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Examining the Exemplary Leadership Level of Cambodian Secondary School Students in Battambang Province

Soksamnang Pheach¹ and Penvara Xupravati²

^{1,2}Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University

*Corresponding Author, e-mail: soksamnangpheach@gmail.com

Abstract

Leadership was one of the eight mandatory competencies that the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport targets secondary school students to acquire after graduation. Because there was no evidence and any relevant study about students' leadership level in Cambodia, the purpose of this study was to explore and examine the level of leadership, including gender inequality, educational level, and grade. The data were collected from 12 sample schools, choosing one school to represent one district. There were 64 out of 72 equivalent to 88.9 % students completed the five-point Likert scale questionnaire. The questionnaire was evaluated by experts through IOC. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (i.e., mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (i.e., independent sample t-test and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)). The findings had shown that students' exemplary leadership level was slightly high (Mean = 3.669). 'Encourage the heart dimension' was scored the highest (Mean = 3.806), while the lowest mean value was 'inspire a shared vision dimension' (Mean = 3.367). There was no significant difference in exemplary leadership level of secondary school students regarding gender, educational level, and grade.

Keywords: Exemplary Leadership, Secondary School Students, Battambang Province

Introduction

Cambodia has experienced a lot of hardship in its history. Since the end of the Khmer Rouge era, education system in Cambodia was destroyed. Schools were demolished, and some were transformed into jails or livestock, leaving the majority of young people under the age of 14 without

a basic education. Cambodia prioritized access to school above quality of education in order to address the issue of education and rebuild the country (Phalla, 2022).

In the context of post conflict country, it is obvious that providing quality education is challenging due to a lack of infrastructure, financial resources, and human resources. Despite this, school quality in Cambodia remains inadequate after more than three decades of war. Students do not have adequate capacity to work after graduating from upper secondary school and require more training before they can work (Phalla, 2022). Cambodia has been working hard to enhance its education system, taking use of as many possibilities as possible to increase student accomplishment (Esther, 2020).

A significant step forward in education reform happened in 2014, with the appointment of a new Minister of Education as part of the government's rigorous reform program (Phalla, 2022). The Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS) has begun to focus on and increase the quality of secondary education by enforcing rigorous mechanisms on national tests for grades 9 and 12 (Nguon, 2014).

Current educational reforms are shifting away from access problems and toward educational quality and governance issues, ushering Cambodia's secondary school system into the twenty-first century (Bredenberg, 2018). The curriculum has also been reformed, and school administrators have been trying to alter and strengthen their leadership abilities, while instructors have been putting more effort into discovering new teaching ideas, activities, and strategies to share and prepare young students to be future leaders (Sopich, 2022). Nowadays, young people have more understanding on the importance of leadership skills since they can adopt the concept and implement the idea for their future utilization for either in school or workplaces (Ekpoh, Edet, & Samuel, 2013). Then, the leadership style or model should be implemented to student at early age of their progressing study period (Haynes-Tross, 2015). Leadership is one of the most important aspects in human accomplishment (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011). As stated by Kouzes and Posner (2017) leadership is the skills that can be adopted both male and female, and type of leadership such as exemplary leadership can help enhance the capability and capacity of the prominent leaders. People who enrich with exemplary leadership skills, are able to move beyond the ordinary to the extraordinary, to turn challenges into opportunities and to obtain remarkable success (Kouzes & Posner 2017). In Cambodia, leadership skills have been implemented by Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS), into the presented curriculum and it is one of eight essential competencies that Cambodia's secondary school curriculum striving to nurture students to have leadership skills after they graduate from grade 12.

Hence, the objective of the current paper is to examine the exemplary leadership level of Cambodian secondary school students in Battambang Province. Since the current reform, Battambang province has received several awards for both best school and best principal. It is clear that Battambang is a suitable province to investigate and study the exemplary leadership level of students.

