Leadership development of curriculum leaders in a Lao Higher Education Institution

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Unitec Institute of Technology
Declaration

Name of candidate: Oud Sipasirth

This Thesis entitled: “Leadership development of curriculum leaders in a Lao higher education institution” is submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the Unitec Institute of Technology degree of Master of Educational Leadership and Management.

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I confirm that:

- This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project represents my own work;
- The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.
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ABSTRACT

The regional and national development plan for education has increased its intensity and now requires curriculum leaders to handle many additional tasks distributed from higher management. In pursuing their new roles and responsibilities, curriculum leaders are confronting many challenges and they need to acquire better knowledge and higher skills in order to fulfil the administrative tasks they are assigned. A leadership development programme would bring about improvement to knowledge and skills of curriculum leaders so they could make greater contribution to the country development.

A qualitative approach was adopted and two data collection methods, the semi-structured interview and document analysis were used in this research project. This study set out to investigate the perspectives of deans and curriculum leaders from a Lao higher education institution regarding the roles and responsibilities, the curriculum leader held, and the nature of leadership development programmes that improve the curriculum leaders’ capabilities to pursue their roles and responsibilities by using semi-structure interviews. Then these relevant documents were analysed.

The findings revealed that the curriculum leaders are not only responsible for the daily scheduled teaching activities, but they are expected to handle the administrative tasks distributed from the higher management as well as maintain and advocate the political accountability, and the institution’s standards and policies.

The findings also highlighted the need for a comprehensive leadership development programme that is contextual, practical, and supportive. While curriculum leaders in Lao higher education institution are the key influence in their institution’s learning, teaching, and managing; there are existing gaps between the requirements of their roles and the existing support they are provided. Nothing could be clearer than the fact that existing leadership development programmes are missing skills and knowledge, are underfunded and inadequately do not meet the needs of the curriculum leaders.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATION AND ACRONYMS

ASEAN-The Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AEC-ASEAN Economic Community
ECCD-Early Childhood Care and Development
EFA-Education for All
UNDP-United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UREC- UNITEC Research Ethics Committee
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a background and overview of the context in which this study takes place, the rationale for the research, the research aims, the research questions, and the organisation of the chapters.

1.1. CONTEXT

During the past two decades, The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have been putting great effort in developing their socio-economic sectors. Instead of focusing on each’s socio-economic development, ASEAN countries have agreed to develop their region to grow together through the ASEAN programme called ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). To respond to this regional cooperation, Laos, which is being ranked as one of the least developed countries in the world, has set a most significant goal in its history of renaming the nation as one of the developing countries in the world by the year 2020. To deliver this significant goal, the country has set a national strategic plan of focusing on eight development goals: eradicating extreme hunger and poverty; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowering woman; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS; malaria and other diseases; and ensuring environmental sustainability (United Nations Development Programme, 2005).

To respond to these strategic development plans, the country strongly needs knowledgeable and skilful human resources. Thus, this challenging mission has been assigned to the Lao Ministry of Education and Sports to reform the nation’s educational system.

For the last fifteen years, the Ministry of Education and Sports has implemented a number of national education reforms. The best-known and the most recent one is the national strategic education reform called Education for All (EFA):

The National EFA Action Plan contains the Government’s policy and strategic framework for action for basic education which covers development targets and programmes for six basic
education sub-sectors, including Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), Primary Education, Lower Secondary Education, Youth and Literacy, Skills Development Programme for Disadvantaged Groups, as well as cross-cutting themes such as gender, inclusive education and special programmes for children with special needs and socioeconomically difficult children, school health and HIV/AIDS prevention (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2005, p. V).

In this strategic plan of the Ministry of Education and Sports, all levels of educational sectors, especially higher education which is the key sector providing technical support and ‘producing’ teachers for primary education, have been challenged by this target. In this challenging responsibility, leadership development of curriculum leaders has been placed as one of the strategies for improving teaching and learning in Lao higher education (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2013). However, while curriculum leaders handle the two most significant responsibilities of leading and teaching, there is inadequate preparation for their roles as curriculum leaders (Mahavong, 2015; Saengaloun, 2012).

1.2. RESEARCH RATIONALE

The rationale for my research topic: “Leadership Development of Curriculum Leaders in a Lao Higher Education Institution”, derives from a number of factors.

The higher education, curriculum leaders are key middle leaders who can make a significant impact on the learning and teaching. They have a dual role of leading and managing in their subject areas. To be precise, they play significant roles in creating, improving, and implementing the institutional strategic academic goals (Blandford, 1997; Busher & Harris, 1999; Fitzgerald, 2000b; Sackdanouvong, 2013; Saengaloun, 2012). Within these broad responsibilities, academic curriculum leaders are specifically involved in interpreting policies and perspectives from senior leaders into departmental operations; applying their
responsibilities of expertise to teach students and instructing their team members, reflecting and taking on good leadership practices, and liaison with internal and external stakeholders (Busher & Harris, 1999). Thus, the roles and responsibilities of the curriculum leaders are crucial to the operation of the institution.

Despite having such fundamental roles, curriculum leaders face many ongoing challenges, hindering their capacity for pursuing their work. There are a number of Lao researchers who have identified that there is a lack of clarity around the roles and the expectations held of curriculum leaders in Lao higher education institutions (Mahavong, 2015; Saengaloun, 2012). This unclear role definition for curriculum leaders is also noted by some international researchers (Bennett, Newton, Wise, Woods, & Economou, 2003; Fitzgerald, 2000a; Kallenberg, 2007).

Secondly, the rationale for this research project is greatly influenced by my former role in middle leadership in a Lao higher education institution. From my experience, there are limited opportunities for leadership development, despite the ongoing challenges in the curriculum leadership role. This ongoing issue is also identified by two Lao researchers who propose that professional development programmes for curriculum leaders in Lao higher education are inadequate, considering the requirements of their roles and responsibilities (Mahavong, 2015; Saengaloun, 2012). It is therefore anticipated that the proposed study in a Lao higher education institution will contribute the new knowledge on curriculum leadership in a Lao higher context. Therefore ‘Leadership Development of Curriculum Leaders in a Lao Higher Education Institution’ needs to be investigated.

1.3. RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS

1.3.1. Research aims

1. To investigate the perceptions of senior leaders and curriculum leaders related to the role of and the expectations for curriculum leaders in a Lao higher education institution.
2. To investigate the perceptions of senior leaders in a Lao higher education institution related to the leadership development opportunities for curriculum leaders.

3. To investigate the perceptions of curriculum leaders related to their leadership development opportunities.

4. To identify the leadership development needs for curriculum leaders in Lao higher education.

1.3.2. Research questions

1. What are the roles and the expectations held for curriculum leaders in a Lao higher education institution?

2. What are the perceptions of senior leaders related to the leadership development opportunities for curriculum leaders?

3. What are the perceptions of curriculum leaders related to their leadership development opportunities?

4. What are the leadership development needs for curriculum leaders in Lao higher education?

1.3.3. Organisation of thesis

This study is organised into five chapters. A brief overview of each chapter is provided below.

Chapter One presents the ‘Introduction’ which describes the research context, the rationale, the research aims and questions and the summary of the five chapters.

Chapter Two presents the ‘Literature Review’ which critically explores a wide range of literature associated with curriculum leadership. This chapter consists of three main parts: educational leadership; curriculum leadership; and leadership development.
Chapter Three presents the ‘Methodology’ which justifies the research methodology and positions. Research sampling related to the research methods is critically discussed. The research methods, the semi-structured interview and the document analysis are critically justified before discussing the validity and reliability of data results, and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four presents the ‘Findings and Data Analysis’. This provides the findings collected from the document analysis, and the semi-structured interview with senior leaders, and curriculum leaders. The findings are organised and presented with the research questions used as headings.

Chapter Five presents the ‘Discussion and Recommendations’. This section outlines the analyses and discusses emerged themes of the findings by drawing a correlation back to references from literature review in chapter two. This chapter also provides conclusions under each research theme. Then this Chapter suggests some limitations of the study and provides some recommendations for future practice and further research on the area interconnected to this study.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION
This chapter reviews literature relevant to this research topic. It specifically explores three key themes; educational leadership, curriculum leadership, and leadership development for curriculum leaders in higher education.

2.2. EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

2.2.1. Concept of educational leadership
To simplify the term ‘educational leadership’, it is perhaps significant to explore a brief overview of leadership in general. Many authors define ‘Leadership’ as the power granted with the will of the followers, and it is a process of influencing others to obtain and allocate material, intellectual, and human resources to achieve task-related goals (Elkin, Jackson, & Inkson, 2008; Weber, 1987). It is significant to note that leadership does not come from a single individual, it is recognised by followers not the appointing organisations (Elkin et al., 2008); a congruent leadership style much depends on situations (Fidler & Atton, 2004); and leadership is inevitably interconnected to management (Elkin et al., 2008; Vroom & Yetton, 1973).

Although the central characteristics of educational leadership are based on general leadership, educational leadership is a specific form of leadership since it centres on pedagogy, learning, teaching, and instruction within school contexts. Many notable authors propose that educational leadership is associated with several dimensions of teaching and learning within educational settings, and these purposes lead to the crucial sense of direction supporting the school and educational leadership (Bush, 2011; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009). Bush (2011) argues that learning-centred leadership emphasises managing learning and teaching as the core activity of educational organisations. In other words, what makes educational leadership unique is it is concerned with educational purpose and vision for teaching and learning development. In relation to the role of educational leadership, Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010) argue that it has two core functions, providing direction and exercising influence, with a constant focus on learning and teaching. As educational
leadership is interconnected to both direction setting, and learning and teaching activities, Cardno (2013) similarly expresses that educational leadership is strongly influenced by middle-level leaders who are the key people influencing the structural image that represents a professional bureaucracy of their institution. In other words, these middle leaders are an integral part in the successful administrative tasks and day-to-day classroom activities.

Contexts play a significant role deciding the meaning of educational leadership. Obviously, early childhood education, school, and college and university settings vary in their sizes, their organisations into subject departments, and the age of their students. Thus, the meaning of educational leadership in these three different settings is generally defined differently.

In early childhood education, leadership is primarily focused on pedagogical outcomes for children (Ramsden, 1998). Within this focus, “the core work of school leaders must be involved with teachers in seeking to promote quality learning for all children and that all management tasks serve that core work” (Starratt, 2003, p. 11).

In schools, leadership is mainly concerned with teaching and learning (Cardno, 2012). In a New Zealand secondary schools context, curriculum leadership is a functional strategy in the educational leadership (Cardno & Collett., 2004). While in a British schools’ context, educational leadership holds various forms of direct, indirect and distributed forms in relation to school size and emphasises learning (Southworth, 2004).

In the context of this research project; higher education, educational leadership is interconnected to “academic business” (Ramsden, 1998, p. 123). Unlike early childhood education and schools, higher education has a greater pressure from external factors which constantly change over time. In other words, universities are responsible for making sure that they constantly respond to the demand of the world of ‘skill-hungry’ businesses. Thus, higher education institutions become more open to the environment in which they operate. Additionally, Ramsden (1998) highlighted that leadership in higher education is very broad and complex
covering the whole spectrum of leadership, management, and leadership levels of programmes in the institution. Many authors convince that higher education administration and management is strongly influenced by the changing social and economic environment. The forces of social and economic development forces higher education to alter their orientation to respond to the needs of communities (Kotter, 1996). This change in educational orientation can be seen clearly in the effort of higher education to offer the courses that reflect the needs of the society (Santiago, Carvalho, Amaral, & Meek, 2006). According to Wallace (2003), these external forces could be seen in the form of politics and governments initiatives that impact on the change in the organisation structure, strategy, culture and the political dynamics. Therefore, the higher education is forced into the economic competitiveness and adopt a more market-oriented strategy in its administration and management (Mercer, 2009). Thus, it is quite obvious that the concept of educational leadership in higher education tends to be broader when dealing with more mature students and a broader context.

By considering different functions of leadership, Busher, Harris, and Wise (2000) propose leadership could be grouped into five major categories according to their function and characteristics of an organisation (See Table 2.1.).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five dimensions</th>
<th>Some of the functions of the subject leaders and middle leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The curriculum                           | • Shaping study programme to meet national standards  
• Considering the quality and quantity of curriculum materials needed to sustain these programmes  
• Creating a preparatory programme for public examinations  
• Setting clear standard and processes for scoring student’s work  
• Provision of special education needs curriculum support  
• Establishing clear processes of giving feedback on the quality of students’ work |
| Operational development and resources management | • Planning, organising, monitoring and evaluating the work of a subject area  
• Setting performing indicators and targets  
• Creating and sustaining deadlines for the projects  
• Linking the curriculum development plans to those of the whole school |
| Human relationships                       | • Knowing self: personal values, professional interests and beliefs, technical responsibilities of expertise  
• Knowing colleagues: personal values, professional interests and beliefs, technical responsibilities of expertise  
• Respecting other people and self, different needs and aspirations |
Moreover, Weber (1987) also proposes a model of six interrelated functions of instructional leadership these include: setting school academic goals; maximizing effects of instructional organisation; hiring, supervising, evaluating teachers; protecting instructional time and programs; setting standards for achievement or setting the tone for learning climate; and monitoring achievement levels or evaluating programs. According to this model, setting academic goals is the key function which is interconnected with the other five functions.

After a decade of researching academic leadership, Weber (1996) suggests that the functions of instructional leadership can be organised under five dimensions; defining the school’s mission, managing instruction, promoting a positive learning climate, observing and improving instruction, and assessing the instructional programme. He also suggests three important factors that need to be considered in order to manipulate the leadership structure are; collaboratively managing, self-evaluating, and actively self-improving. Weber (1996) further comments on how the structure of leadership should target achieving a meaningful learning organisation. This depends on the best configuration of these three aspects above.

Robinson et al. (2009) offer eight dimensions of effective school leadership:
- establishing goals and expectations;
- resourcing strategies;
- planning, coordinating, evaluating teaching and the curriculum;
promoting and participating in teacher learning and development; ensuring an orderly and supportive environment; creating educationally powerful connections; engaging in constructive problem talk; and selecting, developing and using smart tools (p. 49).

This model is strongly associated with leadership knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Furthermore, Robinson et al. (2009) claims that the purpose of such a model is to help leaders to ensure that administrative decisions are properly informed by pedagogical knowledge, the analysis and solving of complex problems, and the building of trust and engagement in open-to-learning conversations.

