Enhancing Life and Career Skills for Students in Khon Kaen Wittayayon School, Khon Kaen Province

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Abstract

The objective of this research was to enhance the life and career skills of the students at Khon Kaen Wittayayon School in Khon Kaen Province by utilizing participatory action research methodology that involved the development of three aspects: (1) changes in the expected and unexpected outcomes from the implementation, (2) learning gleaned from the implementation process for the researchers, co-researchers, and school, and (3) the theoretical knowledge grounded in the specific context of Khon Kaen Wittayayon School. The target group for the development of the research was students in Grades 10-12 at Khon Kaen Wittayayon School, with a total of 268 individuals. The research involved 2 cycles and was comprised of 10 steps.

The results of the study indicated the following: (1) there were improvements in both expected and unexpected outcomes, both in cases in which the jointly developed development guidelines had been followed and in cases, in which the expected life and career skills had been developed; (2) the researchers, co-researchers, and school learned together about the effectiveness of collaborative work, which had helped everyone to see the inefficiency of the individual work that had been carried out in the past; and (3) the theoretical knowledge gained from the implementation, which explained the relationships between expected changes and the driving forces behind those changes, the barriers to change, and the strategies for overcoming those barriers.

Keywords: life and career skills, Khon Kaen Wittayayon School, participatory action research, learning from practice, context-specific knowledge

1. Introduction

The current changes in media and technology are having a significant impact on the hiring practices of various organizations. At present, it is evident that employers are seeking to hire a new generation of workers with appropriate job skills or "soft skills." Therefore, many employers are willing to train high school seniors and sixth-form students to equip them with the important skill sets that are necessary for employment. The required job skills for employment consist of (1) personal responsibility, (2) a good work ethic, (3) teamwork and helping behaviors, (4) leadership & conflict management, and (5) social skills. Therefore, in order to prepare youth for their future careers, it is crucial to understand the learning methods for acquiring these essential skills, as the students receive their high school educations.

The development of life and career skills, as outlined in the National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP) 12th edition for the years 2017-2021, were aligned with the seven objectives and targets for development during the NESDP 12th Plan. This plan placed emphasis on the establishment of a foundation for Thai citizens to become complete individuals, who possess ethics, discipline, good values, public spirit, and happiness; who have good physical health, good mental health, and warm families; and who have the ability to continuously develop their knowledge and skills throughout their lifetimes. The plan also highlighted the importance of economic and social stability and sustainability, as well as the conservation and restoration of natural resources and the quality of the environment. Additionally, efficient, and transparent governance was stressed, along with a collaborative approach to development across all sectors. The goal was to promote regional connectivity and to expand production and service capabilities. Ultimately, the aim of these efforts was to ensure that Thailand is fully and efficiently connected at the regional, national, and international levels so that leadership roles can be assumed, and innovations can be fostered in

the areas of trade, services, and investment within the various cooperative frameworks (National Economic and Social Development Board, 2017).

Khon Kaen Wittayayon School, located in Khon Kaen Province, is a large and prestigious educational institution that offers primary and secondary education (Grades 7-12). The school's vision is to be a high-quality institution that excels in academic education and that can serve as a model for educational management from basic education to professional careers. The organizational culture of the school places emphasis on a commitment to academic excellence. According to the assessment results based on indicators related to life skills and career skills during the Academic Year of 2020-2021, it was found that some students had not met the target of achieving an assessment score of at least 80%. Therefore, it is necessary to develop and enhance the life skills and career skills of the students at Khon Kaen Wittayayon School in Khon Kaen Province, which has not yet achieved the target previously set by the Basic Education Commission and the Khon Kaen Secondary Educational Service Area Office. The target was to have 80% of the students develop knowledge, abilities, or vocational skills in various areas to enhance occupational and life adaptations in society, which align with the requirements and contexts of each area and the challenges of the 21st-century world. The processes of improving the quality of life and career skills of students will be impacted by these challenges (Khon Kaen Wittayayon School, 2021).

