



Culturally Responsive Leadership Development Needs for International School Leaders in Thailand

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the culturally responsive leadership development needs for international school leaders in Thailand. The study involved 67 participants, including 13 Thai school directors, 9 foreign principals, 24 Thai teachers, and 21 foreign teachers. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed by calculating frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and the modified Priority Needs Index (PNI_{modified}). The research instrument was validated by a panel of experts, with item-objective congruence (IOC) values ranging from 0.80 to 1.00, and demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.965$). The results showed that the current state of culturally responsive leadership was at a high level, while the desired state was at the highest level. Engagement with students, parents, and local communities was identified as the top priority ($PNI_{\text{modified}} = 0.237$). For this area, cohorts and networks (33.60%) were the most preferred development strategies, with a duration of 1-3 days (32.56%) and an onsite learning format (44.94%). Promoting culturally inclusive school environments ($PNI_{\text{modified}} = 0.232$) ranked second among priorities. In this area, applied learning, cohorts, and networks (31.58%) were preferred strategies, with a 1-3-day duration (33.73%) and an onsite format (43.30%). This was followed by critical self-reflection on leadership behaviors ($PNI_{\text{modified}} = 0.190$), with cohorts and networks (34.04%) most favored, a 1-3-day duration (43.33%), and a hybrid learning format (41.00%). Lastly, developing culturally responsive teachers ($PNI_{\text{modified}} = 0.158$) was identified as the lowest priority. For this area, coaching and mentoring, along with cohorts and networks (31.85%), were the preferred strategies, with a duration of 1-3 days (37.04%) and a hybrid format (41.84%). The

study's contribution to scholarship on culturally responsive leadership development, especially in the Thai or Southeast Asian context.

Keywords: Leadership Development, Culturally Responsive Leadership, Priority Needs, International Schools in Thailand

Introduction

The modern world is increasingly influenced by rapid and unpredictable change, often described using the BANI (Brittle, Anxious, Nonlinear, Incomprehensible) framework. These changes, driven by globalization, mobility, and sociocultural transformation, have increased multicultural interactions throughout many sectors, including education. While such diversity presents valuable opportunities for intercultural learning, it also involves challenges, particularly in international schools where students and teachers come from diverse cultural, linguistic, and national backgrounds (Walker & Dimmock, 2005; Shliakhovchuk, 2019).

Within this context, culturally responsive leadership (CRL) has gained recognition as an essential competency for school leaders. Rather than focusing solely on administrative effectiveness, CRL emphasizes the ability to recognize cultural differences, address inequalities, and create accepting environments where all members of the school community feel appreciated (Khalifa, 2018; UNESCO, 2022). Although much of the existing research originates from Western contexts, often focusing on racial and ethnic disparities, its core principles are increasingly relevant in Asian settings, including Thailand, where issues of cultural inclusion are becoming more prominent (Dola et al., 2022).

The rapid growth of international schools in Thailand shows the importance of this issue. This expansion has been driven by both parental demand and national policies aimed at positioning Thailand as a regional education hub (Bureau of Academic Affairs and Educational Standards, 2018). However, research indicates that many school leaders are not adequately prepared to manage culturally diverse settings. In particular, there is a lack of structured professional development that provides leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to implement culturally responsive practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Khalifa, 2018).

This concern is also reflected in international accreditation standards. Organizations such as the Council of International Schools (CIS), the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), and Education Development Trust (EDT) increasingly value cultural inclusion, diversity, and equity as key indicators of school quality (Council of

International Schools, 2021; Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2021). These expectations place additional demands on school leaders to develop competencies that go beyond traditional leadership roles.

When CRL is underdeveloped, the consequences can be significant. Students may experience exclusion or a lack of belonging, which can negatively affect both academic achievement and mental health. Teachers may feel professionally marginalized, while parents, particularly those from minority cultural backgrounds, may experience barriers to effective engagement with schools (Sleeter & Grant, 2009; Nieto, 2008; Banks, 2016; Ishimaru et al., 2016). Those conditions can weaken trust and reduce the school's overall effectiveness.

