



การริเริ่มการปฏิรูปการศึกษาสายหลักสำหรับเด็กที่มีความบกพร่องทางสติปัญญา  
ระดับทุติยภูมิในประเทศไทย: การวิเคราะห์เชิงคุณภาพจากผู้มีส่วนเกี่ยวข้อง

**Embarking upon the reformation of mainstream education for children with moderate  
cognitive disabilities in Thailand: A qualitative analysis from the key stakeholders**

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**บทคัดย่อ**

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อพิจารณาการจัดการเรียนการสอนอันสืบเนื่องมาจากกฎหมายพระราชบัญญัติทางการศึกษาที่เกี่ยวข้องสำหรับเด็กที่มีความบกพร่องทางด้านสติปัญญาระดับทุติยภูมิจากโรงเรียน 2 แห่งในกรุงเทพฯ ใช้วิธีวิจัยแบบ Constructivist ซึ่งเน้นผู้ร่วมวิจัยเป็นศูนย์กลางประกอบด้วยพ่อแม่ผู้ปกครอง ครู และผู้บริหาร โรงเรียน ผู้เข้าร่วมวิจัยประกอบด้วยครู 8 คน ผู้บริหารโรงเรียน 6 คน และผู้ปกครองที่มีบุตรหลานเป็นเด็กที่มีความบกพร่องทางด้านสติปัญญาระดับทุติยภูมิ 10 คน โรงเรียนที่เข้าร่วมการวิจัยเป็นโรงเรียนที่จัดการสอนสำหรับเด็กที่มีความบกพร่องทางสติปัญญาระดับทุติยภูมิที่มีวิธีการสอนแตกต่างกันอย่างมีนัยสำคัญ

การเก็บข้อมูล และเปรียบเทียบข้อมูลใช้วิธีการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ โดยใช้คำถามปลายเปิดสอบถามผู้มีส่วนเกี่ยวข้องกับการจัดการเรียนการสอนให้กับเด็กที่บกพร่องทางสติปัญญา เพื่อประเมินการเรียนการสอนที่ใช้ในแต่ละโรงเรียน มีการสัมภาษณ์และบันทึกพฤติกรรมจากการประชุมผู้ปกครอง ผลการวิเคราะห์พบว่า ยังมีข้อถกเถียงในแง่ของการปฏิบัติหลากหลายประเด็น เนื่องมาจากการที่รัฐบาลไทยพยายามผลักดันการศึกษาร่วมเป็นการศึกษาสายหลักของประเทศ ในขณะที่ครูและผู้บริหารโรงเรียนต่างแสดงข้อคิดเห็นที่ขัดแย้งกับการใช้กฎหมายต่างๆ ผู้ปกครองบางส่วนมีความเห็นด้วยกับกฎหมายและพระราชบัญญัติเก่าๆ ที่เคยนำมาใช้อย่างเป็นรูปธรรมและไม่เห็นด้วยกับกฎหมายใหม่ๆ ที่ไม่สามารถนำมาใช้ได้จริง

**คำสำคัญ :** กฎหมายและพระราชบัญญัติ เด็กที่มีความบกพร่องทางสติปัญญาระดับทุติยภูมิ การจัดการเรียนการสอน



## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study was to explore educational policy and practices for educating students with moderate cognitive disabilities in segregated and inclusive schools in Thailand. This study utilized constructivist research methodology to examine the perspectives of parents, teachers, and school administrators who are involved in educating these children at two schools in Bangkok, Thailand. The schools in this research were selected because they represent two completely different models of a segregated school and a pilot inclusive school for students with moderate cognitive disabilities.

Qualitative methods of data collection and a constant comparative method of data analysis were used. The researcher conducted open-ended interviews with teachers, administrators, and parents whose children attended each school. The interview questions were designed to provide insight into what the parents, teachers, and administrators perceived about the common practices used in the schools. In addition, field notes and observation notes from interviews and parent-teacher meetings were collected and analyzed regarding similarities and differences in methods of teaching. The researcher targeted a total of eight teachers and six administrators to participate in the interviews. Additionally, ten parents of children with moderate cognitive disabilities who were attending the schools were also interviewed. The data provided the researcher with a reasonably good understanding of the attitudes, feedback, and activities of stakeholders from two different educational perspectives for educating students with moderate cognitive disabilities. The Thai government has established national policy for inclusive education as a mainstream education model for Thailand. It was found that teachers and school administrators however hold very diverse beliefs and practices about methods of educating students with moderate cognitive disabilities. The findings of this study can provide valuable information for policy makers in Thailand and for leaders and researchers in special education. The findings of this research suggest needed adjustments to policies and related practices, suggestions for special education teacher preparation programs, and ideas for the design of an appropriate special education system that leads to better educational opportunities for students with moderate cognitive disabilities in Thailand.