Research objectives

Literature Review

Exemplary leadership

Leadership is an essential factor in every sector, community, country (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). It is the most important aspect in human accomplishment (Brauckmann & Pashardis, 2011). As stated by Kouzes and Posner (2017), people who have exemplary leadership, are able to move beyond the ordinary to the extraordinary and able to turn challenges into opportunities and remarkable success. Exemplary leadership is the personal-best ability and skill that can be enhanced and improved. Kouzes and Posner (2017) affirmed that people who have exemplary leadership ability be able to 1) set value that guide actions as a leaders, 2) set example for others, 3) articulate a vision of the future when things are so unpredictable, 4) improve ability to inspire others toward a common purpose, 5) create an environment that promotes innovation and risk, 6) build a cohesive and spirited team, 7) share power and information and still maintain accountability, 8) put more joy and celebration into efforts 9) find out what is the source of self-confidence required to lead others and, 10) improve leadership abilities of themselves. Kouzes and Posner (2017) and Sulpakar, Ridwan, Herdian, Sudjarwo, and Hariri (2022) have been developed and define the meaning of exemplary leadership with five dimensions are as follows:

1. Model the way refers to the ability of leaders to take action and make decision in order to be a role model for him/herself as well as to influence others. Model the way consists of 1) clarifying values (finding voice & affirming shared values), 2) setting example (living the shared values & teaching other to model the values).

2. Inspire a shared vision refers to the ability of leaders to communicate a shared vision to others with values, inspiration, and expectation. Inspire a shared vision consists of 1) envisioning the future (imagining the possibilities & finding a common purpose), 2) enlisting others (appealing to common ideal & animating the vision).

3. Challenge the process refers to the ability of leaders to seek and set new better-quality goal through innovative activities as well as willing to acknowledge and encourage new thinking. Challenge

the process consists of 1) searching for opportunities (seizing the initiative & exercising oversight (looking outward), 2) experimenting and taking risk (generating small wins & learning from experience).

4. Enable others to act refers to the ability of leaders to promote collaboration, build and develop belief among others to sustain success. Enable others to act consists of 1) fostering collaboration (by creating climate of trust & and facilitating relationship), 2) strengthening others (enhancing self-determination & developing competence and confidence).

5. Encourage the heart refers to the ability of leaders to encourage others to had them build confidence, and support by recognizing the contribution of the others. Encourage the heart consists of 1) recognizing contribution (expecting the best & personalizing recognition), 2) celebrating the values and victories (creating a spirit of community & being personally involved).

Secondary schools in Cambodia

Cambodia's formal educational framework is 6+3+3. This equates to 12 years for general education completion, divided into six years for primary education (grades 1 to 6) and six years for secondary general education (grade 7 to 12). Secondary education consists of three years of lower secondary education (grade 7 to 9) and three years of upper secondary education (grade 10 to 12). The Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport designed a national curriculum program for all secondary schools in Cambodia to adopt and implement. The secondary national curriculum program based on ChuonNaron (2018) are as follows:

1. Lower Secondary School

After having completed the education level of lower-secondary school (grade 7-9), learners will have developed:

Knowledge of Cambodian's lower secondary school program mainly provided with: 1) construct solid basic knowledge of Khmer language, Social Science, Mathematics, physical health, and moral development, 2) acquire basic knowledge of Science, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Foreign Languages.

Expected skills of lower secondary school students focused on 1) apply solid basic skills in Khmer Language (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), 2) apply basic skills in Mathematics (calculating, comparing, explaining, and solving problems), 3) apply basic scientific knowledge and Information and Communications Technology (ICT), 4) apply basic skills in critical thinking and problem-solving in the learning process and society, 5) acquire comprehensive communication skills for the study and daily life, 6) apply skills in prevention and primary health care, and 7) differentiate right from wrong.

Subjects are Khmer Languages (writing, dictation, composing, grammars, recitation and reading texts) Mathematics, Science (Physics, Earth-Environmental Science, Chemistry, Biology), Social Studies (History, Geography, Moral-Civics, Home Economics), Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Foreign Languages, Art Education, Physical Education and Sport, Health Education, and Local Life Skills.

2. Upper Secondary School

After having completed the education level of upper-secondary school (grade 10-12), learner will have developed:

Knowledge of Cambodian's upper secondary school program mainly provided with: 1) acquire solid basic knowledge of the Khmer language, Social Science, Mathematics, physical health and moral ethic, 2) construct basic knowledge of Science, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), and Foreign Languages.