In response, Thailand's national quality assurance systems have begun to integrate elements of culturally responsive practices. For example, the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA) has introduced indicators of cultural responsiveness into its evaluation framework for international schools (Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment, 2025). At the same time, international standards increasingly promote initiatives such as staff diversification, development of cultural competence, and fair recruitment practices.

Although these developments, empirical research on the development of CRL among international school leaders in Thailand remains limited. Existing studies have primarily focused on multicultural awareness rather than structured leadership development, primarily within international school contexts. This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by identifying the specific development needs of school leaders in Thailand to deliver more targeted, contextually relevant professional development.

In today's increasingly interconnected educational field, CRL is no longer optional; it is a fundamental need for encouraging equity, inclusion, and meaningful learning throughout diverse school communities. Accordingly, this study presents empirical evidence to support the development of leadership practices that respond appropriately to cultural diversity in international school settings (Gay, 2010; Banks & Banks, 2016; Epstein, 2010).

Research objectives

This study aims to examine the development needs of culturally responsive leadership among international school leaders in Thailand.

Conceptual framework

This study adopts Culturally Responsive Leadership (CRL) as its primary conceptual framework because its objective is to identify the development needs of CRL among international school leaders. CRL is grounded in the literature on educational equity, social justice, and culturally responsive practice (Khalifa et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018; Gooden, 2005; Ishimaru, 2013). It focuses on leadership practices that go beyond recognizing diversity, encompassing the ability to promote equity, challenge institutional inequities, and create inclusive school environments.

In international schools, CRL requires a more complex, context-sensitive application than in general school settings. International schools are characterized by high levels of diversity, not only in student populations but also in language, culture, nationality, family expectations, and institutional criteria set by global accreditation bodies. In such environments, CRL entails the ability to navigate intercultural communication, work effectively with diverse parents and communities, and support a school climate in which all members feel respected and included. This positions CRL as a critical competency for ensuring both educational equity and organizational integration in multicultural settings.

Based on a synthesis of relevant literature, this study conceptualizes CRL through four interrelated dimensions: (1) critically self-reflecting on leadership behaviors, (2) developing culturally responsive teachers, (3) promoting a culturally responsive and accepting school environment, and (4) engaging students, parents, and local contexts. These dimensions represent the core competencies the study seeks to examine and develop.

To support the interpretation of development approaches, the study includes School Leadership Development as a supplementary framework. Rather than serving as a primary conceptual framework, this component explains how CRL competencies can be developed in practice. It consists of three key elements: 1) Development Strategies: (1) Internships, (2) Applied Learning, (3) Coaching and Mentoring, and (4) Cohorts and Networks. 2) Duration of Development: (1) Half day-1 day, (2) 1-3 days, (3) 3-7 days, (4) 2 weeks-1 month, and (5) More than 1 month. 3) Learning Formats: (1) Onsite, (2) Online, (3) On Demand, and (4) Hybrid. These elements represent the means of development (how CRL competencies are developed) rather than the study's theoretical core.

Accordingly, the conceptual framework positions CRL as the central construct, with school leadership development components serving as supporting mechanisms for translating identified needs into practical development designs. This integration enables the study to link the analysis of leadership competency gaps to appropriate development strategies, durations, and learning formats that are

responsive to the context of international schools in Thailand. The overall conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

