business, & Mumbai, 2017).

### The four steps of the strategic management process:

1. Environmental scanning involves gathering and analyzing data to understand external and internal influences on a school. Administrators continuously assess this process to improve their environmental position.
2. Strategy formulation is the process of selecting actions to achieve a school's goals. Administrators gain stakeholder buy-in and communicate functional plans.
3. Strategy implementation puts chosen strategies into action, utilizing organizational structure, allocating resources, establishing decision-making processes, and managing human resources.
4. Strategic evaluation is the final phase, assessing internal and external factors, tracking performance, and

implementing corrective measures to ensure goals are met.

These phases form the sequential process of strategic management, essential for developing and adjusting school strategies (Juneja, 2019).

### Strategic planning for Christian principals

After a school is established, a leader has to be chosen to fill the school principal position to govern its daily operations according to their school's visions, missions, goals, objectives and values as effectively and efficiently as possible. The principal is the most important position to fill, because he, or she, is in charge of the decision making on behalf of all others in the school (Cherkowski, Walker, & Kutsyuruba, 2015). According to extensive research, it has been proven that the actions and decisions of a principal have an impact on student attendance, suspension rates, teacher satisfaction and retention. The most effective principals not only connect with teachers instructionally, but also foster a positive school climate, stimulate beneficial cooperation in a professional learning community, as they manage staff and resources (McDougald, 2021).

### Conceptual framework

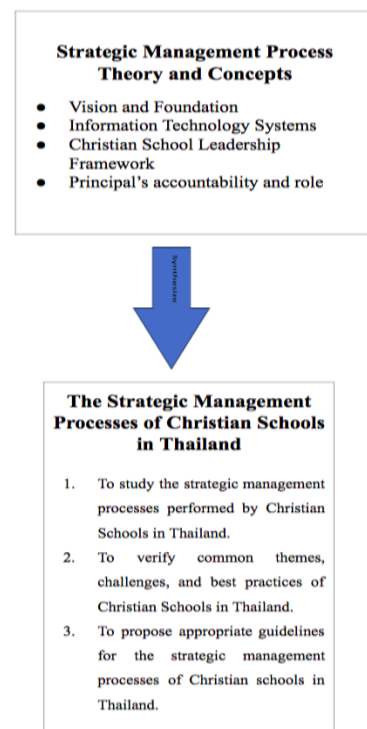


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

## Research methodology

This qualitative research draws upon current articles, as well as an online survey and interview with twelve Christian school leaders working in Thailand to answer the following three objectives: 1) to study the strategic management processes performed by Christian schools in Thailand, 2) to verify common themes, challenges, and best practices of Christian schools in Thailand, and 3) to propose appropriate guidelines for the strategic management processes of Christian schools in Thailand.

### Study site

The twelve Christian school administrators who took part in this study, worked in schools located in the Greater Bangkok Region, such as the districts of Nonthaburi, Pracha Uthit, Bang Na, Suan Luang and also the northern cities of Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai. Four respondents worked in Nonthaburi.

### Sample size/Sampling technique

The sampling size for this research is twelve Christian school administrators who were purposely selected from schools holding Protestant backgrounds and beliefs. They were also chosen for possessing knowledge of their school's strategic management processes. The first online pre-interview survey and interview was conducted on September 25, 2022, and the last one was on January 12, 2023. At that time, Thailand was experiencing the COVID 19 pandemic.

### Verification procedures for survey and interview questions

1. Craft questions based on the literature review of the strategic management process. 2. Conduct an interview with my advisor and co-advisor. 3. Three experts approved the questions to check the validity of the interview questions. 4. Email participation letters to possible respondents. 5. Email the online survey to the respondents. (Most came back in one to two weeks). 6. Interview each respondent.

### Validity and reliability of research instruments

For validity, the interview questions were verified by 3 experts using Item Objective Congruence (IOC) which was based on the score ranging from -1 to +1 where congruent = +1, questionable = 0 and incongruent = -1. The total IOC for the pre-interview and the interview questions was 0.67 to 1.00. This confirmed the reliability of the data by the triangulation method.

