

## ***Disparities in Education of Thailand's Childrens through Economic, Social and Cultural Perspective***

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### **Abstract**

Equality of education is prominently presented in the constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand. However, inequality has been found in Thai education and must be addressed soonest. The survey results about life and society from King Prajadhipok's Institute indicated that factors causing inequality in Thai education most likely were from family's income and property. Considered the ongoing situations, it has been found that family income and property were not equal in a family level and regional level. The problems are from economic, social, and cultural circumstances that are different across the country. The research result showed that there were 3 factors causing educational inequality in Thailand. They are social status and family economy that affect students' education. Families with stable social status and high levels of income contribute quality of education to children. The second factor is social environment. Children living in remote areas are most likely in need of opportunities to be educated. The last factor is culture and family way of life. Children living with functional families have more chances of an education than those who live in dysfunctional families which resulting from their parent education experience and capability to raise children. In order to lower inequality in education in Thailand, quality of life, people's livelihood, income distribution of people in all regions, including education opportunities for children in remote areas have to be developed to meet equality in all areas. Meanwhile, family values on education have to be adjusted which leads to solving this problems in soonest.

Keywords: Disparities in Education, Economic, Social and Cultural

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## **Introduction**

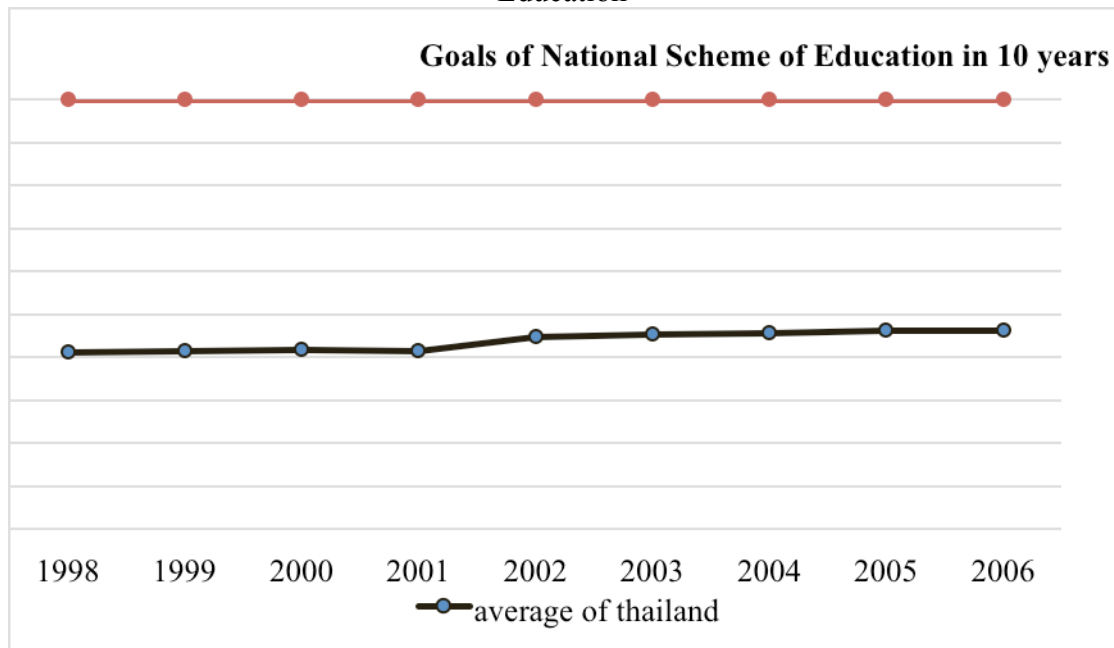
Education is like building up knowledge and importance experience for human at all age and genders regardless of race and religion. Education is always important for the development and the life of human being. According to Thailand's Royal Institute Dictionary, education is defined as learning, practicing, and teaching (Royal Institute of Thailand, 2011). In addition, Professor Dr. Saroj Buasri has defined education as personal and social development that make people learn and develop to become a good member of the society. For this reason, educational system manage is important for the development of citizen in each country, as it is not only defining educational form of the country, but also increase the capacity of educational management of the country.

