Alternative Education in Thailand

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Abstract

Alternative Education also known as non-traditional education or educational
alternative, includes a number of approaches to teaching and learning separate from
that offered by mainstream or traditional education. They are rooted in a number of
philosophies differing from those of mainstream education such as Summerhill,
Montessori, Waldorf and Homeschool, which aim to holistically develop learners to
achieve human completeness. The paper presents the evolution of alternative
education in Thailand in 3 periods. First, the initiative/ pilot (before 1987), second is
the revolution (1987-2007), and third is the acceptance of alternative education (after
2007). Many studies have been continuously conducted on alternative education in
Thailand. Nonetheless, more studies are necessary to provide concrete models on
alternative education that response to more diverse society. It also required the
collaboration among all partners, including government sector, private sector, civil
society sector, traditional and alternative educators to enhance the quality of
alternative education in Thailand.

Keywords: Alternative Education, Evolution of Alternative Education

1. Introduction

Alternative education administration is considered a new approach. It has not appeared or cited in academic researches much as academic debate or evaluation in alternative education administration was rarely seen in the past. In all the researches where alternative education is brought into the discussion, Lange and Sletten (2002) stated that most of the researches done about alternative education administration were the results of the interest in issues such as students dropping out, teenagers' risks and dangers, and other alternative education literatures. Alternative education administration curriculum has later been widely studied but only few with specific interest in academic curriculum. Lange and Sletten (2002) pointed out the behaviors or factors influencing the efficiency of curriculum. More relevant literatures were reviewed and among them is Aron (2006) who explained alternative education as an educational system that supports students who drop out of mainstream schools, teenagers with risky behaviors and exceptional children, allowing everyone to have equal access to education.

'Alternative Education' in Thailand has gone through a great deal of opposition as well as endorsement. Despite the schools and groups' differences in terms of action and time, the goal is common, particularly the attempt to draw a distinction from the mainstream education provided by conventional institutions. The aim of alternative education is to create the learning approach that is truly in compliance with human nature, which ultimately leads to the becoming of a whole human with the freedom and opportunity to pursue one's own belief. As a result, several concepts and discourses in alternative education emerge and have been subsumed as parts of the concept and discourse of educational reform movement (mainstream) throughout different periods of time.

The content in this part aims to present the knowledge regarding the evolution of alternative education in Thailand with the emphasis being put on the definitions and concepts of alternative education including the evolution of alternative education in Thailand. Furthermore, the observations towards alternative education administration in Thailand will also be discussed.

2. Alternative Education: Definition

The Office of Education Council (OEC) (2009) defined Alternative Education in the Dictionary of Education as follows:

> "Alternative Education is an ideal educational philosophy that aims to profess the characteristic of education that differentiates itself from the conventional system. It is often regarded as a 'Free School' where one can learn freely under the non-institutional and community-based approach. It lessens the role of education administration utilized by most schools as it takes on the progressive educational ideology and practice."

The follow-up assessment report for the development of homeschooling (OEC, 2009), gathered the definitions of alternative education from several online sources from different countries. In summary, the international educational communities provide a rather concurrent definition when it comes to alternative education "Alternative

Education is a type of education that is not or differentiates itself from the mainstream education. Its educational philosophy derives from a variety of philosophy. It bounds to no conventions or traditions with a comprehensive and diverse range of teaching and learning methods, particularly when comparing to the mainstream education. It also prioritizes the demands of individuals as well as the community".

3. **Alternative Education: The Concepts**

Alternative Education in Thailand has been influenced by both Eastern and Western ideologies. In the past two to three decades, the concepts and innovations in Alternative Education made their ways into Thai society as an educational innovation utilized by schools in the urban area such as:

Summerhill: First founded by Neil, a British educator. The school emphasizes on the learners' freedom and limits the grown-up's authority, which is considered as an obstacle in the children's learning ability (Neil, 1984).