Expected skills of lower secondary school students focused on 1) construct solid and broader basic skills in Khmer Language (comparing, explaining, analyzing, interpreting and solving problems), 2) apply basic skills in Mathematics (calculating, comparing, explaining, and solving problems), 3) apply basic scientific knowledge and Information and Communications Technology (ICT), 4) apply basic skills in critical thinking and problem solving in the learning process and society, 5) acquire solid and broader skills of communication in the study and society, 6) construct and apply skills in health prevention and primary health care, and 7) develop and make use of knowledge, skills and ethics to protect and enhance the good deeds.

Subjects are Khmer Literature, Mathematics, Foreign Language, Physical Education and Sports, Science (Physics, Earth-Environmental Science, Chemistry, Biology), Social Studies (History, Geography, Moral-Civics, Home Economics), ICT, and Health Education.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was conducted for examining the exemplary leadership level of Cambodian secondary school students in Battambang Province. This study will elucidate the relation difference between exemplary leadership regarding gender, educational level, and grade of secondary school students.

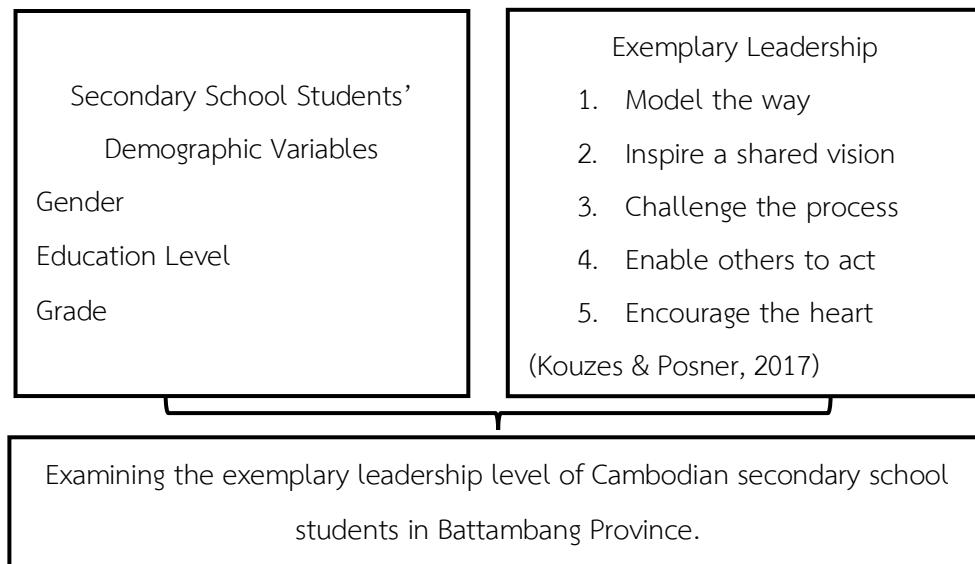


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Population

The population of the study were secondary schools (the school that consisted of 6 levels together from grade 7 to 12) under the jurisdiction of the department of education in Battambang Province, accounting for 26 secondary schools in total.

The informant of the study was the class monitor of each grade (choosing one class monitor to represent one grade (one for each grade 7 to 12), and there were 6 informants in total from each school.

Sample

12 secondary schools of Battambang Province were randomly selected for the sample size of the study (choosing one secondary school to represent one district of Battambang Province, there were 14 districts in overall yet 2 districts (Sampov Loun and Rokkha Kiri district) were exclusion criteria (there was no secondary school that consisted of six levels together from grade 7 to 12), there were only separated between lower secondary school (from grade 7 to 9) and upper secondary (from grade 10 to 12) for these two district which different from the scope of this study). 64 out of 72 (6 informants from the 12 secondary schools, totally 72 informants) questionnaires were returned and valid for data analysis equivalent to 88.9 %.

Table 1 below indicated gender, and grade of the student sample from six grades of the twelve districts.

Table 1 Student Sample.

Grade	Sample		
	Male	Female	Total
Grade 7	2	8	10
Grade 8	4	5	9
Grade 9	2	10	12
Grade 10	2	7	9
Grade 11	4	8	12
Grade 12	7	5	12
Total	21	43	64

Research Instrument

The research instrument was a survey questionnaire consisted of 2 sections:

Sections 1: Demographic data of the informants using checklist, including gender, age, educational level, grade, and educational strand.

