



A Needs Assessment on How to Develop Virtuous Leadership in Secondary School Administrators

Phruetthaya Lertmanop¹ Ponglikit Petpon^{2*} and Dhirapat Kulophas³

^{1,2,3}Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University

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

Abstract

This research aimed to investigate the needs for developing virtuous leadership among secondary school administrators using a multiphase mixed method design. The sample for this study consisted of 748 individuals involved in the development of secondary school administrators based on the concept of virtuous leadership. It included 62 directors or deputy directors of secondary educational service area offices (selected through total population sampling), 343 secondary school teachers who served as heads of academic departments, and 343 chairpersons of basic education school boards under the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC). A multi-stage random sampling method was employed to select participants from the OBEC schools. The sample size was determined using Yamane's formula (1973) with a 95% confidence level. The research utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were obtained via interviews and document analysis. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and content analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current practices and perceptions related to virtuous leadership in secondary school administration.

The findings revealed that the current state of virtuous leadership development needs was at a high level (overall mean = 4.22). Notably, both group and individual learning approaches were moderately emphasized, with mentorship (M = 4.41) and online learning (M = 4.24) receiving high ratings. The desired state was rated at the highest level (M = 4.87) across all dimensions, especially for individual learning methods such as mentorship (M = 4.97) and coaching (M = 4.90), reflecting significantly higher

expectations than the current situation. The overall modified priority needs index (PNI_{modified}) was 0.154, clearly indicating a strong necessity for enhancing the development of virtuous leadership among school administrators.

Keywords: Virtuous Leadership, Educational Administration, Mentorship, Coaching

Introduction

In an era of rapid transformation; economically, socially, and technologically; the education system faces increasingly complex and multifaceted challenges. Educational institutions must continuously adapt and improve in order to meet these demands, especially through the role of school administrators, who are responsible for setting direction, driving change, and managing operations effectively in alignment with educational goals. Leadership competencies required of administrators should extend beyond academic and managerial expertise to encompass virtuous leadership, which emphasizes integrity, transparency, moral principles, and accountability to learners and society. Leithwood et al. (2020).

At present, the concept of virtuous leadership has gained growing attention among educational agencies such as the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA) and the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC), both of which emphasize the development and evaluation of leadership from a moral standpoint. Evaluation data from ONESQA indicate that schools led by morally grounded administrators tend to exhibit higher academic achievement, foster positive learning environments, and encourage inclusive participation from teachers, parents, and communities. However, the development of virtuous leadership continues to face challenges, such as the lack of administrators with strong ethical expertise, insufficient environments that support moral behavior, and the absence of concrete systems for assessing moral values at the organizational level. Quade et al. (2021).

Virtuous leadership has gained scholarly interest over the past decade. Scholars such as Sergiovanni (1992) and Northouse (2019) highlight that ethical principles, justice, and social responsibility are central to effective leadership, contributing to organizational trust, positive relationships, and sustainable development. While most administrators demonstrate favorable attitudes toward virtuous leadership, Grimani and Gotsis (2022) noted that the absence of clear and effective developmental frameworks remains a key limitation, making the promotion of virtuous leadership difficult to implement in practice.

In Thailand, virtuous leadership among school administrators comprises core components such as Justice, Courage, Humanity, Temperance, Integrity and Responsibility. These elements are essential for fostering trust, ethical climate, and sustainable school improvement. Their importance lies in shaping not only administrators' personal conduct but also influencing the moral development of students and the overall school culture. In the Thai educational context, developing ethical leadership is necessary due to the lack of structured support systems, insufficient assessment mechanisms, and limited promotion of moral decision-making. Therefore, identifying and strengthening these components is vital for achieving educational reform and long-term organizational credibility.

Given these reasons, studying the needs for developing virtuous leadership among secondary school administrators is of critical importance. It enables the creation of tailored developmental strategies and innovative administrative models that align with the educational context and national moral policy. Particularly, gathering perspectives from regional education office directors, school board chairpersons, and teachers those who work closely with school leaders can provide a comprehensive understanding of both the current and desired states of virtuous leadership development. Such insights will serve as a solid foundation for planning and designing effective leadership development approaches that are truly responsive to the needs and contexts of Thai secondary schools.

Research objective

This study aims to investigate A Needs Assessment on how to develop Virtuous Leadership In Secondary School Administrators.