2. The Objectives of the Study

Through the process of participatory action research, this study aimed at enhancing the life skills and career skills of the students at Khon Kaen Wittayayon School in Khon Kaen Province. The study intended to achieve three objectives: (1) to identify changes in the expected and unexpected outcomes from practice, (2) to learn from practice, which included the lessons learned by the researchers, co-researchers, and the school regarding what should or should not be done based on the research activities, which did not refer to knowledge gained from training or academic materials, but rather to practical knowledge, and (3) to gain theoretical knowledge rooted in the specific context of Khon Kaen Wittayayon School located in Khon Kaen Province, which served as the fundamental basis for future development.

3. Research Methodology

The current research is a participatory action research study, in which the researchers identified the research participants based on voluntary participation and ethical considerations. The researchers provided the participants with information on the nature of the research process, including giving suggestions and explaining the benefits to the participants, as well as placing emphasis on the principle of respecting the privacy rights of those individuals, who did not wish to participate. The research participants were made up of the school's Deputy Director, Head of the Academic Department, and the Head of the Curriculum Development Unit, as well as nine high school teachers, totaling 12 individuals. The target group for the development of the research was students in Grades 10-12 at Khon Kaen Wittayayon School, with a total of 268 individuals. The research involved 2 cycles and was comprised of 10 steps.

4. Results

4.1 The Expected and Unexpected Changes in the Outcomes Resulting from Practice

4.1.1 The Expected Changes

The study evaluated the expected and unexpected changes in learning outcomes by comparing the average scores of the pre-assessment and post-assessment of the learning characteristics before and after implementing the first and second cycles of development. The results showed a significant improvement in the average scores from 3.40 before the first cycle to 4.17 after the first cycle and then to 4.27 after the second cycle of development, indicating positive changes in the lives and career skills of students at Khon Kaen Wittayayon School.

4.1.2 Unexpected Changes

As a result of implementing the program, the following unexpected changes were observed:

1) The teachers became more interested and involved in the program since it had directly impacted the students' learning outcomes. Their eagerness to learn increased, and they became more enthusiastic about teaching.

2) Participation in the various life and career skills activities had increased the teachers' involvement in the program, allowing them to understand and to perform their roles more effectively and with a greater sense of

willingness.

3) Learning occurred at various levels - individual, group, and school-wide.

4) The work became natural. Everyone was friendly and open-minded and was able to express his or her opinions well. This resulted in the program exceeding the expected outcomes.

5) The program led to unity and collaboration, as well as to the concerted efforts of teachers and stakeholders in naturally achieving the shared goals, without pressure. The shared learning experience was enjoyable and rewarding.

6) The rate of absenteeism, truancy, and disinterest in learning decreased. Moreover, the students were given more opportunities to participate and express their opinions. Increased shared responsibility among stakeholders created a more conducive learning environment.

4.2 Learning from Practice

4.2.1 Individual-Level Learning

1) Working as a Team: Having clear information, allowing the freedom to think and to solve problems, and placing emphasis on self-development.

2) Collaborating: Working together as a team can result in better exchanges for learning and in more job success than working independently.

3) Incorporating principles: Using the Four Noble Truths, the Four Brahma Viharas, the Four Right Efforts, the Five Faculties, and the Seven Factors of Enlightenment can promote cooperation within the workplace.

4.2.2 Group-Level Learning

1) Learning about collaborative teamwork, which is based on the principles of the Five Faculties, can promote better cooperation among members.

2) Learning about the principles of the Four Right Efforts can lead to success in achieving the objectives.

4.2.3 Learning at the Organizational Level

1) In accordance with the Seven Principles of Sufficiency Economy, participating in collaborative development and in solving problems related to life and career skills can lead to successful outcomes and benefits in the development of people, work, and organizations.

2) The integration of the Sufficiency Economy and the Four Principles of Compassion can improve the development of life and career skills for teachers through their persistence and the sacrifices they make to complete the work.

3) Participation from the management team can effectively drive the research activities since they can provide guidance and support during the process.