Sections 2: Exemplary leadership levels of secondary school students in Battambang province, Cambodia.

The questionnaire has been developed and constructed through the five dimensions (there were four items in each dimension) of exemplary leadership model (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Participants were asked to respond to 20 statements with a 5-point Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 refers to behave at the lowest level to 5 refers to behave at highest level).

Content validity of the questionnaire was evaluated by three content experts through indexes of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC). Items with IOC values of 0.5 and higher were chosen with no revision or deletion. IOC values of all items were equal to 1.

30 students who are characterized as similar to the sample of the study were chosen for the try-out to measure reliability (i.e., internal consistency) of the questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the exemplary leadership questionnaire was calculated to be 0.932. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each dimension of the exemplary leadership questionnaire were calculated to be: 'model the way' (0.806); 'inspire a shared vision' (0.740); 'challenge the process' (0.819); 'enable others to act' (0.747); and 'encourage the heart' (0.755). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.7 or above is acceptable (Mallery & George, 2000).

Data Analysis

Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 22 was used to analyze the data. Data gathered from the first section of the questionnaire were analyzed and interpreted in descriptive statistics: frequencies and percentages. Data in the second section were analyzed using descriptive statistics: mean and standard deviation and using inferential statistics: independent sample t-test and one-way ANOVA.

Results

In this section, the analyzing results of exemplary leadership levels of Cambodian secondary school students will be discussed. Table 2 show the mean, standard deviation and level of the student in overall view.

Table 2 Exemplary Leadership Level of Secondary School Students (n = 64).

Exemplary leadership		Mean	SD	Level
1. Model the way	1. Find voice	3.600	0.924	(3)
	2. Affirm shared values	3.770	0.920	(1)
	3. Live the shared values	3.726	0.926	(2)
	4. Teach others to model the values	3.500	0.971	(4)
	Total	3.649	0.924	4
2. Inspire a shared vision	1. Imagine the possibilities	3.500	1.036	(1)
	2. Find a common purpose	3.328	1.106	(3)
	3. Appeal to common ideals	3.377	1.051	(2)
	4. Animate the vision	3.262	0.893	(4)
	Total	3.367	1.022	5
3. Challenge the process	1. Seize the initiative	3.645	1.093	(4)
	2. Exercise oversight	4.081	0.946	(1)

Exemplary leadership		Mean	SD	Level
	3. Generate small wins	3.710	1.092	(2)
	4. Learn from experience	3.710	0.857	(2)
	Total	3.750	0.997	2
4. Enable others to act	1. Create a climate of trust	3.645	0.960	(4)
	2. Create facilitate relationships	3.855	0.827	(1)
	3. Enhance self-determination	3.774	1.015	(2)
	4. Develop competence and confidence	3.726	1.027	(3)
	Total	3.750	0.957	3
5. Encourage the heart	1. Expect the best	4.000	1.024	(2)
	2. Personalize recognition	3.484	1.020	(4)
	3. Create a spirit of community	3.645	1.118	(3)
	4. Personally involved	4.097	0.953	(1)
	Total	3.806	1.029	1
	Total	3.669	0.988	

Table 2 reveals that exemplary leadership level of Cambodian secondary school students in Battambang Province was slightly high (Mean = 3.669, SD = 0.988). The first highest exemplary leadership level of secondary school students in overall was ‘encourage the heart’ (Mean = 3.806, SD = 1.029), followed by ‘challenge the process’ (Mean = 3.774, SD = 0.997), ‘enable others to act’ (Mean= 3.750, SD = 0.957), ‘model the way’ (Mean = 3.649, SD = 0.935) and the last was ‘inspire a shared vision’ (Mean = 3.367, SD = 1.022).

The following table will discuss regarding to gender and educational level of Cambodian secondary school students in Battambang Province. The analysis was using t-test and F-test for comparing mean result between male and female (21 male students and 43 female students) and

comparing the mean result between two levels of educational level (lower and upper secondary school). The details of Table 3 were given as follows:

Table 3 Results of t-test and F-test regarding Gender and Educational Level of Students (n = 64).