Montessori: Founded by Dr. Maris Montessori (M.D.), a female Italian doctor who proposed the learning management that aims for children to grow and develop according to their true nature. This approach also highlights the importance of the creation of learning environment, learning-aid tools, which allow children to bring out their best potential (Yankee, 1997).

Waldorf: Founded by Rudolf Steiner, an Austrian philosopher with belief that human being was made of body, soul and spirit and that the three things develop throughout different ages. The true education, therefore, had to function as an integrative system that enhances the creation of the three capabilities of a human being (thinking, feeling and willing) in order to develop an individual with intellectual freedom (Clouder and Rawson, 2003).

Reggio Emilia: A group of parents in the town of Reggio Emilia in Italy established an elementary school in their village where they played active parts in the formation of policies, curriculum, assessment methods and budget with the emphasis being put on the children's learning to form their own personality. The open-end curriculum did not have specific and predetermined content; instead, it gathered different subjects and topics speculated as relevant to children's interests as they learned through different projects they worked on (Lewin-Benham and Howard, 2005). The Reggio Emilia approach reflected the attempt to organize an education that is truly useful in everyday-life and a community-based education.

Homeschooling: An educational approach where parents were responsible for their children's education instead of the school. The active advocator of homeschooling in the United States was John Holt, who believed that conventional mainstream education had been growing in the wrong direction, obstructing intellectual maturity and learning ability. Holt believed that children could grow and develop without having been put in school. The environment, family's relationship and everyday-life activities could enhance the learning ability from within (Holt and Farenga, 2003).

Concepts and innovations in alternative education from Eastern educators were influenced by religious faiths and teachings with the emphasis on different dimensions such as morality, being a part of nature with freedom in life as the goal. The widely reputable approaches were such as Anantamak or Neo-Humanism by P.R. Sagar, Santinegeton or School under the Trees by Raphin Nartthakul, and the study according to Krissanamurati philosophy (Chalermchai and Chalermchai, 2006). The research on 'Alternative Education: Database and Analysis' by Suchada Jakpisut and others conducted under the support of the Office of Thailand Research Fund (TRF) in 2003 discussed the development of alternative education in Thai society through the discourse that had been participated by contemporary thinkers (Jakpisut et al., 2003). The work has gained considerable recognition and responses from the public. In the past two-three decades, Siwaraksa (2002) proposed the educational discourse for Thai-ness whereas Venerable Phra Brahmagunabhorn (P. A. Payutto) put forward the extensive idea of Buddhist Education that encompassed learning for peace, learning for intellectual development, learning for the search for solutions. Nithi Eeawsriwong initiated the discourse in education for the future of Thai society through alternative higher education and community education while Praves Wasri advocated education reform and intellectual reengineering including the concept of holistic education and education for the society as a whole, education for learning society. Pipop Thongchai came up with the discourses such as returning education back to the society, the school is dead, education for freedom, etc. (Siwaraksa, 2002).

4. The Evolution of Alternative Education in Thailand

The evolution of alternative education in Thailand could be divided into 3 periods. The first being the Age of Pioneering and Experimentation (before 1987) the second period is the Age of Education Reform (1987-2007) and the third period is the Age of Acceptance (post 2007).
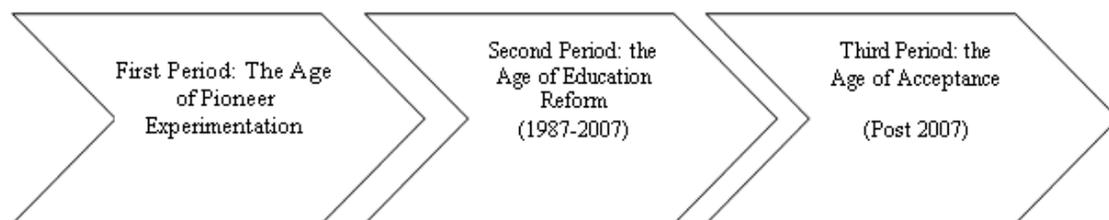
Figure 1: The Evolution of Alternative Education in Thailand

The First Period: The Age of Pioneering and Experimentation (before 1987)

There was the time when alternative education was not officially accepted with arguments and oppositions constantly emerged. Most of the concepts were discussed in the form of academic writings and criticism of the education system. The most of the primary concepts referenced the western experiences such as Summerhill, Montesseri, Waldorf, Reggio Emilia and homeschooling. The eastern movements included neo-humanism, Shanti Niketan or the Krishnamurti educational philosophy (Jakpisut et al., 2003).