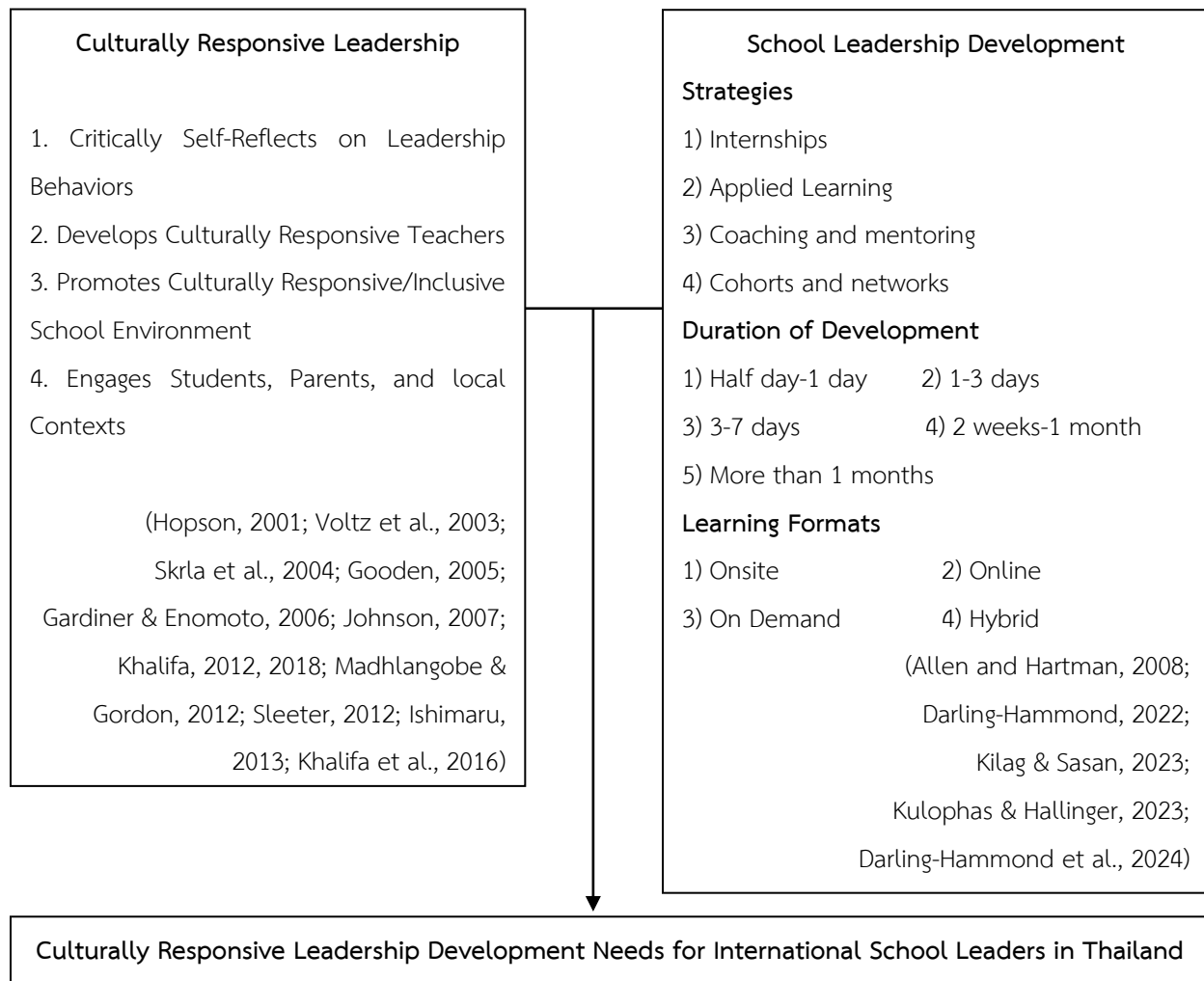


Figure 1 Conceptual research framework

Methodology

This study used a quantitative, descriptive research design to examine the development needs for culturally responsive leadership among international school leaders in Thailand.

1. The population and sample

The target population of this study comprised international school leaders and educators working in international schools across Thailand. Given the exploratory nature of this study and the focus on identifying development needs, a purposive sampling approach was used to ensure the inclusion of participants with relevant experience in multicultural school settings.

Participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) currently working in an international school in Thailand, and (2) having direct experience in teaching, school leadership, or school administration within culturally diverse environments. A total of 67 respondents participated in the study, including 13 Thai school directors, 9 foreign principals, 24 Thai teachers, and 21 foreign teachers.

The sample included participants with multiple demographic and professional backgrounds, including gender, age, educational qualifications, and years of experience in their current roles. In addition, respondents were drawn from multiple regions across Thailand, including Bangkok and the Central, Northern, Southern, and Northeastern regions.