In New Zealand, the Ministry of Education (2008) developed a model of Kiwi Leadership for principals which emphasises the qualities, knowledge and skills to lead within the contemporary school context. The model comprises educational leadership which centres on improving student academic performance, creating conditions for effective teaching and learning, making connections and networks, and developing others as leaders. Leading change and problem solving are seen as significant activities for effective educational leaders while the relationship of pedagogy, culture, partnership and networks are tied together so that school leaders work across these four interrelated areas of practice for leadership effectiveness (Ministry of Education, 2008).

2.2.2. Leadership versus management

Many researchers draw clear distinctions between leadership and management and acknowledge the dual roles of middle leaders as a manager and a leader. According to Bennis and Nanus (1985), “managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing” (p. 21). This statement is interconnected to many authors’ arguments. Kotter (2007) discusses that a manager is a person who is assigned by the organisation and has a formal role to direct the organisational activities aiming at achieving the organisation strategic goals. However, a leader is a person who influences others but might not have a formal position. In other words, provided that a manager influences others to
accomplish the organisation goals without using his or her formal authority, the manager is demonstrating leadership (Bennis & Nanus, 1985).

Thus, the term ‘middle leaders’ and ‘middle managers’ may be used interchangeably depending on the institution’s perception of the core responsibilities of those middle leaders or managers (Glover, Miller, Gambling, Gough, & Johnson, 1999). These authors clarify that if the roles strongly focus on the strategies and development the term ‘middle leaders’ are likely to be used. However, if the operational aspects are emphasised more, the ‘middle manager’ is a preferred term. In addition, Yukl (2002) argues that leaders have more emphasis on flexibility, innovation and adaptation; while managers, on the other hand, value stability, order and efficiency.

Zaleznik (as cited in Fidler & Atton, 2004) summarises the differences of leaders and managers by categorising the differences into four categories; orientation toward goals, work, human relationship and their selves (See Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Differences between managers and leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Managers</th>
<th>Leaders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Orientation toward goals</strong></td>
<td>‘Managers tend to adopt impersonal, if not passive attitudes towards goals. Managerial goals arise out of necessities rather than desires…’(p.70).</td>
<td>Leaders are ‘active rather than reactive, shaping ideas rather than responding to them…’ They influence and change the way people think about what is ‘desirable, possible and necessary’ (p.71). Leaders ‘develop fresh approaches to long-standing problems and …open issues for new options’ (p.72).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Their work</strong></td>
<td>Managers view their work as an ‘enabling process’</td>
<td>Leaders who are more concerned with ideas relate in more intuitive and empathetic ways. Leaders pay attention to what the events and decisions mean to participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Their human relationship</strong></td>
<td>Managers prefer to work with people and to maintain a low level of involvement in these relationship. Managers pay attention to how things get done.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Their selves</strong></td>
<td>Managers have had a straightforward life. They have a feeling of belonging.</td>
<td>Leaders have had continuous struggle. They have a feeling of separateness. They search out opportunities for changes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Zaleznik 1977 as cited in Fidler & Atton, 2004, p. 31)
By considering the different aspects of the both terms, many authors point out that managing is closely related to maintaining organisational arrangements, planning, budgeting, organising, staffing, controlling and problem-solving. However, leading is correlated to establishing direction, aligning, motivating, and inspiring people (Fidler & Atton, 2004; Kotter, 1990; Spillane & Goldren, 2011).

However, some authors suggest that leadership and management share a close relationship. Leadership and management both take shape in the interactions of school leaders, followers, and aspects of their situations (Spillane & Goldren, 2011). In addition, both leadership and management involve making decisions on what needs to be done, building relationships to implement it, and ensuring that the decision is implemented successfully (Yukl, 2002).

It is quite challenging to see the differences between the two concepts because “the concept of management has been joined, or superseded, by the language of leadership but the activities undertaken by principal and senior staff resist such labels” (Bush, 2011, p. 18). In other words, to distinguish between the two, it is helpful to pay attention to leaders’ interactions with other leaders and followers, and how the practice of leading and managing emerges in and through these interactions.

According to Cardno (2013), a dual emphasis on both leadership and management is intrinsic to academic leadership and these exchangeable characteristics are viewed as problematic by some people. In addition, while it is inevitable to have both leadership and management strategic thinking in the same organisation, it is importance to have a balance of the two. In this regard, Bolman and Deal (1997) state that:

leading and managing are different, but both are important. When organisations are over managed but under led, they eventually lose any sense of spirit or purpose. Poorly managed organisations with strong charismatic leaders may sour briefly only to crash shortly thereafter (p. xii).
This statement is also interconnected to Yukl (2002)’s argument which suggests that if there is a strong focus on leadership, order and efficiency will be negatively impacted, and strong management can hamper risk taking and innovation of the followers. It is also significant to note that although leadership may not be a formal position, it is needed, and no matter what the contexts and the focuses are (Cardno, 2012).

The knowledge of the different and shared characteristics of leadership and management are strongly relevant to this study because it primarily focuses on leadership development of the curriculum leaders who constantly involves leading and managing in their day-to-day activities. It is also essential for the curriculum leaders to be able to recognise these different and shared characteristics of leadership and management so that the congruent response could be applied.

2.3. CURRICULUM LEADERSHIP

2.3.1. Overview of curriculum leadership

Generally, middle management is the management level of “a hierarchy of authority between the operating core and the apex” (Mintzberg, 1989, p. 98). This means middle management is at “two levels, below the CEO and one level above line workers and professionals” (Huy, 2001, p. 73).

In the educational organisation context, curriculum leadership is critical for the success of the teaching and learning. The curriculum leadership could be considered as “the exercise of those functions that enable school systems and schools to achieve beyond the normal teaching and pastoral functions” (Kemp & Nathan, 1989, p. 7). According to Bradley (2003), a curriculum leader usually refers to:

A role within a broader administrative position, as opposed to a position unto itself…the school system may have an administrative position that clearly assigns the role of curriculum leader to a specific person or position…The most common titles are curriculum director, specialist, curriculum coordinator,
Thus, the curriculum leaders are “those people whose role places them between the senior management team and those colleagues whose job description does not extend their goal of ensuring quality in what students learn” (Allan, 2000, p. 23).

By considering the behaviours of curriculum leaders, Schubert (1996) categorises curriculum scholars into four main theoretical orientations, namely Intellectual Traditionalist, Social Behaviorist, Experientialist, and Critical Reconstructionist. The Intellectual Traditionalist is a curriculum scholar who is “appearing somewhat formal, self-assured, and willing to deliver the inspirational lecture or to engage in analytic, socratic dialogue and debate” (Schubert, 1996, p. 21). The Social Behaviorist is someone who is in “less formal attire, not quite a lab coat—but in that spirit, oozing with desire to discover and invent, analytically and scientifically, what works for the needs of today’s world; a little rough around the edges” (Schubert, 1996, p. 21). The Experientialist is someone who is “very casual, trying to “tune in” to the audience, obviously desirous of engaging them in an interpersonal fashion, rather than by lecture or by precept” (Schubert, 1996, p. 22). The Critical Reconstructionist is the curriculum scholar who is “starkly serious, upset with injustice and the complicity of the status quo about it; suspicious of conspiracies—intentional and unintentional—restless about the lack of time to right wrongs before injustice reigns supreme” (Schubert, 1996, p. 23).

In this research project, the term ‘curriculum leader’ is used as a broad concept which relates to all curriculum positions and exercise that involve curriculum leadership, curriculum design, as well as management of teaching and learning.

2.3.2. Relationship of leadership and curriculum leaders

The relationship of leadership and curriculum leaders comes with the application of distributed leadership in which managerial tasks are distributed down from the higher management level of the organisation. According to Youngs (2009), distributed leadership is the leadership resulting from shared activities,
discussions or dialogues rather than the routine of tasks. The distributed leadership is supported by the notion of transformational leadership which believes that a one-person leadership does not exist, and the relationship between leaders and followers is inextricable because without followers, leaders are just powerless (Ramsden, 1998).

Some researchers state that to be able to decipher the notion of distributed leadership, we have to consider the interaction of leaders and followers. Spillane and Goldren (2011) maintain that “viewing leadership through a distributed lens requires close attention to how the practice of leading and managing is constituted in the interactions of leaders and followers” (p. 36). They clarify their view that distributed leadership can be ‘stretched across’ multiple leaders, and take sharp interaction between leaders and followers (Spillane & Goldren, 2011).

Spillane and Goldren (2011) consider distributed leadership as not only a practical tool that helps us to consider leadership practices and styles that highlight the interactional and contextual nature of practices; but also as an analytical framework helping us to diagnose and design strategic work. They further that leading and managing can be distributed in three ways. First, collaborated distribution is where leadership and management influence two or more leaders who co-perform a particular organisational routine. Second, collective distribution is where leadership influences two or more leaders work separately but interdependently to co-perform a leadership activity. Third, coordinated distribution, occurs when leaders work separately or together to respond to the leadership arrangement tasks.

The curriculum leaders’ contribution to the educational institution’s leadership is considered as an integral part of the success of the organisation. They are the key group who ensure the quality of teaching, learning, and inspiring their organisation to be successful (Earley, 1998). While Busher (2006) notes that these middle leaders increase the organisational collaboration and the cohesion. In addition, they are the strategies makers who use their leadership positions to manipulate the work of students and their institution in various ways (Blase & Anderson, 1995).
2.3.3. Roles and responsibilities of curriculum leaders

Curriculum leadership is considered as one of the busiest positions in the school organisation hierarchy. According to Busher and Harris (1999) curriculum leaders perform multi-tasks—translation, supervisory leadership, transformation, and representative leadership. These authors provide further clarification that academic curriculum leaders’ roles and responsibilities specifically involves interpreting policies and perspectives from senior leaders into departmental operations; applying their responsibilities of expertise to teach students; and instructing their team members; reflecting and adopting good leadership practices, and liaison with internal and external stakeholders. In other words, curriculum leaders are one of the core management camps in the educational organisation hierarchy. This similar claim is also noted by Busher et al. (2000). Throughout their research, they found that once leaders have to deal with the curriculum, some of the prevalent job requirements they have to perform are:

- Shaping study programme to meet national standards;
- Considering the quality and quantity of curriculum materials needed to sustain these programmes;
- Creating a preparatory programme for public examinations;
- Setting clear standard and processes for scoring student’s work;
- Provision of special education needs curriculum support; and
- Establishing clear processes of giving feedback on the quality of students’ work (p. 109).

Moreover, Blandford (2006); Fitzgerald (2000a) suggest that curriculum leaders are not only responsible for leading and managing, but they are also accountable for teaching.

In the context of this study; Lao higher education, curriculum leaders are accountable for “taking initiatives to lead change, representing the senior management, and the implementation of strategies and policies into practice” (Sackdanouvong, 2013, p. 52). In a similar sense, a local researchers also found that curriculum leaders are accountable for the heaviest workload because they have to be responsible for managing the dual roles of managing and teaching (Mahavong, 2015; Saengaloun, 2012). Mahavong (2015) provides further details
that apart from regular teaching responsibility, these curriculum leaders’ administrative roles are related to “interpreting the institutional strategies and policies into action plans, implementing, monitoring and evaluating, and supervising” (p. 76).

In addition, Mahavong (2015) also found out that the roles of these middle leaders in Lao public higher education are strongly influenced by the country’s political system, and the curriculum leaders have to handle one additional role as political advocates on top of being a teacher, academic leader, and administrator. He furthers that this political role deals with maintaining and ensuring political standards of the higher management are met. Although the politics are not generally included in the list of the roles and responsibilities of curriculum leaders, many notable authors consider the politics as a possible leadership choice to negotiate the needs of the individuals and the organisation’s goals (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Burns, 1978; Hoyle, 1990).

To ensure the effectiveness of the curriculum leaders’ roles and responsibilities, many researchers suggest the required capabilities the curriculum leaders should obsess. According to Shahmandi, Silong, Ismail, Samah, and Othman (2011), there is a connection between effective academic leadership, roles and the competencies of the leaders. They further that competencies are interconnected to personal characters, behaviours, knowledge and values (Shahmandi et al., 2011). In relation to the required competencies, Gonzalez (2004) groups the competencies of a leader into four broad categories; personal characteristics and skills which consist of all intrapersonal skills; administrative competencies which deal with managing, leading, communicating and instructing skills; competencies of social responsibilities which deal with sensitivity to cultural and diversity, the national policy, demands, economic situations; and institutional competencies which are interconnected to institutional identity and philosophy, culture, and commitment.

2.3.4. Challenges for curriculum leaders

Curriculum leaders in education are juggling two mammoth responsibilities, leading and teaching. It is well documented by a considerable amount of
literature that middle leaders are challenged by the increase in their workload and the complexity of these two essential tasks. To be specific, the most common challenges for academic curriculum leaders can be categorised into two major categories; balancing time with an increase of workload, the growing complexity of roles.

2.3.4.1. Balancing time for the increase of workload

As mentioned earlier, higher education is more open to outside communities, so all levels of leadership have assumed a significant increase in workload expected by both internal and external stakeholders (Ramsden, 1998). One of the plausible explanations of the challenge is that it may be caused by the distribution of the workload from the senior management. As stated by Gronn (2003), the senior leaders’ workload have escalated, it is necessary that some of the managerial tasks are distributed to the curriculum leaders. Thus, the curriculum leaders have suffered a consequence; the distribution of additional management tasks on top of their heavy teaching hours. This aspect has put more pressure on middle leaders to balance their time to manage many responsibilities; teaching, managing, carrying out specific research as well as professional development for the staff (Bennett et al., 2003; Ingvarson et al., 2005; Mercer, 2009).

The curriculum leader role traditionally encompassed tasks like managing budgets and resources, curriculum planning, and working with people and teams (Blandford, 1997; Gold, 1998; Kemp & Nathan, 1989). However, the contemporary expectation has now expanded to include developing educational policy (Brown & Rutherford, 1999; Fitzgerald, 2000a) as well as managing staff development and appraisal (Busher & Harris, 1999; Cardno, 2012; Fitzgerald, 2000a).

According to Wright (2002), a curriculum leader’s work is fragmented and complex because they often have insufficient compensatory time to deal with the additional managerial tasks. Similarly, Mintzberg (1989) describes a middle leader’s work as “brevity, variety, and discontinued” (p. 10). In other words, even though middle managers are likely to perform the daily tasks and duties repetitively, they tend to discontinue the activities and many authors blame the
rise in the demands and complexity of the roles for the claim. They suggest that the demands and complexity of their roles might be so depressing that some of the tasks do not get adequate attention or skipped so they can get the job done (Ingvarson et al., 2005; Wright, 2002). This can be assumed that the quality of the tasks can be greatly minimised unless curriculum leaders are ready with a constant ongoing learning experience through leadership or professional development programmes.