In these early days, there have been experimentations on alternative education in the key areas such as the establishment of t children village school according to Summerhill approach where children and adults were considered to be equal by Piphop and Ratchanee Thongchai's Children Foundation in 1979 or the experimental homeschooling by Dr. Chotchoung Chutinthorn in 1980.

The Second Period: The Age of Education Reform (1987-2007)

The concept and accomplishment of experiments in alternative education in Thailand had become more accepted while the failure of mainstream education system had been seriously questioned. The call for an education reform in Thailand had been intensified accordingly.

In 1999, National Education Act B.E.2542 (1999) was issued and marked the important turning point as well as a practical beginning of education reform era. Governmental agencies were improved, the Office of National Education was changed into The Office of Education Council (OEC) as researches and important academic works with recognition and acceptance in the significance of alternative education have been continually conducted and published.

The researches on alternative education included 'Thai Education and Future Alternatives' (Siwaraksa, 2002), 'Alternative Education: Database and Analysis' (Jakpisut et al. 2003), which are considered the first database of alternative education. The works were followed by the research proposal 'Framework for Learning Center Management according to the National Education Act B.E.2542 (1999) in Thailand' which references the possibility of alternative education under the 'learning center' as cited in section 18(3) of the Act.

The Third Period: The Age of Acceptance (Post 2007)

This is the time when Alternative Education is officially validated in every level. It has been placed in the constitution, official documents issued by governmental agencies and most importantly, in the proposal of the Second Decade of Education Reform (2009-2018 B.E.) and the National Scheme of Education B.E. 2545-2559 (2002-2016).

A network of alternative education administrators has been formed and become more substantial. The official recognition from the country's education system is the result from the long and continual stimulation from the network group, intellectuals and alternative higher education bodies.

The beginning of the 12 schools in the Thaitai School network in December of 2008 came with the official announcement, which stated the purpose of the network at a session of Lightning Talk (Rapee Sewana).

The starting point of the framework and forces behind the establishment of Alternative Education Council in 2010 to carry forward a systematic alternative education administration in different forms and approaches, both through and not though the country's educational system.

Jakpisut et al. (2003) conducted a study to develop the definition and meaning of alternative education within the context of Thai society though the focus group method. The categorization was done in regions as findings showed that alternative education in the Northern region has been defined as a learning process that was holistic, diverse and in compliance with the local wisdoms, which ultimately resulted in the happiness and success of an individual as well as the community. In the central region, it has been explained as a way-out for the crisis of mainstream education. It based itself on natural diversity and real life where active participation leaded to the development of a whole human being, physically, mentally and spiritually. While the alternative education in the Northeastern region has been clarified as an educational approach that responded to human's demands and potential; the learning for human's potential and a community operation. In the Southern region, it has been described as an educational approach that led to the actual way of life and brings happiness to the community and society with Thai way of life as the core foundation.

The definition of alternative education in Thailand according to the views of focus group in each region could be summarized as the provision of educational alternatives for both teachers and learners, in which the skills were created and enhanced to be in compliance with the nature, society, community and resources. It was an educational approach that was conceived from the actual practices, which ultimately led to the life that was filled with developments.

