

An Implementation of Inclusive Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore implementation of Inclusive Education (IE) in the Northeast sector of Thailand. The methodology used documentary analysis and an open ended survey questionnaire. Survey data were collected through interviews with teachers and principals in 34 inclusive schools in the Northeast sector of Thailand. It was found that inclusion has been adopted in some schools as an educational policy to enhance educational achievement, social justice, equity and human rights. However, many educational and social benefits of inclusion are not being successfully achieved as the result of three key barriers to implementation. First, facilities and personnel training programs to assure adequate support services, relevant materials and support personnel are not available. This factor was considered a major problem to effective implementation in addition to lack of a permanent funding structure to provide educational and special services to students with special needs. Second, it was estimated that support for special needs students was approximately 5 times greater than the cost of providing for students without special needs. A special needs provision for inclusive classrooms were not a priority of government policy and expenditure due to high costs. Finally, although Thailand has laws to support the effective implementation of inclusive education the Government has not recognized the priority and policy established by translating policy into practical entitlements and programs. The study concluded that the most prevalent form of inclusive services practiced nationwide in regular schools was integrated education for students with special needs and mainstreaming.

Keyword: Inclusive Education

Introduction

The paper explores an implementation of inclusive education (IE) for students with special needs in the Northeast sector of Thailand. The trend in social policy in many countries of the world during the past three decades has focused on promoting inclusive programs and combating exclusionary and discriminatory practices (Eleweke & Rodda 2002). Friend et al.(1998) defined IE as the integration and education of most students with disabilities in general education class. The fundamental principle of IE is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties and difference they have (UNESCO 1994). Kirk and Gallagher (1997) described inclusion as an effort to provide educational services for students with special needs in least restrictive environment. This mean that the child will 1) be placed with his or her peers; 2) receive services in the regular class (not special class); and 3) interact as much as possible with his or her peers without disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Inclusive schooling is considered as the means of developing classrooms that cater for all children. The principle of inclusion seeks to achieve education for all by restructuring schools as institutions that include everybody, support learning and respond to individual needs (UNESCO 1999). The Salamanca Statement adopted at the World Conference on Special Needs Education (UNESCO 1994) is based on the principle of inclusion as a means of achieving the goal of education for all. This goal is to be achieved by ensuring that schools can serve all children including those with disabilities. Ainscow (1999) considered that the process of developing effective inclusive programmes required improvements in several aspects. The improvement should be considered as a process of growth involving 1) utilization of existing practices and knowledge as starting points for development, 2) acknowledging differences as opportunities to learn rather than problems to be fixed, 3) examining barriers to pupils participation, 4) effective use to available resources to support learning, and 5) the creation of conditions that encourage a degree of risk-taking.

Thailand is a developing nation of 70 million citizens, 98% of whom are Buddhist. Under the first educational reform act in the year 1999, the education system of the country was organized into 175 education districts. This system serves the vast majority of 12 million Thai students, consists of 30,000 primary schools and 2,700 secondary schools. Twelve-year free basic education was granted to students throughout the country for the first time in the history of Thai education in October 2002. Currently fifteen-year free basic education has been granted since May 2009. Following the 1999 National Education Act, which has been the spearhead of major educational reform, quality improvement has become the ultimate goal in the provision of education in addition to maintenance of equity and social justice. The issues of quality in education for normal students, the gifted, the disadvantaged and special needed require more attention. To support the provision of education for students with special needs, the Ministry of Education has announced ministerial regulations indicating criteria and procedures for providing facilities, media, services and other forms of educational aid as well as ministerial regulations indicating criteria and procedures for allocating education budget for the disabled.

Inclusive Education policy and programs are desirable for students with special needs in Thailand in that in academic years 2002-2003 it is estimated that there have 160,000 students with special needs. Successful implementation of inclusive education could increase the number of students with special needs receiving education.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore an implementation of Inclusive Education in the Northeast sector of Thailand.

Methodology

The methodology used documentary analysis and open ended survey questionnaire. Survey data were collected through interviews with teachers and principals in 34 inclusive schools in the Northeast sector of Thailand.

Result and Discussion

1. Inadequate personnel training programs and facilities

Principle and policy of an inclusive education has been stated in many countries to achieve education for all, social justice, equity and human rights. Also The Salamanca Statement adopted at the World Conference on Special Needs Education (UNESCO 1994) is based on the principle of inclusion as a means of achieving the goal of education for all. This goal is to be achieved by ensuring that schools can serve all children. For Thailand, this principle and policy has been state in the national educational reform act in 1999 and amendments act in 2002. The ministry of Education subsidized funding to scaling-up this policy in to practice in about 400 schools over the country. These schools were called inclusive pilot schools which have received funding for implementing an inclusive school model call SEAT in arranging Students, Environments, Activities, and Tools.

It was found that inclusion has been adopted in some schools as pilot projects of the Ministry of Education, Those schools who adopted this project were call “inclusive pilot schools” and would receive some subsidization to improve physical environment to fit for students with disabilities and personnel training about special education. The Top-down model of implementing has strong specificity but the professional training was not enough, schools require significant professional development, technical assistance, monitoring, and material. Apart from regular and special needs teachers of different kinds, the successful education of students with disabilities in inclusive schools requires the involvement of different professionals who assist in identification, referral, diagnosis, treatment and provision of appropriate educational and related services. Research indicates that adequately trained professional is required in the provision of meaningful educational services to students with special needs in regular schools. This result relevant to Bodily (1998), found that higher levels of implementation were associated with designs that had whole-school training, facilitators, and extensive training days. Evidence suggests that a holistic approach to teacher management for education reforms and quality often requires huge amount of resources.

