

Establishing Citizen Democratic Networks to Promote Political Participation in Schools under the Provincial Administrative Organization in Mahasarakham

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Abstract

This research focused on the mechanism of establishing citizen democratic networks to promote political participation in schools under the provincial administrative organization in Mahasarakham. This research aimed to 1) analyze the model of creating a civil-democratic network between universities and schools, and 2) study the process of promoting students' political participation in schools under the provincial administrative organization in Mahasarakham. The qualitative research methods were conducted by document study and then in-depth interviews with the participant observation method. Research instruments were 1) the related documents and research in a reliable database, and 2) four interview questions for each group and the participant observations form. Collected data were analyzed and categorized into critical issues and themes based on the literature. The participants comprised sixty-two interviewees and were divided into four groups: 1) Two representatives of the Office of Education, Religion and Culture of the provincial administrative organization; 2) Twenty school administrators under the provincial administrative organization; 3) Twenty teachers responsible for the civics course, and 4) Twenty high school students. The findings revealed: 1) The model for creating a civic network between universities and schools. There must be a central person in the management position with the authority to command leadership and technical communication between the school and the university. The creation of a network of citizens of democracy will be successful. 2) The process of creating the political participation of students in schools arose from the process of building democratic citizenship through school education and extra-curricular activities. Students can then apply that knowledge in daily life.

Keywords: civics education, democratic citizenship, democratic education, democratic network, extracurricular activity, participation activity, political participation, school education

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

There are many concepts of citizen democracy in political science, for example, critical citizen (Norris, 1999), active citizen (Marinetti, 2003), or participants in the concept of civic culture (Almond & Verba, 1963). The diverse reasons for defining citizens in political science are due to the beliefs of political scientists. The definition of democracy is so flexible that it can be broken up into different models (Held, 2006). However, those diverse political scientists still agree that democracy has some fundamental principles that cannot be changed, such as elections, the rule of law, political participation, and guaranteeing the right to freedom of expression (Bidner et al., 2014; Deschouwer et al., 2010).

Establishing political culture as part of daily life has been brought up and often mentioned to promote democratic lifestyles in practice for children and youth. It is to create a process of political and social participation among youth to instill the ideology of democracy since childhood. Cultivation could happen individually and through cooperation from educational institutions and communities (Chanruang, 2016). This process is to co-design activities through various learning processes in the school. According to the Academic Affairs and Educational Standards Bureau (2014), activities may be carried out through the civics course or by launching projects to promote the learning process to create citizenship in a democratic system. This could include the case of political

participation in people's daily lives to control the exercise of state power. The use of social media and communication tools allows information to pass between them, impacting the state powers' users, and there was an inspection process according to the specified framework by the law. It points out that democratic citizenship can be achieved in every case.

Previous studies on developing citizenship education in foreign countries such as Singapore, Finland, Germany, the UK, and the USA have shown that preparing policy recommendations to improve and develop education to complete citizenship in Thailand is essential. The study found that the organization of the curriculum for citizenship through the learning process encompasses informal, non-formal, and formal education. It was the part of the learning process' development (Siridhrungsri, 2017, pp. 100-113). Creating extra-curricular activities in the civics course is important to help strengthen citizenship in democracy from the foundation level. Citizenship education without cooperation from teachers, students, and local communities to build a democratic learning society together may make the way of life according to democratic principles ineffective (Mansup, 2020).

Therefore, this research aimed to analyze the model of creating a civil-democratic network between universities and schools and promoting students' political participation in schools under the provincial administrative organization in Mahasarakham. The research findings would reveal a successful model of networking to promote shared democratic citizenship between higher education institutions and secondary schools, which is an important part of creating the foundation of democratic knowledge for youth. Promoting students' political participation would lead to developing citizens who understand the principles of democracy.

1.2 Research Objectives

- 1) To analyze the model of creating a civil democratic network between universities and schools.
- 2) To analyze the process of political participation of students in schools under the provincial administrative organization in Mahasarakham.

2. Literature Review

The review of the literature would lead to a research framework for analyzing models of civic-democratic networking between universities and schools and an analysis of the process of political participation of students in schools under the provincial administrative organization in Mahasarakham. The concepts are related to democratic principles, citizenship in a democracy, political participation, and social network analysis.