5. Relevant Research on Alternative Education Administration in Thailand

The review of literature relevant to alternative education in Thailand found that the past researches done on alternative education administration in Thailand could be categorized into 3 main groups. The first was the researches which objective was to conduct the mapping of alternative education administration in Thailand by creating directory of groups and communities that adopted alternative education. The researches that fell into this category were such as those of Jakpisut et al. (2003). The second group encompassed the researches that examined the learning management and effectiveness of alternative schools such as the work by Jariyapan (2012). The third group was the researches that aimed to develop alternative education administration approaches for different groups such as the works by Suwannasuan, et al. (2013) and Ninlamot (2014). When considering the relevant researches on alternative education administration in Thailand in comparison with the 3 periods of the evolution of alternative education in Thailand from the First (the age of pioneering and experimentation: before 1987) and the second (Educational Reform: 1987-2007) and the third period (Acceptance: 2007), the findings revealed that the studies relevant to alternative education administration in Thailand began in the second period or the age of Education Reform. Later in the third period or the Age of Acceptance, it was found that the researches have been focusing on different approaches as well as learning administration and effectiveness of alternative schools, including researches that develop alternative education administration approaches for different groups. The details are shown in Figure 2.
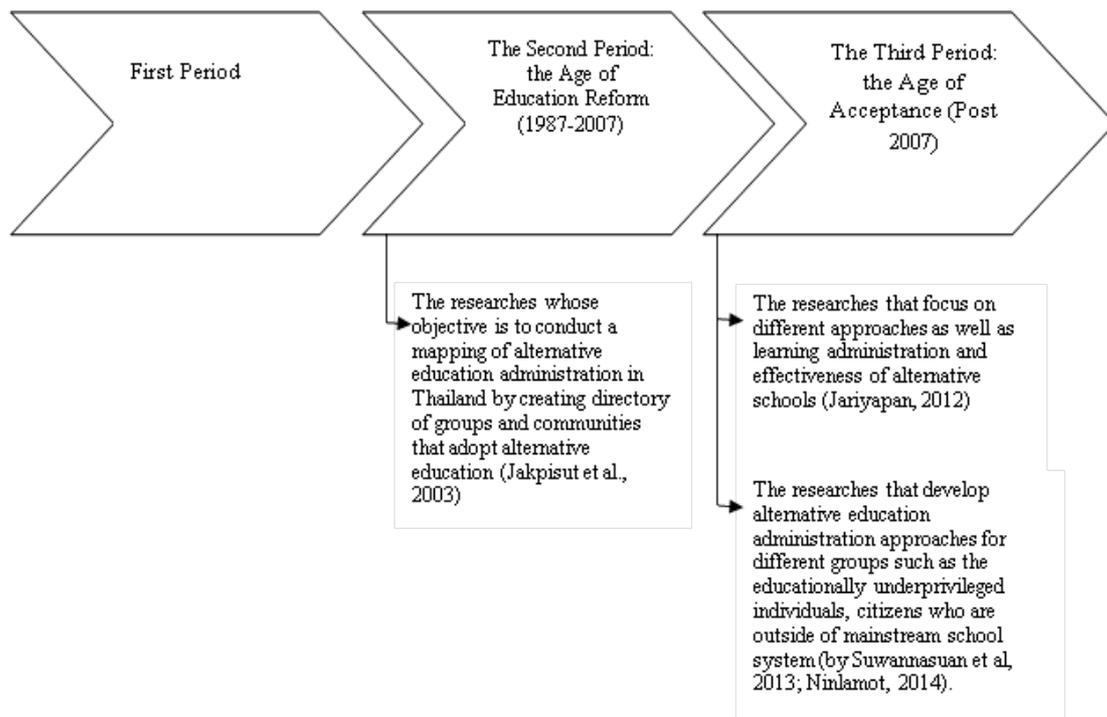
Figure 2: The relevant researches on alternative education administration in Thailand categorized according to the evolution of alternative education in Thailand

The relevant research on alternative education administration in Thailand could be categorized in the following:

Jakpisut et al. (2003) created a directory of groups and communities that adopt and administer alternative education. The directory functioned as a database that confirmed the identity and tangibles of the administrations. Most information in the database was obtained through different research methods from questionnaire, selected list of private development organizations, fieldtrip researches and the selection of case studies for in-depth interview. This study includes 209 case studies; 58 in the northern region, 50 in the central region, 51 in the northeastern region and 50 in the southern region. The database encompasses 5 subject matters: background of groups-communities, intention of learning management, content and curriculum, learning format or process and possible effects. The results from the study reveal that learning or education management can be categorized into 7 basic learning approaches:

1) Alternative Education administered by families (homeschooling), both in nuclease families and a group or network of homeschool families. There are currently 100 homeschool families nationwide.