4.3 The Knowledge Gained from Practice

Knowledge from Practice

1) The important principles that can lead to successful work are as follows: 1) the principle of voluntary participation; 2) the principle of working together with collaborative effort; 3) the principle of being aware of the potential that is hidden within the research participants, 4) the principle of being a researcher, who has a theoretical understanding; and 5) the principle of integrating the life and career skills of students, while also exploring the potential within the research participants with respect to the theoretical knowledge studied by the researcher.

2) The knowledge, gained from practice, comes from the collaboration and co-creation of proposals with a variety of options between the researcher and research participants during the process of integrating academic and experiential streams that can enhance the life and career skills of students. This is achieved through the implementation of the five principles, five strategies, five steps, and five ethical principles that lead to successful work.

3) Knowledge gained from practice is derived from a system of thinking for the purpose of taking action that aims to bring about change. The researcher and research participants were aware of the current situation, the desired expectations, and the effective driving forces that could help in achieving those expectations.

5. Discussion

5.1 Changes in Practice

The evaluation results of the expected learning outcomes were compared before the first cycle, after the first cycle, and after the second cycle of practice using the assessment form of the expected learning outcomes from the development. The results showed an increase in the average values in sequence. The significant reason for this was due to the first aspect, which resulted from using the methodology of participatory action research (PAR), which emphasizes the importance of using democratic leadership. The researchers and co-researchers collaborated equally in planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The study demonstrated that the use of the participatory action research methodology, which prioritizes the use of democratic leadership, had demonstrated a positive impact on effectiveness and productivity compared to the use of authoritarian leadership. The second aspect was a result of using the R-C-A activity integration approach in the curriculum management plan for all subject areas that were aligned with the problems and subjects of each teacher. The approach aims at enhancing the effectiveness of each teacher's implementation by assigning one teacher to develop an R-C-A integrated learning plan for each unit of study. From the researchers' perspective, this is a powerful measure that promotes change because not only does each researcher have to adhere to the principle of collaborative teamwork, but he or she must also adapt to thinking creatively and developing innovative thinking skills. This enables the production of appropriate and relevant innovations or selection strategies that can be utilized to help solve the problems faced by both teachers and students. When implemented, this approach leads to positive changes. Therefore, it is important to encourage teachers to think creatively and to study a variety of information to develop effective learning activity plans that can be used with students. This is important since it can promote benefits to students in multiple ways. According to the perspective of Rooptam and Sanrattana (2021), the increasing number of educational innovations in schools represents more than just empty words. These innovations have become rapid methods of teaching and learning for both students and teachers. Educational innovation stimulates learners and teachers to explore and use all tools in order to discover new things. Innovation is related to different ways of viewing problems and solving them. Furthermore, it helps to enhance education by requiring learners to use higher-level thinking skills in order to solve complex problems. Innovation does not solely involve using new technology or inventions, but these can lead to creative innovations. Innovation is related to new ways of thinking that can help learners to develop creative thinking and to promote the effective use of problem-solving skills.

5.2 Learning from Practice

5.2.1 Individual Learning

Based on research findings, learning occurs when individuals work as a team and have clear information on the subject matter, since it leads to collaboration among team members with a common goal. This allows for freedom to think of ways to solve problems and to develop the individual work, which can then be exchanged among team members, and which will result in each person being satisfied with his or her work. Additionally, working in a team allows teachers to interact with members of the group to effectively achieve a common goal. Furthermore, the integration of the four principles of the social contract, the four principles of ethical restraint, the principle of karma, and the seven principles of Buddhist ethics in the work process will lead to better cooperation than in the past. This is because these aforementioned principles have an impact on demonstrating the good behaviors of members when teachers normally work together and promote unity among their colleagues. The process leads to the development of work methods and results in the success and progress of research work for researchers, co-researchers, and students. Therefore, it helps to strengthen and create research work that is of a higher quality through the teachings of Phra Phrom Kuanaphon (Phra Ajarn Payutto, 2008) and Buddhathat (2006) who summarized that when working the aforementioned five ethical principles serve as moral reminders to help ensure that the work is of high quality and that success is achieved.