In the past special education area in Thailand has shortage of special education teachers both in pre-service and in-service training because of the attitude toward the students with disabilities. In addition of the government’s civil servant downsizing policy together with the early retirement scheme implemented during the period 2000-2006 resulted in a loss of 53,948 positions for teachers in every area. Also increasing educational opportunities, the number of students with special needs had an annual increasing

trend. Thus teachers who taught normal students need to attend in the special education training. Consequently, in some schools there were so little contact between the students with disabilities and their teacher and other students, also at the primary school levels some students are socially isolated by just sit in the classroom and never participated in any activity. In addition, children with special needs in rural areas remain at home because the few facilities in the urban centers are inaccessible due to cost and distance. The schools facilities are inadequate and the facilities essential for educating students with disabilities in many schools were lacking or grossly inadequate where available. Thus the most prevalent form of inclusive services practiced nationwide in regular schools were integrated education for students with special needs and mainstreaming.

In past 15 years, there have been numerous reforms and initiatives in many countries in Asia-Pacific region to change education. Unfortunately, many of these educational reforms with good intentions and huge resources investment have been found ineffective of teachers and their professional development at the institutional and system levels to prepare and support the numerous change and initiatives (Cheng 2009)

2. Lack of funding structure

The ministry of Education estimated that support for special needs students was approximately 5 times greater than the cost of providing for students without special needs. This information relevant to Chaikind et al. (1993), the estimated cost of providing educational and other services to students with special needs could be 2.3 times greater than the cost of providing for students without special needs (cf. Eleweke & Rodda, 2002). Thus, a well structured funding arrangement is desirable for students with disabilities in inclusive schools. The financial provision for the educational and other needs of individuals with disabilities have received from government, the government lottery office, the foundations and the donation which not stable. The ministry of Education also support the teachers who taught students with disabilities in inclusive schools to receive extra money in form of coupon to buy materials or to produce teaching aids when providing extra activities or any interventions. But it appears that the government copes with economic crisis, political turbulence and inefficiency in administration, management and utilization of resources for education which effected to educational services were not being adequately paid. A special needs provision for inclusive classrooms were not a priority of government policy and expenditure due to high costs. Some of the reasons for this according to Mba (1995) were: 1) meeting the needs of citizens with special needs is considered 'too costly', 2) it is argued that the needs of the 'normal' majority will have to be addressed before considering those of individuals with special needs who were in the minority, and 3) due to lack of awareness of the potentials of people with disabilities expenditure on services for them is considered 'a waste of scarce funds' and that even with the best training some of them will perpetually remain 'tax-eaters' and never becoming 'tax-payers'.

3. Absence of enabling legislation

Inclusive Education Principal was state in The 1997 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, The 1999 National Education Act , The 2008 Special Education for Disable Persons Act, and The National Education Plan (2002-2016) especially The 2008 Special

Education for Disable Persons Act which necessary in the implementing of inclusive education in that they posses 1) protective safeguards which guarantee the rights of the beneficiary to receive specific services, 2) time onset and phase plans, 3) consequential effect for non-compliance, 4) room for litigation, 5) accountability, evaluation and monitoring procedures, and 6) financial backing and structure.

Although, Thailand has legislation to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities to equal rights and opportunities and it can further help in securing the resources needed to translate abstract rights into practical entitlements. Research found that the process of translate abstract right into practical entitlements for implementing was slow and the absence of policies influencing the provision of services. The government has not recognized the priority and also the country cope with economic crisis and political turbulence.

Also the power of inclusive education policies was multilevel, includes differential rewards and sanctions which relevant to several educational laws which have been announced since the 1999 National Educational act. Reseach found that implementation of certain educational issues is still pending, since the necessary laws have not yet been issued and also central authorities have taken action to apply the laws with emphasis on reform of organizational structure rather than on improvement of teaching and learning.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Three factors which were the key barriers of successful implementation were 1) Inadequate facilities and personnel training programmes 2) Lack of funding structure and 3) Absence of enabling legislation. Increasing educational opportunity to persons with disabilities also require time, resources, monitoring, multidisciplinary team, parental cooperation, respect of differences and break down barriers in attitude. Clearing owing, political turbulence, attitude, culture in Thailand, achieving Western models of inclusion will remain unrealistic. However inclusive services practiced nationwide in regular schools was integrated education for students with special needs and mainstreaming.

Education planning by government and the ministry of education in Thailand should concentrate on providing education for all persons in all economic condition, through both public and private school. The process of achieving successful inclusive education and programmes need critical examining teaching and learning practices as well. UNESCO (1994) indicated the regular schools with inclusive orientation have been considered the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.

Considering, inclusive education in Thailand was one policy of the education reform in response to the challenges and impacts of globalization. Cheng, (2005a, 2007, cf. Cheng 2009) said that Reform Syndrome: Due to the serious international or regional competitions, when one country in the Asia-Pacific Region was going to initiate educational reforms, other regional competitors also conduct their reforms and initiate more changes in their education systems. As part of globalization influence, most competitors would follow the emerging international trends of educational reforms as soon as possible. This was the reason why so many countries and area in the world shared similar patterns or trends in educational reforms.

There appeared some key features of an educational reform syndrome across the region : (1) the educational reforms have been mutually influenced or inflected among countries and areas in the region, sharing some common patterns of reform behaviors; (2) they were often eager to achieve the reform targets in a very short time and implement many initiatives in parallel; (3) they often ignored their own cultural and contextual conditions in implementation of educational reforms; (4) they worried losing their country competitiveness if they did not reform as fast as possible; and (5) then there resulted in too many parallel reforms with chaos and painful failures to the education sector

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