Conceptual framework

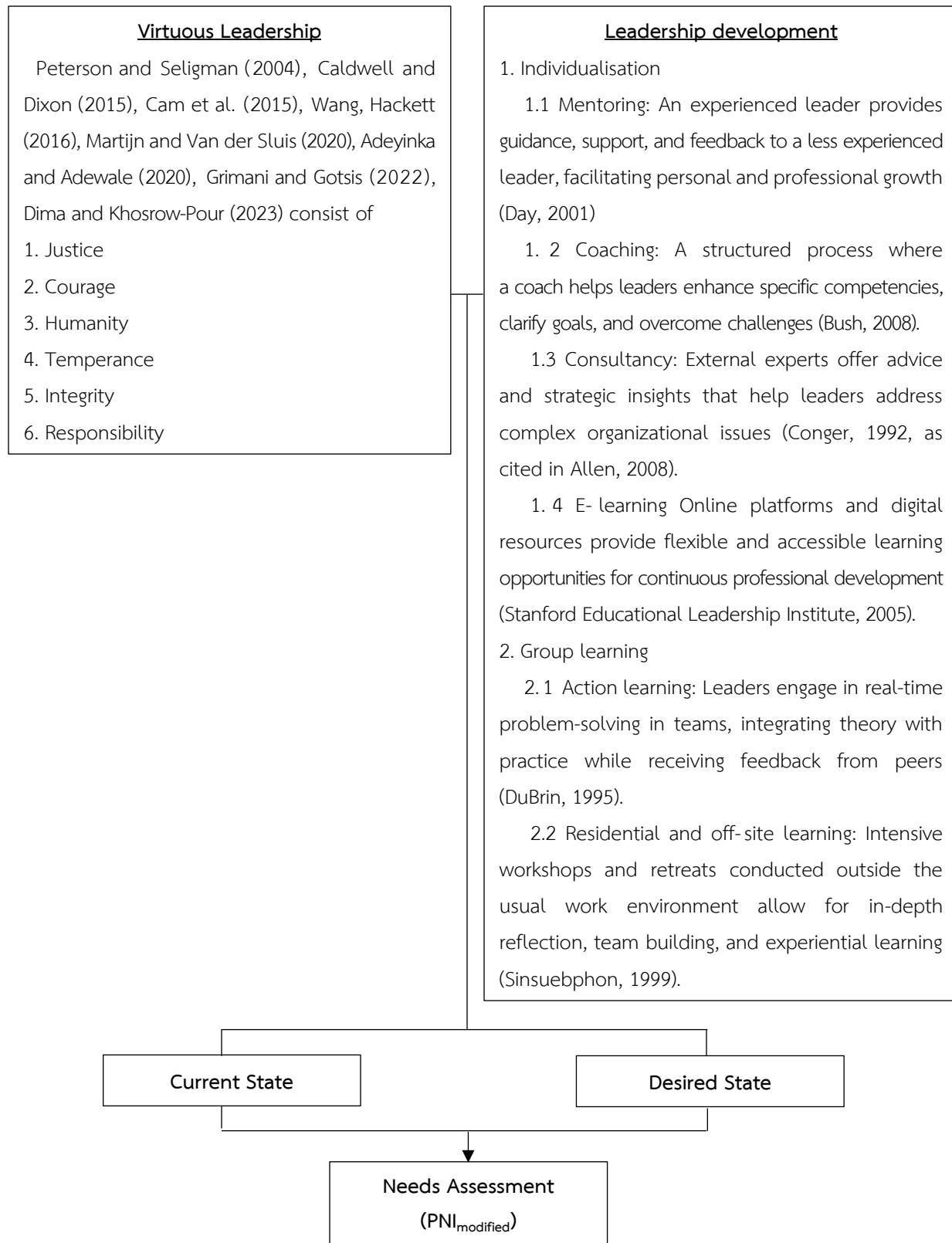


Figure 1 Conceptual framework of the study

Methodology

1. Population and Sample

1.1 Population

The population for this study consisted of 4,782 individuals, including 62 directors or deputy directors of secondary educational service area offices, 2,360 secondary school teachers under the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) who served as heads of academic departments, and 2,360 chairpersons of basic education school boards in secondary schools affiliated with OBEC.