**Keywords:** Educational Policy, Students with Moderate Cognitive Disabilities, Special Education



## **tatement of the Problem**

Over the past ten years, a growing body of research and practices has been emerging to examine instructional practices in special education. Inclusive education stemmed from the belief that students with and without disabilities should all be integrated into the mainstream of education (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996). To achieve inclusive schools, special and general teachers must come together to achieve the goal of effective and appropriate education for every student (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997). These authors also suggested strategies for promoting inclusive schools such as (a) establishing the school philosophy, (b) adapting the curriculum in the general education class, and (c) integrating all students in the same classroom.

Even though, many strategies to implement inclusive education have been suggested, until now, there is limited empirical data that studies the implementation process of inclusive education in different settings. Consequently, this study is important in that it addressed the educational policy and practices of inclusive practice in an inclusive school in conjunction with the educational policy and practices of segregated practice in a segregated school by using qualitative analysis. Additionally, this study addressed the benefits of having both schools as alternative choices in

education for parents who have children with moderate cognitive disabilities.

In the last twenty-five years, Thailand has witnessed a growing preoccupation by society, governments, community groups, and parents regarding the nature and quality of school education and has de facto expanded the impact and role of schools. When the basic unit in society, the family, begins to fragment, schools are called upon to assist in the personality development of the needs of children. Schools are also expected to overcome these dysfunctions and mend the disintegrating personalities. In 1993, the Thai government signed many United Nations (UN) agreements regarding the educational needs of students with disabilities within inclusive settings. Before that, Thailand had only regular school settings and segregated school settings for students with disabilities. In 1994, the Thai government agreed to sign the UN Salamanca agreement that considered including children with disabilities in regular schools but in Bangkok metropolitan, the agreement has applied to only a small number of schools. Even though, inclusive education is an international goal, its practical conceptualization is still ambiguous, attitudes vary, and most of the literature is not based on empirical research (Dykens &



Hodapp, 2001). While inclusive education seems significant to children with moderate cognitive disabilities, Thailand may not yet be ready to implement inclusive education as its main education system. Rather, segregated schooling may be a more practical option.

Many influences play a significant role in the educational decisions and practices related to education of students with moderate cognitive disabilities, especially since these students are not allowed to study in any other regular schools. Although much research has shown that learning in inclusive education settings has a positive impact on students with and without disabilities and their academic success (Dixon, 2005; Hogan, 2005; Ravaud & Stiker, 2000; Jenkins, Pious, & Jewel, 1990), some of the advantages identified in the literature might not be applicable to educating students with moderate cognitive disabilities. For example, there are criticisms of segregated classrooms in that they marginalize students with disabilities; students with disabilities lose out on many of the activities of childhood experienced by typical children, typical students lose out on what their fellow students with disabilities have to offer them (Dixon, 2005), especially considering the common practices in Thailand. Consequently, if there is to be hope to improve services for

students with moderate cognitive disabilities, it is important to understand the educational policy and practices in both settings in Thailand.

Moreover, what is effective in one country might not be applicable to another. In many ways, Thailand adopted the idea of inclusive education from the United States in order to replace the old mainstream education system. Traditionally, the special education system in Thailand had concerns for educating deaf, blind, and physically disabled children only and special education teachers have been trained in a centrally located institute for the last two decades. Current policies were drawn up in the *1999 National Education Act*, which supports decentralization of special education and the development of more inclusive education (Ministry of Education, 2004). Nevertheless, Thailand had a segregated system of special education that originated from philanthropic support received in the 1960s and which was taken over as a government responsibility in the 1980s.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the promising educational policy and common practices for educating students with moderate cognitive disabilities in Thailand. More specifically, the study identified the policies and practices used