2.1 Democratic Principles

In the explanations related to the principles of governance in a democracy, many studies on democracy produce various definitions. There is also a change in how views are created and the principles of democracy are explained according to the context of society. Democracy comes from the Greek word *Demokratia*, which comes from the words *demos* (people) and *kratos* (government). This concept of government by the people was developed from the era of direct democracy in Athens until the era when there was a demand to overthrow the use of ruling power in a dictatorship. It opens up the possibility of a government of the people by the people with the guarantee of rights, liberty, and equality through a constitution. The essential principle of popular sovereignty is a political system with free elections. There is a system of checks and balances and civil liberties (Chanruang, 2008; Banomyong, 1974; Schumpeter, 2003).

2.2 Citizenship in Democracy

The workgroup to study and understand the concept of citizenship in a democracy is described in terms of complex concepts and constantly changing social conditions (Bureekul et al., 2019; The Secretariat of The House of Representatives, 2013). According to the study, citizens are categorized into three types as follows:

- 1) Responsible citizen. Citizens who will solve problems and develop society must have good character, honesty, willingness to perform their duties, be responsible, respect the laws and rules of society, have practices such as being responsible to the community, working hard and paying taxes, and obeying the law.
- 2) Engaged citizens. Citizens who want to solve problems and develop society must be involved as leaders of groups. The leaders must be active, attentive to social problems, know how to set up systems and structures, and have guidelines. This includes being a member of an active group of organizations committed to community development, community management, economic development, and understanding the working process of the state and working in connection with the relevant networks.
- 3) Citizens who focus on social justice. Citizens who want to solve problems and develop society must question and change society's existing systems or structures that cause injustice. Some guidelines include critical thinking on the structure of society, policy and economy, and investigating and presenting issues of injustice

in society.

2.3 Political Participation

In the work that studies political participation, it can be explained that political participation is the expression of citizens that affects change in the ruler. It can set and push government policy, express opinions, and scrutinize government actions. Moreover, it includes political rallies and the selection of political leaders at the national and local levels. However, the political participation forms in each society happen in different periods and political participation formats, whether successful or not. Whether from time to time or continuously, the action is intended to influence policy or administration, such as people protesting or expressing opinions on various government policies. Participation in politics is necessary for citizens in a democratic system because it will allow them to gain knowledge and understanding from the experience of being involved in the political process, political nature, and more political problems (Biegelbauer & Hansen, 2011; Brown, 2006; Kongkirati, 2019; Crick, 2002).

2.4 Social Network Analysis

The previous educational studies that describe the creation of a social network as social networking have evolved from the basis of exchange theory. In a social network, some people are related to each other according to each person's roles or duties. Each person does not have just one role in everyday life. Interpersonal relationships in social networks sometimes follow reciprocity theory because individuals do not simply follow expected roles in society or follow inherited norms. Interpersonal relationships are also based on reciprocal perceptions and decisions between the couple. The relationship is both material and spiritual (Chamaratana, 2018). This knowledge was used to analyze social networks and study power and dependency. Networking is a tool for building and developing relationships through which individuals, groups, and organizations can communicate to exchange knowledge and support practical work to achieve individual goals for those groups and organizations. Establishing a solid network does not have to be cohesive (Wipawin, 2015; Purakom, 2007). Loose relationships can regularly transfer knowledge and experience to each other.

Social network analysis can be analyzed as follows (Chutithamwong, 2011; Thongphubate, 2011):

- 1) Analysis of the central person of the network to find influential people in the network. This information is obtained by determining the importance of the people in the network with whom they are related, such as communicating with each other to provide information support, emotional support, encouragement, resource support, etc. This study approach is suitable for studying small networks or randomly selecting some network members to study their strengths.
- 2) A central analysis of the network society or analysis of the whole network. It is the study of every relationship that occurs in a network. The boundaries of the network must be clearly defined.
- 3) An analysis of the loosely connected individuals' actions at the level of people, units, and organizations that are presented as an attempt to increase social costs. They are fostering networked bonds between interest groups and emphasizing the importance of bridging between groups and intergroups. People who connect relationships between groups can strengthen social ties by reorganizing their network.