1.2 Sample

The sample comprised directors or deputy directors of secondary educational service area offices—one person per office, totaling 62 individuals, selected through total population sampling. In addition, the sample included 343 secondary school teachers under the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) who served as heads of academic departments, and 343 chairpersons of basic education school boards in secondary schools affiliated with OBEC. Thus, the total sample size was 748 individuals.

A multi-stage random sampling method was employed to select the sample. The sample size was calculated using Yamane's formula (1973) at a 95% confidence level.

2. Research Instrument

The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire designed to assess the current and desired states of the development of secondary school administrators based on the concepts of leadership development and virtuous leadership. The questionnaire consisted of 72 items, which included both checklist items and a five-point Likert scale. It covered two main dimensions:

1. Individualised Learning, which included:
 - Learning through mentoring
 - Learning through coaching
 - Learning through consultancy
 - Learning via online systems and electronic media (E-learning)
2. Group Learning, which included:
 - Action learning
 - Residential and off-site learning

The researcher will use this to study the developmental needs of secondary school administrators based on the concept of virtuous leadership, in order to design an innovative development program for secondary school administrators grounded in virtuous leadership in the subsequent phase.

The quality of the research instrument was verified as follows:

2.1 Content Validity

The questionnaire was examined for content validity by a panel of five experts. The Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) values for all items ranged from 0.8 to 1.0, exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.5. This indicated that all 72 items met the criteria for content validity.

2.2 Reliability

The questionnaire was pilot-tested with 30 secondary school administrators, teachers, and chairpersons of basic education school boards who were not part of the actual study sample. The collected data were analyzed for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which yielded a reliability score of 0.97, indicating a high level of internal consistency. Additionally, the discrimination power of each item was assessed using the classical test theory approach by comparing the responses of the top 27% and bottom 27% of respondents. The results showed that all items had discrimination indices ranging from 0.32 to 0.78, which are considered acceptable to high, confirming the instrument's ability to differentiate effectively between individuals with varying levels of the measured attributes.

3. Data Collection

The data collection process was initiated by the researcher through an official request from the Academic Division of the Faculty of Education to the directors of Secondary Educational Service Area Offices and principals of secondary schools under the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC). The purpose was to seek cooperation in completing the researcher-developed questionnaire.

Data on the current and desired states of the development of secondary school administrators based on the concept of virtuous leadership were collected using online questionnaires via Google Forms. The data collection period was conducted between April and May 2025.

The researcher received completed responses from 51 out of 62 educational service areas, representing a response rate of 82.26%, and from 295 out of 343 secondary schools, accounting for a response rate of 86.01%.

4. Data Analysis

The data regarding the development of secondary school administrators based on the concept of virtuous leadership were analyzed using a statistical software package (SPSS for Windows). The statistical methods employed included: Frequency (f), Percentage (%), Mean (M), Standard Deviation (SD) and Modified Priority Needs Index (PNI_{modified})

Research and Discussion

The analysis of the current status, desired state, and priority needs for developing secondary school administrators based on the concept of virtuous leadership revealed several significant findings.

The current overall level of virtuous leadership development among secondary school administrators was high ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.78$). Both group learning and individual learning dimensions were similarly rated at a high level, with individual learning slightly higher ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.74$) than group learning ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.86$). The sample was diverse in terms of position, gender, experience, school size, and region, with 92% consisting of teachers and chairpersons of basic education school committees who work closely with school administrators. This proximity adds credibility to the data as these respondents provide direct insight into the leadership practices and development needs of administrators. Sharma (2015) emphasized the importance of direct interaction between administrators and teachers as a critical factor in understanding leadership outcomes, supporting the reliability of these findings.

Despite the overall high rating of virtuous leadership ($M = 4.22$), individual learning scored the lowest among the dimensions ($M = 4.18$), indicating limitations in self-development and a lack of structured support for personal learning. Tantineeranat (2018) similarly identified “self-care” as the least practiced dimension among school leaders, especially regarding health management, time management, and stress control key elements for sustainable leadership development. This suggests that while administrators prioritize collective ethics and institutional responsibilities, foundational personal development requires more attention. Systems that support individual learning, such as wellness programs, scheduled learning time, and professional coaching, should be emphasized to foster resilient and ethically grounded leadership.