to educate students with moderate cognitive disabilities in school A as a segregated public school in Thailand and school B as an inclusive school which provides education for students with moderate cognitive disabilities. The study examined all the factors that affected these policies and practices of segregated and inclusive practices that offered for students with moderate cognitive disabilities. As stated above, students with moderate cognitive disabilities normally are not accepted by regular public schools, and are rejected from inclusive schools which accept only students with slight visual impairments and physical disabilities that are educable. This study was designed to explore the major factors in educational policies and common practices that influenced the implementation of educating students with moderate cognitive disabilities in segregated and inclusive schools in Thailand. Specifically, this study examined the attitudes and perspectives of parents, school administrators, and teachers with respect to educational policy used in schools and at the national level as well as the common educational practices used to implement those policies and apply to students with moderate cognitive disabilities in both segregated and inclusive settings. Using an in-depth qualitative approach, the researcher was able to conduct

interviews and collected data to identify these factors and summarize the findings. The researcher hypothesized that teachers, parents, and school administrators were playing significant roles in providing suitable education practice for students with moderate cognitive disabilities and therefore were a rich source of qualitative information. The primary research question is, “What are the educational policy and common educational practices used for educate students with moderate cognitive disabilities in segregated and inclusive schools?”

### **Review of the Literature**

The literature and related research were reviewed in the aspect that is necessary to consider when addressing the research questions being studied. First, the study was examined the rights to education for children with disabilities, the timeline and the steppingstones should be addressed. In 1989, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) committed signatory countries to work toward meeting the right to education for every child. This year was also known as a turning point for educating children with disabilities all over the world. In doing so, all countries in the East Asia and Pacific region, including Thailand, were signatories to this



landmark declaration (OHCHR, 1989). Two years later, in 1990, the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien (Thailand) announced and set targets of universal access and completion of primary school, recognizing children with disabilities as being entitled to an education that best meets their basic learning needs (Unesco, 1990).

Four years later, The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (1994) was created to provide a more detailed framework for inclusive education. The participants at the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) sponsored conference recognized that “those with special needs must have access to regular schools”(p.12), and that “regular schools with inclusive education are the most effective means of building an inclusive society, providing an effective education to the majority of students and achieving education for all” (p.21). Participants of the conferences considered the policy shifts required to promote inclusive education and agreed that education should be provided to all children with or without disabilities. Regarding children with unique learning needs, the consensus and agreement were that children with disabilities have a right to attend every local school (UNESCO, 1994).

More recently, at the UN World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal (2000), specific strategies and actions for education for children with disabilities were outlined in the outcome document A World Fit for Children. These strategies included expanding comprehensive early childhood care and education for the most vulnerable groups, ensuring that the learning needs of all children are met through access to appropriate learning and life skills programs, and promoting innovative programs to include children who are now excluded from education. With 1100 participants, the signatory countries affirmed a goal to achieve “Education for All” by year 2015 (UNESCO, 2000).

#### *Inclusive Education in Thailand*

Inclusive education in Thailand was a movement that the government has been trying to implement in the last fifteen years. Beginning at the end of the first Asian & Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (ESCAP), some progress had been achieved in extending the right to a quality education to children with disabilities in Thailand; however, the efforts have fallen far short of the education targets. Over the past decade, enrollment rates of students with disabilities in Thailand have increased, but they still remain extremely



low. Specific strategies for children with significant progress is to be made toward disabilities are included in very few national development of inclusive school systems.

Education For All (EFA) plans, and teacher Although Thailand is still lacking clear training, curriculum development and community legislation supporting inclusive education for support for inclusive education are still weak children with disabilities, it has made notable (UNESCO, 2004). progress in recent years (United Nations, 1999).

Only very recently, the government had However, the country is still in the process of some momentum developed for national policies integrating inclusive education for students with and legislation about education for children with disabilities into the national Education For All disabilities. As of 2002, the government had (EFA) plans. In addition, result shows that finally drafted and adopted legislation affirming Thailand has one of the broadest policy the right for all children to receive an education. frameworks for education of children and youth Policies supporting inclusive education for with disabilities. The National Education Act of children with disabilities have also been adopted. 1999 mandates that the government provide Governments, non-governmental organizations twelve years of basic education, at no charge to (NGOs), private voluntary organizations (PVOs), the individual, for all children with disabilities. It and multilateral agencies were mainly responsible also includes provisions for early intervention for the proposals influencing inclusive education. services, educational materials and facilities, These organizations have experimented with flexibility in education management as well as various initiatives to extend quality education to home schooling supported by the government. children with disabilities and other marginalized

groups over the last decade. Awareness training The year 1999 was declared the “Year of Education for Disabled Persons” in Thailand, and and communication campaigns had made inroads as part of the national policy, a sign was posted at in changing attitudes, and in some instances, all schools stating “Any disabled person who national networks have been established to wishes to go to school, can do so”. One important coordinate efforts in education provision. These outcome of the policy process has been the activities need to be strengthened and expanded, participation of children and youth with and linked with national reform efforts if disabilities, their parents and non-governmental



organizations (NGOs) in the development of education management plans (United Nations, 1999).