2.3.4.2. Growing complexity of roles

It is well documented that the roles of the curriculum leader get more and more complex. One of the plausible explanations is the change in the orientation of the school’s aims and interests. According to Bargh, Bocok, Scott, and Smith (2000), the contemporary education becomes more and more market-oriented, and the higher education institutions are required to meet not only formal demands of roles and accountability, but they need to handle additional tasks from wider communities. The boundary of a higher education institution is not only concerned with the traditional requirements for internal roles and accountability, but also the expectations of external stakeholders who are probably the main financial support. Therefore, middle leaders do not only define their roles in terms of teaching but also in managerial tasks. In this regard, many curriculum leaders seem to find it very challenging to decipher what it means to be a curriculum leader (Allan, 2000; Briggs, 2001; Leader, 2004).

In addition, middle leaders sit between the managerial apex and the bottom line workforce, teachers. Holding this ‘hybrid’ position, middle leaders are greatly challenged by a ‘leadership dilemma’. A number of scholars define a dilemma as a ‘complex’ and inherit problem which is difficult and sometimes impossible to find a proper solution for (Argyris, 1977; Cardno, 2012; Senge et al., 2000). Cardno (2012) views dilemmas as ‘people problems’ because dilemmas are related to people’s business and the organisation’s concerns related to its people. They are “complex, tension-fraught problems that arise when the leader is challenged to achieve more than one objective” (Cardno, 2012, p. 62). While Argyris (1977) perceives dilemmas as ‘wicked’ problems as dilemmas always have more than one problem in which leaders are torn between organisational
concerns related to achieving objectives and individual concerns related to relational needs.

In educational settings, the common dilemma is usually related to performance management, especially performance appraisal for teaching and learning; and arise in the course of meeting organisational goals and maintaining collegial relationships (Cardno, 2012; Cardno & Reynolds, 2008). Herein, Cardno (2012) classifies this type of dilemma as a leadership dilemma because it is owned by leaders, it is a leader’s obligation; and it is interconnected to a leader’s responsibility to achieve organisational objectives and a good collegial relationship between the leader and individual(s). Furthermore, Cardno (2012) elaborates that the leadership dilemma occurs when a colleague’s performance fails to achieve the organisation’s goal and the issue cannot be addressed collaboratively without confrontation between the leader and the individual. In other words, the leadership dilemma creates considerable tensions and inevitable compromises between achieving organisational goals and maintaining a collegial relationship (Cardno, 2012). The tensions of roles and accountability sandwiched among polarised norms and values, internal and external demands can be a great hindrance for academic leaders in terms of maintaining their balance and focus as well as defining their actual roles and accountability (Bolman. & Gallos., 2010).

2.4. LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FOR CURRICULUM LEADERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

2.4.1. Concept of leadership development

Leadership development is quite a broad concept connected to many features of school development. According to Van Velsor and McCauley (2004), leadership development includes the learning and the expanding of experiences, the development of connections between individuals, the building on the capacities of the groups, the development of connections between the groups in the organisation, and the development of organisational culture and systems. These authors provide further clarification that leadership development can be considered as a process that influences a collection toward achievement of organisational goals and vision by strengthening connections, setting direction,
aligning and maintaining the school commitment. In a similar sense, Day (2001) argues that leadership development is interconnected to teambuilding and organisational development and it is concerned about development of social structures and processes.

Many authors suggest that a leadership development or professional development programme is the most beneficial when it fits the context and responds to the objectives to be met in the performance appraisal (Bolam, 2002; Cardno, 2012; Huy, 2001). In other words, in order to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the leadership development or professional development programme, the development needs of the individual, as well as the organisation, must be first defined, so that the programme can objectively align and respond to the needs.

Leadership Development or Professional Development is so critical for the organisation that both individuals and the organisation need to be held accountable for its implementation. As stated by Macky and Johnson (2003), middle managers must be responsible for their personal learning and for managing their leadership development. This is also supported by Bush and Middlewood (2005) and Rudman (2003) who suggest that leadership development or professional development is the responsibility of both the individual and the organisation.

2.4.2. Components of a leadership development programme

There are a number of elements leaders need to consider when a leadership programme is designed. According to Huber (2008), leadership development programmes have mainly focused on personal learning and one’s needs in terms of dispositions, performance and knowledge that would benefit in a more complex environment. In addition, it is significant to educational leaders that leadership development programmes deal with current and future needs, and need to align strategically with the schools’ visions (Bush, 2010; Cardno, 2012; Van Velsor & McCauley, 2004).
Regarding the components of a leadership development programme, Rudman (2002) states that a leadership development programme incorporates three major elements, namely management training, management education, and management support. Management training is a process which is guided by formal structure intended to develop skill development. Management education is the type of learning which take place in institutional framework leading to a qualification. Management support is on-the-job and off-the-job support opportunities which lead to professional growth. In a similar sense, Bush (2010) suggests that the design of the leadership development and professional development programmes should embrace four dimensions: bridging between the work and learning circumstances for reflection of practice; learning identification; active learning strategies and ongoing effective learning support; as well as assessment of the relationship and its quality.

However, Dimmock (2012) discusses that in order to ensure the effectiveness of leadership development/professional development programmes, they should consist of three critical elements, namely experienced leadership practices and their relative efficacies; clear job descriptions for current and future leaders; and a clear concept of how leaders best learn. In addition, Lambert (2003) argues that leadership development programmes should be mutual and interactive so that they can invest in the development of all participants. Additionally, Lambert (2003) suggests that the design of leadership development programmes must attend to both teacher as well as student learning and should embrace four elements:

- Surfacing of ideas, assumptions, histories, and prior knowledge: What do we currently believe and do?
- Engaging in inquiry (e.g., examining student work, conducting action research and observations, and reading and discussing recent research): What new knowledge can we generate?
- Entering into dialogue and reflection that we can understand: How do we make sense of prior assumptions and practice in light of what we now know?
Reframing actions and plans to account for what we now know and understand: How we reshape our practice and our school plan? (p. 22).

In relation to learning through reflection, Van Velsor and McCauley (2004) highlight “leaders learn primarily through their experiences, not all experiences are equally developmental” (p. 3). In other words, exposure to a completely new experience, being given constructive feedback, and encouraged to practice usually are more developmental than the other way around. By drawing a correlation between leaders’ experiences and their leadership development, McCauley, Van Velsor, and Ruderman (2010) created a two-part model of leader development (Figure 2.1). The first part of the model suggests that developmental experience of a leader is interconnected to three key elements; assessment, challenge, and continuing support. The second part of the model depicts that both a leader’s different developmental experiences as well as her/his personal ability to absorb the experiences contributed to her/his own development.

Figure 2.1: Leader Development Model

![Leader Development Model](image)

Cardno (2005) created the holistic model for planning a professional development programme (Figure 2.2). The model illustrates that a professional development consists of three primary elements: educational leadership to underpin the model; performance appraisal is placed at the heart of the model; strategic management and review acting as the overarching leadership practice to guide and assess the planning. These three components are constantly
interconnected with each other. The model also depicts that a quality professional development programme should consist of at least four dimensions, namely school development, curriculum development, personal development and management development. Although this model is for professional development, the components of the model and how they interact with each other share a similar concept with the concept of other authors discussed above. Thus, this model can be a very useful tool to guide a leadership development programme.

**Figure 2.2: A Model of Holistic Professional Development**

![A Model of Holistic Professional Development](image)

*Source:* (Cardno, 2005, p. 296).

### 2.4.3. Challenges of leadership development programmes

There are a number of challenges facing the educational organisation when implementing leadership development programmes. Firstly, while there is a lack of leadership development programmes that can enhance the curriculum leaders’ skills and capacity, the existing programmes often do not tailor the needs of the participants. According to Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyorson, and Orr (2010), the leadership development programme contents usually cannot cater for the differences of participants’ needs especially those who have different career stages, background, experience and school context. Thus, they are often irrelevant and not effective. In addition, by drawing back to this study context, the leadership development programme is not recognised as a key development aspect in some educational institutions in Laos. According to Mahavong (2015), in a Lao university, middle leaders do not receive any training to prepare them for
the promotion for leadership roles, and thus some curriculum leaders are not qualified for the role and responsibilities they have to perform.

Another most important challenge that hinders the efficiency of leadership development programmes is that there is not a clear link between the leadership development programme, and teaching and learning development. This is due to the fact that leadership development programmes have an emphasis more on the management and administrative aspects and are less focused on curricular, pedagogic and learning issues which are more beneficial for teaching and learning (Hale & Moorman, 2003). In other words, the most important educational organisation’s goal of improving teaching and learning, sometimes does not benefit from the existing leadership development programme. However, a number of notable scholars argue that educational organisations should link their activities to their organisational end which is improving teaching, learning, and student learning outcomes (Cardno, 2012; Senge, 2006; Senge et al., 2000).

In Lao higher education, having a lack of funding and qualified staff are the additional challenges narrowing the choices of leadership development programmes. While Cardno (2005) argues that time and money are two of the most significant requirements for professional development, many Lao local researchers suggest that planning and organising leadership and professional development programmes are usually very challenging tasks for the senior leaders because of the lack of financial support (Mahavong, 2015; Saengaloun, 2012). This issue is especially common for the newly established public higher education institutions that merely rely on the support from government budget allocation (Mahavong, 2015).

2.4.4. Leadership development need in higher education

As we have discussed so far that there are a number of challenges confronting curriculum leaders especially the increasing workload (Blandford, 1997; Gold, 1998; Kemp & Nathan, 1989), the expansion of their roles, and the increase of its complexity and demands (Bennett et al., 2003; Filan & Seagren, 2003; Hammersley-Fletcher & Kirkham, 2007). These challenges indicate that there is a strong need of leadership development programme so that they can make a worthwhile contribution to the development of their institutions.
In the context which this study took place, the demand for congruent and efficient leadership development programmes that could increase the current middle leaders’ capacity and prepare future-to-be middle leaders for the challenging position, is also strongly needed. The scholars, who conducted their research in the Lao higher education context, suggest that most of the new middle managers find challenging the new responsibilities because leadership development programmes which could prepare them for the new position are not available. These authors also found that the existing development programmes sometimes do not meet the needs of the curriculum/middle leaders and there is a specific need for a leadership development programme in a Lao higher education institution (Mahavong, 2015; Saengaloun, 2012).

2.5. CONCLUSION

In higher education, the curriculum leadership is one of the most important positions holding the dual responsibilities of teaching as well as managing. As the setting of higher education gets much wider and become more market-oriented with more involvement of external communities and stakeholders, the curriculum leaders’ roles and their demands also get more complex. This escalation of demands, and complexity of the roles require the curriculum leaders to manage their time effectively. However, the curriculum leader sometimes finds it very challenging to ‘squeeze’ the workload into their already heavy teaching schedule. Thus, this issue consequently affects the quality of both their ‘new’ managerial task as well as their traditional teaching responsibility.

This literature review clearly indicates that there is a strong need for quality leadership development programmes that can prepare the curriculum leaders for the challenging roles and responsibilities. It is also confirmed that the research topic are sound and significant for Lao higher education, and the four research aims and questions are relevant to the research topic.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION
This chapter explores and discusses the research methodology used within this research project. It specifically studies literature related to the research methodology and outlines the research methods employed including semi-structured interviews and document analysis. This chapter also discusses strategies for data analysis and means to ensure validity and reliability of the data collected as a part of this study.

3.2. METHODOLOGY

3.2.1. Introduction
Educational research has been well documented throughout its history. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) define educational research as “the systematic and scholarly application of the principles of a science of behaviour to the problems of teaching and learning within education and to the clarification of issues having direct or indirect bearing on these concepts” (p. 1). This formal and scientific application is used “to provide a basis for action” in education (Husen, 1997, p. 20) and utilised to decipher the reality of the educational issues through describing, making a hypothesis, and explaining the educational objectives (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009).

Educational research is essential for the development of education. According to Creswell (2012); Freebody (2003), educational research plays a significant role in the development in education for many reasons; it contributes new knowledge to the research knowledge, informs policy debates, and improves the current educational practice. Creswell (2012) provides further explanation that policy makers can utilise the research finding to debate and suggest the change or development which can improve the quality of the current practices.

In the light of educational research, ontology, epistemology, and methodology used are key aspects playing a fundamental role ensuring the success of a research study. Ontology is originally a Greek compound words—‘onto’ means
‘existence’ or ‘being real’, and ‘logia’ means ‘science’ or ‘study’ (Poteat, 1993). Therefore, ontology is the assumption about what knowledge and things are there in the world (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Epistemology also comes from two Greek words, ‘episteme’ means ‘knowledge’ or ‘understanding’, and ‘logia’ means ‘science’ or ‘study’ (Poteat, 1993). In philosophical context, epistemology is the study of knowledge in general. The example of philosophical questions could be; what does the knowledge mean? How does a person get to know something? What is the basis of the true knowledge? (Davidson & Tolich, 2003).

Epistemology is not only related to the concept of how we gain the knowledge, but it is also interconnected to how all knowledge is communicated to one another (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). In this regard, Davidson and Tolich (2003) explain that ontology is about what knowledge there is in the world while epistemology is built upon the ontology, and it is all about how we can know certain knowledge and what count as valid knowledge. Meanwhile, research methodology could be referred to as a strategic process or action that is utilised to link methods to outcomes when studying theoretical arguments of the research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2003). In short, ontology is ‘reality’, epistemology is the relationship between the ‘reality’ and the researcher, and methodology is the strategies used to recover the ‘reality. By drawing a connection between the concept to ontology, epistemology and methodology to this research project.

This study intended to examine and identify the perceived leadership development practices that transform outcomes for curriculum leaders’ achievement in a Lao higher education institution. This required me to gather the perceptions of curriculum leaders and senior leaders in two faculties of a Lao higher education institution. Thus, I adopted an interpretative epistemological position as the research questions. According to Davidson and Tolich (2003), the interpretative paradigm is described as:

the systematic analysis of social meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds(p. 26).
According to Cohen et al. (2007); Davidson and Tolich (2003); Neuman (1997), interpretative epistemological position is suitable for this study because:

- This study is a small study (Neuman, 1997). There are only two participating faculties in the same Lao university with a specific small group of participants (a mere ten interviewees), and a small scale of document analysis of relevant documents.

- The participants, the organisational culture, and context of this research are contextually unique to the participating Lao higher institution (Neuman, 1997).

- The study is associated with understanding and translating the individuals' perceptions and understanding of their environment and situations (Cohen et al., 2007; Davidson & Tolich, 2003).