### Research instrument #1 Online Pre-interview Survey

An online pre-interview survey was emailed to

the twelve Christian school leaders, who were also called "Respondents." (In the data R1, R2, R3, etcetera, refers to Respondents). This survey contained twenty short-answer questions. It was used to gather a general understanding of their leadership practices and their school's strategic planning processes. The online survey questions sought data on such topics as:

1. The respondents' schools' vision, mission, goals and objectives.
2. The respondents' education level and style of leadership they exude upon their staff.
3. Their school's strategic planning processes.
4. Rating groups that pose the least and greatest challenges.

5. The importance of Christian leaders and teachers in their school.

6. How the Bible is presented in their school's curriculum.

7. The ability to share about Jesus in their school.

Aside from gathering general information, the pre-interview survey results were also used by the researcher to help elicit specific information for the interview to follow.

### Research instrument #2 Interview

An interview was conducted after each of the twelve respondents returned the pre-interview survey. The interviews of nine respondents were performed through online Zoom meetings, while three were conducted in person. The interview consisted of fourteen open-ended questions. The interview questions sought data on such topics as:

1. What skill, or skilset, has been most beneficial in their role as leaders?
2. Who created their school's VGMOs?
3. How does their school promote the spiritual health of their staff?
4. How does their school implement Faith-Learning Integration?
5. How does their school preserve their Christian school values?

6. How can schools work together to better promote the Kingdom of God?

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the respondents' strategic management processes, these questions were open-ended, so they were given more opportunity to elaborate on their responses given in the pre-interview survey.



## Results

The following are answers to the three objectives based on the literature review, online survey and interview, focused on the strategic management processes of Christian schools in Thailand:

### Research objective No 1.

The strategic management processes performed by Christian schools in Thailand, found five key highlights:

#### 1. Vision and foundation

In the process of starting a Christian school in Thailand, the initial step emphasizes the importance of receiving a vision from God. Recognizing that such a vision is essential for intellectual and spiritual development for the Kingdom of God. Drawing on Proverbs 29:18, underscores the significance of having a vision to guide the school's mission. The subsequent steps involve forming an administrative leadership team, establishing relationships with local officials and educators, determining the school's organizational structure and financial needs, seeking financial support, and creating essential policy documents such as the philosophy of education and statement of faith. Emphasizing the importance of a strong Christian leader, the process also involves finding suitable facilities, possibly within church buildings, and implementing effective promotional strategies. Financial policies are highlighted, emphasizing the need for careful budgeting to avoid deficits in the initial year. The overall approach emphasizes reliance on divine guidance, careful planning, and a focus on creating a solid foundation for a Christ-centered education in the Thai context.

#### 2. Information technology system

Having a robust school website and Learning Management System (LMS) is crucial for schools. LMS, a technology facilitating distance education, automates the administration, organization, distribution, and reporting of educational content and student outcomes. The primary advantage of an LMS lies in its ability to centralize administrative and classroom tasks, streamlining data collection, computing, and communication on a single platform. This consolidation not only enhances efficiency but also saves time and resources for schools. Online applications facilitate effective communication between administrators, staff, teachers, students, and parents, eliminating the need for physical presence. A well-designed LMS not only enhances the flow of information within the school but also contributes to its overall functionality and success.

### 3. Christ school leadership framework (CSLF)

The literature underscores the crucial importance of having a Christian school's administrative leadership team and teachers committed to Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit, as emphasized in Amos 3:3 - "Can two walk together without agreeing where to go?" It highlights the potential challenge when Christian schools mix Christian and non-Christian teachers, citing an example where the hiring of teachers of different faiths led to confusion and a shift away from the school's Christian mission. The data stresses the necessity for Christian schools to avoid scenarios that compromise their Christian identity, emphasizing trust in God's provision. The belief that where God guides, He provides is supported by Proverbs 3:5-6. The importance of prayer in seeking the Lord's guidance is emphasized, aligning with Matthew 6:10. The literature also refers to Proverbs 16:3, encouraging committing all works to the Lord for plans to be achieved. The Christian School Leadership Framework (CSLF) introduces four Christ-centered competencies under the title "LEADERSHIP FROM THE HEART": 1. Commitment: The head of a Christian school must be wholly committed to Jesus Christ in both personal life and the education profession. 2. Calling: Despite not being a church, a Christian school is seen as a ministry led by the Holy Spirit. The leader should be convinced of God's calling to the position. 3. Character: A successful Christian school leader must exhibit the Fruit of the Spirit, as outlined in Galatians 5:22-26. 4. Chemistry: Refers to the leader's natural abilities, including aptitude, temperament, and relationship management skills.