Putting inclusive legislation and policy into practice is difficult and at times imbalanced, often requiring significant school reform. Creating school systems may require reorganization (moving from a system that supports separate special schools to mainstreaming children with disabilities), revision of curriculum to make it more flexible, the use of child-centered pedagogy, improved assessment and evaluation, capacity building for education personnel, and other inputs. To become more inclusive requires that schools remove the barriers to participation by creating inviting, accessible environments that welcome all students, including children with disabilities.

The transition towards inclusive education systems is being supported by governments, communities, schools, families and local and international organizations. Efforts exist at the national, local and school level. In Thailand, a national level partnership for coordination of services and support to persons with disabilities has been established (United Nations, 2001). The Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) has been involved in the development, testing, and use of materials and in-service

training for teachers and children with disabilities in an inclusive education framework according to the National Education Act. The nationwide survey has been developed for school-age children with special needs to generate data to guide schools in providing children with appropriate services. In addition, the national database of children with disabilities has been developed for use in education planning and monitoring.

After a decade of piloting, experimentation, and experience, much had been learned about what works and what does not work in various contexts. While governments, aid organizations, communities and school systems have learned that it is not easy to help schools become more inclusive, there are some methods and strategies that work such as including students with mild autism spectrum, using adapted curriculum, and providing assistance for students with disabilities as needed (United Nations, 2001).

In Thailand, the school referred to as School B in this study, is known as a model of an inclusive approach to educating children with disabilities. Currently ten percent of the student body, approximately 130 of the 1,300 total student body, is children with disabilities. These students are identified as having a myriad of moderate disabilities, including autism, visual impairment,





Downs Syndrome, and learning disabilities. In addition, the school is the only private school in Thailand that incorporates inclusive education strategies, and is being used as a resource by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry sends over 4000 teachers per year to the school to observe and learn how to implement child-centered learning in a Thai school-based environment. Apart from this school, there are also many demonstration schools (university schools) that are trying to incorporate children with disabilities, especially children with autism spectrum, in elementary and secondary levels. Two of these university programs are the Kasetsart University Demonstration School and the Chulalongkorn University Demonstration School. Both of these schools are leaders in teacher preparation and have the strong commitment to provide education for all children with or without disabilities. However, these schools were not selected for this study because both of them are still in the process of admitting students with moderate to severe cognitive disabilities into their respective schools.

#### ***(Segregated) Special School Initiative***

During the past fifty years, western societies, including the U.S., had become increasingly concerned about ensuring the right to education

for all children, irrespective of the severity of any disadvantage or disability. Although the integration of students with disabilities into the regular school system and the same educational setting as other students has become accepted as a social imperative, and even though the governments of most western societies have subscribed to the integration principle, the issue of integration and its implications for education continues to be controversial. The history of U.S. special education began in 1859 when Thomas Gallaudet established the first American Church for the Deaf (Winzer, 1993). However, advocacy for segregated classes in the public schools began in the 1880s because of considerations about the rights of social, education, legal, and medical circumstances (Winzer, 1993). From the 1920s onward, the separate system for special education was enlarged and refined, being seen as an expression of society's support for students with disabilities (Winzer, 1993). The most powerful initiative to have segregated classrooms in public schools stemmed from the law which directed that every children had to attend school; not only students without disabilities, but also children with disabilities as well. The compulsory law stimulated people to be aware of the responsibilities



for educating children with disabilities without exception in regular classrooms.

Prior to compulsory education, children with disabilities had to attain their industrial training and moral development in segregated institutions founded and funded by philanthropic commitments. However, after the compulsory attendance laws went into affect, everything changed. In the last three decades of the nineteenth century, the concept of schools or institutions for children with disabilities had been changed from the place of punishment or restraint, treatment or cure to the image of education and training (Winzer, 1993). With the rapidly increasing special classes, the professional paradigm that guided special education shifted and expanded. Special educators developed a clearer mission and established the credentials that qualified a person to enter the profession. In doing so, new visions of teacher training were created and the creation of a specialized professional recognition. At the turn of the century, special education reformers were coming to see that children with disabilities were neither dependent nor delinquent but rather they were worthy of the same educational rights and privileges accorded to regular children (Winzer, 1993).