- The values and perception of the participants (senior leaders and curriculum leaders) are considered as an integral part of their working situation as well as this research project (Davidson & Tolich, 2003; Neuman, 1997).

3.2.2. Research methodology

Every researcher makes a decision on the methodology to be adopted, prior to initiating the research project. Morrison and Scott (2006) and Davidson and Tolich (2003) define methodology as the nature of reality and how an individual perceive it. In other words, methodology embeds a specific paradigm and provides a rationale for the strategies used to conduct the research.

In the light of social and educational research, there are three main types of methodology; quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodology. The quantitative research is used to demonstrate the relationship between research and theory through deductive and predictive approaches (Bryman, 2008). According to Gay et al. (2009), in quantitative research, there is a lack of interaction between researchers and participants as data collection is mostly through non-interactive data collection approaches. Gay et al. (2009) provide further clarification that the
quantitative research primarily aims at testing scientific hypothesis cases rather than understanding the human interaction and their environment.

The qualitative approach that has been adopted from my research primarily aimed at understanding the relationship of the human behaviours and their environment through the use of a naturalistic and an interpretive approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative methods are used to identify “the unique lived experiences of the participants to enhance understanding of particular phenomena” (Mutch, 2005, p. 19). According to Creswell (2002), a qualitative research consists of grounded theory, document analysis, case studies, ethnographies, narrative and phenomenological research. Thus, the qualitative research approach allows researchers to explore small areas in greater depth, so is suitable for educational purposes (Mutch, 2005). A qualitative approach is suitable for my research which aimed at exploring the circumstances, perceptions, and interpretations of the senior leaders and curriculum leaders regarding the leadership development in their institution. I was particularly interested in a deep understanding of the participants regarding their leadership development opportunities and challenges.

Another research methodology is mixed methods research approach. The mixed research methods consist of both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Although there are both quantitative and qualitative approaches in the mixed method, the research can have a different focus depending on the aim and purpose of the research project (Gay et al., 2009; Hibberts & Johnson, 2012). There are four different paradigm emphasises design in mix research method, namely QUAL-quan, QUAN-qual, QUAL-QUAN, and QUAN-QUAL (Hibberts & Johnson, 2012). The capital letters in the models symbolise dominant paradigm of the research while to lower case letters indicate the lower dominance.

3.3. RESEARCH METHODS

Choosing the appropriate methods is one of the most crucial aspects of the effective research. Cohen et al. (2007) view the research method as “a technical exercise and as concerned with understanding the world; this is informed by how
we view our world(s), what we take understanding to be, and what we see as the purpose of understanding” (p. 5). To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, two research methods namely, semi-structured interviews and document analysis were selected.

3.3.1. Semi-structured interview

The semi-structured interview was chosen as the first method of this study’s data collection. In the two selected higher education faculties, I interviewed one dean in each (N=2); four curriculum leaders in each (N=8) so ten interviews in total which is the appropriate size for this thesis. The study investigated the perspectives of deans and curriculum leaders from two different faculties, on the leadership development opportunities in a Lao higher education institution (See Appendix 1: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule).

An interview is “a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 269). The semi-structured interview is one type of the interview. The semi-structured interview can be both structured and unstructured (Hinds, 2000). In other words, there were some prepared broad questions guiding the study, but the questions could be extended during the course of actual interviews if the research needs a greater depth of a particular aspect.

A semi-structured approach is suitable when the research “needs in-depth information, or subject matter is potentially sensitive, or the issues under examination would benefit from development or clarification” (Hinds, 2000, p. 47). This aspect was especially significant for my research topic—the leadership development opportunities and the challenges for academic curriculum leaders in Lao higher education. The study is unique to the Lao higher education context where there is a sparsity of existing literature.

There are a few ways that can be used to gather data in the semi-structured interview such as face-to-face interviews, by video link or online, and by telephone (Coleman, 2012). In this study, the first approach; the face-to-face interview was used. According to Coleman (2012), in face-to-face, interviewees’
body language that shows the discomfort or comfort, is the signal for the interviewer to move on to another question.

To ensure the effectiveness of the semi-structured interview, there are some certain things a researcher needs to consider. First, as suggested by Hinds (2000), there should be a pilot interview. Piloting the question does not only ensure that the questions in the interview are comprehensible and follow a progressive order, but piloting also provides interviewers with practical feedback from colleagues or peers (Hinds, 2000). Another essential thing a researcher needs to be aware of is data transcribing. In this regard, Bell (2010) suggests that, the interview should be recorded, and researchers need to listen several times to be able to categorise the data, “code, summarise and note comments which are of particular interest without having to try to write them down during the course of the interview” (p. 167).

3.3.2. Selection of participants for the semi-structured interview

This research project took place in a specific context within only two faculties in a Lao higher education institution, and the study was quite small; aiming at a mere ten interviewees. Therefore, all participants needed to be particularly informative and able to provide a great depth of perceptions throughout the interview. To be specific, the targeted participants were expected to show a broad understanding of the roles and responsibilities of curriculum leaders, the challenges facing them, and the opportunities and challenges of leadership development programmes for curriculum leaders. Thus, the participants who were selected to take part in the study are two deans of two different faculties, and eight curriculum leaders who are the head of departments in the two faculties.

3.3.3. Documentary analysis

A document could refer to “technical reports, government files, newspapers, books, journals, magazines, letters, bank cheques, to name a few” (Tang, 2012, p. 2). According to Yin (2009), the document analysis method can “provide other details to corroborate information from other sources” (Yin, 2009, p. 103). This statement is also supported by Duffy (2010) who notes that using document
analysis can increase the reliability and validity of the findings because it will strengthen the findings obtained from the primary data gathering method.

By drawing a connection to this research project, the first data collection method; the semi-structured interview only allowed me to access the data from the ten interviews from the two faculties. This second method; document analysis allowed me to view the finding from a broader context within the wider Lao higher education institutions and the Lao Ministry of Education and Sports. Thus, the use of document analysis strengthened the findings as it confirmed and disconfirmed the findings gathered from my first data collection method. For instance, the document analysis also allowed me to categorise the findings and informed me if the issue is technically acknowledged by their institution or wether it is a pure perception of the participants.

In addition, using document analysis as the secondary sources of the data allows the study to achieve triangulation and it also added a rigour to a research through the use of multi-methods (Wellington, 2000). It is quite clear that document analysis can be “used to supplement information obtained by other methods” (Duffy, 2010, p. 125). In other words, the document analysis will dramatically increase my research validity and credibility by confirming or supplementing the data that I got from my first method.

3.3.4. Documents selection

To ensure the quality of the study, sources of the documents that are used in the analysis is very important for a quality research. According to Ray and Gael (2011):

Document-based strategies focus on documents of potentially any form that may have been produced for other purposes at other times and places and by other people, as well as documents generated specifically with the context of the research investigation itself (p. 329).

As my study; ‘Leadership Development of Curriculum Leaders in a Lao Higher Education Institution’; was conducted in a Lao higher education institution, it has
a unique context so the documents which were used in this study are the documents which directly interconnected to the participated departments, institution. The documents include the mandated requirement of the roles and responsibilities, and leadership development for the departmental level of the participated university. In addition, the author also used the Ministry of Education and Sports’ documents which have the impact on the participating institution’s development and are linked to the research topic.

Evaluating document quality is one of the most essential elements for effective and efficient document analysis. Many authors suggest that there are four major criteria to judge and reflect upon the quality of documents: Authenticity - is the document genuine?; Credibility - is the document error-free?; Representativeness - is the document typical?; and Meaning - is the document comprehensible (Scott, 1990; Wellington, 2000). In this regard, the documents which were used in my research project are only error-free technical documents which were professionally drafted with a clear source of reference.

By using document analysis as another method in the research, it is also significant to be aware of the possibility of the gap between the theory in the document and actual action-in-use. Regarding this matter, a number of scholars warn that there is a significant chasm between espoused theories and theories-in-use (Argyris, 2010; Argyris & Schon, 1996; Bolman & Deal, 2008; Dick & Dalmau, 1999). In other words, individuals’ self-description is usually disconnected to what they actually do.

Many authors suggest that the documents provide the researcher a ‘clean’ source of data because the researcher typically has no influence both on the content and production of the document (Ray & Gael, 2011; Wellington, 2000).

3.4. RESEARCH DATA ANALYSIS

3.4.1. Strategies for qualitative data analysis

A qualitative data analysis is a “transformative process in which raw data are turned into ‘findings’ or ‘results” (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006, p. 195). In qualitative data analysis, data is emerged “when empirical or theoretical
observations emerge inductively, they are often said to be “grounded” in the sense of emerging from the ground up rather than being called forth by prior theoretical constructs” (Lofland et al., 2006, p. 195). Thus, qualitative data analysis is considered as inductive rather than deductive data analysis. In addition, data analysis repetitively occurs throughout the data collection process so that the data analysis is recursive and dynamic (Bryman, 2008).

There are a number of elements that need to be carried out in the data analysis process. According to Neuman (2003), data analysis involves “examining, sorting, categorizing, evaluating, comparing, synthesizing, and contemplating the coded data as well as reviewing the raw and recorded data” (p. 448). Similarly, Miles and Huberman (1994) state that data analysis consists of three interconnected processes, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

My research project data collection was conducted in Lao language, and some of the documents used in document analysis are also in the Lao language. Thus, the data analysis in this research project consists of translation from Lao language to English as an additional element. To ensure the accuracy and validity of the findings, the translations were verified by a nominated person who is proficient in both English and Lao languages.

3.4.2. Semi-structured interview data analysis

To ensure the validity of the data, it is significant for a researcher to check the accuracy of the transcriptions of audio records because researchers could mishear or misinterpret the audiotapes because of poor quality recordings (Galletta, 2013; Kvale, 2007). In this research project, I had cross-checked the transcriptions with the audio files of the interviews in order to ensure the accuracy. First, the transcriptions were sent to the interviewees to verify the correction of the information. Then the transcriptions were verified by a professionally qualified body who signed the confidentiality agreement prior to their involvement. The fact that this research data collection was conducted in the Lao language so the verified transcription had to be translated into English and
verified by a nominated person who is proficient in both English and Lao languages.

Many authors point out that in the qualitative study, coding is significant to qualitative research analysis because researchers can categorise data into groups and thus, it is easier to see the common themes emerged (Kvale, 2007; Lofland et al., 2006). In a similar sense, Watling and James (2007) “the structuring and coding underpin the key research outcomes, and can be used to shape the data to test, refine or confirm established theory, apply theory to new circumstances, or used to generate a new theory or model” (p. 359).

In this study, I created coding tables in which the interview transcriptions were analysed through structuring, coding, and categorising themes. The themes that emerged were categorised under each structured question of the interview.

### 3.4.3. Document analysis

In relation to data gathering and analysis, Ray and Gael (2011) details a key things the researcher need to consider when implementing document analysis in the interpretative research approach:

you will need to transparently describe the process for identifying and selecting text, facilitated by detailed annotation in your research diary about when, how, where, from whom and why specific texts were brought into the frame of your research. 
you will need to transparently build up the system for coding, representing and displaying the author/ producer’s perspective, based on the textual content itself (but perhaps informed by other data and contextual knowledge you have linked to the author/ producer).
you must take care to keep interpretations, accounts and stories about the texts as close to the text data as possible to ensure maximal authenticity - this often means relying heavily on verbatim quoted material to help display convincing interpretations (Ray & Gael, 2011, p. 330)
My research project was conducted in a Lao higher institution and some of the documents were published in Lao language. By taking this fact into the consideration, the researcher had to take a special precaution in the analysing process. The coding table was created in which the sources of the document are clearly shown. The coding table also consists of findings in its original text (in Lao language) and its verbatim translation. The translations then were verified by a professional translator before proceeding to the next step of analysis.

3.5. VALIDITY

According to Davidson and Tolich (2003), validity is “the extent to which a question or variable accurately reflects the concept the researcher is looking for” (p. 31). In a similar sense, Bryman (2008) states that the validity requires the researcher to ensure whether the data collection questions effectively measure the concept which is being researched. In addition, Cohen et al. (2007) add that validity could be considered as a measure if a specific ‘instrument’ of the research really “measures what it claims to measure” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 133). In this particular research project, I ensured the validity of the research project by making sure that the aims of my research were crystal clear before preparing the search questions. In addition, I prepared some questions to guide the interview so that noone can get off track throughout the interviews. This means themes discussed during the interview are interconnected to the aims of the research project.

Apart from ensuring the efficiency of research question, many researchers note that credibility and validity can also be ensured through data triangulation (Bryman, 2008; Cardno, 2003; Cohen et al., 2011). The use of triangulation involves the use of multiple methods and thus the researcher can get more congruent data. In other words, triangulation can be utilised as a validation process to strengthen the validity and credibility of the data (Bryman, 2008; Cohen et al., 2011; Davidson & Tolich, 2003). To draw a connection to my research project, I also ensured the validity and reliability of the data through the use of multiple methods; namely, semi-structured interviews and document analysis.
3.6. ETHICAL ISSUES

Ethical issues are especially significant for this research project for many reasons. First, my research topic, ‘The Leadership Development of Curriculum Leaders in a Lao Higher Education Institution’, could be considered as a sensitive topic as some of the data collection could be interconnected to power, equality and inattentive educational policies. Thus, I had to play full attention on whether I had provided all participants and the organisation sufficient information about my research and had received the full participants’ consent before the research takes place. Secondly, the organisational culture in the Lao context is quite different from that context of the existing literature I used in my search. Regarding this matter, I consulted with local personnel for guidance what need to be followed within a Lao culture context.

According to Bryman (2012), when research is dealing with humans, there are four ethical considerations; a lack of informed consent; harm to participants; invasion of privacy; and deception must be taken into account. For this research, three ethical issues had been considered relevant these being: informed consent; harm to participants; and confidentiality and anonymity.

A number of researchers highlight that all participants must be informed about the aims of the research and their role involved in the research, and they must voluntarily take part in the study (Bryman, 2008; Davidson & Tolich, 2003; Wilkinson, 2011). For this research project, permission to enter the targeted institution and conduct the research was asked through formal documents before the actual study took place (see Appendix 5: Organisation Consent Letter). All participants were fully informed of the aims and objectives of the study through both written and verbal form of communication (see Appendix 2: Information Sheet). Once they were fully informed of the aims and objectives of the research, the participants were asked to give the formal consent (see Appendix 3: Participant Consent Form) before the actual interviews were initiated.

In relation to confidentiality and anonymity, a number of scholars suggest that all information related to the participant must be confidential and researchers must make sure that all data is kept in a secure place and access is limited to those
whom have been disclosed as having access (Bryman, 2008; Cohen et al., 2011; Davidson & Tolich, 2003). In my study, all data transcripts, electronic files, and hard copy files, were securely stored in a locked cupboard and had code protected computer files (Bryman, 2012). All participants were also informed that only my supervisor and I would have the access to the data in this study.