#### 4. Principal's accountability role

The principal plays a pivotal role in shaping and carrying out the school's daily operations in alignment with its Vision, Mission, Goals, and Objectives (VMGOs) (Cherkowski, Walker, & Kutsyuruba, 2015). The principal is the primary decision-maker, significantly influencing various aspects such as student attendance, suspension rates, and teacher satisfaction and retention. Extensive research indicates that an effective principal not only engage with teachers on an instructional level but also cultivate a positive school climate, encourage collaboration in a professional learning community, and adeptly manage staff and resources (McDougald, 2021). The principal's actions and decisions have far-reaching implications, impacting on the overall functioning and success of the school. Given the authoritative position of a school principal, it is emphasized that they must

possess a high degree of moral and ethical integrity. The principal also serves as a key agent in developing and maintaining the moral and ethical culture of the school, being accountable not only to human standards but also to God, the Righteous Judge of all. An essential responsibility of Christian school leaders, particularly principals, is to lead students toward Jesus and not away from Him (Mosley, 2021).

### **5. Beware of falling away from conservative Christian values**

The literature emphasizes the crucial role of Christian school principal in upholding the spiritual foundation of their institutions. It underscores the need for the principal to prioritize seeking God, staying connected with the Holy Spirit, and keeping Jesus at the center of the school to prevent the loss of a profound relationship with the divine teacher Jesus Christ. The narrative warns against the potential transformation of Christian schools into mere religious entities 'by name only,' emphasizing the importance of sustaining a genuine passion for Christ. Drawing from 2 Timothy 3:5, the text cautions against having a form of godliness while denying its power, urging a turn away from such tendencies. It further discusses the risks faced by Christian schools that, over time, might succumb to spiritual lethargy, human-secular philosophies, or persecution, leading them away from their spiritual foundations. Colossians 2:6-10 emphasizes the need to continue walking in Christ and avoid being captivated by philosophy and empty deception based on human tradition and worldly forces and drifted away from their original commitment to Jesus Christ.

**Research objective No 2.** To verify common themes, challenges, and best practices of Christian schools in Thailand, and found the following:

#### **1. 10 common themes:**

(1) God's calling: A Christian leader has to have a strong sense that God is calling them to come work as a Christian educator in Thailand.

(2) Communication and partnerships: Effective communication and partnership-building skills with parents are highlighted as crucial by multiple respondents.

(3) Biblical ethics: They derive their moral and ethical principles from the Bible and their Christian faith. It is also important that the Bible be integrated into the curriculum or other school activities.

(4) Bible integration: They agree that the Bible is a central component of their schools' educational philosophy and scripture verses should be integrated into curriculum and/or school activities.

(5) Holistic education: They desire to build up the whole student, physically, emotionally, academically and spiritually.

(6) Strategic planning activities are a regular occurrence in their schools, and they have a positive view of the processes.

(7) Christian leadership and teachers: Having Christians on their school leadership teams and Christian teachers in their classrooms are considered crucial in their Christian school communities.

(8) Patient and understanding: New Christian leaders coming to work in Thailand have to be patient, understanding of Thai culture, and cannot come to place their own western ideologies upon the Thai people.

(9) Topics adverse to Christian values: Human Secular ideals, Transgenderism, gay marriage and other topics adverse to Christian values is something that may need to be addressed in their school.

(10) Multicultural environments: The need to understand and acquire better skills while trying to work with people in a multicultural environment.

### **2. Challenges**

Christian school leaders face several significant challenges: hiring non-Christian employees, financial constraints due to parents' inability to pay tuition, communication barriers, and managing diverse relationships with stakeholders. These challenges jeopardize financial stability and sustainability, as parents prioritize expenses over education. Cultural diversity poses additional hurdles, requiring leaders to navigate varied beliefs and backgrounds. Managing difficult individuals and ensuring alignment with educational philosophies and standards are also pressing concerns. Effecting cultural change within the school demands substantial time and effort. Overall, these challenges underscore the multifaceted nature of Christian leadership, necessitating strategies to maintain financial stability, foster cultural sensitivity, improve communication, and manage relationships while upholding Christian values and mission.