### *Specific Agendas on Educating Children with Disabilities in Thailand*

The government of Thailand has historically provided a limited number of educational opportunities for individuals with disabilities, especially cognitive disabilities, but it has recently demonstrated a movement toward a more comprehensive education system through legislation. The educational legislation has not only begun to expand the incorporation of services for children with disabilities but has also introduced many attempts through the *Rehabilitation Act of 1991*, the *Constitution of 1997*, the *National Education Act of 1999*, and recently, the *Education for People with Disabilities Act 2007*, which aims to include children with disabilities in inclusive education classrooms and has been an impetus for the inclusive education concept in the public education system. However, as far as children with moderate to severe cognitive disabilities are concerned, these children still have a lack of opportunities to participate in an inclusive setting because of conflicts in the legislation itself.

The legislation on education in Thailand has always assumed a free public education for all citizens until the age of 12 (Office of the Council of State, 1997) and just further to age of 15 (Office of the Council of State, 1997). The special



education system in Thailand mainly aims to provide education for those with disabilities according to their human rights (Office of the Council of State, 1997; Office of the National Education Commission, 1999). The legislation covering general education is deemed to apply to children with disabilities. However, for a long time, children with moderate to severe cognitive disabilities did not have special services available at the public schools to fulfill their needs. Legislation on special education appeared, at first, as sections that tried to regulate the operation of special education services and to guarantee the right of education to exceptional individuals. Specific legislation on special education first appeared in the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act and Ministerial Regulations Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act B.E. 2534, also known as the Rehabilitation Act of 1991. Although the apparent intention of this law is to include special education within the general public education system, the Thai government does not commit itself and ends up leaving the task of offering education services to children with disabilities to the private institutions. Other laws on general education include sections referring to special education. However, despite trying to determine objectives and goals for special education

services, the Thai government has continued to send most of the financial resources to public institutions that do not always follow the technical guidelines recommended, especially those referring to the principle of integration.

Although the Rehabilitation Act of 1991 established the responsibility for the provision of appropriate special education for children with disabilities; children with moderate to severe cognitive disabilities are viewed as a minority within the special needs children population and are still prevented from entering the general public education.

#### *The Reality Practices of Educating Children with Disabilities*

Special education in Thailand has been established for almost thirty years. The most significant stepping stone occurred in 1991, when the *Rehabilitation Act of 1991* was passed. This Act included universal access to and completion of primary school for students with disabilities as a primary goal. Further, statements within the act recognized children with disabilities as being entitled to an education that best meets their basic learning needs (Office of the Committee for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons [OCRDP], 1991). Inclusive education for all children with disabilities, which was strongly encouraged by the



1994 UN Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, and which was forced to become the public education system for all Thai people, is also stated in the National Education Plan of 1999 (Office of the National Education Commission, 1999). The legislation statement in the National Education Plan of 1999 which is now the primary education legislation stated, “Special education is provided nationally for children who are hearing-impaired, mentally retarded, visually-impaired, physically-impaired, or health-impaired. Other groups of children who need special education services are specific learning-disabled, autistic, emotionally/ behaviorally disordered, as well as gifted and talented children” (p.23). The teaching and learning of special education is organized in both segregated (special) and inclusive schools. The segregated schools in this legislation referred to the school for children with visual impairments and the school for children with hearing difficulty only, while inclusive schools refers to regular schools which include children with and without disabilities together. The curriculum used in School for the Deaf and the School for the Blind was different from the curriculum offered in inclusive schools, which may be adjusted to meet

the needs of children with disabilities (Office of the Education Council, 2000).

As stated before, traditionally, the special education system in Thailand mainly concentrated on educating deaf, blind, and physically disabled children. For the last two decades, special education teachers have been trained in a centrally located institute for the special education field. However, current policies drawn up in the *National Education Plan of 1999* supported the decentralization of special education, which included not only education for children with physical disabilities, but also for children with other disabilities as well, focusing on transforming inclusive education into public education (Office of the Education Council, 2004). The outcome of this plan addressed that children with moderate cognitive disabilities must be educated in the public school.

In response to increasing numbers of children with disabilities in the last ten years, there are also child development centers that have been established in many large cities by non-governmental agencies for children with disabilities (Office of the Education Council, 2005). These centers are not schools, as the intention is to help children with disabilities learn basic living skills rather than teaching academic



skills. Some of these centers also provide health care to children with disabilities as well.