3. Research Conceptual Framework

The researchers reviewed the literature to analyze the model for building citizen networks in a democracy and creating the political participation process. They then designed the conceptual framework for the research. There are two critical conditions. The first factor is the reliance on groups of people and organizations that will create citizen networks in democracy in schools under the provincial administrative organization in Mahasarakham. The second factor is the political participation factor of the students. It requires learning both inside and outside the educational curriculum that will enable students to understand the mechanisms of political participation, which leads to daily practice.

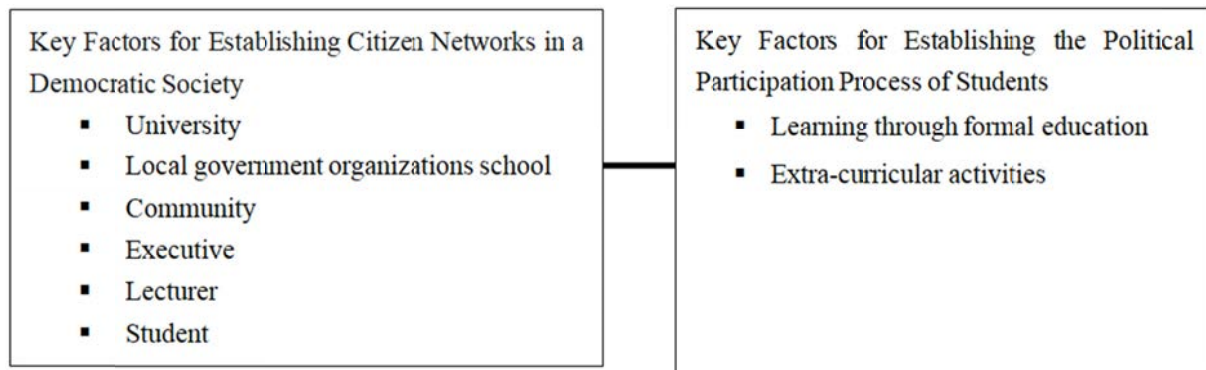


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for research

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Methodology

This research used a qualitative research methodology to study the mechanism of establishing citizen democratic networks to promote political participation in schools under the provincial administrative organization in Maharashtra. There were two main steps:

- 1) Study document. Researchers studied the related documents and research in a reliable database, such as the concept of political participation of citizens in democracy, extra-curricular activities, contents of the civics course at the high school level, the 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan, and the provincial development plan in Maharashtra for the year 2018-2021 to design research tools and research activities.
- 2) In-depth interviews with the participant observation method. Researchers interviewed key informants and people involved in participation activities and designed extracurricular activities in the civics course in-depth. It is a small group discussion on a specific issue with four sets of interview questions designed for four groups of interviewees. Then, the researchers observed using the participant observation method.

4.2 Participants

The participants were selected using objective sampling, which selects representative participants of the relevant agencies as typical cases and a specific participant who provides essential information as the key informant of the relevant agencies, such as the number of responsible teachers or those involved in the student council of each school, or being a teacher in civics courses and the number of students who have the primary responsibilities in the student council of each school.

The participants for this study consisted of sixty-two interviewees who were divided into four groups: 1) Two representatives of the Office of Education, Religion and Culture of the provincial administrative organization in Maharashtra; 2) Twenty school administrators under the provincial administrative organization in Maharashtra; 3) Twenty teachers responsible for teaching the civics course, and 4) Twenty high school students.

Then, the researchers observed using the participant observation method. We have carried out activities in the subjects studied and got involved in situations related to the issues studied. There are reflections after the activities that have been done with the informants each time in order to plan activities with the informants in the future

4.3 Research Instruments

Research instruments included 1) the related documents and research in a reliable database, and 2) four sets of interview questions designed for four groups of interviewees, as the participant observations were conducted.

4.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers collected data from the related documents and research in a reliable database. Then, we interviewed using four interview questions designed for each group along with the participant observations form. The data were analyzed and categorized into critical issues and themes based on the literature. In addition, the data were interpreted in order to explain and evaluate the results of the study. In conclusion, there are links to related concepts and theories.

5. Research Results

The research results on building democratic citizenship among high school students in schools under the provincial administrative organization in Mahasarakham found that the model for creating democratic citizenship networks between universities and schools was explained through the concept of social networks. A person must be at the center of the coordination, with authority and a command and leadership position. Therefore, creating the democratic citizen network will be successful, while an explanation of the political participation process of students in schools under the provincial administrative organization in Mahasarakham is developed. The critical part of creating a mechanism for political participation was cultivation through family practice and classroom teaching and knowledge enhancement through various extra-curricular activities included as part of the content in the social studies, religion, and culture subject groups.