Although the sample was not intended to be statistically representative, the inclusion of participants from different professional roles and geographic areas enabled the study to capture a scope of perspectives on culturally responsive leadership throughout diverse international school contexts. Such diversity strengthens the relevance of the findings for understanding development needs across different institutional and cultural settings.

2. Research instrument

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire titled “Culturally Responsive Leadership Development Needs for International School Leaders in Thailand.” It was built on a conceptual framework adapted from Khalifa’s (2016) Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) model. The instrument aimed to measure both the current and desired levels of leadership skills across four main areas: (1) critically self-reflecting on leadership behaviors, (2) developing culturally responsive teachers, (3) promoting a culturally responsive and inclusive school environment, and (4) engaging students, parents, and local communities. The development approaches consist of three key elements: (1) development strategies, (2) duration of development, and (3) learning formats.

The questionnaire was composed of three sections:

Section 1 collected demographic data through checklist items, including gender, age, educational qualification, position, years of experience, and school location.

Section 2 examined the current state and the desired state of culturally responsive leadership development. It contained 15 sub-dimensions under the four core domains. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale for both current and desired states.

Section 3 focused on respondents’ preferences for school leader development strategies, durations, and learning formats, including items on applied learning, coaching, mentoring, and collaborative learning formats (online, onsite, hybrid).

The content validity of the questionnaire was assessed by five experts in educational leadership and multicultural education using the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) method. Items with IOC values above 0.5 were kept. The instrument's internal consistency was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.965, indicating high reliability (Kanjanaawasee, 2013).

3. Data analysis

Descriptive statistics, frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to describe the participants and summarize their responses. To evaluate development needs, the modified Priority Needs Index (PNI_{modified}) was calculated as $(I-D)/D$, where I represents the desired mean and D the current mean. This index helps prioritize leadership development needs by showing the size of perceived gaps between the current and desired states. PNI_{modified} has been widely employed in educational needs assessment research due to its clearness and simplicity of interpretation (Wongwanit, 2019).

Research results

This study surveyed 67 educators from international schools across Thailand, consisting of 34.33% males and 65.67% females. Participants included Thai school directors (19.40%), foreign principals (13.43%), Thai teachers (35.82%), and foreign teachers (31.34%). The majority were aged 41–50 years (35.82%), followed by those over 51 (28.36%).

In terms of qualifications, most held a master's degree (62.69%), with 29.85% holding a bachelor's and 7.46% a doctorate. Regarding tenure, 35.82% had less than five years of experience in their current role, while nearly half had 6–24 years. Geographically, respondents came from varied regions: 53.73% from Bangkok, and the rest from the Central, Northern, Southern, and Northeastern areas.

This sample shows variety in leadership and teaching roles, ages, education levels, and regional school settings. The next section presents findings on the current state, desired state, and the top needs for culturally responsive leadership development among international school leaders in Thailand.

Table 1 The current and desired states of culturally responsive leadership development for international school leaders in Thailand.

Culturally Responsive Leadership	Current State			Desired State			PNI _{modified}	Rank
	M	SD	Result	M	SD	Result		
1. Critically self-reflects on leadership behaviors								
1.1 Commitment to learning about cultural diversity	4.00	0.58	High	4.88	0.33	Highest	0.220	1
1.2 Critical analysis of roles and responsibilities	4.01	0.75	High	4.78	0.45	Highest	0.190	3
1.3 Openness to feedback from parents and the community	4.04	0.56	High	4.90	0.35	Highest	0.210	2
1.4 Continuous monitoring and evaluation of cultural responsiveness in schools	4.13	0.65	High	4.75	0.47	Highest	0.148	4
2. Develops culturally responsive teachers								
2.1 Professional development of teachers to improve teaching that aligns with cultural diversity	4.07	1.02	High	4.73	0.48	Highest	0.161	3
2.2 Creating opportunities for ongoing professional development	4.30	0.98	High	4.84	0.41	Highest	0.125	4
2.3 Supporting teachers in using assessment tools and methods that meet cultural needs	4.01	0.98	High	4.75	0.47	Highest	0.182	1
2.4 Analyzing school data to support teacher professional development and improve teaching to meet the needs of all student groups	4.10	1.06	High	4.79	0.48	Highest	0.167	2
3. Promotes culturally responsive/inclusive school environment								
3.1 Modeling the creation of a learning environment that respects cultural identity	3.94	0.72	High	4.87	0.39	Highest	0.235	2
3.2 Creating an atmosphere where students feel safe and accepted	3.97	0.78	High	4.97	0.24	Highest	0.252	1
3.3 Using data to analyze disparities in learning and disciplinary actions to ensure	3.93	0.86	High	4.75	0.44	Highest	0.209	3