### **3. Best practices**

First and foremost, Christian school leaders need to be guided by a divine calling to ensure all policies, practices, and rules honor Jesus Christ. They foster their Christian faith through daily devotions and corporate worship with their leadership team. Emphasizing their faith, they set aside weekly chapel and devotional times for students and teachers, integrating biblical principles across the curriculum. Leaders prioritize hiring Christian

staff and ensure adherence to the school's Statement of Faith. They maintain accountability through regular meetings and uphold boundaries to prevent burnout. Effective leadership involves navigating cultural diversity with sensitivity and offering professional development on multiculturalism. They strive for integrity, transparency, and positive partnerships, fostering a school culture aligned with Christian values and mission.

**Research objective No 3.** To propose appropriate guidelines for the strategic management processes of Christian schools in Thailand.

#### **Ten proposed guidelines**

The following ten proposed guidelines for the strategic management processes of Christian schools aim to establish effective strategic management processes that uphold Christian values, respect cultural diversity, and create a conducive environment for students' spiritual growth and academic development.

1. Divine calling and spiritual foundation: Leaders should possess a genuine divine calling and maintain a strong spiritual foundation through daily devotion and corporate worship, setting an example for the community.

2. Biblical worldview integration: The curriculum should incorporate a clear biblical worldview, linking scriptures and principles to academic subjects, fostering a comprehensive understanding of faith in students.

3. Sensitivity and inclusivity: Schools should respect diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, presenting a biblical worldview without imposing faith, and maintaining an inclusive environment.

4. Statement of faith and parental agreement: The school's faith statement should be clearly defined in the Student Handbook and Enrollment Contract, with parental alignment required.

5. Hiring practices: Schools should prioritize hiring Christian believers, using thorough vetting processes, including faith essays and references, to ensure alignment with the school's mission.

6. Accountability and oversight: Implement oversight measures, such as meetings with neutral counselors or chaplains, to support staff and ensure adherence to the school's values, especially for foreign staff.

7. Addressing violations: Swift and appropriate action should be taken for violations of the school's faith or values, ranging from correction to termination for severe breaches.

8. Cultural understanding and adaptation: Leaders should invest in understanding Thai culture and language, approaching their roles with humility and openness, and avoiding the imposition of Western culture.

9. Decision-making and boundaries: Leaders should base decisions on convictions and divine guidance, maintain composure under criticism, and set healthy boundaries to prevent burnout.

10. Building positive partnerships and relationships: Leaders should foster strong, professional relationships with the school community, promoting integrity, accountability, transparency, and open communication, and offering professional development in multicultural environments.

#### **Discussion**

The data collected confirmed the reality of the two aspects of the Statement of the Problem: Firstly, there is an adverse spiritual climate in Thailand, and secondly, the human secular agenda is encroaching upon Thailand trying to wipe out conservative Christian values from the global education sector (Dahlfred, 2021; Larsson, 2019). R8 said, *"There is a lot of spiritual warfare in Thailand."* R1 said, *"The human secular agenda is trying to rid Christian schools of their traditional values."* R4 said, *"Christian organizations like the YMCA, are now just the Y." A Christian school educator's overall guide to winning the battle written in the problem above was answered by R12 and R7. R12 said, "Yes, we are in a non-Christian nation and our students and parents are our customers. But, we have to know what our school is here for, and they have to know what they signed-up for. We need to stay true to our core-values and the vision and mission of our school. Especially, because it lines up with the will of God."* R7 said, *"Christian leaders have to be reading the word of God daily. It's our Daily Bread. We need to take time to fast and pray. We need to be hearing from our Father. This is what Jesus had to do, and He expects us to do this also. We have to be obedient to follow Him. God is the greatest Leader ever, and He will help us lead and keep us on track. He will keep us from falling. He wants to give us and our schools the victory and help us finish strong."*