Harm to participants was another ethical issue; I strongly took into account. Apart from prioritising anonymity and confidentiality, to ensure that all participants are physically and mentally unharmed, all participants could withdraw from taking part in the study anytime up to five weeks after the interviews were conducted. In addition, to make sure that the data cannot be tracked back to the participants and institutions, all the names of the participants and their institution are identified by a special coding system.

Finally and most importantly, this research project complied with UNITEC Research Ethics Committee (UREC) guidelines, and the data collection process had not proceeded until UREC approval was granted (UNITEC Research Ethics Committee, 2009).
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

4.1. FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS – SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

4.1.1. Introduction

The section provides the summary of the findings of the interviews with two deans and eight curriculum leaders from two faculties in a Lao higher education institution. The findings are divided into four main parts; the role and expectations of curriculum leaders; the perceptions of senior leaders and curriculum leaders on the leadership development opportunities for academic curriculum leaders; leadership development needs for academic curriculum leaders; and the core elements of a proposed leadership development programme for academic curriculum leaders. The findings are categorised by the questions used in the interview.

Table 4.1: Coding for Interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Representation</th>
<th>Roles and Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SL1</td>
<td>Senior leader Faculty A</td>
<td>The Dean  Faculty A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SL2</td>
<td>Senior leader Faculty B</td>
<td>The Dean  Faculty B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL1</td>
<td>Curriculum leader Faculty A</td>
<td>Head of Department Faculty A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL2</td>
<td>Curriculum leader Faculty A</td>
<td>Head of Department Faculty A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL3</td>
<td>Curriculum leader Faculty A</td>
<td>Head of Department Faculty A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL4</td>
<td>Curriculum leader Faculty B</td>
<td>Head of Department Faculty B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL5</td>
<td>Curriculum leader Faculty B</td>
<td>Head of Department Faculty B</td>
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<tr>
<td>CL6</td>
<td>Curriculum leader Faculty B</td>
<td>Head of Department Faculty B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL7</td>
<td>Curriculum leader Faculty B</td>
<td>Vice-Head of Department Faculty A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL8</td>
<td>Curriculum leader Faculty B</td>
<td>Vice-Head of Department Faculty B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.1.2. Findings

4.1.2.1. The roles and expectations of curriculum leaders

Question 1: What are the roles and expectations held of curriculum leaders in your faculty/organisation?

All of the interviewees clearly identified the roles and expectations of the curriculum leaders. They stated that curriculum leaders’ roles and responsibilities are interconnected to managing and leading, implementing classroom activities, and maintaining the political accountability.

One of the deans suggested that in public educational institutions, curriculum leaders are primarily accountable for designing the curriculum, implementing the curriculum, and assessing and evaluating it for future development:

The primary responsibilities of a curriculum leader are being the person who builds, produces, and assesses.

‘To build’ means to design the curriculum, identify the necessary facilities, equipment and budget to implement it, and propose and organise the required training programme or seminar to ensure the quality of the curriculum.

‘To produce’ means to be the teachers themselves and work closely to the students’ learning and development.

‘To assess’ means to implement evaluation of the curriculum. The term of assessment could be at the end of every term or once a year (SL1).

In relation to the roles and responsibilities of the curriculum leaders, one of the deans categorised the roles and responsibilities of curriculum leaders’ roles and responsibilities into two major categories; ‘responsibilities of expertise’ and ‘disciplines’. This senior leader explained that:

Every department of our [institution] has quite a distinctive list or mandate regarding the department’s vision and required roles.
and responsibilities of all staff at all levels from the dean down to teachers and staff. However, the primary roles and responsibilities of the curriculum leaders can be grouped into two major tasks: ‘responsibilities of expertise’ responsibilities deal with classroom teaching, supervising and administrative tasks, and ‘disciplines’ is concerned with maintaining political ideology, department’s vision as well as standards (SL2).

According to SL2, the curriculum leaders are expected to be the role-model for their subordinates in maintaining the political accountability.

*The design of the curriculum needs to be aligned with the political requirements of the Ministry of Education and Sports (SL2).*

However, seven of eight curriculum leaders participating in the interview agreed that although their departments have clearly listed their roles and responsibilities, they find it challenging to define some of the tasks especially political accountability.

*Most of the required roles and responsibilities of our curriculum leaders are quite clearly stated and easy to follow, but political requirements are abstract concepts and difficult to interpret into actions (CL3). What makes the political requirement of roles and responsibility a confusing and challenging task for some people is that it deals with political beliefs and there is no training or programme for such knowledge (CL4).*

All of the senior leaders and curriculum leaders suggested that the political requirements only exist in the public educational institutions. Five of the eight curriculum leaders find this requirement as an unequal task assigned by the Ministry of Education and Sports. However, the two deans and five curriculum leaders find this mandate requirement to their advantage because the political knowledge allows them to understand the country’s strategic development plan.
In addition, they suggested that having the political work experience could help them to transfer their job to a private educational sector if they wish to.

Political roles and responsibilities surely help us to reflect on the government’s strategic plan (SL2).

Working as a curriculum leader in public school will give you an advantage for your future career. Curriculum leaders in private school do not have in-depth work experience in political ideology so it is easier for people in public school to get a new job (CL8).

The findings suggested that the roles and responsibilities of curriculum leaders are placed into two major categories; responsibilities of expertise and responsibilities of disciplines. Responsibilities of expertise are interconnected to designing the curriculum, teaching, supervising students and teachers, assessing and evaluating the curriculum and administrative tasks. Responsibilities of disciplines are concerned with maintaining political ideology, department’s vision, and standards.

**Question 2: What are the progression requirements of curriculum leaders in your faculty/ organisation?**

All the senior leaders and the curriculum leaders agreed that before being promoted as a curriculum leader (vice-head of department or head of department) one must have had experience in every position below the middle management level. In other words, every curriculum leader must have worked as a staff member, a teacher, or as a head of the subject or a programme leader before they could be promoted to a vice-head position and then a head of department position.

Being a curriculum leader, you must have adequate work experience and achievement. You need to have experience in the line workforce and be promoted step-by-step from a team leader, a head of subject, a vice-head of department and then a head of department (SL1).
Another prerequisite of curriculum leadership is the political decision-making skills. All of the interviewees; both the deans and the curriculum leaders, clearly stated that curriculum leaders are those who have strong political acumen and are politically accepted by the majority of staff in their teaching department.

Before being promoted to a curriculum leadership position, you need to have an acceptable knowledge in political ideology and can make a sound judgement once he/she comes across a political issue (CL3).

The two deans and six curriculum leaders stated that holding a master degree in the relevant field of study is another prerequisite for the promotion of curriculum leaders.

The Ministry of Education and Sports has set the 1-6-3 requirement of the degrees held by all personnel in every department...1-6-3 Requirement means out of ten people in a department, there must be at least one person holding a Ph.D., at least six people graduated with a master degree, and three people or less holding a bachelor degree (SL2).

Before being promoted as a vice-head of department, you must have completed a master degree and have some work experience in the relevant field of the study in the department (CL7).

The two deans and two curriculum leaders suggested that seniority is also considered as another prerequisite of a curriculum leader position.

Apart from other requirements, you must be mutually accepted. Mutuality is categorised into three major groups; new recruit, junior, and senior staff. Before being promoted to a curriculum leader position, you need to be at least in the senior group of people (SL2).

Seniority depends on the number of years you have been working in the current institution, exclusively other past work experience (SL2).
In addition, one of the deans and three other curriculum leaders addressed that before taking on a position of curriculum leadership, the individual must be both physically and mentally healthy.

Apart from general requirements, it is also very important that all people who will take the challenging roles of being a curriculum leader, she/he must be physically and mentally ready (SL2).

Regarding the seniority requirement, five in eight curriculum leaders stated there are not any documents that clearly define ‘seniority’ so it is quite difficult to say how many years service you need to be considered as the junior or senior staff.

The findings suggested that the progression requirements of the curriculum leader depends on five key prerequisites; work experience in every position below the curriculum leadership, at least holding a master degree, acceptable political acumen and seniority, and to be physically and mentally healthy.

**Question 3: What are the required capabilities you need to have before being promoted to a curriculum leader in your faculty/organisation?**

The two deans and seven other curriculum leaders agreed that subject knowledge, leadership and management skills, political acumen are the three prerequisite skills a curriculum leader must have.

*The curriculum leaders are very significant people in both management and workforce level. Thus, first, a curriculum leader must have sound knowledge in the subject area in their department. For instance, the vice-head or head of department of French language, she/he must be fluent in French and be able to teach the language comfortably. Another important thing is that a curriculum leader must be an effective leader and manager. She/he must have a strong leadership and management skills and be able to make a consistent sound judgement when an issue occurs. Of*
course in public school, a head or vice-head of department must be the person who has an acceptable political experience and knowledge so that she/he can contribute to the nation’s strategic plan fully (SL1).

The curriculum leaders should be able to address day-to-day issues related to leading and managing, the department’s field of study, as well as the department strategic goals and vision (CL8).

The findings suggested that to take a role in curriculum leadership, the individual must have knowledge in the department’s subject knowledge, leadership and management skills, sound political judgement skills.

**Question 4: What do you need to do to strengthen the above-mentioned capabilities?**

The two deans and five of eight curriculum leaders agreed that there is a strong need for development programmes that can strengthen the subject knowledge of the curriculum leaders.

*The curriculum leaders are the role models for all teachers in our department and traditionally we are expected to be the best teachers in class and if we fail being good teachers in class, our subordinates could be discouraged. Therefore, it is my conviction that improving the subject knowledge especially teaching methodology of our field subject is the most important for us to improve (CL5).*

However, two other curriculum leaders considered knowledge associated with the political ideology as the most challenging requirements and needed a solid support from their institution to enhance such knowledge.

*As our leadership and management somehow ties together so without a high level of understanding the political ideology of the nation, it is very challenging to make a sound and acceptable decision when an issue or important decision*
needs to be made. Therefore, I think that some of our curriculum leaders including me strongly need to improve this type of knowledge so that we can contribute to the teaching and learning meaningfully and without interfering with the nation political ideology (CL7).

The findings gathered from the majority of the interviews showed that there is a need for development programmes that can strengthen the subject knowledge of the curriculum leaders’ department and political knowledge which could be applied to the development of the learning and teaching.

4.1.2.2. The perceptions of senior leaders/ curriculum leaders on the leadership development opportunities for academic curriculum leaders.

Question 5: What types of leadership development training or programmes does your organisation offer to aspiring leaders prior to their appointments as academic curriculum leaders?

All of the interviewees suggested that their departments do not have adequate training or leadership development programmes due to a lack of funding. Five interviewees including the two deans and other three curriculum leaders stated that their departments only provide two exchange leadership and management experience seminars at the end of the semester break twice a year.

There are two development seminars that are organised at the end of the semester breaks. The programmes are called exchange the leadership and management experience that primarily aims at discussing the weakness and strength of our past semester’s management and teaching and learning. The programmes are just like a round table seminar in which everyone can share their experience and respond to the other’s (SL1).

There are not many formal development programmes available for us in the institution. However, we are strongly encouraged to
apply for an external funded scholarship to pursue our further study (CL8).

The findings showed that apart from mid-year and end of the year experience exchanged seminars, there are no formal leadership development programmes organised by the participants’ department, faculties, or institution. The curriculum leaders need to rely on external funding of scholarships to pursue studies in order to improve their leadership and management skills.

**Question 6: What are the core selection criteria in your organisation to select staff members to participate in the leadership development trainings or programmes?**

All of the interview participants agreed that everyone is encouraged to participate in the internal leadership development programmes. However, to be able to apply for an external scholarship for further study, the individual must have at least one year experience in the current institution and is not on the probation period.

*In relation to our department development programmes such as methodology of languages teaching, leadership and professional development seminars, there are no entry requirements. As long as you work in the department you are encouraged to participate in the programme and some of the development programmes are compulsory for all staff (CL1).*

*Traditionally, if you would like to pursue further study by applying for an external scholarship, you need to be on the permanent staff with at least one year experience working in your department (CL3).*

The findings indicated that there are no entry requirements for internal leadership development programmes. However, if the curriculum leader would like to pursue further study, she/he must be on the permanent staff and have at least one year experience in her/his current organisation.
Question 7: How does your organisation provide or offer leadership development training or programmes to academic curriculum leaders? What leadership capabilities do the leadership programme provide?

All of the interviewees agreed that their departments provide at least two development seminars which are usually organised at the middle and the end of the year. The development programmes do not usually involve external experts but all of the staff and management teams who bring their real experiences from their day-to-day working.

*Our department organises middle year and end of the year discussion table seminars. They are unlike normal professional development programmes, our programmes do not involve external experts but a staff member is the person who runs the workshop… everyone takes turn to bring out their experience they had confronted and explains how she/he had responded to such situations while others can share their thoughts about the good thing and what she/he could have done better,…, these development programmes do not require a huge funding so they are quite worth doing for our department,…, if there is an involvement of external experts, we really need a huge budget but we need to use the budget on other important things (CL4).*

The findings suggested that there are two seminars organised a year. The programmes do not involve external experts due to a lack of budget within the organisation.

Question 8: What are the main constraints of providing leadership development programmes for academic curriculum leaders in your organisation?

According to seven of ten interviewees, the primary constraints of providing leadership development programmes for staff, teachers, and curriculum leaders are the lack of financial support.
A lack of funding has greatly impacted on our department’s capacity to organise development programmes especially the programmes that involve external experts. Inadequate financial support also greatly impacts on our lack of availability of facilities that could support leadership and professional development (CL1).

Every project and money is always tied together. I would consider my faculty as under-funded… it is very challenging for us to be innovative while we are quite sure we do not have the budget to implement the plan (SL2).

The findings showed that inadequate financial support is the major constraint hindering the implementation of leadership development programmes.

4.1.2.3. Leadership development needs for academic curriculum leaders

Question 9: What challenges or issues do academic curriculum leaders encounter?

The majority of the interviewees suggested that there are many challenges the academic curriculum leaders have to confront. The two deans and four of eight curriculum leaders stated that the curriculum leaders are over self-reliant.

Although our department as well as faculty strongly encourage every teacher and curriculum leader to be autonomous and to learn through our mistakes and challenges of our day-to-day work. However, I think that we are being over self-reliant because we are not provided with any technical support when a very specific and serious issue occurs… we are expected to be a good leader, manager, teacher, and sometimes IT person (CL4).
The two deans and other five curriculum leaders stated that the available small number of development programmes do not respond to the specific gaps in knowledge and skills of the teachers and curriculum leaders.