5.1 The Model for Creating a Civic-Democratic Network Between Universities and Schools

According to the concept of social networks, emphasis will be placed on the emergence and maintenance of social relationship networks between individuals as social relation networks that extend throughout society. The factors of the form and characteristics of social networks must be considered to explain the behavior of individuals in the network. The success of a network requires a central person who coordinates or works in operations to ensure the creation of a citizen network. This may cause this network to be unsuccessful in creating a network of democratic citizens between Mahasarakham University and schools under the provincial administrative organization in Mahasarakham. The central person was from the provincial administrative organization in Mahasarakham under the Office of Education, Religion, and Culture. There are two working styles: 1) a single important role, and 2) a variety of people playing essential roles numbering about 3-4 people in the network to support, including the director of the office of education, with supervisors, group leaders, and a deputy group leader.

5.2 Personal Characteristics That Explain the Network's Success

According to the conclusion of the analysis of network structure data about people who play an essential role in coordinating or working in the field of citizen networking, there must be personnel from the university, the provincial administrative organization in Mahasarakham, and the schools. We can analyze the characteristics of people that explain the network's success, including: 1) people who have leadership qualities; 2) people who have techniques for communicating and coordinating connections between schools and universities, and 3) people who can advise about work systems. The analysis results in these characteristics found that people who play important roles that can create success and have all three characteristics are in the executive positions of every organization. Whether it was the Dean of the College of Politics and Governance, the Director of the Office of Education, Religion and Culture, or the directors of all 20 schools in the network, the successful people must contain the following components:

- 1) The coaching mechanism was the participation of the university, which is a mechanism responsible for designing the learning process, increasing the knowledge and skills necessary to drive work, and developing a database system for a network of children and youth who have civic consciousness together with mentors through learning and developing skills to drive children and youth work.
- 2) Provincial administrative organization working group mechanism caused by the working team finding a network of youth and education workers, including a network of experienced teachers working with students in the area of 20 schools, namely Kerngwittayanukul School, Kampompittayakhom School, Khokorpittayakhom School, Nguabawittaya Khom School, Donngoenphitthayakhan School, Thakhonyangphittayakhom School, Nakhawittayakhom School, Nasinuanphittayasan School, Makhapittayakhom School, Matthayomdongyang School, Muangtaowittayakhom School, Loengfeakprachabumrung School, Wiangsa-ardpittayakhom School, Srisukpittayakhom School, Suakokwittayasan School, Nongkowichaprasitpittayakom School, Nongbuapiyanimit School, Nongphovittayakom School, Nongleksuksa School, and Huarueapittayakhom School
- 3) Setting up a mechanism to create awareness, including driving work to elevate systematic work and create roles and responsibilities to give recommendations from project consideration. It is giving perspectives on creating student citizenship to the working group mechanism, including integration with teachers, executives, and representatives from the provincial administrative organizations in Mahasarakham. Related processes must include strengthening listening skills, questioning, analytical thinking, and connecting situations to enhance observing skills in the students' learning changes. It was a skill development for the mentoring team that helped observe and provide feedback on students' democratic citizenship development and the implementation of the student's projects.

5.3 The Process of Political Participation of Students in Schools under the Provincial Administrative Organization in Mahasarakham

Creating citizens in a democratic system was the process of creating people who have knowledge about the political and governance system in a democracy, understand the democratic process, and understand political participation, which was an essential part of the process of creating citizens in a participatory democracy. Conducting extra-curricular activities for students to learn about citizenship was a critical process, along with gaining experience in the political process, political nature, and political problems that caused the space for thought expression and were a part of creating citizens who participate in politics. Cultivating citizenship was of great importance, as was building a democratic society that required a process of knowledge creation and pointed out everyday practices for students.

The interview data on students representing each school participating in the activity and the observations of student behavior that occurred after participating indicated the process of doing activities through enhancing skills and knowledge to create citizenship in the form of five basic activities: civic duties, world citizenship, freedom, tolerance, and equality. The students can illustrate democracy in everyday life and practice through daily life activities such as exchanging opinions with teachers and classmates in various subjects, listening to opinions from those with whom we exchanged without judgment and with mutual respect, exercising the right to elect student council representatives under the framework of fair rules, and paying VAT through the purchase of products used for daily consumption (Student representative, interviewee, 26 February 2021).