For Objective No 1. To study the strategic management processes performed by Christian schools in Thailand, found that: a leadership approach grounded in Christ-centered vision, mission, and goals was of utmost importance. Advocating for prayerful communication and guidance, referencing biblical



principles was Proverbs 16:9 and Habakkuk 2:2. These scriptures stress the foundational importance of Jesus Christ in establishing and sustaining a Christian school in Thailand. In Step 1. of the program, *'How to Start a Christian School for A.C.E. Students'*, describes how a vision from God is often formed in the heart of one individual and is nurtured and carried out through a life of prayer (Association of Christian Schools International, 2017). R5 said, *"God gave our two founders, a husband and wife, the idea to establish the vision, purpose, objectives, and goals for a kindergarten school 25 years ago."* R8 said, *"The vision and mission statements for our school were inspired by the desire to share God's love, wisdom and truth with the Thai people."* The related study: Hollis (2019), studies How Christian School Leadership Practices Impact the Creation of a School Environment Where Spiritual Nurture Can Occur in Students: A Phenomenological Investigation, supported the critical role of Christian school leadership in providing a healthy spiritual climate for students, aligning with the respondents' discussion on the importance of receiving a vision from God and maintaining a Christ-centered leadership team. The emphasis on spiritual leadership and guidance also resonates with the respondents' focus on divine calling and the pivotal role of the principal in aligning school operations with godly vision, mission, and goals. Objective No 1. Also found the importance of receiving a vision from God for intellectual and spiritual development. It draws on the biblical reference of Proverbs 29:18 and outlines steps to founding a school, by forming a Holy Spirit-filled leadership team, building relationships, determining the school's organizational structure, seeking financial support, and creating policy documents. The related study of Rasavanh (2022) Development of Strategic Planning Model for Small-sized Schools Under the Church of Christ in Thailand, found the need to highlight the importance of strategic planning for school development, which corroborates the necessity for effective strategic management processes. The challenges identified in this study was a lack of essential stakeholder commitment and the need for the principal to oversee the achievement of strategic goals. Also, in regard to Objective No 1, the findings showed the need for a school to have a robust Learning Management System (LMS) and Information Technology (IT) Department, as concurred with the related study of Widiawati, Lestari T, and Sutarsih (2018) The Implementation of Strategic Management in Developing

Schools, which put an emphasis on the importance of strategic management and technology in education.

For Objective No 2. To verify common themes, challenges, and best practices of Christian schools in Thailand, found that: two topics came up as a theme, challenge and best practice. These two topics were, "having good communication" and "building partnerships." These two skills were deemed a necessity by multiple respondents. R6 stated, *"In the position of Head of School, I stress open communication and collaboration in order to solve problems and avoid the blame game. Our different departments work in teams toward common goals centered around our students and their learning."* R3 spoke about working together in his school's "multicultural environment:" *"We all have many different ways of thinking about things. Having clear communication and understanding about what each other means is very important. Understanding how to work in a multicultural environment would help us understand our student population, as well."* Effective communication and partnerships with parents are emphasized, reflecting the importance of community engagement. The related study of Trakarnpairoj (2021) focused on developing a strategic management model based on the Montessori Method of Education and the Bible, highlighting the importance of effective leadership and strategic planning. This aligns with respondents' discussions on the significance of good communication and partnerships. Another important finding for Objective No 2. was the greatest challenge these Christian leaders face in their schools revolving around hiring the wrong employees, particularly non-Christians. This was supported by R10, who said, *"I have seen too many International Schools, even in Thailand, they start out saying they are Christian schools. But later on, when the schools grow and they need more people, they end up hiring non-believers and slowly, slowly change. But for us, from our Board Members, they give us a very strong command that we have to hire Christians only."* Another concurring example is from the Christian School Leadership Framework: The head of a Christian school must have their whole personal life and Christian education profession committed to Jesus Christ (Association of Christian Schools International, 2017). Agreeing with the hiring of Christian educators R10 said, *"Even though it can be hard to find Christians in Thailand to work for us at times, we try our best to pray a lot about hiring Christian staff only."* R11 said, *"Number one, I think the leadership team and upper management all*

*need to be Christians, in a Christian school. They all have to have the same heart. It started with our founders' love for Jesus, and now we as the leaders love Jesus. We want our teachers to love Jesus, so that our students can love Jesus, and then hopefully, even their parents."*