Stakeholders expressed very high expectations for virtuous leadership development overall ($M = 4.87$, $SD = 0.36$). The individual learning dimension had the highest desired score ($M = 4.89$, $SD = 0.31$), closely followed by group learning ($M = 4.84$, $SD = 0.44$). This reflects the organizational demand for leaders capable of self-directed learning and mentoring others, as noted by Intharabutr (2019). In a constantly evolving educational environment, such leadership is essential to build trust and inspire personnel. The findings indicate that schools require leaders who are not only effective managers but also moral exemplars who cultivate an ethical culture and promote shared learning.

The overall Modified Priority Needs Index ($PNI_{\text{modified}} = 0.154$) shows a moderately high demand for development, with group learning ranked highest ($PNI_{\text{modified}} = 0.158$). This emphasizes the importance of interactive, practice-based learning methods, such as mentoring and coaching, which involve close

guidance and interpersonal support. Furthermore, moral development through digital platforms was identified as a priority area with considerable potential for growth. Martijn and Van der Sluis (2020) similarly highlighted that digital media for leadership development remains underutilized and requires ongoing enhancement. Digital tools, although promising, need to be effectively tailored to the learning context to truly support moral leadership development.

These results reveal a moderate to high level of need for developing secondary school administrators, particularly through group learning activities that emphasize interactive, practice-based methods and digital moral development. The need arises because group learning facilitates effective moral leadership development through close interpersonal support, whereas digital tools have yet to be fully optimized in the learning environment. Additionally, there is a lack of structured support for continuous self-directed learning and personal growth among administrators.

These findings are consistent with previous research. Tantineerarat (2018) identified “self-care” as the least practiced dimension among school leaders. Sharma (2015) stressed the critical role of direct interaction between administrators and teachers in leadership development. Intharabutr (2019) underscored the organizational demand for leaders capable of self-directed learning and mentoring others. Additionally, Martijn and Van der Sluis (2020) noted that digital media use in leadership development remains insufficiently supported and requires continuous improvement.

In conclusion, the results highlight the necessity of designing development systems that integrate both personalized and group learning approaches to sustainably and effectively cultivate virtuous leadership capacities in secondary school administrators, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Development of Secondary School Administrators Based on the Concept of Virtuous Leadership: Current Situation, Desired Situation, and Modified Priority Needs Index (PNI).

No.	Development of Secondary School Administrators Based on the Concept of Virtuous Leadership	Current Situation			Desired Situation			PNI _{modified}	Priority Rank
		M	SD	Level	M	SD	Level		
1	Individual Learning	4.24	0.74	High	4.89	0.31	Highest	0.153	2
2	Group Learning	4.18	0.86	High	4.84	0.44	Highest	0.158	1
Overall		4.22	0.78	High	4.87	0.36	Highest	0.154	-

The results of the needs analysis and prioritization clearly indicate that different development methods, whether group-based or individual, are more effective in cultivating specific sub-indicators of virtuous leadership among secondary school administrators. Table 2 summarizes these findings by highlighting which methods contribute most significantly to the development of each sub-indicator:

1. Mentoring (Group & Individual Method)

Mentoring strongly supports the development of equality within the organization, with the highest priority need focused on treating individuals equally ($PNI_{\text{modified}} = 0.228$). It also effectively fosters truthfulness and promise-keeping, empowerment to act rightly without fear, responsibility-taking for school problems, empathy and cooperation, and emotional self-regulation.

2. Coaching (Individual Method)

Coaching is particularly effective in enhancing administrators' ability to regulate emotions and personal desires for maintaining balance ($PNI_{\text{modified}} = 0.211$). It also promotes empowerment aligned with personal values, equality, honesty, accountability, and empathy.

3. Consultancy (Individual Method)

Consultancy primarily addresses the promotion of equality, responsibility, truthfulness, empathy, emotional balance, and encouraging right actions without fear, though with slightly lower priority needs compared to mentoring and coaching.

4. E-learning and Digital Media (Group & Individual Method)

Digital learning platforms are notably effective in encouraging courageous right action and fostering empathy and cooperation. They also support equality, truthfulness, accountability, and emotional regulation, though these areas still require further enhancement.

5. Action Learning (Group Method)

Action learning excels in promoting responsibility and problem-solving. It also cultivates courageous actions, truthfulness, emotional balance, equality, and empathetic collaboration through practice-based group learning.