Culturally Responsive Leadership	Current State			Desired State			PNI _{modified}	Rank
	M	SD	Result	M	SD	Result		
equity in education and inclusive development								
4. Engages students, parents, and local contexts								
4.1 Playing a role in building positive relationships with students, parents, and the community	3.96	0.56	High	4.94	0.30	Highest	0.249	1
4.2 Supporting activities that encourage participation	3.99	0.62	High	4.96	0.27	Highest	0.243	2
4.3 Sharing positive information and jointly setting policies to ensure education aligns with local contexts	3.94	0.76	High	4.81	0.43	Highest	0.220	4
4.4 Promoting participation and building learning networks for the well-being of all members of the educational community	3.90	0.78	High	4.82	0.42	Highest	0.238	3

Note: The interpretation of mean scores was based on a five-point Likert scale: 4.51-5.00 = Highest, 3.51-4.50 = High, 2.51-3.50 = Moderate, 1.51-2.50 = Low, and 1.00-1.50 = Lowest.

The results in Table 1 indicate that international school leaders in Thailand perceive the current state of culturally responsive leadership (CRL) development as relatively strong across all four core dimensions. Among the subdimensions, creating opportunities for ongoing professional development reported the highest mean score ($M = 4.30$), suggesting that leaders place considerable emphasis on continuous learning as a foundation for culturally responsive practice. In contrast, promoting participation and building learning networks for the well-being of all individuals of the educational community received the lowest mean ($M = 3.90$), indicating comparatively less emphasis on greater community participation in current practice.

In terms of the desirable state, all dimensions were rated at the highest level, conveying strong aspirations for further development. The highest desired mean was found in creating an atmosphere where students feel safe and accepted ($M = 4.97$), illustrating the importance leaders place on cultivating inclusive and caring school environments. Conversely, professional development of teachers to improve

teaching that aligns with cultural diversity received the lowest desired mean ($M = 4.73$), although it remained at a high level overall.

The Priority Needs Index (PNI_{modified}) further clarifies these patterns through identifying areas where the gap between current and desired states is most pronounced. The highest priority need was creating an atmosphere where students feel safe and accepted ($PNI_{\text{modified}} = 0.252$), followed closely by playing a role in building positive relationships with students, parents, and the community ($PNI_{\text{modified}} = 0.249$). These data show that, despite relatively strong current practices, school leaders perceive a significant need to strengthen relational and affective dimensions of leadership, particularly those that promote inclusion, trust, and a sense of belonging throughout culturally diverse school communities.

Table 2 The desired state of culturally responsive leadership development for international school leaders in Thailand (Overall).

Culturally Responsive Leadership	M	SD	Result	Rank
1. Critically self-reflecting on leadership behaviors	4.45	0.84	High	3
2. Developing culturally responsive teachers	4.42	0.76	High	4
3. Promoting a culturally responsive/inclusive school environment	4.57	0.66	Highest	2
4. Engaging students, parents, and local contexts	4.60	0.63	Highest	1

Table 2 shows the aggregated desired means and standard deviations for culturally responsive leadership development among international school leaders in Thailand. All four core dimensions were rated at high to highest levels, showing a strong desire to improve leadership capacity in multicultural settings.

The highest desired mean was found in engaging students, parents, and local contexts ($M = 4.60$), followed by promoting a culturally responsive/inclusive school environment ($M = 4.57$). These data highlight the importance that leaders assign to relational and community-focused leadership practices that encourage stakeholder engagement beyond internal school operations. This emphasis aligns well with research emphasizing community partnership as a key to culturally responsive leadership.