Students' political participation would be at the level of greater or lesser participation depending on contextual factors, the political situation, and economic factors. This required a legal mechanism to be certified as well. The interview data on students who gave information showed that students' political participation was at a high level. It occurred in a political context with constitutional mechanisms supporting political involvement. The government allowed people to express different opinions without inviting people to adjust their attitudes. The economic factors of the students' family income were good. They did not need to rely on student labor to earn income for the household, giving students time to be interested in political activities. Political participation would be less when no constitutional mechanism supports free political participation, there is no elected government, and people have to adjust their political attitudes. The economic factor of the students' family income was in the low range, causing students to take time off from study or only sometimes spend their time studying, helping their families earn money. Therefore, they did not have much time to pay attention to politics.

According to the economic factors and political situation during 2014-2020, students stated that household economic factors were complicated and that they had household debt after the COVID situation. As a result, some students had to spend their free time earning money to support their families; therefore, students did not participate in politics. However, there is still some interest in following the political situation.

For the political situation information, the students grew up in political situations with a less democratic atmosphere because they faced two coups in Thailand in 2006 and 2014 and a government that was not elected (Student representative, interviewee, 26 February 2021). This caused a political rally to oppose the coup, with arrests and opposition to political dissent. The political participation forms that students knew and were familiar with have changed. They also had direct experience demanding rights on various issues, namely expressing opinions and examining government actions through political rallies.

Students' political participation patterns in schools under the provincial administrative organization in Mahasarakham were based on the interview data with student representatives. It could be classified as follows:

- 1) Expressing political opinions and examining government actions. Students participate in politics by expressing political opinions through social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter and exchanging political opinions with classmates whenever an interesting political situation arises. Some students participate in investigating public politics by participating in projects in villages, sub-districts, or local government organizations. It also suggests ways to solve local problems through listening to public opinions in community projects. However, students' political participation could not be elevated to the level of civil society at a higher level as expected, having a role in participating in proposing the removal of members or local administrators.
- 2) Political rallies. Although students were aware of the movement and political demonstrations of student groups by themselves in various areas and Mahasarakham province, they were not involved in political rallies. This was because of the long-distance traveling to participate in political rallies. Parents did not encourage participation because the gathering time was usually at night. Students were only exchanging political opinions and discussing the political movements of student groups that were taking place all over the

country.

However, it can be seen if the country's situation has an elected government, it will result in greater political participation following the mechanism of creating democratic citizenship through policy. Citizens can have space to advocate for their own and collective needs, including a way of getting solutions to the problems from the government.

6. Summary and Discussion

The research results are as follows:

6.1 *The Model for Creating a Civic-Democratic Network Between Universities and Schools*

A central person must coordinate or work in the operations to create the civil network; otherwise, creating this network may not be successful. The persons as mentioned above are personnel from the provincial administrative organization in Mahasarakham under the Office of Education, Religion and Culture. There were two working styles: 1) a single important role, and 2) a variety of people playing essential roles numbering about 3-4 people in the network to support, including the director of the Office of Education, supervisors, group leaders, and a deputy group leader. The people have an essential role in coordinating or working in citizen networking. There must be personnel from the university, the provincial administrative organization in Mahasarakham, and the schools. The people's characteristics which could explain the network's success included: 1) people who have leadership qualities; 2) people who have techniques for communicating and coordinating connections between schools and universities, and 3) people who can advise about work systems. These characteristics showed that people who play important roles that can create success and have all three characteristics are in the executive positions of every organization, whether it was the Dean of the College of Politics and Governance, the Director of the Office of Education, Religion and Culture, or the directors of all 20 schools in the network.