6. Residential and Off-site Training (Group Method)

This method emphasizes truthfulness and promise-keeping most strongly and supports empathy, emotional balance, courageous action, responsibility, and equality within the learning community.

In summary, the analysis reveals that group learning methods such as mentoring, action learning, and residential training are especially impactful in developing interpersonal and ethical dimensions of virtuous leadership, including equality, empathy, and collaboration. Meanwhile, individual-focused

methods such as coaching and consultancy significantly contribute to personal mastery, emotional regulation, and ethical responsibility. Digital and e-learning platforms hold promising potential to support multiple sub-indicators but require continued development to maximize their effectiveness.

Table 2 Current Situation, Desired Condition, and Needs for the Development of Secondary School Administrators Based on the Concept of Virtuous Leadership.

No.	Development of Secondary School Administrators Based on the Concept of Virtuous Leadership	Current Situation			Desired Situation			PNI _{modified}	Priority Rank
		M	SD	level	M	SD	level		
Individual Learning									
1	Learning through mentoring	4.17	0.68	High	4.84	0.37	Highest	0.161	2
2	Learning through coaching	4.14	0.67	High	4.90	0.31	Highest	0.184	1
3	Learning through advising	4.41	0.71	High	4.97	0.18	Highest	0.127	4
4	Learning through online systems and electronic media	4.24	0.85	High	4.86	0.35	Highest	0.146	3
Overall		4.24	0.74	High	4.89	0.31	Highest	0.153	-
Group Learning									
1	Learning through practice	4.29	0.78	High	4.93	0.26	Highest	0.149	2
2	Learning through off-site training (retreat format)	4.07	0.93	High	4.75	0.55	Highest	0.167	1
Overall		4.18	0.86	High	4.84	0.44	Highest	Highest	-

Recommendations

Recommendations for practices

1. The Ministry of Education and affiliated agencies should establish clear policies or frameworks for the development of virtuous leadership, particularly focusing on moral behaviors such as constructive assertiveness, emotional regulation, and fairness. These elements are essential to elevate the standard of educational leadership across all regions in a systematic and continuous manner. Educational administration units, such as the Office of Educational Service Area, should promote the formulation of Individual Development Plans (IDP) for school administrators, linking these plans to performance evaluation systems and professional advancement mechanisms.

2. Group-based training programs on virtuous leadership should be developed, emphasizing coaching, mentoring, and peer learning processes. These approaches encourage administrators to engage in collaborative learning and to practice ethical behaviors continuously through simulated situations.

3. School administrators can utilize the findings of this research as a guideline for self-development planning. Emphasis should be placed on cultivating moral leadership in areas such as self-discipline, compassion, and justice. Moreover, tools for assessing the current and desired states of leadership qualities should be used regularly to support structured and ongoing professional development.

Recommendations for further research

Based on the findings of this study regarding the development of secondary school administrators through the concept of virtuous leadership, several recommendations for future research are proposed:

1. Longitudinal Studies on Development Impact

Future research should consider longitudinal designs to track the long-term effects of different development methods such as mentoring, coaching, and action learning on the virtuous leadership competencies of school administrators. This would provide deeper insight into the sustainability and evolution of leadership behaviors over time.

2. Comparative Effectiveness of Development Methods

Further studies could explore the comparative effectiveness of group-based versus individual-focused development methods in different educational contexts. This would help clarify which approaches are most suitable for specific leadership sub-indicators, and under what conditions they yield the greatest improvements.

3. Digital Platform Optimization for Virtuous Leadership

Given the identified potential and current limitations of digital learning tools, future research should focus on designing, implementing, and evaluating tailored digital platforms that effectively support moral leadership development. Investigations into user engagement, content personalization, and interactive features would be valuable.

4. Contextual Factors Influencing Leadership Development

Research exploring how contextual variables such as school size, regional culture, and administrative workload affect the uptake and success of virtuous leadership development programs would provide actionable insights for program customization and policy formulation.

Conclusions

The study aimed to analyze the current situation, desired condition, and priority needs for the development of secondary school administrators based on the concept of virtuous leadership. The findings revealed that the overall current state of administrator development was at a high level, while the desired condition was rated at the highest level. Among the two key dimensions studied individual learning and group learning both were found to be in need of further development, with group learning showing slightly higher priority needs.