Critically self-reflecting on leadership behaviors ($M = 4.45$) also ranked highly, showing recognition of the importance of reflexivity and adjustability in diverse culturally based settings. Similarly, developing culturally responsive teachers ($M = 4.42$) was identified as a key priority, confirming the role of teacher development in promoting culturally relevant pedagogy and impartial learning opportunities.

Overall, the results point out a common belief that culturally responsive leadership should be integrated across all aspects of school practice, rather than viewed as a separate skill.

Table 3 Opinions on developing culturally responsive leadership for international school administrators in Thailand.

Developing School Leaders	Frequency/Percentage	Strategies					Duration of Development						Learning Formats				
		Internships	Applied Learning	Coaching and mentoring	Cohorts and networks	Total	Half day – 1 day	1 – 3 days	3 – 7 days	2 weeks – 1 month	More than 1 month	Total	Onsite	Online	On Demand	Hybrid	Total
1. Critically self-reflecting on leadership behaviors	f	72	128	192	172	564	44	104	28	64	76	316	152	48	36	164	400
	%	12.77	22.70	34.04	30.50	100.00	18.33	43.33	11.67	26.67	24.05	100.00	38.00	12.00	9.00	41.00	100.00
1.1 committed to learning about cultural diversity	f	15	30	50	43	138	10	28	6	18	22	84	39	14	10	40	103
	%	20.83	23.44	26.04	25.00	24.47	22.73	26.923	21.43	28.13	28.95	26.58	25.66	29.17	27.78	24.39	25.75
1.2 critically analyze their roles and practices	f	17	35	45	45	142	10	26	8	14	24	82	42	11	8	42	103
	%	23.61	27.34	23.44	26.16	25.18	22.73	25.00	28.57	21.88	31.58	25.95	27.63	22.92	22.22	25.61	25.75
1.3 receptive to feedback from parents and the community	f	19	29	49	41	138	11	26	7	15	17	76	33	13	12	39	97
	%	26.39	22.66	25.52	23.84	24.47	25.00	25.00	25.00	23.44	22.37	24.05	21.71	27.08	33.33	23.78	24.25
1.4 consistently monitor and evaluate cultural responsiveness in schools	f	21	34	48	43	146	13	24	7	17	13	74	38	10	6	43	97
	%	29.17	26.56	25.00	25.00	25.89	29.55	23.08	25.00	26.56	17.11	23.42	25.00	20.83	16.67	26.22	24.25
2. Developing culturally responsive teachers	f	56	140	172	172	540	40	120	44	56	64	324	152	40	36	164	392
	%	10.37	25.93	31.85	31.85	100.00	12.35	37.04	13.58	17.28	19.75	100.00	38.78	10.20	9.18	41.84	100.00
2.1 enhance teachers' skills in managing instruction that accommodates cultural diversity	f	11	35	45	40	131	9	30	13	16	19	87	37	11	9	38	95
	%	19.64	25.00	26.16	23.26	24.26	22.50	25.00	29.55	28.57	29.69	27.53	24.34	27.50	25.00	23.17	24.23
2.2 provide opportunities for continuous professional development	f	13	40	40	38	131	8	27	12	10	17	74	32	12	11	41	96
	%	23.21	28.57	23.26	22.09	24.26	20.00	22.50	27.27	17.86	26.56	23.42	21.05	30.00	30.56	25.00	24.49
2.3 support teachers in using assessment tools and methods that respond to cultural needs	f	20	34	44	45	143	12	28	10	13	16	79	35	8	6	43	92
	%	35.71	24.29	25.58	26.16	26.48	30.00	23.33	22.73	23.21	25.00	25.00	23.03	20.00	16.67	26.22	23.47
2.4 analyze school data in order to identify educational and developmental gaps for improving instruction for all student groups	f	12	31	43	49	135	11	35	9	17	12	84	48	9	10	42	109
	%	21.43	22.14	25.00	28.49	25.00	27.50	29.17	20.45	30.36	18.75	26.58	31.58	22.50	27.78	25.61	27.81