For Objective No 3. 10 Proposed guidelines for the strategic management processes of Christian schools. Out of these ten findings one of the greatest undertakings for Christian schools is to provide a Faith Learning Integration with their school's curriculum to present a strong biblical worldview for their students. R4 said, *"Every subject in our school has two master lists. One is of biblical character traits that are uniquely relevant to that subject. Every course in that subject will select one, or two of those biblical character traits to focus on. The other master list is of biblical principles that uniquely relate to that subject. So, there are two master lists like that for every subject. And the teachers need time to meditate and integrate both the character traits and the biblical principles into their subject."* R11 said, *"We believe Faith Learning Integration comes from our teachers' biblical worldview. If we get teachers who have strong Christian worldviews, that will come out in everything they say and do. Because our students are non-Christian, you can teach them a Bible story, and it may mean nothing to them. But, as the teachers teach their students little things and show them love every day, their relationship as a good teacher will be showing them Faith Learning Integration."* R12 said, *"Our school overall, has been increasing in our Faith Learning Integration. The Director that was here before me was not a Christian, and implementing faith was not a big priority. But, now that we have hired a majority of strong Christian teachers, we are working on integrating biblical lessons into every grade-level in our school."* The related study of Santipochana (2016) sheds light on the integration of Christian faith into teaching practices, which aligns with the respondents' focus on the importance of the integration of a biblical worldview into the curriculum. There is also an emphasis on relationships with students, professionalism, and cultural awareness that resonates with the respondents' discussions on the holistic approach to faith integration and the importance of sensitivity and inclusivity.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to assist, support, equip, educate, and aid in development of Christian schools in Thailand as follows:

1. Administrators should reinforce the importance for these schools to implement a robust Information Technology (IT) Department and Learning Management System (LMS).

2. Administrators should have effective communication and strong partnerships with parents to emphasize and reflect the importance of community engagement.

3. The head of a Christian school must have their whole personal life and Christian education profession committed to Jesus Christ.

4. Explore potential strategies to bridge cultural gaps and foster better understanding and acceptance of the Gospel in the Thai context.

## Topics for further studies

1. Christian and Thai schools' strategic planning processes:

Research the strategic planning processes of both Christian schools and Thai schools and compare the differences and similarities of their visions, missions, goals, objectives, values and worldviews.

2. Clear communication and conflict resolution in a Christian school in Thailand:

Investigate barriers to clear communication between leaders, students and parents in the multicultural environment of International Christian schools in Thailand. Establish steps for conflict resolution when communication breakdowns occur, based on biblical principles.

3. Hiring and firing processes for Christian schools in Thailand:

Research the best practices for hiring processes for believers, non-believers, foreigners and Thai nationals to work in Christian schools in Thailand. Identify the most effective tools for vetting their faith and capabilities as Christian educators. Also, determine the best methods for firing employees when they break the school's ethics agreement.

## Conclusion

This article is based on qualitative research conducted with the aim of providing insights and practical guidance to strengthen and support Christian schools in Thailand. Its focus was on the status of Christian administrators, establishing a Christian school on a solid foundation, achieving sustainability, and protecting biblical values for the future. It expounded upon the methods by which Christian school leaders are to carry out their strategic planning processes and by the

values and character they are to perform. It focused on the importance of merging the academic and spiritual aspects of their pedagogy and the transformational power that can result as their students receive the teaching.. This research, its data, and findings should be one of many more research projects to come, to strengthen the rapidly growing field of Christian education in Thailand.