The analysis of the Modified Priority Needs Index (PNI_{modified}) indicated that group learning had the highest priority for development ($PNI_{\text{modified}} = 0.158$), particularly through residential and off-site training and action learning. In terms of individual learning, coaching and mentoring showed the highest needs, with a focus on promoting emotional regulation, ethical behavior, and equity within the organization.

More specifically, high-priority needs were identified in several areas, such as: Fostering ethical behavior through coaching and mentoring, Promoting emotional self-regulation and accountability, Encouraging moral courage and fairness in decision-making and Utilizing both traditional and digital platforms for learning and leadership development.

These findings suggest that a balanced approach integrating both individual and group learning methods—with emphasis on virtuous leadership principles—can significantly contribute to the holistic development of school administrators. Targeted training programs should prioritize coaching, mentoring, and experiential learning strategies that embed moral and ethical competencies, thereby enhancing leadership effectiveness and school performance.

Acknowledgements

The researcher would like to express sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Education and all related educational authorities for their support and cooperation throughout this study. Special thanks are extended to the school administrators, teachers, and school board members who participated in the survey and provided valuable insights, which significantly contributed to the findings of this research.

Appreciation is also given to the academic advisors for their thoughtful guidance, encouragement, and constructive feedback during every stage of this research. Their expertise was instrumental in shaping the direction and quality of this study.

Finally, the researcher would like to thank all colleagues and institutions who supported this work both directly and indirectly. Their assistance made this research possible and meaningful.

References

- Adeyinka & Adewale. (2020). A Model of Virtuous Leadership in Africa: Case Study of a Nigerian Firm. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 161, 749-762.
- Allen, S. J. (2008). Adult learning theory & leadership development. *Leadership Review*, 8, 26-40.
- Bush. (2008). *Educational management administration & leadership*, 36(2), 271-288.
- Caldwell, C., & Dixon, R. D. (2015). Love, forgiveness, and trust: Critical values of the modern leader. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 93(1), 91-101.
- Cam, P., Hand, M., & Levinson, R. (2015). Philosophy for Children, Values Education and Philosophy of Education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 47(9), 898-903.
- Conger, J. A. (1992). *Learning to lead: The art of transforming managers into leaders*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Day, D. V. (2001). Leadership development: A review in context. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 11(4), 581-613.
- Dima, A. M., Almaraz, J., & Khosrow-Pour, M. (2023). Moral Leadership in Contemporary Education: Challenges and Frameworks. *Journal of Educational Leadership and Ethics*, 11(1), 45-62.
- DuBrin, A. J. (1995). *Leadership: Research findings, practice, and skills* (2nd ed.). Houghton Mifflin.
- Grimani, K., & Gotsis, G. (2022). Ethical leadership and its development: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 179(1), 123-145.
- Intarabutr, W. (2019). *Leadership and professional development in educational institutions: A study of school administrators in Thailand* [Master's thesis, Chulalongkorn University].
- Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2020). *Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited*. *School Leadership & Management*, 40(1), 5-22.
- Martijn, J., & Van der Sluis, J. (2020). Online leadership development: Enhancing ethical decision-making through digital tools. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 23(2), 235-250.
- Northouse, P. G. (2019). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (8th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. Oxford University Press.
- Quade, M. J., Perry, S. J., & Hunter, E. M. (2021). The paradoxical effects of leader humility and competence on follower engagement and performance. *Journal of Management*, 47(4), 957-986.
- Sergiovanni, T. J. (1992). *Moral leadership: Getting to the heart of school improvement*. Jossey-Bass.

- Sharma, R. (2015). *Leadership and management in education: A guide for educators*. Oxford University Press.
- Sinsuebphon, N. (1999). *Human Development and Training*. Dhonburi Rajabhat.
- Stanford Educational Leadership Institute. (2005). *Developing successful principals*. The Wallace Foundation.
- Tantineeranat, D. (2018). *A development guideline of caring leadership for school administrators based on the educational vision of the Foundation of the Church of Christ in Thailand* [Master's thesis, Chulalongkorn University]. Chulalongkorn University Theses and Dissertations. <https://digital.car.chula.ac.th/chulaetd/3036>
- Wang, L., & Hackett, R. D. (2016). Virtuous leadership: The role of character strengths in ethical leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 27(5), 801-814.
- Yamane, T. (1973). *Statistics: An introductory analysis* (2nd ed.). Harper & Row.