2) Education in reference to the state's system refers to the schools in the system with the learning process that emphasizes on experience and practice-based knowledge outside of textbooks as well as learning innovations.

3) Alternative Education by Teachers of Local Knowledge is the education where knowledge is passed on from one generation to another through the local scholars who are associated in a group or a network. The education can be both free or with expenses, encompassing knowledge and practice of

traditional craftsmanship, local medicines and herbs, reading and writing of ancient languages, local performance arts, etc.

4) Alternative Education through Religion and meditation follows different religious contents provided to members of religious communities as well as the general public and interested individuals. The education also encompasses sufficient economy philosophy, anti-consumerism as well as different approaches of meditation and dharma practice according to the belief picked up by each school to enhance the learning experiences of the members.

5) Alternative Education as an institution outside of the state's system refers to the non-formal education provided to a specific target group, both free of charge and with expenses, for instance, learning institutions operated by private developmental organizations (centers and clubs) such as Sawigasikkalai, Midnight University, Community Potential Development Institution, Semsikkalai, etc.

6) Alternative Education by learning groups through activities is considered to the widest and most diverse educational landscape such as the learning groups through savings activities, agriculture, traditional medicines, occupational developments, transmission of local wisdoms and culture, preservation and revitalization of natural resources, sanitation and public health, children and youths supervision, AIDS patient care and treatment, drug prevention, community management, etc.

7) Alternative Education through learning media and sources such as mass communication (publications, radio, television) and modern media (website) including libraries, museums, tourism and other public learning sources that are consistent and enhance the learning experiences.

Jariyapan (2012) studied different types of learning administration, resources and effectiveness of alternative schools through the analysis of textbooks, documents, in-depth interviews and objective observation on focus groups comprising of school administration officers, teachers and parents from 7 different schools. The analysis followed 7 concepts of alternative education, which composed Constructionism, Buddhist approach, Neo-humanist, Hi-Scope, Waldorf, Reggio Emilia and Montessori. The findings revealed that all alternative schools adopted the student-centered learning management by considering the differences of each student's individual potential. It also highlighted learning through actions and organization of activities to enhance a wide range of skills. There were, however, dissimilarities in the leaning management such as contents, activities and assessment methods. As for learning resource management, most alternative schools used media and tools to create and enhance learning environment. Nevertheless, the source of income, teacher selection process, organization of school and classroom's environment, the use of technology for students' learning experience varied for each school.

The study of the effectiveness of alternative schools found that the focus group of parents from all the schools were satisfied with the concept, teaching and learning methods as well as credentials and characteristics of teachers and the management officers and the effect of end results on the students. There were certain amount of

parents who were concerned about the students' future education and adjustability. The average results of quality assessment outside of education institutions conducted by Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA) on every school was in the good to very good level. In addition, alternative schools have been accepted as a form of education that can be applied and used while the schools' innovations have been widely promoted. The schools' personnel have been invited as lecturers and consultants for interested organizations to help with the application of learning innovations. The study also revealed that students who had access to alternative education were children whose parents had sufficient financial ability.

The main suggestion for alternative education principle is how the government and involved governmental agencies should review the regulations that can be considered the obstructions for the learning management of alternative schools. For instance, the measure used for external quality assessment of educational institutions conducted by ONESQA should be designed specifically for alternative schools due to the differences in concept and objectives between alternative schools and mainstream schools. In addition, there should be a support system for children from families with low income to have access to alternative education.