Thailand's educational system has been specified in the Educational Act since 1999 onward. In Thailand, the important educational objectives are the process of learning that fosters good sense of the democratic administration with His Majesty the King as the head of state, know how to preserve and promote the right, duty, freedom, compliance to the law, equality, and prestige, be proud of being Thai, protect the common and national profits, support religions, art, culture, sport, local wisdom, Thai wisdom, and international knowledge, as well as conserving natural resources and environment, posses the ability to work, having self-reliance, creativity, yearning to learn, and continuing on self-learning (Ministry of Education, 1999). There are 3 forms of Thai educational system, formal education, non-formal education, and informal education. These aforementioned educational systems have been enforced on Thai youth for long years. These systems are not only allowing Thai students to have alternatives in choosing their own way of develop their learning, but also encourage parents and society to engage in the education. However, it is normal to have some problems in educational management in each country. The important educational problem that cannot be avoided is the problem on educational inequality of Thai students that can be found in different regions of the country. When we consider on the causes of the problems, we found that there are 3 major causes, which are economical factor, social factor, and factors on culture and way of living. This is an urgent case that governmental organizations and public need to corporate on solving the problems.

## **The Problems of Educational Inequality in Thailand**

The problems of educational inequality in Thailand persist for a long time. This problem has become an important obstacle for the development of educational equality for Thai students and affected on the development of Thai people. Due to these reasons, during the past decades, the rate of educated Thai population age between 15-59 years old is increasing. From 1998, the rate was 7.0 and increase to 8.7 in 2006, which increased by 0.15 percent per year.

Table 1: Display the average academic years of Thai population  
Source: Office of the Basic Education Commission, Education Council, Ministry of Education



From the information above, it shows the condition of Thai's education that has been increasing and scattering in different regions. However, we still found the inequality of education of Thai students in different parts of Thailand as can be seen from the statistic report of King Prajadgipok's Institute on the survey of life and society (Office of Research and Development, King Prajadhipok's Institute) during October 2014 – March 2015. The report was conducted by using descriptive statistic to depict percentage, average value, and standard deviation value. There is an analysis on the differences among economic variables and educational inequality by using Chi-Square Test and Regression Analysis in order to find the variables that having a relationship with educational inequality. The study found that the factors that affect the educational inequality in Thailand the most are economic factor, social factor, and factor on culture and family's way of living.

### **Educational Inequality of Thai Students through Economic Perspectives**

Human resource is an important factor in driving the country's development in all aspects towards the objective of becoming a developed country. After 8<sup>th</sup> National Economic and Social Development Plan, Thailand has been focusing on the concept of human centered development. Earlier, Thailand possesses advancement in many aspects. However, inequality is still a problem for Thai society due to the economic development policy that supports the expansion of other industries rather than agricultural industries, which most of the labors are working in.

The causes of poverty and income gap in each region are differently severe. One of the reasons is caused by basic economic factors of family since birth, which affecting on the inequality of opportunities in developing knowledge skills and working in order to earn to support oneself and family. It is found that who has O-NET results above 50 percent in the 4 main subjects (Thai language, English, Mathematics, and

Science) have the characteristics relevant to the economic development. That is to say, Central region is the best and border area of the Southern area is the worst. Knowledge and education play important roll in bringing opportunities to a person in carrying out a profession, earning, and improving the quality of life. This shows that people in each region receive benefits from economic and social development differently.

### **Governmental Sector and the Management in Solving Inequality Problems through Education**

#### **Educational Resources Allocation Management (Science-Mathematics Program)**

In 2019, Thailand invests on educational budget for 489,798.6 million baht, which is accounted for 16.3 percent of total country's budget. The budget is allocated to the development plan for graduates of general education for 435.4857 more than the development plan for graduates of vocational education 688.3186 (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2018) . This is due to the rate between numbers of students in general education and vocational education 65.4:34.6 percent. However, there are many factors in increasing the numbers of students in vocational education. It is opposite to the applicant rate per vacancy of a position for graduate of Vocational Certificate – High Vocational Certificate/Diploma with the rate of 15.9 percent, which is the highest among all. Governmental sector has allocated budget to support per capita (National Institute of Educational Testing Service, 2019). As a result, it caused inequality in educational resources. The study of Chaityut and others (2016) shows that educational management cost of school will decrease when the size gets bigger and with a proper size. The schools that are able to manage to have enough numbers of students will be able to increase the efficiency on expenditure (Bureau of the Budget, 2018). The method of budget allocation according to numbers of students without specify the proper size of school or allowing students to choose to study within the serving area cause a problem of student grabbing. Together with the changes in population structure, it caused the decreasing numbers of students. When the transportation becomes more convenient and cheaper, it causes separation of big size schools and small size schools. The number of small sized schools is increasing due to the lack of ability in competing.