As a result of the *Constitution of 1997*, the *National Education Act of 1999*, and the *Education for People with Disabilities Act of 2007* and other international agreements, the government and cities became aware of the rights of children with disabilities in education; conversely, many of these laws still need some enforcement to be put into practice because children with cognitive and learning disabilities are still excluded from public education.

Concisely, many western researchers focused on promoting the advantages of inclusive education as an educational model. Even though inclusive education is an international goal, its practical conceptualization is still ambiguous, attitudes vary, and most of the literature is not based on empirical research (Dykens & Hodapp, 2001). However, very few of them however were aware of how cultural differences and attitudes of people who are involved in special education settings may affect the extent to which different countries wish to and can readily adopt inclusion due to various perspectives about what benefits their students' best. Therefore, this study was aimed to capture the perspectives of parents, teachers, and school administrators in educational

policy and common practices in hope to clarify the implementation of educating these students in both segregated and inclusive approaches.

## **Methodology**

This study collected in-depth information within a limited setting using a qualitative research method. The primary sources of data were interviews and documents collected from two schools in Bangkok that use different methods of teaching. A systematic approach to collecting, coding, and analyzing these data (Miles and Huberman, 1994) guided an inductive review for this study. A qualitative research approach was selected as the best method to answer the research questions because it allowed the researcher the opportunity to interact with participants and gain knowledge in response to the research questions. Furthermore, the collected data was rich in descriptions of people, places, and conversations that would not be represented in quantitative methodology (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Using qualitative research, this study presented a thick description (Geertz, 1997) from people who are involved with the students with moderate cognitive disabilities. Also, as Pugach and Johnson (2002), the thick description was developed from three main sources in an effort to



provide a full and rich portrait of the experiences and perceptions of parents, teachers, and administrators involved with these group of students in the schools (a) interviews with teachers, parents, and school administrators; (b) field notes; and (c) teacher assignments.

A case study approach was also utilized in this study and was conducted at School A and School B in Thailand. School A is the only segregated school in Bangkok for K-6 students with moderate cognitive and learning disabilities, including students with autism, mental retardation, learning disabilities, and Down syndrome. The school is under the responsibility of the Department of Mental Health under the Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Education in Thailand. Approximately 300 students attend the school.

Another school in this study was School B which has become a model of inclusive approaches to education for children with disabilities in Thailand. Currently 10 percent of the students, or approximately 130 of the 1300 total student body, are children with disabilities. These students are identified as having a myriad of disabilities, including autism, visual impairment, learning disabilities, and Down Syndrome. Teaching children from kindergarten

through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, the school uses a child-centered approach with strong participation from students, parents and the community. It is the only private school in Thailand that incorporates inclusive education approach, and is being used as a resource by the Ministry of Education.

The staff for School A included 1 principal, 2 assistant school administrators, and 4 special education teachers who participated in the study. Also, 10 parents of students who attend the school were participants. School staff was apprised of the purposes of the study prior to the start as suggested from the principals. Parents who participated in this study joined the parent meeting on Wednesday and Friday. In addition, the school administrators were appointed to assist in locating and bringing additional information about the schools and methods of teaching. An optional informational meeting was held for parents interested in learning about the study. Actual participation in the study was entirely voluntary. All participants had to sign and submit the consent form before being allowed to participate in this study.

The staff for School B included 1 principal, 2 assistant school administrators, and 4 special education teachers who participated in the study. Also, 10 parents of students who attend the school



were participants. An optional informational meeting was held for parents interested in learning about the study. Actual participation in the study was entirely voluntary. All participants had to sign and submit the consent form before being allowed to participate in this study.

The schools in this study were selected based on the fact that (a) students with moderate cognitive disabilities were accepted, and (b) the schools had different perspectives and methods for providing education for these students. The following criteria were used to select the participants for this study. First, they were teachers or administrators employed by either school or they were parents of students with disabilities who were enrolled in one of the two school. Second, the principal selected school administrators who worked closely in developing and enforcing school policies for students with moderate cognitive disabilities. Third, school administrators identified teachers who work closely with students with moderate cognitive disabilities in the classrooms for potential participation. Last, school administrators recommended parents who have children with moderate cognitive disabilities in the respective schools. The parents were selected from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds (from low to high) in order to receive

a variety of perspectives. Using this method, ten parents, eight teachers and six school administrators were interviewed.