According to the results of the study, the model of creating a civic-democratic network between universities and schools explained that the essential roles of the central person involve characteristics as follows: 1) people who have leadership qualities; 2) people who have techniques for communicating and coordinating connections between schools and universities, and 3) people who can advise about work systems. This study's results were consistent with the research of Chutithamwong (2011), who studied and analyzed the social networks of people involved in the schools' student support system from different backgrounds and the individual characteristics that explain the successful networks. The 12 selected schools are based on the school size, school quality, and the success of the student support system. The collected information showed that a central person helped provide care and assistance to students. This person holds the position of head of the student support system or holds the position of deputy director of the personnel management group. He has a working style that plays an essential role as one person and has a network of cooperation within the school, including head level, guidance teachers, and school directors. Such people are essential to the success of a network with unique characteristics. Characteristics of people who play an essential role in coordination or working in the operation of the student care and support system are as follows: 1) communication and coordination techniques; 2) good advice; 3) good care and attention, and 4) a working system. These individuals will be most successful in solving student behavior problems. The success of creating a network of citizens was caused by talking and building good relationships between leaders in organizations representing each network, which is in the same direction as Chutithamwong's research, which has collected suggestions that are beneficial to network building. Creating a successful network requires building good relationships between parents, students, and teachers. All involved parties should be encouraged to participate and be aware of the importance of the student care and support system. However, if the network construction is star-shaped, i.e., having the single highest-value central person making the work concentrated, networks can be easily destroyed.

6.2 *The Process of Political Participation of Students in Schools under the Provincial Administrative Organization in Mahasarakham*

The process of political participation of students in schools under the provincial administrative organization in Mahasarakham involved key factors related to political participation: Students' political participation would be high or low. It also depends on contextual factors, the political situation, and economic factors that require a legal mechanism to be certified. The political participation patterns of students in schools under the provincial administrative organization in Mahasarakham could be classified as expressing opinions and examining the government's actions. Students participate in politics by expressing political opinions through social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, or exchanging political opinions with classmates whenever an interesting political situation arises. Some students participate in investigating public politics by participating in projects in villages, sub-districts, or local government organizations. There was only the follow-up of news related to the

rallies, but they would not participate in political rallies.

According to the results of the process of political participation of students in schools under the provincial administrative organization of Mahasarakham, cultivating citizenship was important for building a democratic society. It required creating a body of knowledge and pointing out the daily practice to the students. As shown in the work of Japar (2018), youth development is needed to create citizenship in a democratic system through the education system. It lays the foundation for youth to learn through activities to develop analytical thinking and to learn from experiences in related case studies by using the basic principles of democracy, such as the principles of human rights, and the principles of political participation. The study of Ribeiro and Menezes (2022) referred to activities that take place in citizenship education. It was a meeting forum, presenting information to exchange opinions and debating on various issues which plays an important role in giving young people the confidence to express their political opinions, leading to the development of skills and a tendency to participate in politics.

Moreover, the interview data on students representing each school participating in the activity and the observations of student behavior that occurred after participating indicated the process of doing activities through enhancing skills and knowledge to create citizenship in the form of five basic activities: civic duties, world citizenship, freedom, tolerance, and equality. The students can illustrate democracy in everyday life and practice through daily life activities (Student representative, interviewee, 26 February 2021). This research result was in the same direction as the study of the civil sector political promotion office (King Prajadhipok's Institute, 2016) in the issue development and building citizenship of provincial citizen schools in Roi Et, which were about developing and creating citizenship for learners in the community to have knowledge and understanding, and to be able to develop the potential oneself and the strong community according to the actual needs of the community, while having a sense of citizenship in a democratic system. Setting up a civic school in one's community area was another channel for citizens to exchange knowledge. The community leaders were participating in determining the curriculum to create education that accessed the community ways. The Citizen School Drive has studied schools in Roi Et province, covering 20 districts, and 16 citizen schools. Additionally, it found that creating civic schools was a new dimension of instilling knowledge in various subjects related to citizenship in a democracy. It has been transmitted from citizen lecturers to the real action by community participation that starts from an individual and leads to the community's everyday issues.

7. Suggestions

- 1) The government must push citizenship education to become a law and a national agenda. Most foreign case studies pushed education to create citizenship from the legal level to show the clear intention of the importance and the need for continuous youth development.
- 2) The agencies related to education should reform the entire social studies curriculum systematically and create a process of understanding by using various activities as tools that make the school a model place for creating democracy in everyday life.

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Authors contributions

Yanapirat, T. was responsible for study conception and design, literature review, research tools, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of results. Yanapirat, T. and Seechaliao, T. drafted and revised the manuscript. Seechaliao, T. was the corresponding author. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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