Developing School Leaders	Frequency/ Percentage	Strategies					Duration of Development						Learning Formats				
		Internships	Applied Learning	Coaching and mentoring	Cohorts and networks	Total	Half day – 1 day	1 – 3 days	3 – 7 days	2 weeks – 1 month	More than 1 months	Total	Onsite	Online	On Demand	Hybrid	Total
3. Promoting a culturally responsive/inclusive school environment	f	42	126	105	126	399	42	84	18	45	60	249	126	30	24	111	291
	%	10.53	31.58	26.32	31.58	100.00	16.87	33.73	7.23	18.07	24.10	100.00	43.30	10.31	8.25	38.14	100.00
3.1 model the creation of a learning environment that respects cultural identities	f	15	44	31	42	132	9	31	8	13	19	80	45	8	8	35	96
	%	35.71	34.92	29.52	33.33	33.08	21.43	36.90	44.44	28.89	31.67	32.13	35.71	26.67	33.33	31.53	32.99
3.2 create an atmosphere where students feel safe and accepted	f	10	40	38	48	136	18	26	4	17	15	80	41	12	10	37	100
	%	23.81	31.75	36.19	38.10	34.09	42.86	30.95	22.22	37.78	25.00	32.13	32.54	40.00	41.67	33.33	34.36
3.3 use data to analyze inequalities in learning and discipline to create equity in education and ensure comprehensive development	f	17	42	36	36	131	15	27	6	15	16	79	40	10	6	39	95
	%	40.48	33.33	34.29	28.57	32.83	35.71	32.14	33.33	33.33	26.67	31.73	31.75	33.33	25.00	35.14	32.65
4. Engaging students, parents, and local contexts	f	56	148	128	168	500	60	112	52	44	76	344	160	36	24	136	356
	%	11.20	29.60	25.60	33.60	100.00	17.44	32.56	15.12	12.79	22.09	100.00	44.94	10.11	6.74	38.20	100.00
4.1 play a role in building positive relationships with students, parents, and the community	f	15	33	35	39	122	13	33	12	13	19	90	37	7	5	32	81
	%	26.79	22.30	27.34	23.21	24.40	21.67	29.46	23.08	29.55	25.00	26.16	23.13	19.44	20.83	23.53	22.75
4.2 support activities that foster participation	f	16	36	31	48	131	14	25	11	7	17	74	50	8	7	38	103
	%	28.57	24.32	24.22	28.57	26.20	23.33	22.32	21.15	15.91	22.37	21.51	31.25	22.22	29.17	27.94	28.93
4.3 share positive information and co-develop policies that ensure education meets local contexts	f	12	42	33	44	131	16	26	15	10	28	95	39	10	6	34	89
	%	21.43	28.38	25.78	26.19	26.20	26.67	23.21	28.85	22.73	36.84	27.62	24.38	27.78	25.00	25.00	25.00
4.4 promote participation and build learning networks for the well-being of everyone in the educational community	f	13	37	29	37	116	17	28	14	14	12	85	34	11	6	32	83
	%	23.21	25.00	22.66	22.02	23.20	28.33	25.00	26.92	31.82	15.79	24.71	21.25	30.56	25.00	23.53	23.31

Table 3 shows the preferences of international school administrators in Thailand regarding strategies, durations, and learning formats for developing culturally responsive leadership across four key dimensions.

For critically self-reflecting on leadership behaviors, coaching and mentoring emerged as the most preferred development strategies (34.04%). In terms of duration, the majority preferred short-term commitments (43.33%). Hybrid learning formats were the most popular (41.00%).

For teacher development in cultural responsiveness, coaching and mentoring (31.85%) and applied learning (25.93%) were prioritized, with 1-3 days being the most preferred duration (37.04%). Hybrid delivery remained the dominant method (41.84%).

To promote a culturally responsive/inclusive school environment, leadership development strategies focused on applied learning and cohort-based networks (both at 31.58%), with coaching and mentoring slightly less common (26.32%). While 1-3 days (33.73%) was the most common duration, 24.10% of programs lasted for more than 1 month. On-site learning was favored by 43.30% of respondents.