5.2.2 Group Learning

Group learning is more effective in learning about collaborative work than learning individually. For instance, the principle of Galayanamittra, which emphasizes collaboration, enables a better exchange of knowledge and more successful work outcomes compared to working individually. This is because Galayanamittra represents a principle of working together, which is the basis of benefits, guidance, teamwork, and consistency, as well as the process of learning about the principles of successful work. Other principles, such as the Four Influential Principles or the Principles of Success, are also essential for learning about the principles of successful work. Both researchers and co-researchers use their intelligence to plan, carry out, summarize, analyze, synthesize, and report results in order that they can jointly develop successful research and work development objectives. This is consistent with the vision

of James, Milenkiewicz & Bucknam (2008), who argued that collaborative action research is a powerful process for personal and professional development. If those who use PAR (Participatory Action Research), such as school administrators, teachers, and community members, are committed and collaborate to solve problems together, then this methodology can be a useful tool for achieving better results.

5.2.3 Organizational Learning

Organizational learning was found to be crucial in enhancing and addressing the life and career skills of students collaboratively in all subject areas within the school. Equal importance was placed on the work of all individuals, with management also participating in the research processes and adhering to ethical principles. This approach led to the achievement of the research goals. The Seven Principles of Sappurit Ethics were useful in guiding the research process towards quality and success, which resulted in benefits for individual development, job improvement, and organizational development. In accordance with Phra Phrom Khunaporn's (P.A. Payutto) explanation in 2551, "Sappurisadhamma 7" refers to the virtues of an accomplished person, the qualities that make one a good person, and the ethics of a good person. And this knowledge was applied by researcher to comprehend and appreciate the differences between individuals, which allowed for the successful engagement and development of research participants in line with the research objectives.