Data collection and data analysis occurred simultaneously in order to determine data saturation. The data were gathered from three sources - interviews, field notes, and observation notes - in an effort to provide a full and rich portrait of experiences and perceptions of parents, teachers, and administrators involved with students with moderate cognitive disabilities in the schools. The individual interviews were arranged at times and locations convenient to the participants and were guided by a set of pre-determined open-ended questions and probes designed to elicit information about the practices and factors implemented to support the development and learning of students in inclusive/segregated settings.

## **Results and Discussion**

With the program XSight, the researcher was able to define the similarities and differences in participant perspectives for the research question. This program allowed the researcher to input the transcribed data based on the participants' experiences and generate the relationship among all of the findings. At the very beginning of the study, it was believed that everything from the



instructional methods, lesson formats, and learning materials needed to be accommodated to best meet each student. Result was found, from the perception of parents, teachers, and school administrators, each component were a jigsaw to create the whole picture of better education for these students. However, the researcher found not only these components played significant roles in developing better education for these students; there were other social issues that had been the results of the specific government's agenda on educating students with moderate cognitive disabilities in general. In this regard, if government aspired to help bridge the gap between students with and without disabilities by using education, the national act and educational policy should be strongly enforced.

Moreover, efforts towards enhancing the quality of education for students with moderate disabilities in Thailand will no doubt continue to be an issue in the future irrespective of the difficulties currently encountered. Motivation to develop opportunities that might ultimately result in more widespread inclusion will be dictated, in one hand, by a growing awareness of the countless problems that these children face in many ways. Therefore, it appears essential for the Thailand government to be affirmed, with supporting

strategies, so that a more effective educational system might ensure. On the other hand, the education for students with moderate disabilities should be assured by the government not only to be supported in inclusive schools, but in the segregated school where students are viewed as having learning abilities as well.

Furthermore, not every special education teacher opposes the idea of inclusion or segregation; however, most of them are more critical of the practicability. However, most parents of the students with moderate disabilities are not optimistic about the practice of inclusion. Rather, they prefer the status quo because of the fear that their children may not be able to have a more careful institution if there is no competent special education teachers in inclusive schools and if there is not sufficient financial support from the government to segregated schools. From this point of view, disseminating neutral and integral information regarding inclusion and segregation methods can be the imperative step that Thai government must now embark upon. Referring to Moberg (2003), "Any policy to transform the school system towards inclusion that omits the accommodation of realistic additional resources and training support for regular class teachers is perhaps a much greater threat to successful





inclusion than teacher attitudes”. Under the umbrella of globalization, how to fashion an individual with the conception of “think globally; act locally” would become another burning question simmering over people’s minds. The concept of inclusion is highly context-dependent and the socio-cultural difference should be a principal point being considered in people’s minds when adapting a universal approach towards inclusion without completely giving up the idea of segregation.

However, most of the teachers built a strong case supporting the need for multiple educational environments based on student needs. In one hand, the inclusive education environment may simply not be appropriate for all students all the time, especially for those students with moderate to severe cognitive disabilities. On the other hand, the segregated education environment may not be appropriate for those students all the time either, as they will enter a new phase of life after graduation. When this is the case, alternative educational settings must be provided. Preferably, the researcher believes that both education approaches should have alternative environments within or outside the schools. Also, the community should offer many settings in which students with and without disabilities could practice their learning abilities and their social skills. With the open-

mined, positive attitude, and support from people in the community towards students with moderate disabilities, these students will definitely become more independent in their future life.

Another aspect that was found this study was about life after graduation. The researcher has always sturdily believed in individualization based on IEP goals. In this related topic, the researcher found it is ineffective after graduation from schools because most of the time these students remained home after completing school. It is very unlikely that some of these students would continue their study to secondary school as most of them perceived are to have “disabilities” too severe and are often rejected from schools. Only for the students who are able to continue their education, can the IEP be transferred to the next school; otherwise, it will be destroyed.

### **Conclusions & Suggestions**

This study is very unique and important to individuals who are concerned about educating students with moderate cognitive disabilities in Thailand because Thailand has a very unique special education system where students with disabilities have three main alternatives to choose if they would like to receive education - a segregated school, inclusive school, and no school



at all. The policy makers in Thailand never completed a national public participation forum with input from parents, teachers, and school administrators about the concerns in including students with disabilities in regular schools before the legislation was enforced. The result is that even though the legislation was passed, most of students with disabilities still do not study in the regular schools or many do not even study in any school. This study has contextualized the actuality in educational policy and common practices that are used in classrooms, and schools in both segregated and inclusive schools and presented the viewpoints from people who are involved with these students and are concerned with this matter. Segregated schools have always been the first option for parents who had children with disabilities; however, for the last 10 years, there was an inclusive school where students with disabilities were accepted and had the same educational opportunities as their normal peers. This study presented two schools with completely different methods of accepting students and teachers, different teaching model, environments, and learning styles; but sharing the same goal - educating students with disabilities.