Engagement with external stakeholders was most effectively supported through cohort-based learning (33.60%) and applied learning (29.60%). Most respondents preferred short formats (13 days, 32.56%) and onsite delivery (44.94%), with hybrid formats (38.20%) also being popular.

Across all areas, the pattern is unmistakable: school leaders prefer development experiences that are interactive, flexible, and directly applicable. Such preferences align with the qualities of culturally responsive leadership, which emphasize sustained reflection and participation rather than mere conceptual understanding.

Conclusion and discussion

This study examined the development needs for culturally responsive leadership among international school leaders in Thailand. The findings indicate that, although leadership competencies were generally perceived as high across all four dimensions, critically self-reflecting on leadership behaviors, developing culturally responsive teachers, promoting inclusive school environments, and engaging students, parents, and local communities, a clear gap remains between current and desired states.

The dimension with the highest Priority Needs Index ($PNI_{\text{modified}} = 0.237$) was engagement with students, parents, and local contexts. This result can be understood in relation to the nature of CRL, which emphasizes leadership practices that extend beyond internal school management to include

meaningful interaction with diverse communities (Khalifa et al., 2016). In international school settings, where diversity extends beyond students to include parents, cultural expectations, and communication norms, engagement becomes a complex and demanding leadership function. While leaders may perceive themselves as generally effective, expectations for authentic, inclusive, and culturally responsive engagement are substantially higher, which helps explain why this dimension emerged as the highest-priority need.

The persistence of a gap despite high current ratings also reflects the developmental nature of culturally responsive leadership. According to Khalifa (2018), CRL is not a static competency but an ongoing process that requires continuous reflection, adaptation, and responsiveness to evolving cultural contexts. As a result, leaders may demonstrate foundational competence, yet still perceive the need for further development as expectations become more sophisticated. This dynamic helps explain why high current scores do not eliminate the perceived need for improvement.

Other dimensions, including the promotion of inclusive school environments ($M = 4.57$) and critical self-reflection ($M = 4.45$), were also rated as highly desirable. These findings reinforce the central role of reflection and inclusivity within CRL, aligning with theoretical perspectives that view leadership as a process of ongoing learning and critical awareness (Gooden, 2005; Ishimaru, 2013). Together, these dimensions suggest that effective culturally responsive leadership requires both internal (self-reflection) and external (community engagement) competencies.

These findings significantly provide practical implications for leadership development in international school contexts. Given that stakeholder engagement represents the most significant developmental need, leadership development programs should prioritize relational and context-responsive practices. This includes strengthening leaders' capacity for intercultural communication, community partnership, and inclusive decision-making. Furthermore, the presence of persistent gaps suggests that development should not rely solely on short-term training, but should incorporate continuous, practice-based approaches such as coaching, mentoring, and collaborative learning.

Overall, the findings extend existing literature by highlighting how CRL is enacted within the specific context of international schools, where cultural diversity is both broader and more complex than in general school settings (Lumby & Coleman, 2007). Leadership that effectively responds to this complexity can strengthen relationships, improve communication, and foster inclusive environments that support student success (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016; Johnson, 2014).

Recommendations

Recommendations for practical implications

1. Leadership development programs should focus more on relational and culturally grounded practices. Learning activities should be designed to simulate real school environments and promote critical reflection.
2. Short and flexible formats, such as workshops, coaching sessions, and hybrid learning, seem to be the best options for busy school leaders. These formats enable participants to engage in valuable learning without long-term disruptions to their professional responsibilities.
3. Coaching and mentoring should be core elements of leadership development. These methods provide tailored support and help leaders tackle real challenges in their specific settings.
4. School leaders must assist teachers in developing evaluation methods that are fair and suitable for different student groups.

Recommendations for further research

1. Upcoming research should investigate the long-term effects of culturally responsive leadership development on school outcomes, such as student achievement and school climate. Longitudinal studies would be especially useful in this area.
2. Comparative studies of different types of international schools and regions in Thailand could offer a greater understanding of contextual differences.
3. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods would help capture not only overall trends but also the lived experiences of school leaders working in multicultural environments.

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