5.3 Knowledge Gained from Practice

The knowledge gained from practice in this research was derived from the framework of force-field analysis by Kurt Lewin (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000). This framework explains the relationship between expected changes and the driving forces used to bring about change, the restraining forces against change, and the specific strategies that can be used to overcome resistance to change in a particular context. Based on the various issues summarized in the research results, the researcher presented the aforementioned force-field analysis framework. Specifically, in the case of expected changes, the assessment of life and career skills from the target group's development was conducted in three stages: before practice in Cycle 1, after practice in Cycle 1, and after practice in Cycle 2. The findings showed improved changes as determined by mean and standard deviation values. In terms of the driving forces used to bring about the expected changes, this research identified six driving forces that had contributed to the successful enhancement of life and career skills. These were the *three primary driving forces* and *three supporting driving forces*, respectively.
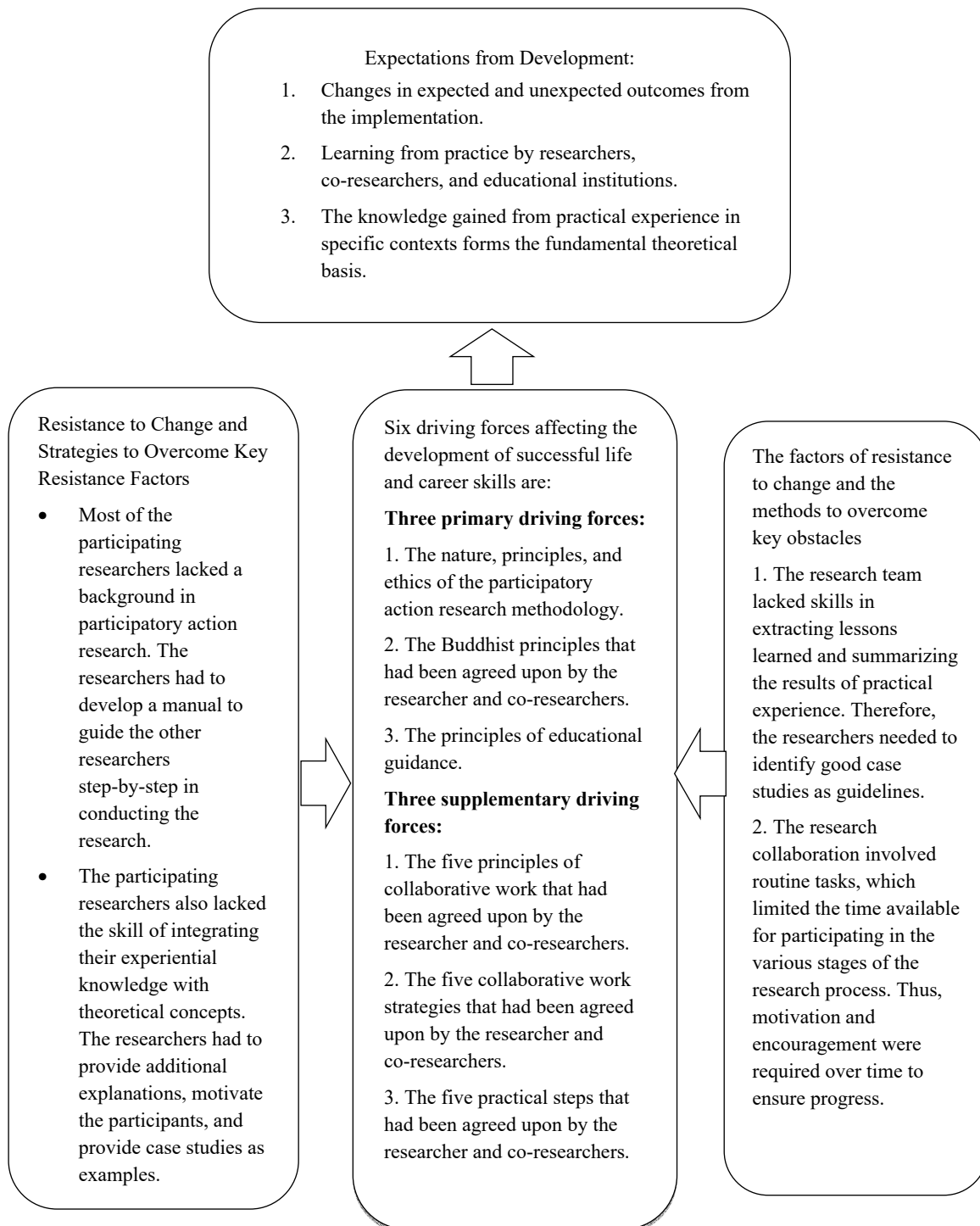
The Three Main Driving Forces

1) The operational research methodology with collaborative participation is characterized by the equal status of the researchers and co-researchers in a collaborative process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting that operates in a spiral cycle.

2) The Buddhist moral principles serve as a reminder for quality work and successful outcomes, which consist of 1) the Four Sankhahavatthu to promote harmony; 2) Khanti for patience and endurance towards wholesome goals; 3) the Four Itthibat for diligence, mindfulness, and wisdom in one's work; 4) Kanlayanametta for the benefits of being friendly and helpful; and 5) Sappurisadhamma for understanding the truth, setting wholesome goals, being self-aware, being moderate, understanding time & place, understanding the community, and recognizing individual differences.

3) The supervision and monitoring of the project by the management team was conducted by employing the principle of "listening to feedback from all participating teachers in the research" and the ethical standard of "consultation and proposal have been approved by all parties." This is in line with the following educational communication principles: 1) respecting individual differences, cooperating, and working together to achieve goals, utilizing knowledge and skills to perform tasks; and 2) directing teachers to develop their methods of work, which allows them to become self-directed and enables them to solve their own problems.

The Three Supporting Driving Forces

1) The five principles of working together

2) The five strategies for working together

3) The five steps for implementing a collaborative developmental approach

The knowledge gained from practicing these components serves as a prototype model that can be used to enhance life and career skills. This knowledge is based on the participatory action research conducted at Khon Kaen Wittayayon School, as shown in Figure 1.