*We do sometimes have leadership and professional development seminars or intensive trainings. However, most of them are organised and run by the institution...the development programmes are designed for all departments in the institution...when all participants are from different departments, it is quite difficult to ensure that the programme can respond to everyone’s needs* (SL2).

In addition, eight interview participants considered having no further study or scholarship from the institution as another challenge for the teachers and curriculum leaders.

*Our department, faculty as well as institution does not provide a scholarship for us to do further study...the only way to pursue a degree-based further study is to apply for an external or foreign scholarship for which we have to compete with people around the country. Therefore, it is very difficult to be awarded such a scholarship* (CL1).

The findings indicated that the curriculum leaders are usually self-reliant because there is a lack of technical support from their faculties and institutions; the available training or development programmes usually does not tailor to their needs, and the curriculum leaders usually have to rely on external funding if they would like to do further study. These three challenges are considered as the primary issues recurring in their departments as well as faculties and institutions.

**Question 10: How do these challenges/issues affect their leadership practice?**

All of the interviewees agreed that the challenges had hindered the achievement of the institutional goals or action plans. Some of the organisation goals and
action plans had been extended and caused a ripple impact on the achievement levels as the workload had accumulated.

*Having a lack of knowledge and skills while the technical support is not available can slow down the teaching and learning… the plan of the department could be delayed and lead to the workload issue and the achievement of the goals set is completed with very low quality (SL1).*

Another impact of the existing challenges is that the respect and trust for the curriculum leaders by the colleagues and subordinates has diminished and ultimately impacted negatively on the teamwork within the department.

*[For sure] curriculum leaders are the role models of the department. Once we fail to pursue a certain task by not showing the confidence in guiding a particular situation, we will not be respected and unable to lead the team…there was a case which recently occurred in our department when some teachers and staff refused to accept the feedback from a curriculum leader because they felt he did not have adequate responsibilities of expertise in the field (CL3).*

The findings revealed that the challenges greatly impact on the curriculum leaders’ workload, increase the time span for the task achievement, decrease the quality of their work and impacts negatively on the teamwork within the organisation.

**Question 11: How do academic curriculum leaders cope with these challenges or issues?**

All of the deans and curriculum leaders stated that any issues that go beyond the abilities and skills of the individuals, need to be advised to and guided by the higher management.

*In public educational organisations, it is a mandatory requirement that any unsolvable problems must be consulted within the higher management. For instance, if the issue occurs*
at the team level and cannot be resolved, it is compulsory that the issue is consulted and supervised by a one level higher management which is subject level...if the issue is still unsolved, it must be passed on to the department level and then faculty level (SL1).

Seven of ten interviewees said that that an open discussion is one of the most effective ways to overcome these challenges.

_Having formal and informal open discussion is usually the best way to exchange thoughts and seek the solution to the issues,..., we have our mid-year and end of the year formal seminar in which everyone is encouraged to open their minds and honestly share and respond to the feedback of senior leaders, colleagues, and subordinates... informal open discussion among colleagues, and between subordinates and senior leaders are also encouraged in our department (SL2)._  

**Question 12: What areas would you encourage academic curriculum leaders to develop in order to enhance their capabilities?**

All of the interviewees considered improving in a foreign language as one of the most significant areas that all curriculum leaders should develop.

_Due to the national development plan and international cooperation, especially after our nation has joined AEC, we have not been working isolated. There are regional seminars we have to join... it has not happened so far but we are expected to be able to host a regional seminar or workshop. Thus, right now it is very crucial and I cannot stress more, that all teachers, curriculum leaders, as well as our senior leaders should work on their foreign language proficiency, especially English (SL1)._  

_I have to say improving formal foreign language is the top priority right now because our department as well as institution_
or probably all public educational institutions do not offer further study scholarships and most importantly, our teachers as well as everyone here cannot afford the expense of further study…Therefore, we need to work hard on foreign language development and apply for an international scholarship for our further development in responsibilities of expertise and knowledge…one of the international scholarship’s selection criteria is foreign language proficiency (CL2).

The two deans and six other curriculum leaders agreed that broadening their knowledge of politics and educational policy are two areas that curriculum leaders need to improve.

Our national political ideology has always been tightly interconnected to the educational policy,…, it is very helpful for all teachers, and curriculum leaders to understand in depth all of education policies, requirements as well as the current amendments which possibly will impact on our learning and teaching,…, having a clear understanding of the national ideology, vision, and strategic development will help us to respond to the development meaningfully (SL2).

I think that gaining political acumen is necessary for all curriculum leaders, teachers as well as general staff because it is one of the criteria for promotion to a higher position and most importantly, political knowledge is very challenging, there are no formal courses that we can attend, but it is interconnected to our institution’s educational policy and vision (CL1).

The findings suggested that both senior leaders and curriculum leaders see learning a foreign language, and gaining knowledge of the politics of the day as the necessary knowledge for curriculum leaders to strengthen their capacity.

**Question 13: What are the leadership development needs for academic curriculum leaders in Lao higher education?**
All of the interviewees stated that there is a strong need for a leadership development programme or scholarship to be offered in their departments and faculties. The two deans and five curriculum leaders agreed that their departments, faculties or institution should provide a specific development programme or a scholarship for teachers and curriculum leaders to study overseas.

*Although we have many curriculum leaders and teachers who have graduated from many countries that have world class educational profiles like Australia, the United States of America, China, etc., there are many specific skills and knowledge we need to develop (SL1).*

*No matter how good or skilful the educational leaders and teachers are, working in higher education they need to have a consistent development programme on what is happening in the world outside their offices (CL8).*

*Instead of relying on external funding scholarships, our institution should take the responsibility by asking for government funding to provide a specific development programme or scholarship,...., the foreign scholarships sometimes do not offer the field of study that we can use to address our specific issues and fill the gap of missing knowledge or skills. Therefore, if our faculty or institution could offer a scholarship that we can bring back a specific knowledge, it would be very helpful for our teaching and learning development (CL5).*

The findings showed that there is a strong need for leadership development programmes for both curriculum leaders and teachers. However, the data suggests that the development programmes that are designed and organised by internal staff, are more beneficial than those provided by external stakeholders.

**4.1.2.4. The core elements of a proposed leadership development programme for academic curriculum leaders**
Question 14: What are the core elements of a proposed leadership development programme for academic curriculum leaders?

All of the interview participants agreed that the key elements of a proposed leadership development programmes should be the knowledge and skills which could help the curriculum leaders to carry out their roles and responsibilities, and elements that are required for the new promotion.

Nine of the ten interviewees stated that political knowledge and capabilities, foreign language, and IT skills are the necessary knowledge needed to be focused. Whereas seven of the ten interviewees believe that managing and leading capability are other key elements that all leadership development programmes for curriculum leaders should have.

The findings revealed that there are four key components of leadership development programmes for the curriculum leaders; political knowledge and capabilities, foreign language, IT skills and managing and leading knowledge and skills.

4.2. FINDINGS FROM DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

4.2.1. Introduction

This section provides the summary of the findings gathered from document analysis of four documents from four different departments in two faculties in a Lao higher education institution, four documents from the Ministry of Education and Sports, and one government decree document (see Table 4.2: Coding of the documents). The findings are sectioned into four main parts; the role and expectations of curriculum leaders, leadership development opportunities for academic curriculum leaders, leadership development needs for academic curriculum leaders; and the core elements of a proposed leadership development programme for academic curriculum leaders.
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<td>2.</td>
<td>School Document 2</td>
<td>Departmental Responsibilities and Job description</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<td>Departmental Responsibilities and Job description</td>
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<td>4.</td>
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4.2.2. Findings

4.2.2.1. The roles and expectations of curriculum leaders

4.2.2.1.1. The roles and expectations of curriculum leaders

According to The Ministry of Education and Sports (2013, 2014), the curriculum can vary from one institution to another. However, all curriculums must consist of three national educational characteristics; nationalism, science and people learning experience; and five educational principles; disciplines, knowledge, workforce, accountability, and arts. All level leaders must be responsible for ensuring that these characteristics and principles are included in the curriculum and they are constantly implemented (The Ministry of Education and Sports, 2013, 2014).

The document analysis suggested that the roles and responsibilities of the curriculum leaders in the Lao higher education institution are strongly influenced by the three mandated educational characteristics and the five educational principles. According to the four school documents the curriculum leaders’ roles and responsibilities are interconnected to many aspect of learning, teaching, managing, and maintaining mandated political requirements (School Document 1, 2013; School Document 2, 2014; School Document 3, 2014; School Document 4, 2014). The four documents clearly group the roles and responsibilities of the curriculum leaders into two major categories; the curriculum leaders as a vice-head of a department and the curriculum leaders as a head of a department.

The four School Documents state that the curriculum leaders as the vice-head of a department need to be responsible for five key responsibilities of expertise-related tasks; management of learning and teaching, management of the academic and social science research, management work/subject-related skills improvement, management of curriculum supplementary activities, and management of final year students’ thesis writing and vocational training. Whereas the curriculum leader as a head of a department is accountable for other five key management-related tasks; political responsibility, personnel allocation and administration, financial management, supervision of the head teachers, and management of all issues related to the staff, teachers within the
In relation to these roles and responsibilities, The School Document 1 (2013) details the roles and responsibilities of the curriculum leaders as the head of a department that:

1. Political responsibility (Advocating the political ideology to the subordinate, organising leadership and professional development programmes, assessing and reporting the result to the dean of the faculty, acting as the representative of the department in the Institution Board of Administration).
2. Personnel allocation and administration (planning and observing all projects within the department, implementing and controlling the project to ensure the achievement of the projects’ aims and purposes, planning and acquiring for the needs of the department, planning the professional development programmes for the staff inside and outside the country, encouraging the staff to constantly develop and improve their knowledge and skills, observing, supporting, and assessing the work of teachers and staff, managing and observing students’ everyday learning activities, reinforcing the department rules and standards, as well as law of the country, managing and controlling the condition of the department builds, facilities, as well as teaching and learning equipment, and assessing and recording the teachers’ achievement and reporting to the faculty for their award or promotion).
3. Financial management (managing overall budget, expense of the department, managing the financial system of the department, allocating and assigning the financial manager of the department.
4. Supervision of the head teacher.
5. Management of all issues related to the staff, teachers within the department (pp. 16-17).
School Document 3 (2014) also lists all the required roles and responsibilities of a curriculum leader as the vice-head of a department that:

1. Management of learning and teaching (planning, designing, and managing the curriculum and related projects, acting as a representative of the departmental curriculum designers to participate in faculty’s curriculum design and management, allocating teachers into each subject, supervising the design of teaching schedules, semester examinations and yearly examinations, assessing the implementation of the curriculum, observing, assessing and improving the departmental and faculty curriculum, supervising the record of the students’ enrolment statistics, the students’ academic records and graduations, observing and providing additional support to the down-graded students).

2. Academic and Social Science Research (managing all academic and social science research within the department, encouraging and supporting the teachers to improve their research skills through the faculty, university as well as external scholarships).

3. Work/Subject-related skills improvement (encouraging the teachers to improve their work-related skills through participating in development programmes of the department, faculty as well as institution, supporting and encouraging the teachers to apply for scholarships to improve their work-related skills).

4. Curriculum supplementary activities (coordinating staff to organise and manage the departmental activities that are related to teachers’ skills and knowledge improvement, planning and supervising the organisation of seminars and supplement activities aiming at improving teaching and learning in special events).

5. Final year students’ thesis writing and vocational training (planning and managing overall final year students’ thesis writing, observing and supervising students’ thesis-writing
supervisors, supervising the organisation of the thesis presentations, providing the additional support (when it is necessary) for the students’ thesis writing, supporting, facilitating and supervising the students’ vocational trainings in the participated external stakeholders) (pp. 16-17).

The findings of the documents analysis show that the role and responsibilities of the curriculum leaders consist of two major categories; the curriculum leaders as the head of a department and the curriculum leaders as the vice-head of a department. The curriculum leaders who are the head of department are accountable for five major responsibilities; political responsibility, personnel allocation and administration, financial management, support the head of the classroom teachers and manage all issues related to the staff and teachers within the department. Whereas the vice-head of the department is responsible for five different responsibilities; management of learning and teaching; academic and social science research; work/subject-related skills improvement; curriculums’ supplementary activities, final year students’ thesis writing and vocational training.

These two major categories of the roles and responsibilities of the curriculum leaders confirm the finding from the semi-structured interviews that the curriculum leaders in Lao higher education are primarily responsible for three broad roles and responsibilities which are interconnected to teaching, managing and maintaining political accountability for their senior management.

4.2.2.1.2. The progression requirements of curriculum leaders

In relation to the requirements of promotion of a decision-making position in public educational section, the article no 4 of the government decree no 461/NDC amended on 9 October 2012 states that the prerequisites of all level leadership and management positions are to have:

Political knowledge and beliefs, relevant knowledge and skills, managing and leading skills, having at least two years’ work
experience in public educational sectors, and must be physically and mentally healthy (The National Assembly, 2012, p. 30).

This document confirms the findings from the interview of the two deans and eight curriculum leaders who agreed that the progression requirements of the curriculum leader depends on five key prerequisites; work experience in every position below the curriculum leadership, at least holding a master degree, acceptable political acumen and seniority, and to be physically and mentally healthy.

4.2.2.1.3. The required capabilities you need to have before being promoted to a curriculum leader

The article no 4 of the government decree no 461/NDC amended on 9 October 2012 also list all the required capabilities before being promoted to any decision-making position:

1. ability in summarising and reporting to the higher management.
2. strong in the work-related knowledge.
3. completed at least one management course.
4. abilities in learning from teams and colleagues.
5. computing and information and technology (IT) skills.
6. Foreign languages (relevant the work)

The data from the document analysis confirms the findings from the interviews that the required capabilities for the curriculum leadership position promotion are the department’s subject knowledge, leadership and management experience, qualifications and skills, political judgement skills. The document analysis also suggests two additional requirements for the curriculum leadership position promotion; computing and IT skills and relevant foreign languages.
4.2.2.2. The leadership development opportunities for academic curriculum leaders.

4.2.2.2.1. The core selection criteria to select staff members to participate in the leadership development trainings or programmes

According to School Document 1 (2013); School Document 2 (2014); School Document 3 (2014), all staff, teachers as well as curriculum leaders are entitled for a long study leave. However, the new recruits who are on their probation period are not considered for a study leave longer than their annual vacation period (15 days).