Suwannasuan et al. (2013) conducted mix-method study in order to develop alternative education model for underprivileged children in the highlands of the upper northern region. The findings revealed the demands for alternative education administration for educationally underprivileged children in the highlands of the upper northern region consist of the students and local communities' wish concerning alternative education administration of educational institution. For instance, the provision of teachers, establishment of sub-learning centers where teachers can teach, curriculum that is suitable and the teaching of knowledge that can be applied to students' everyday life. The committee of such educational institution should participate in the creation of curriculum as well as the teaching of the knowledge that will be useful for the students and their choices of occupation. The academic demands encompass the creation of curriculum that is suitable for the school's context and the community's requirements. The community should be incorporated as a part of curriculum formation. Additional use of learning media can motivate the students' interest whereas the learning management should consider and facilitate flexibility for the students.

The study also revealed that the format of alternative education administration for educationally underprivileged children in highland areas of upper northern region of Thailand comprises of 4 main components as follows:

(1) Inputs: Comprising of two subcomponents, which are (1) personnel such as committees and administrators of educational institutions and teachers (2) educational institution management such as the key mission (academic works) support mission (academic support works).

(2) Process: consisting of 5 steps, which are Planning: P, Doing: D, Controlling: C, Acting: A with Motivating: M as the mechanism of each step.

(3) Outputs: Comprising of 3 subcomponents: opportunity to receive educational services, quality of students and educational institutions and efficiency of educational management.

(4) Conditions for Achievements: comprising of 2 factors: the factors that obstruct and the factors that enhance alternative education administration for educationally underprivileged children in highland areas of upper northern region of Thailand.

The study of Suwannasuan et al. (2013) concluded that the development of alternative education model for educationally underprivileged children in highland areas of upper northern region of Thailand was considered a practical and worthwhile model at high level. In terms of benefit, the model was rated at highest level.

Ninlamot (2014) conducted research on the development of alternative education format to enhance lifetime learning suitable for the citizens in the out-of-school system. Ninlamot (2014) also specified alternative education for the enhancement of lifetime learning for citizens in the out-of-school system as his research framework. The concept could be operated using the right format and standing at the opposite side of the belief and concept upheld by the mainstream education, particularly the key weakness of mainstream basic education, which was considered as 'the education that contradicts with the principle of being a true human'. The format of alternative education administration for citizens in the out-of-school system has been developed according to the research and development procedure and process. The study aimed to develop a whole human basing on the mixed concepts, principles and beliefs of the following educational philosophies: (1) Humanism (2) (Neo-humanism) (3) Progressivism (4) Reconstructionism (5) Existentialism (6) Constructivism (7) Constructionism and (8) Buddhistic Philosophy. The analysis of these philosophical concepts found that the common theme they share is the 'belief in human beings' different natures'. Hence, the educational and learning method should be varied but share the same goal, which is to develop a learner to achieve human completeness.' Furthermore, Ninlamot (2014) proposed philosophical concept of alternative education for citizens in out-of-school system as 'the education for life and society to achieve human completeness and sustainable development'. This has been raised as the core concept of the development of alternative education administration format for the enhancement of learners' lifetime learning.

Referring alternative education administration in Thailand, it has been discovered that the alternative education administered by families or homeschooling was considered to be a significant phenomenon in alternative education administration in Thailand. The synthesis of the relevant researches finds that the works done by researchers in this particular period can be divided into 4 main groups as follows:

The First Group - The research in the first group explored the reasons behind families' decisions to embrace homeschooling with family members and parents as educational administrators (Satawarintu, 2000).

The Second Group - The research in the second group with contents involving the concepts and formats of homeschool education, which include works such as Formats and Development of Homeschooling in Thai Society (Chalermchai et al., 2000),

Concept and Format Analysis of Homeschooling in Thailand (Pholwiwat, 2004), Presentation of Online Learning Management Format for Homeschooling (Chammuangpak, 2004).