Exemplary Leadership Dimensions	Gender				F	P	Educational Level				F	P				
	Male		Female				Lower Secondary		Upper Secondary							
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			Mean	SD	Mean	SD						
1. Model the way	3.791	0.671	3.591	0.786	0.713	0.402	3.697	0.695	3.621	0.798	0.592	0.445				
2. Inspire a shared vision	3.197	0.784	3.456	0.748	0.050	0.823	3.489	0.840	3.298	0.711	0.816	0.370				
3. Challenge the process	3.815	0.622	3.755	0.882	1.711	0.196	3.860	0.875	3.716	0.764	0.407	0.526				
4. Enable others to act	3.763	0.658	3.744	0.758	0.151	0.699	3.800	0.707	3.716	0.743	0.001	0.977				
5. Encourage the heart	3.763	0.761	3.825	0.799	0.244	0.623	3.700	0.912	3.878	0.683	0.631	0.430				
Total	3.661	0.555	3.706	0.691	2.134	0.150	3.790	0.623	3.627	0.661	0.000	0.982				

*P < 0.05

Table 3 shows that there was no significant difference in students' exemplary leadership regarding gender and education level as a whole ($F = 2.134$, $P = 0.150$; $F = 0$, $P = 0.982$, respectively).

Regarding gender, there was no significant difference in exemplary leadership for each dimension: 'model the way' ($F = 0.713$, $P = 0.402$), 'inspire a shared vision' ($F = 0.050$, $P = 0.823$), 'challenge the process' ($F = 1.711$, $P = 0.196$), 'enable others to act' ($F = 0.151$, $P = 0.699$), and 'encourage the heart' ($F = 0.244$, $P = 0.623$).

Regarding educational level, there was no significant difference in exemplary leadership for each dimension: 'model the way' ($F = 0.592$, $P = 0.445$), 'inspire a shared vision' ($F = 0.816$, $P = 0.370$), 'challenge the process' ($F = 0.407$, $P = 0.526$), 'enable others to act' ($F = 0.001$, $P = 0.977$), and 'encourage the heart' ($F = 0.631$, $P = 0.430$).

The following table will discuss regarding to grade (grade 7-12) using One-Way ANOVA for comparing mean result between the six grades and exemplary leadership. The results were presented in Table 4 as follows:

Table 4 Results of One-Way Analysis of Variance in Exemplary Leadership of Secondary School Students Regarding Grade (n = 64).

Grade	Exemplary leadership											
	1. Model the way		2. Inspire a shared vision		3. Challenge the process		4. Enable others to act		5. Encourage the heart		Exemplary leadership	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Grade 7	3.611	0.663	3.607	0.518	3.861	1.005	3.806	0.818	3.528	1.100	3.929	0.427
Grade 8	3.625	0.756	3.281	0.940	3.778	0.795	3.639	0.792	3.694	1.088	3.507	0.858
Grade 9	3.932	0.717	3.667	0.807	3.792	0.681	3.979	0.626	4.000	0.594	3.882	0.578
Grade 10	3.722	0.592	3.222	0.423	3.861	0.681	3.750	0.500	4.000	0.650	3.711	0.477
Grade 11	3.295	0.900	2.979	0.956	3.667	0.990	3.646	1.025	3.729	0.765	3.450	0.859
Grade 12	3.727	0.833	3.523	0.596	3.727	0.702	3.659	0.528	3.841	0.528	3.695	0.569
Total	3.653	0.753	3.373	0.763	3.774	0.807	3.750	0.724	3.806	0.782	3.692	0.646
F	0.716		1.014		0.539		1.791		1.359		1.777	
P	0.614		0.419		0.746		0.130		0.254		0.135	

*P < 0.05

Table 4 shows that there was no significant difference in exemplary leadership regarding grade as a whole ($F = 1.777$, $P = 0.135$).

Regarding grade, there was no significant difference in exemplary leadership for each dimension: ‘model the way’ ($F = 0.716$, $P = 0.614$), ‘inspire a shared vision’ ($F = 1.014$, $P = 0.419$), ‘challenge the process’ ($F = 0.539$, $P = 0.746$), ‘enable others to act’ ($F = 1.791$, $P = 0.130$), and ‘encourage the heart’ ($F = 1.359$, $P = 0.254$).