School Document 2 (2014) defines new recruits as:

*New recruits are anyone who has joined the organisation with a period of not more than one year or are on the unpaid probation period*(School Document 2, 2014, p. 10).

In relation to the leadership development opportunities, The Ministry of Education and Sports (2013) documented that:

*New recruits may not be eligible for some of the organisation’s policies such as social welfare, salary, or further study opportunities as the permanent staff*(The Ministry of Education and Sports, 2013, p. 26).

The data from the documents analysis confirms the findings from the interviews that all staff, teachers, and middle-level leaders and managers exclusively new recruits are entitled for a short and long further study or development programmes to enhance their leadership and work-related knowledge and skills.

4.2.2.3. Leadership development needs for academic curriculum leaders

Throughout the analysis of all the documents above, there is no recognition of the leadership development needs of curriculum leaders within the participating institution and other public educational sections that are not involved in this research project.
4.2.2.4. The core elements of a proposed leadership development programme for academic curriculum leaders

4.2.2.4.1. Requirements for a proposed leadership development programme for academic curriculum leaders

According to The Ministry of Education and Sports (2013, 2014), all curricula must embrace three national characteristics of education; nationalism, science and people learning experience; and five educational principles; disciplines, knowledge, workforce, accountability, and arts. These three national characteristics of education and five educational principles are the guided scope and required to be embedded in all formal and long courses (The Ministry of Education and Sports, 2013).

The document analysis revealed there are two major categories of requirements of formal leadership development programmes. It is suggested that all formal and long leadership development programmes must embed the three national characteristics of education and five educational principles. This data adds the additional information to the findings of the interviews which suggested that there are four key components of leadership development programmes for the curriculum leaders; political knowledge and capabilities, foreign language, IT skills and managing and leading knowledge and skills.
4.3. SUMMARY

After synthesising all data from both interviews and document analysis, there is strong evidence that the curriculum leaders in Lao higher education hold a diverse role from the lower level of teachers up to the higher academic level of curriculum leaders. Having such a broad role, the curriculum leaders are expected to be responsible for the two major groups of responsibilities; responsibilities of expertise and responsibilities of disciplines.

In relation to leadership development opportunities, apart from a couple of seminars, there are no formal leadership development programmes available within their institution. However, all permanent staff can be granted long study leave once they can access a scholarship.

However, while there are no formal development programmes, most of the interview participants agreed that their organisation should provide formal development programmes that can provide specific knowledge and skills dealing with their ongoing issues, specifically within their organisations.

Regarding requirements of a proposed development programme, while the document analysis revealed the requirements of a development programme or course, the data from the interviews suggested the specific knowledge and skills a development programme should emphasis. The document analysis suggested that all formal and long development programmes must consist of the three national characteristics of education; nationalism, science and people learning experience; and five educational principles; disciplines, knowledge, workforce, accountability, and arts. Whereas the finding from the interview indicated four key areas a development programme should focus on; political knowledge and capabilities, foreign language, IT skills and managing and leading knowledge and skills.
Table 4.3: Summary of the findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Themes</th>
<th>Key Findings</th>
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<tr>
<td>The roles and responsibilities of curriculum leaders</td>
<td><strong>Roles:</strong></td>
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<td>- Teachers</td>
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<td>- Academic leaders and managers</td>
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<td>- Political advocate</td>
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<td>- Financial managers</td>
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<td>- Academic and social science researchers and supervisors</td>
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<td><strong>Responsibilities:</strong></td>
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<td>- Interpreting the institution policies and strategies into action plan</td>
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<td>- Monitoring and evaluating, and supervising the teachers and staff</td>
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<td>- Implementing academic and social science research and supervision.</td>
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<td>- Assessing and evaluating the curriculum and administrative tasks.</td>
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<td><strong>Responsibilities of expertise:</strong></td>
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<td>- Maintaining political accountability, department’s vision, and standards.</td>
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<td>- Improving political acumen.</td>
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<td><strong>Progression requirements:</strong></td>
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<td>- Work experience in every position below the curriculum leadership.</td>
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<td>- Holding at least a master degree.</td>
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<td>- Acceptable political acumen.</td>
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<td>- Seniority</td>
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<td>- Physically and mentally healthy</td>
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<td><strong>Required capability developments:</strong></td>
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<td>- Political acumen</td>
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<td>- Subject/ work-related knowledge.</td>
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<td>- Computing and IT skills</td>
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<td>- Foreign language proficiency and foreign language teaching methodology.</td>
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<td><strong>Ways to enhance the required capabilities:</strong></td>
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<td>- Open discussion with subordinates, colleagues and senior leaders</td>
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<td>- Consulting with the higher management.</td>
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<td>- Pursuing a specific leadership development programmes especially those are designed and organised by their departments, or faculties.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Leadership development opportunities for academic curriculum leaders</th>
<th>Existing Leadership development programmes</th>
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<td></td>
<td>- Only two seminars organised every year. There are no formal leadership development programmes provided by the departments or institution.</td>
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<td><strong>Selection criteria of participating the leadership development programmes:</strong></td>
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<td>- Permanent staff are eligible for study leave. New recruits who are on the job probation period are not eligible for study leaves longer than 15 days.</td>
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<td><strong>Constraints of providing leadership development programmes:</strong></td>
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<td>- A lack of financial support.</td>
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<th>Leadership development needs for academic curriculum leaders</th>
<th>Requirements of a formal and long leadership development programmes:</th>
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<td><strong>The core elements of a proposed leadership development programme for academic curriculum leaders</strong></td>
<td><strong>National characteristics of education:</strong></td>
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<td>- Nationalism</td>
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<td>- Science</td>
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<td>- People learning experience</td>
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<td><strong>Five educational principles:</strong></td>
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<td>- Disciplines</td>
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<td>- Accountability</td>
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<td><strong>The knowledge and skills the leadership development programmes should focus on</strong></td>
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<td>- political knowledge and capabilities</td>
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<td>- educational management and leadership</td>
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<td>- foreign language</td>
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<td>- IT skills</td>
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CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter draws a correlation between the literature reviewed and the key findings from the interviews and the document analysis. This chapter also provides the conclusions from the data to make some recommendations to senior leaders and curriculum leaders in Lao higher education to develop their leadership capabilities. This chapter finally raises the limitations of this research, and makes recommendations for future research.

This study used a qualitative approach gathering descriptive and interpretative data from the ten interviews with two deans and eight curriculum leaders in a Lao higher education institution, and the analysis of nine relevant documents.

The discussions of findings and its conclusions are presented according to the identified four main themes: roles and responsibilities of curriculum leaders in a Lao higher education institution, leadership development opportunities for academic curriculum leaders, leadership development needs for academic curriculum leaders, and the core elements of a proposed leadership development programme for academic curriculum leaders.

5.2. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.2.1. Roles and responsibilities of curriculum leaders in a Lao higher education institution

The findings from the ten interviews and the nine documents analysed, revealed that the curriculum leaders in Lao higher education institution are performing multi-roles as teachers, academic leaders and managers, financial managers, political advocate, academic and social science researchers, and supervisors. These roles are interconnected to two primary responsibilities; responsibilities of expertise which deal with teaching, and managing, and responsibilities of disciplines which are associated with maintaining and reinforcing the political accountability and standards of the department as well as the institution.
Many international researchers claim that the curriculum leaders’ roles and responsibilities are interconnected to two primary tasks; teaching and managing (Blandford, 2006; Fitzgerald, 2000b). However, the findings of this study suggested that apart from pursuing teaching and managing tasks, the curriculum leaders also have political responsibilities. The findings of these additional political tasks of the curriculum leaders are also supported by Mahavong (2015) who conducted his research in a similar context to this study. He argues that the curriculum leaders perform three primary tasks; teaching, managing and advocating political accountability. In relation to this additional task, Bolman and Deal (2008) note that managers and leaders are inevitably connected to power and politics and politics is sometimes a necessary option to balance the needs of the institutions and societies. In a similar sense, many researchers argue that politics could be the possible choice of leading strategies to create the negotiating needs of the individuals and their organisations (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Burns, 1978; Hoyle, 1990).

In relation to the curriculum leaders’ responsibilities of expertise, the findings revealed that they are responsible for interpreting the institution policies and strategies into an action plan, monitoring and evaluating, supervising the teachers and staff, implementing academic and social science research and supervision, and assessing and evaluating the curriculum and administrative tasks. These findings are supported by Busher and Harris (1999) who state that curriculum leaders perform multi-tasks especially translation, supervisory leadership, transformation, and representative leadership. While Busher et al. (2000) argue that their responsibilities are associated with shaping the curriculum to meet national standards, planning both the quality and quantity of curriculum materials, establishing a preparatory programme for public examinations, setting clear standard and processes for scoring student’s work, providing special education to support the curriculum, and creating processes of giving feedback on students’ academic performance.

This study shows that the responsibilities of disciplines of the curriculum leaders are involved maintaining political accountability, department’s vision, and
standards as well as improving the political acumen of the subordinates and themselves. This finding is supported by Mahavong (2015)’s argument which points out that the curriculum leaders in Lao higher education work closely with the senior management in terms of interpreting the organisational standards and strategic goals into action plan and ensuring that both developmental and political outcomes are achieved.

Regarding these roles and responsibilities of the curriculum leader, the findings from both interviews and document analysis also suggested that the roles and responsibilities of the curriculum leader as a head of a department are slightly different from the curriculum leader as a vice-head of a department. The roles and responsibilities of the curriculum leader as a head of department have more focus on managing and maintaining political accountability while the roles and responsibilities of the curriculum leader as a vice-head of a department have more emphasis on responsibilities of expertise which are strongly interconnected to implementing, assessing, and evaluating the academic practices.

In relation to progression requirements of the curriculum leaders, the data from the interviews and document analysis agreed that there are five primary prerequisites before being promoted to the curriculum leadership position; work experience in every position below the curriculum leadership, holding at least a master degree, acceptable political acumen, seniority, and good health. In regards to these required knowledge and skills, the data suggests that the curriculum leaders need to work on four capability developments; namely political acumen, subject/ work-related knowledge, computing and IT skills, and foreign language proficiency and teaching methodology.

These findings were also argued by Mahavong (2015) who suggests that the effective curriculum leaders require six capabilities; “political acumen, communication and foreign language skills, subject knowledge, teaching and instructional skills, IT skills, and leadership and management skills” (p. 81). This is echoed by Shahmandi et al. (2011) who suggest that there is a link between effective academic leadership, roles, personal characteristics, behaviours, knowledge and values. In addition, Gonzalez (2004) argues there are four type of
leadership competencies that can enhance the effectiveness of the roles and responsibilities of a leader: personal characteristics and skills which consist of all intrapersonal skills, administrative competencies which deal with managing, leading, communicating and instructing skills, competencies of social responsibilities which deal with sensitivity to cultural and diversity, the national policy, demands, economic situations, and institutional competencies that deal with institutional identity and philosophy, culture, and commitment.

The data suggested three possible ways to improve such capabilities. First, open discussion with subordinates, colleagues and senior leaders, consulting with the senior management, and pursuing a specific leadership development programme especially those that are designed and organised by their departments, or faculties. According to Day (2001), leadership development is interrelated to team building, organisational development and development of social structures and processes. In addition, Blandford (2006) points out that acknowledging what is needed for the curriculum leader’s roles is an integral part of the organisational achievement.

5.2.2. Challenges for curriculum leaders

The findings suggested three major recurring challenges the curriculum leaders are facing. First, although the curriculum leaders are responsible for both managing and teaching, they are over self-reliant as there are not provided adequate support especially those that could assist them in their day-to-day managing and teaching responsibilities. The second challenge the Lao curriculum leaders are confronting is the available leadership development programmes do not tailor their needs. The finding also suggested the lack of internal funding for further study as the third major challenge of the Lao curriculum leaders.

These findings are interconnected what many authors agree. Brundrett, Burton, and Smith (2003); Gronn (2003) state that curriculum leaders are challenged by two major tasks; teaching and managing. However, there is a lack of leadership development programme which could prepare the middle leaders for their new promotion (Mahavong, 2015; Saengaloun, 2012). Saengaloun (2012) also
further that there is a strong need of quality professional development programmes because most of the available professional development programmes usually have low quality and do not address the specific issue in the organisation.

5.2.3. Leadership development opportunities for academic curriculum leaders in a Lao higher education institution

Although the data relating to the leadership development opportunities was not available in documents analysed, there is strong evidence that the curriculum leaders in Lao higher education institution do not have the access to formal leadership development programmes. The findings suggested that there were a mere two seminars organised by their departments or institution every year. These findings are echoed in the research of two other local researchers, Mahavong (2015); Saengaloun (2012) conducted their research in the Lao higher education context, suggest that there are limited opportunities for the curriculum leaders to participate in the leadership development programmes that can specifically address their unique issues. While other international researchers argue that there are a lack of leadership development programmes that can prepare the middle leaders for their new roles and responsibilities (Adey, 2000; Harris, 2009).

In regards to the limited number of leadership development programmes provided by the institution, the aims and purposes of most of the existing programmes were too broad because they were designed and based on the unique issues of most of the departments. This finding reflects on the work of many authors who state that the leadership development programme contents usually cannot cater for the differences of participants’ needs especially those who have different career stages, background, experience and school context (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). In relation to the aims and purposes of the leadership development programmes, Hale and Moorman (2003) argue that leadership development programmes are likely to focus more on the management and administrative aspects and have less emphasis on curricular, pedagogic and learning issues which are more beneficial for teaching and learning.
The findings from both interviews and document analysis also suggest that only permanent staff are eligible for leadership development programmes and long study leave. In other words, people who are not the key staff have a very limited or no opportunities to enhance their capabilities to fulfil their tasks or to progress. This is supported by Mahavong (2015) who suggests that it is more likely that the leadership development programmes are only designed for the aspiring leaders.

The data also revealed the inadequate financial support is the key hindrance to providing leadership development programmes for the curriculum leaders. One of the senior leaders stated that:

*Every project and money is always tied together. I would consider my faculty as under-funded... it is very challenging for us to be innovative while we are quite sure we do not have the budget to implement the plan (SL2).*

The data from this study echoed the arguments of two local researchers who state that limited funding, lack of facilities and inadequate human resources are the key deterrents to providing leadership development programmes to the middle leaders in Lao higher education (Mahavong, 2015; Saengaloun, 2012).

5.2.4. Leadership development needs for academic curriculum leaders in a Lao higher education institution

The findings from the interviews revealed that there is a strong need for development programmes to be tailored to the specific departmental context and to meet the needs of the staff within. Many interviewers believe that provided that the development programmes are designed by or within their own departments, they will fully address the unique issues occurring within their departments.