Participants in this study hold very diverse beliefs about what the best methods of educating

students with moderate cognitive disabilities should be and should not be. Three main issues seemed to be at the heart of these differences for parents in both schools. They are a) factors related to teachers and teaching instruction, b) proportion of students with disabilities in one classroom and the effect on learning abilities in general, and c) funding and tuition fee issues. Based on these beliefs, most of the parents hold a primary belief that methods of teaching are the most important regardless of the schools. They also noticed that proportions of students with disabilities included in each classroom should be more concrete so all of the students will receive the equal attention from the teachers. Lastly, both personal funding and school funding should be sufficient to provide suitable and appropriate aids for these students. Parents from low-income families perceived tuition fee is an obstacle to receiving education in general. The teachers also shared the same perspective in funding availability for school and students; three main issues seemed to be at the heart of these differences as well. They are (a) attitudes of parents towards other students with disabilities in a classroom; (b) adaptations and modifications in methods of teaching, curriculum, and learning materials; and (c) the national legislation. Based on these beliefs and the manner



in which individuals constructed the meaning of educating students with moderate cognitive disabilities, teachers implemented instructional practices that were aligned with their beliefs or searched out new knowledge and new educational practices that assisted them to better reach their goals. Often, when dealing with issues surrounding providing appropriate education for students with moderate cognitive disabilities, teachers ran into additional barriers that made it difficult for them to implement practices that were consistent with their beliefs. Teachers in each school felt tension from parents of these students and from their own peers in aspiring for best practices; however, they perceived these students as most important and ultimately adjusted their teaching methods to match the needs of the students. Parents' attitudes were important as it guided the teachers in preparing IEPs for each student as teachers perceived themselves as the most influential people to provide the impetus for teaching these students as a whole. They also agreed and disagreed about some of the legislation themes. Lastly, the school administrators disclosed the unrealistic legislation offered by the government with the teachers; two main issues seemed to be at the heart of the differences as well. They are a) attitudes of parents and teachers towards learning abilities of students with moderate disabilities, and b) who can and should be included in the classrooms. Based on these beliefs and the manner in which individuals construct the meaning of providing and enforcing policies used in the schools, school administrators perceived that collaborative working of teachers and school administrators in the schools, based on a shared beliefs in the value of educating these students, would help teachers to overcome every barrier. Policies were intentionally created to help students to live and learn in the small communities successfully. They also perceived that policies per se would not help build a suitable learning environment for these students; but, parental positive attitudes, beliefs of teachers, collaborative efforts in teaching, and understanding the same goals would definitely increase the level of learning for these students. To be successful, all of the parents, teachers, and school administrators needed to do felt right for these students. The educational policy and practices should be weighed equally to achieve the common goal - the appropriate methods to successfully educate students with moderate cognitive disabilities.

Though these points are significant and relate directly to the research question of this study, an additional function of this research may be equally important. Teachers who believed they



were doing great things for their students were able to share their strategies and difficulties in the practices used. Parents who believed their children received appropriate education were able to share their beliefs and goals. Also, school administrators who believed they created the policies that were considered suitable for these students were able to share their suggestion to parents and teachers. Through studies such as this, individuals are able to share with others the important work in which they are engaged. Additional concerns for such sharing are necessary within the field for change to happen and progress to occur. This study provided a context for parents of children with and without disabilities, teachers in any schools, and policy makers to examine and investigate their practices towards students with disabilities. For parents, the study will help them contextualize the advantages and disadvantages of students with disabilities studying in segregated and inclusive schools. For teachers, the study will help them realize what works and what should be modified in order to create the appropriate curriculum and classroom that match the needs of these students. For school administrators or policy makers, the study should be a guideline of what should be implemented and considered in the future in order to effectively provide education for these students. All things considered, everyone in this study played an important role in providing the best information and limitations to contribute to an investigation of current methods, challenges, and opportunities for educating students with moderate cognitive disabilities in Thailand.



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