From 2015 PISA test result , it shows that Thai students on average have lower skills than students in OECD countries equivalent to 2.5 academic years and lower skills than students in Southeast Asia and Pacific Region (EAP) countries almost 3 academic years in every subject. Moreover, when comparing on the result of cost per student per year that governmental sector pays (average accumulative expenses from grade 1 – 9), it shows that Thai students skills are below the average of other countries with the similar amount of expenses. The average score of Thai students is likely to decrease on all subjects when comparing to the first evaluation in 2000 (PISA 2000)

PISA test results also reflect educational inequality on science studies and reading among students in big cities and students in village schools. PISA evaluated by using Economic, Social, and Cultural Status (ESCS) and found that the gap on science skills between students from the most upper 20 percent and the most lower 20 percent of different financial and social condition families rose from 1.6 academic years in 2012

to 1.8 academic years in 2015. Meanwhile, students in village schools possess less science skills than students in big cities, which the numbers of academic years rose from 1.1 to 1.8 at the same period. Regarding the reading skill, students in village schools are falling behind students in big city school for almost 3 academic years. Moreover, students in the lower 20 percent ESCS group are falling behind students in the most upper 20 percent for 2.3 academic years in the 2015 evaluation.

Methods in developing and managing educational resources of governmental sector become an encouragement for elites to collecting capital. The inefficiency of resources allocation caused the inequality in accessing basic services provided by governmental sector. Education is considered to be an important factor in facilitating the access of equal economic opportunity. It helps smoothen the shift of social class. Nowadays, educational resources in Thailand are still clustered in big cities. Teachers in Bangkok on average possess higher educational background and experience when comparing to teachers in other cities. At the same time, small schools in the remote area have higher cost than normal schools. This shows that higher costs in the remote areas do not reflect good quality of education.

### **Household Sector and the Passing on of Wealth**

#### **- Abilities to access education**

The survey of National Statistics Office shows that 10 percent of the most wealthiest group of population has 19.29 times higher income than the 10 percent of the most poorest group of population. The income of wealthy group has increased very fast and obvious during the past 30 years. Meanwhile, though the income of the poor group has increased faster than the income of the wealthy group, it is still not enough to make the income share significantly increase (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2019).

Table 2 showing the net rate of fundamental education attendance classified by income level of the population

Source: The survey of household economic and social condition by National Statistics Office

	Primary School	Junior High School	Senior High School	Higher Education
10% of the richest population	88.3	68.2	49.7	76.1
10% of the poorest population	87.1	62.9	57.8	3.8

From the table above, it shows that the net rate of fundamental education attendance according to the income level divided the population into 10 even groups – starting from the first 10% group of the poorest population until the tenth 10% group of the richest population in 2017. Children of the 10% group of the riches population have 1.9 and 17 times higher rate in attending high school and higher education respectively when comparing to the 10% group of the poorest population. Children in different areas have different opportunities to access education. Especially at higher educational level, it is found that students in the municipality areas have one fold higher rate in attending Bachelor's degree than students outside the municipality areas. This shows the capacity of the groups with high income in accessing

educational resources; hence, it is resulting in the inequality of education and higher competitiveness of this group of students than other groups.

The 2018 Human Capital Index shows the evaluation result of Thai student average capacity in studying at school for 12.4 years, but the quality of learning is equivalent to attending class for only 8.6 year (World Bank, 2018). This affects national education evaluation and university admission. Therefore, students with inferior opportunity to access to education cannot compete with students who have more educational resources. It is found that students in the cities with the lowest average O-NET score (National Institute of Educational Testing Service, 2019) are in 6 cities among the top 10 cities with the highest rate of poverty or the most poverty density in 2017. Moreover, students in the top 4 cities with highest O-NET score have average income of 32,761-45,707 Baht/month, which 3 out of 4 cities are in Bangkok and the metropolitan area – the most developed economic region and the governmental, public administration, trade, and financial center of the country.