This finding reflects on the arguments of many authors who note that it is significant for educational leaders to have the access to leadership development programmes that deal with current and future needs while aligning strategically with the schools’ visions (Bush, 2010; Cardno, 2012; Van Velsor & McCauley, 2004). Whereas Huber (2008) suggests that leadership development
programmes would be of benefit in a more complex environment, if they emphasise more personal learning and individual’s needs in terms of dispositions, performance and knowledge. It is perhaps significant for the educational leaders to consider using the elements of unique issues that each department encounters as the key issues that the leadership development programmes needs to address, and to provide the necessary knowledge and skills to tackle the issues.

5.2.4. The key elements of a proposed leadership development programme for academic curriculum leaders in a Lao higher education institution.

The document analysis revealed the requirements of a leadership development programme or course, the data from the interviews suggested the specific knowledge and skills a development programme should emphasise. The document analysis suggested that all formal and long development programmes must consist of the three national characteristics of education; nationalism, science and people learning experience; and five educational principles; disciplines, knowledge, workforce, accountability, and arts.

Although the data from the document analysis shows very broad and unique requirements for leadership development programmes, there are many components of these requirements that are echoed by other notable authors. According to Rudman (2002), a leadership development programme should incorporates three major elements, namely management training, a process which is guided by formal structure intended to develop skill development; management education is the type of learning which takes place in an institutional framework leading to a qualification; and management support through on-the-job and off-the-job support opportunities which lead to professional growth. In a similar sense, Bush (2010) suggests that the design of the leadership development/professional development programmes should embrace four dimensions namely; bridging between the work situation and learning situation for reflection of practice; learning identification; active learning approaches; and ongoing effective learning support as well as assessment of the relationship and its quality. In addition, Cardno (2005) argues that a professional development programme planning should consists of three primary elements:
educational leadership to underpin the model; performance appraisal placed at the heart of the model; and strategic management and review acting as the overarching leadership practice to guide and assess the planning.

The findings from the interviews indicated four key areas that a leadership development programme should focus on; political knowledge and capabilities, foreign language, IT skills and managing and leading knowledge and skills. These areas of knowledge and skills are similar to the arguments of other local researchers (Mahavong, 2015; Saengaloun, 2012).

5.3. CONCLUSIONS

This research project was conducted in a Lao higher education institution aiming at gathering the perspectives of the senior leaders as well as curriculum leaders regarding the leadership development programmes for the curriculum leaders. The aims of this qualitative study are investigating the perceptions of senior leaders and curriculum leaders related to the role of and the expectations for curriculum leaders, the leadership development opportunities for curriculum leaders, and leadership development needs for curriculum leaders in a Lao higher education institution.

The study revealed that the curriculum leaders in the Lao public higher education act multi-roles; teachers, academic leaders and managers, political advocate, financial managers and academic and social science researchers and supervisors. These roles are interconnected to two very broad categories of roles and responsibilities; expertise and disciplines. The responsibilities of expertise deals with interpreting the institution policies and strategies into action plan, monitoring and evaluating, and supervising the teachers and staff, implementing academic and social science research and supervision, supervising students and teachers; and assessing and evaluating the curriculum and administrative tasks. Whereas the responsibilities of disciplines are associated with maintaining political ideology, department’s vision, and standards; and improving political acumen.
Regarding these roles and responsibilities of the curriculum leader, the findings from both interviews and document analysis also suggested the new knowledge that the roles and responsibilities of the curriculum leader as a head of department have more focus on managing and maintaining political accountability while the roles and responsibilities of the curriculum leader as a vice-head of a department have more emphasis on responsibilities of expertise which is strongly interconnected to implementing, assessing, and evaluating the academic practices.

In relation to the progression requirements of the curriculum leaders, this study revealed that there are five primary prerequisites before being promoted to the curriculum leadership position; work experience in every position below the curriculum leadership, holding at least a master degree, acceptable political acumen, seniority, and health. Regarding these required knowledge and skills, the data suggest the curriculum leaders need to work on four capability developments, namely political acumen, subject/ work-related knowledge, computing and it skills, and foreign language proficiency and teaching methodology.

It is also suggested by the empirical data that the curriculum leaders could enhance the required capabilities through the open discussion with subordinates, colleagues and senior leaders, consulting with the higher management, and pursuing a specific leadership development programmes especially those are designed and organised by their departments, or faculties.

There is also a valid evidence showing that there are limited number of leadership development programmes provided by the institution, the aims and purposes most of the existing programmes were too broad because they were designed based on the institution’s issues. In addition, the available programmes are only for the key staff.

This study also suggested that there is a strong need for development programmes that can provide a specific knowledge and skills, especially the programmes or scholarships provided by their departments, faculties or institutions, and especially the development programmes that are designed by or
within their own departments for addressing the unique issues occurring within their departments.

In relation to the required element of a proposed leadership development programme, it was suggested that all formal and long development programmes must consist of the three national characteristics of education; nationalism, science and people learning experience; and five educational principles; disciplines, knowledge, workforce, accountability, and arts.

The findings from the interview indicated four key areas a leadership development programme should focus on; political knowledge and capabilities, foreign language, IT skills and managing and leading knowledge and skills.

5.4. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE HIGHER EDUCATION SENIOR LEADERS AND CURRICULUM LEADERS

The data, has shown a need for a leadership development programme to be developed for the higher education curriculum leaders in Laos. First of all, some of the roles and responsibilities especially those related to the political tasks of the curriculum leaders need to be clearly defined and understood by the curriculum leaders. In both formal and informal discussions the roles could be clarified to assist the curriculum leaders to meet their expected responsibilities.

Another consideration is that the institution should prioritise funding to establish the leadership development programmes either within or else to provide funding for staff to attend external programmes in other tertiary institutions to build their capacities in leadership and management.

The last recommendation is that the institution, the faculties as well as the department, should consider reducing the heavy workload of the curriculum leaders by delegating some of their roles and responsibilities. This could provide the opportunities for other staff who are aspiring to be in a leadership role, to gain experience and have some responsibilities. This has a potential to increase the quality of their work especially teaching and learning. Many notable authors
suggest that one-person leadership does not exist (Ramsden, 1998; Youngs, 2009). While many researchers agree that dealing with teaching and managing already creates a considerable workload for the curriculum leaders (Blandford, 2006; Fitzgerald, 2000b).

5.5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

One of the primary limitations to this research was the limited local literature available in the Lao higher education context. This led to the researcher reviewing a wide range of the international literature relating to the curriculum leadership and leadership development.

Another limitation of this research project is the time-frame of nine months that was very short. The researcher spent considerable time typing the documents from English language to Lao language and the transcription of the interviews and document analysed from the Lao language into English language. Although the research was conducted in Laos, the analysis was completed in New Zealand that resulted in a time lapse between the two different locations.

Another limitation was that the research was restricted to only one Lao higher education institution and the findings are very specific to this institution. However, the findings could have a generic application to other higher education institutions not only in Laos but also in other developing countries.

5.6. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Through the experience and the knowledge that the researcher gained from this research project, the researcher would like to suggest three recommendations for the future research.

The first recommendation is that the future research should be conducted in both private and public higher education institutions in Laos. This would enable a more comparative study to consider the leadership development needs for the curriculum leaders in Lao higher education.
The second recommendation is that the study could include more senior leaders beyond the deans of the faculties to include the dean of the higher education institutions. The latter needs to be involved as they hold the power, control and manage the institutional budget.

The third recommendation is that an online survey could be conducted across a wider sample of curriculum areas and Lao higher education institutions. This online survey would be easier to administer, cost effective, and less time-consuming.
REFERENCES


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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Title: The Leadership Development of Curriculum Leaders in a Lao Higher Education Institution

Section I: The roles and expectations of Curriculum Leaders

Question 1. What are the roles and expectations held of curriculum leaders in your faculty/organisation?

Question 2. What are the progression requirements of curriculum leaders in your faculty/organisation?

Question 3. What are the required capabilities you need to have before being promoted to a curriculum leader in your faculty/organisation?

Question 4. What do you need to do to strengthen the mentioned capabilities?

Section II: The perceptions of senior leaders/curriculum leaders on the leadership development opportunities for academic curriculum leaders.

Question 5. What types of leadership development training or programmes does your organisation offer to aspire leaders prior to their appointments as academic curriculum leaders?

Question 6. What are the core selection criteria in your organisation to select staff members to participate in the leadership development trainings or programmes?
Section III: Leadership development needs for academic curriculum leaders

Question 9. What challenges or issues do academic curriculum leaders encounter?

Question 10. How do these challenges/issues affect their leadership practice?

Question 11. How do academic curriculum leaders cope with these challenges or issues?

Question 12. What areas would you encourage academic curriculum leaders to develop in order to enhance their capabilities?

Question 13. What are the leadership development needs for academic curriculum leaders in Lao higher education?

Section IV: The core elements of a proposed leadership development programme for academic curriculum leaders

Question 14. What are the core elements of a proposed leadership development programme for academic curriculum leaders?

Thank you very much for your valuable time to contribute informative information, answers, and comments to this interview.

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (2015-1022)

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 22/7/2015 - 22/7/2016. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 2: Information Sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Oud Sipasirth. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Educational Leadership and Management in the Faculty of Education at Unitec, New Zealand and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a thesis course which forms a substantial part of this degree.

The aim of this research is to investigate the leadership development of curriculum leaders in a Lao higher education institution. I am particularly interested in the roles and expectations held for curriculum leaders in the higher education setting; the leadership development opportunities for academic curriculum leaders; and their leadership development needs.

I request your participation in the following way:
I will collect data by conducting semi-structured interviews of up to sixty minutes duration. This Information Sheet, the questions for the interviews will be handed to you by the researcher. The interview will be recorded, transcribed and translated by the researcher and the transcription will be checked by a qualified professional who will sign a confidentiality agreement. Neither the dean nor other people will be able to identify you as a participant in this project. The participants will have the opportunity to check the transcription for the accuracy of the information. The interview will be located in a private area such as office, room in your institution. You as the participant can be sent the final report of the interview on request.

If you agree to participate, I will be asking you to sign the attached consent form regarding the interview. It is understood that you may withdraw your consents within two weeks after you have received the transcript from the researcher. Neither you nor your organisation will be identified in the Thesis.
I hope you find this invitation to be of interest. If you have any queries about the research, you may contact my principal supervisor at Unitec New Zealand.

My supervisor is Dr Josephine Howse and may be contacted by email or phone.
Phone: +64 9 8154321 ext. 8348 Email: jhowse@unitec.ac.nz

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (2015-1022)
This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 22/7/2015 - 22/7/2016. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext. 8551. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Participant Consent Form

Programme: Master of Educational Leadership and Management

Project Researcher: Oud Sipasirth

THESIS TITLE: The Leadership Development of Curriculum Leaders in a Lao Higher Education Institution

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understand the information sheet given to me.

I understand that I don’t have to be part of this research project should I choose not to participate and may withdraw my consent within two weeks after receipt of the transcript.

I understand that everything I say is confidential and none of the information I give will identify me and that the only persons who have access will be the researcher and the supervisor. I also understand that all the information that I give will be stored securely on the researcher’s personal computer for a period of 5 years.
I understand that my interview with the researcher will be taped and transcribed with the opportunity to verify the transcription.

I have had time to consider everything and I give my consent to be a part of this project.

Participant Name: .................................................................

Participant Signature: ...................................................... Date: (day, month, year) :

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UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (2015-1022)

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 22/7/2015 - 22/7/2016. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext. 8551. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 4: Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

Research Project Title:
The Leadership Development of Curriculum Leaders in a Lao Higher Education Institution

I Duangpanya VOLAVONG agree to treat in absolute confidence, all information that I become aware of during the course of participation in the above research project. I agree to respect the privacy of those involved and will not divulge in any form, information with regard to any participating person or institution and agree to not retain or copy any information involving the above project.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement and for any harm incurred by individuals or organisations involved, should information be disclosed.

Visou Village, Luangphabang, Laos
Telephone: 020 55555 5965
Fax: (856-71) 253 266
E mail: deepeeman@hotmail.com

Date: 25/7/2015

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (2015-1022)

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 22/7/2015 - 22/7/2016. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 5: Organisation Consent Letter

Lao People’s Democratic Republic
Peace Independence Democracy Unity Prosperity

Ref. No. 2015
Date: June 11th, 2015
Vientiane, Lao PDR

Mr. Oud Sipasirth
Master of Educational Leadership and Management Candidate
Department of Education, Unitec Institute of Technology
139 Carrington Road, Mount Albert, Auckland 1025
Tel: +64 96154321

Subject: Permission to Collect Data at [ ] for Master of Educational Leadership and Management Thesis

LETTER OF PERMISSION

Dear Mr. Oud SIPASIRTH,

You please kindly refer to your letter dated on 03rd June 2015 to [ ] regarding the data collection for your research project leading to master degree thesis writing to be submitted to Unitec Institute of Technology for the degree of Master of Educational Leadership and Management.

In regard to your proposal, we, after having considered, are pleased to inform you that you are permitted to conduct your data collection during the date proposed, Herewith, I, on behalf of the [ ] would like to ask all the faculties and teaching staffs concerned to actively facilitate, assist and participate in his data collection conduction, kindly referring to his document analysis and interview questions. Your kind participation and assistance are highly appreciated and your information given will be confidentially and anonymously treated.

As to inform your arrangement, you please to kindly inform us if you have anything required prior to your data collection to be conducted at [ ] so that we can be appropriately prepared for your requirements.

We indeed wish you to have the success in your data collection and Master degree thesis writing.

Yours Sincerely,

[Signature]

Assoc. Prof. Dr. [ ]

Vientiane Capital, PO Box [ ]
Full name of author: Oud Sipasirth


Department of Education

Degree: Master Degree of Educational Leadership and Management Year of presentation 2016

EITHER:

(1) I agree to my thesis/dissertation/research project being lodged in the Unitec Library (including being available for inter-library loan), provided that due acknowledgement of its use is made. I consent to copies being made in accordance with the Copyright Act 1994.

and

I agree that a digital copy may be kept by the Library and uploaded to the institutional repository and be viewable worldwide.

OR:

(2) I wish to apply for my thesis/dissertation/research project to be embargoed for a limited period as per Academic Policy 12 Conduct of Student Research, Guideline 12/8.

Reason for embargo: ...............................................................................................................................

Supervisor Approval: .............................................................................................................................

Dean, Research Approval: .......................................................................................................................

Embargo Time Period: ............................................................................................................................

_______________________________________________

Signature of author: ...............................................................

Date: 07/07/2016