## References

- Ashford, B. (2016). *Casting a vision for distinctively Christian education*. Retrieved from <https://cfc.sebts.edu/faith-and-culture/casting-vision-distinctively-christian-education/>
- Association of Christian Schools International. (ACSI). (2014). *Christian school leadership framework: HOS 360 evaluation*. Retrieved from <https://www.acsi.org/docs/default-source/website-publishing/school-services/steps-to-school-improvement/standard-2/christian-school-leadership-framework-hos-360-eval.pdf>
- Association of Christian Schools International. (ACSI). (2017). *How to start a Christian school for A.C.E. students*. Retrieved from <https://harleyvoogd.files.wordpress.com/2017/09/start-a-school-checklist.pdf>
- Cherkowski, S. L., Walker, K. D., & Kutsyruba, B. (2015). Principals' moral agency and ethical decision-making: Towards transformational ethics. *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership*, 10(5), 1–17.
- Dahlfred, K. (2021). *A new challenge to the Christian faith in Thailand*.
- Elizabeth, B., & Katzer, J. (2023). *Teacher Turnover and Retention the Choice to Leave: Lived Experiences of Teachers in Rural Montana* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Montana. USA.
- ESV study Bible: English Standard Version. (2001). *Crossway Bibles*.
- Hilderbrand, K. (2015). A historical analysis of hindrances related to the slow growth of Christianity in Thailand. *Great Commission Research Journal*, 7(2), 198–211.
- Hiltibran, K. J. (2020). *Strategic planning in international Christian schools: Leadership practices and perceptions* (Doctoral dissertation). Columbia International University. USA.
- Hollis, D. (2019). *How Christian school leadership practices impact the creation of a school environment where spiritual nurture can occur in students: A phenomenological investigation* (Doctoral Dissertation). Liberty University. USA.
- Joshua Project. (2024). *Country: Thailand*. Retrieved from <https://joshuaproject.net/countries/TH>
- Juneja, P. (2019). *Strategic management - Meaning and important concepts*. Retrieved from <https://www.managementstudyguide.com/strategic-management.html>
- Larsson, T. (2019). *Secularization and the Thai state*. Retrieved from <https://api.repository.cam.ac.uk/server/api/core/bitstreams/9ff06a03-b1a9-480d-8a8d-5a7cfd1c37dd/content>
- McDougald, V. (2021). *The principal effect: How school leaders affect students and schools*. Retrieved from <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/principal-effect-how-school-leaders-affect-students-and-schools>
- Mirzoyan, V. (2021). *LMS in school: Role, importance, advantages*. Uteach. Retrieved from <https://uteach.io/articles/lms-in-school-role-importance-advantages>
- Mosley, K. (2021). *Accountable education*. Retrieved from <https://www.legacyca.com/accountable-education/>
- Muehlhoff, T. (2023). *Spiritual battle in the classroom (part 2)*. *Christian Scholar's Review*. Retrieved from <https://christianscholars.com/spiritual-battle-in-the-classroom-part-2/>
- OxfordLanguages. (2021). *Our dictionaries*. Retrieved from <https://languages.oup.com/dictionaries/>
- Porter, M., Business, H., & Mumbai, S. (2017). Strategy: Creating and Sustaining Competitive Advantage. In *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from [https://www.hbs.edu/ris/Publication%20Files/20170524%20Strategy%20Keynote\\_%20v4\\_full\\_final\\_2814963a-c8ca-457d-8ee6-69e8b57921ea.pdf](https://www.hbs.edu/ris/Publication%20Files/20170524%20Strategy%20Keynote_%20v4_full_final_2814963a-c8ca-457d-8ee6-69e8b57921ea.pdf)
- Rasavanh, D. (2022). *Development of a strategic planning model for small-sized schools under the Church of Christ in Thailand*. Retrieved from <http://library.christian.ac.th/thesis/document/F015065.pdf>
- Santipochana, K. (2016). *Christianity and English language teaching: A case study of Christian missionary teachers in Thailand*. Retrieved from <https://repository.nida.ac.th/server/api/core/bitstreams/75e6fc2d-267c-4eaa-a498-3b8285ab53/content>
- Schultz, R. (2019). *Christianity and the American university*. Retrieved from <https://www.liberty.edu/journal/article/christianity-and-the-american-university/>
- The Holy Bible. (2011). New International Version (NIV). Zondervan.
- Turnbull, D., Chugh, R., & Luck, J. (2020). Learning management systems: An overview. *Encyclopedia of Education and Information Technologies*, 1052–1058.
- Trakarnpairoj, A. (2021). *Development of school strategic management model according to the Montessori method of education based on the Bible for Chiangkham Christian School*. Retrieved from <http://library.christian.ac.th/thesis/document/T044734.pdf>
- Widiawati, W., Lestari T, Y. S., & Sutarsih, C. (2018). The implementation of strategic management in developing schools. In *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Research of Educational Administration and Management (ICREAM 2018)* (pp. 265–268). Amsterdam, Netherlands: Atlantic Press.