The Third Group - The research in the third group studied the conditions and scenarios of homeschooling, which included The Study of Scenarios of Homeschooling in Bangkok (Chew, 2000), Homeschooling in Thai Society: Conditions and Database (Yuthachai Chalermchai, Chummas Panghom, Wilailak Julanon and Pholwiwat, 2004), Homeschooling in Thailand: Policy Proposals (Sukseangprasert, 2004) and The Study of Conditions and Dilemmas in Basic Education Administration by Homeschooling Families (Intrarasopha, 2006).

The Fourth Group - The research in the fourth group aimed to develop the indicators of homeschooling standard, which included works such as Development of Indicators of Educational Standard for External Quality Assessment of Homeschooling (Konlaw, 2002), Development of Indicators of Homeschooling (Nantavichit, 2006), Development of External Quality Assessment Format for Homeschooling as a Basic Education (Moondej et al., 2006).

After the Age of Acceptance (post 2007), homeschooling has become more acceptance. The synthesis of relevant research discovered that the works done by researchers in this particular period comprised of the research that followed up the evaluation of homeschooling (Office of the Education Council, 2009), the Development of an instruction by family system according to learners' age (Yahakorn, 2010), A Study on the Parents' Socio-Economic Status and Expenses for Home School Basic Education (Chosoungnean, 2011) and The Ideology and Process of Home School Management in the Northern province (Anuwararat et al., 2012).

6. Conclusions and Suggestions

'Alternative Education' is utilized to differentiate itself from mainstream and non-formal education, which are provided by the state and designed to be in one format with the purpose to dominate learners to succumb to the state as the sole ideological guideline. As a result, alternative education in Thailand after periods of advocacies and supports is considered as a 'discourse that reacts to the educational system established by the state and for the state's domination, as well as a creation of an educational system that truly belongs to the people, by the people and for the people.' Alternative Education in Thailand, therefore, has significantly interpreted structural injustice while enhancing learners to have a better understanding of the world and life in general. Students are encouraged to see the diversity of life, not to look down on those who are less privileged, to love and understand each other, as everything and everyone is considered as companions, born to share the same cycle of life. Such interpretation complies with Siwaraksa (2002) regarding the synthesis of the key principles of alternative education in Thailand, which is defined as an education with great diversity that cherishes the human values.

The movement of alternative education in Thailand is considered to be rather far from the word acceptance due to the disconnection between the concept and the social context. Nevertheless, alternative education must continue to evolve to search for the

most suitable and tangible code of conduct that genuinely responds to the more diverse social demands.

More importantly, the emphasis should be put on the collaborations between the involved sectors, be it private, governmental or local, as well as educationists of both mainstream and alternative education. The successful example can be seen in the second decade of Education Reform period where the new paradigm is created and truly redefines the meaning of education. Nevertheless, it is widely accepted that education reform can be a great deal of challenge, particularly for the educational system of a large country with massive amount of educational personnel. It is even perceived as a failed system. The birth and existence of alternative education cannot replace the mainstream educational system or is expected to be successful and resolve educational crisis in an instant. Nonetheless, the concept of alternative education should be understood and applied as an alternative for mainstream education. The key factor is the implementation of philosophies, methods and experiences of alternative education in all types of curriculums and educational institutions. This will allow the education to resonate with the individuality of each learner or group, offering them a chance to come into contact with diverse learning experiences. Students then learn to discover themselves, develop and succeed in life with their true nature and potential. In terms of the learning standard, flexibility should also be provided according to the curriculum and educational measurement and evaluation.

Alternative Education in Thailand can be divided into 3 different periods: The Age of Pioneering and Experimentation (before 1987), The Age of Education Reform (1897-2007) and The Age of Acceptance (post 2007). The review of researches relevant to alternative education administration in Thailand in comparison with the evolution of alternative education in Thailand finds that the researches with the contents involving alternative education administration in Thailand began to emerge in the Age of Education Reform. In the Age of Acceptance period, most of the researches highlight the learning management and effectiveness of alternative schools including the works that aim to develop the format of alternative education administration for different groups of learners.

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