Expectations from Development:

1. Changes in expected and unexpected outcomes from the implementation.

2. Learning from practice by researchers, co-researchers, and educational institutions.

3. The knowledge gained from practical experience in specific contexts forms the fundamental theoretical basis.

Resistance to Change and Strategies to Overcome Key Resistance Factors

- Most of the participating researchers lacked a background in participatory action research. The researchers had to develop a manual to guide the other researchers step-by-step in conducting the research.

- The participating researchers also lacked the skill of integrating their experiential knowledge with theoretical concepts. The researchers had to provide additional explanations, motivate the participants, and provide case studies as examples.

Six driving forces affecting the development of successful life and career skills are:

Three primary driving forces:

1. The nature, principles, and ethics of the participatory action research methodology.

2. The Buddhist principles that had been agreed upon by the researcher and co-researchers.

3. The principles of educational guidance.

Three supplementary driving forces:

1. The five principles of collaborative work that had been agreed upon by the researcher and co-researchers.

2. The five collaborative work strategies that had been agreed upon by the researcher and co-researchers.

3. The five practical steps that had been agreed upon by the researcher and co-researchers.

The factors of resistance to change and the methods to overcome key obstacles

1. The research team lacked skills in extracting lessons learned and summarizing the results of practical experience. Therefore, the researchers needed to identify good case studies as guidelines.

2. The research collaboration involved routine tasks, which limited the time available for participating in the various stages of the research process. Thus, motivation and encouragement were required over time to ensure progress.

Figure 1. The Prototype Model for Enhancing Life and Career Skills Based on the Participatory Action Research Conducted at Khon Kaen Wittayayon School

6. Suggestions

6.1 Suggestions from the Research Findings

6.1.1 Since This Research was conducted in The Specific Context of Kan Kaew Wittayayon School, it is not Experimental or Reference Research. Therefore, the Knowledge Gained from The Practice, which is a Set of Ideas and Beliefs That Indicate the Expected Changes, should be used as a Strategy for Development and should be utilized to Reinforce both Life and Career Skills.

In the ongoing management of education, it is important to recognize the resistance to change that occurs and to seek ways to overcome it. The ideas and beliefs from this research should be considered as valuable knowledge that can be used to strengthen the students' lives and career skills in the future.

6.1.2 Despite the Limitations of Their Generalizability and Applicability, The Results of This Experimental Research Provided Valuable Insights and Recommendations for Similar Situations or Contexts That are Undergoing Similar Changes.

Thus, in order to enhance the students' life and career skills, presenting the knowledge, which had been gained from this exemplary model can serve as a guide that other organizations can study and adapt to their own settings. This framework considered the model's concept of the expected relationship between the anticipated changes and the driving forces that are used to create these changes, as well as the obstacles to change and ways to overcome them.

6.1.3 The Knowledge Gained from this Research Consisted of Six Driving Forces that can Impact the Success of Enhancing Students' Life and Career Skills.

1) Collaborative action research methodology, 2) moral Buddhist principles, and 3) educational communication techniques. Additionally, three reinforcing driving forces were identified: 1) collaborative principles, 2) collaborative work strategies, and 3) the developmental steps leading to practical application. Therefore, any utilization or application of this knowledge should undergo a thorough analysis in order to determine what other driving forces could be employed to enhance future development.

6.2 Recommendations for Research

6.2.1 Regarding the Study's Findings, Promoting the Participation of School Administrators and Teachers in Practical Research Activities is recommended so that the Life and Career Skills of Students in other Grade Levels can be Continuously Enhanced.

This can be achieved through the development of new methods, innovative ideas, and new approaches to teaching and learning activities, particularly in the development of various areas of teaching techniques. Additionally, it is suggested that collaborative efforts be made to create innovative practices that will enhance the life and career skills of students and will lead to excellent practices.

6.2.2 The Knowledge Gained from this Research has provided new Insights into the Factors that Affect the Success of Educational Changes in Khon Kaen Wittayayon School.

This knowledge can be applied to other grade levels. Moreover, it can be further studied and developed by using research and development methodologies or collaborative practical research activities.

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