Discussion

The main goal of this study aimed at examining the exemplary leadership level of Cambodian secondary students in Battambang Province and determine whether any differences existed regarding gender, educational level, and grades. Five dimensions were used to measure the exemplary leadership abilities: 1) model the way; 2) inspire a shared vision; 3) challenge the process; 4) enable others to act; 5) encourage the heart.

The finding addressed that the exemplary leadership level of Cambodian secondary school students in Battambang Province was (Mean= 3.669, SD = 0.988). The highest level of exemplary leadership that secondary school students in overall was ‘encourage the heart’. According to these results, this may explain that students are good at motivation among each other and have a good relationship with their peers and being involved with others. The lowest one was ‘inspire a shared vision’. Based on the result, this may result from less opportunities given for students to exercise their leadership in position in the real world, such as imagine the possibilities, find the common purpose, appeal common ideals, and animate the vision.

The result of t-test regarding gender showed that female students presented higher level than male students and the result in overall was (Male = 3.661 and Female = 3.706). Based on the result of Table 2 even male student addressed higher level in some following dimensions: ‘model the way’ (Male = 3.791 and Female = 3.591), ‘challenge the process’ (Male = 3.815 and Female = 3.755), ‘enable others to act’ (Male = 3.763 and Female = 3.744), however there are not statistically significant difference in any dimension of exemplary leadership regarding gender. This study concluded that the exemplary leadership abilities of students are equal for both genders. This result was similar to (Bento & Ribeiro, 2010), suggested that secondary students with both genders are able to learn and develop leadership skill equally. On the other hand, the other author thought that men have more opportunities for becoming leaders and leadership skills is a characteristic normally associated with males than females (Foley, 2005).

Taking the educational level into account, the lower-secondary students presented higher level than upper secondary students and the result in overall was (Lower-secondary = 3.790 and Upper-secondary = 3.627). The lower-secondary students reported higher levels of exemplary leadership in the following dimensions: ‘model the way’ (Lower-secondary = 3.97 and Upper-secondary = 3.621), ‘inspire a shared vision’ (Lower-secondary = 3.489 and Upper-secondary = 3.298), ‘challenge the process’ (Lower-secondary = 3.860 and Upper-secondary = 3.716), and ‘enable others to act’ (Lower-secondary = 3.800 and Upper-secondary = 3.716). Again, however, none of these differences are statistically

significant. This study concluded that the exemplary leadership abilities of students do not rely on lower level or higher level of students. Both lower and upper secondary school students can learn and improve their leadership skill equally based on the effort of each one because exemplary leadership is the person-best that can learn and improve. Given that Kouzes and Posner (1995) suggest that leadership results from a set of observed practices which can be learned and improved, it is possible that, with higher levels of students one might acquire higher levels of ability in these dimensions.

Similarly, the result from one-way ANOVA indicated that there was no significant difference in exemplary leadership regarding grades. This result concluded that the exemplary leadership abilities of students in each grade can learn and adopt the exemplary leadership equally because it is possible to learn depend on the personal effort.

Finally, the results of this study affirm that secondary school students both male and female, lower-secondary level and upper secondary level, and all grades can be learned and improved the exemplary leadership equally.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Practice

The Ministry of Education Youth and Sport should embed exemplary leadership into national program, as well as regular school curriculum since the result of the study addressed that students in lower and upper secondary levels were no significance difference leadership abilities in both levels and especially in all grades.

Recommendation for Further Research

1. Further research should focus on what kinds of school activities or factors contribute to students' exemplary leadership in dimension of inspire a shared vision since this research study revealed that among the five dimensions of exemplary leadership 'inspire a shared vision' found to be the lowest scores for secondary school students in Battambang province.

2. The similar studies should examine the exemplary leadership level of secondary school students in other province in order to measure whether it has the significance difference regarding gender, educational level, and grade for secondary school students in other provinces, since the result of this study addressed that there was no significance difference regarding these demographic factors for secondary school students in Battambang province.

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