#### - Inheritance of Wealth

Education causes intergenerational mobility. In Thai society, it is found that Thais at the age between 28-38 years old were born in the bottom half level family. Only 35.85% of this group of people (or accounted for 1/3 of the population) has the opportunity to move up to the upper half level and only 15.4% of this group has the opportunity to move to 1/4 household group (or 25%), which is the highest income group. Conversely, 47.68% of Thai children who born in a family with the highest income, which accounted for 1/4 or the first 25% have the opportunity to become adults with the highest income in the first 25% group as there were. This reflects the inheritance of privilege through generation in current Thai society (GDIM, 2018).

### **Educational Inequality of Thai Students through Social Perspective**

In current Thai society, many are still giving importance on family's social status, which affects level of education of Thai students. What can be found the most is children in a family with middle to high-income level will have more opportunity on receiving educational supports than children in a family with low income. These educational supports include admission to famous and widely accepted schools, taking extra lessons with famous tutors or institutions, as well as supports of educational capital from the family. This situation can be seen from children in a family in Bangkok and metropolitan area more than other regions. This is because the development and modernity of the area affect family's social status. This situation reflects educational values in Thai society obviously. From National Research Policy and Strategy during 2012-2017, it is found that there are 2 social factors affecting children's educational quality.

The first factor is the quality of educational system and curriculum in each institution that emphasizing on the academic development and competition among students in the institutions. This is to increase the numbers of students and fame of the institutions, which can be seen from the admission examination of high school or universities that many students are interested to get in. From the high competitive society, it affects the quality of educational management in the institutions. This causes many institutions to try to present their image and identity to persuade and

attract students to study at their institution. On the other hand, educational quality management of the institution is not as good as it should be, which emphasizing on the numbers of graduates more than the quality.

The second factor is the quality and competence of the instructors teaching in fundamental education level or higher education level. Most of the instructors who graduated with a degree in pedagogy or education have fundamental knowledge suitable for working as an instructor and have enough capacity to instruct students on the development and fundamental knowledge necessary for living. This also includes essential skills to develop students. However, the current social condition requires many more teachers, which resulting in the opening application for teachers and highly demanded field or scarce field of government officers. Due to this reason, there are many personals without a degree in pedagogy or education working in educational institutions. Therefore, when it is required for these teachers to instruct, they may not have adequate knowledge and understanding on psychology of teaching and teaching skills when comparing to those with directly related degree. Moreover, another obstacle in developing educational quality of Thai students is the preference of modern teachers to be teaching in a school in a developed area like in Bangkok and metropolitan. Due to these reasons there are many teachers graduated and working in that area. However, there are a few teachers and personals, who go back and work in their local area in different region of Thailand. For this reason, there are not many students in other regions have the opportunity to study with qualified teachers due to the preferences of the teachers that cling on convenience and modernity of the area and ignore most of the area of the country with high number of students that are still waiting for the development and educational opportunity like those in the big cities.

Educational management condition of schools is still emphasizing on competition in producing high number of graduates rather than qualified graduates. This causes a competition among students in the schools. Moreover, the preferences of the teachers that cling on convenience and modernity of the area cause obvious educational inequality, which reflects Thailand's social condition that families are still supporting students to emphasize on competition, reputation of the educational institution, and social value that cling on the convenience of educational personals.

### **Educations Inequality of Thai Students through Cultural and Way of Living Perspectives**

Family is considered to be an important part in creating educational opportunity for Thai students. We can see clearly that family plays an important role in educational supports for children in the family. With this reason, the condition of the family is important for creating educational opportunity and educational quality of children all over the country. In addition, culture and way of living of people in the family is a social capital that is important in influencing children's education. Due to this reason, we can see clearly that children in complete family with father and mother tend to have more opportunity to receive education according to requirement more than children from a single-parent family.

We can see that during 2007 – 2010, the number of single-parent family has been increasing. This shows that there are more children with single parent during the past 10 years. This is important information that helps us to see the situation of the

increasing number of Thai children receiving less educational supports than children in a complete family. We often see this situation mostly occur in the Northeastern and Northern regions of Thailand. It is due to the fact that most of the families are agricultural family causing the separation of parents with the increasing numbers. This leads to the value of this type of family gives less importance on educating their children, because education is not necessary for working and the living of the family and they do not need much knowledge in doing agriculture. Moreover, it may not be adequate when there is only one parent giving financial support for the children's education. Therefore, students need to leave school to help their parent working to support the family, which is more important. Together with the low level of education of the parent, children in this type of family tend to have highest education level at a primary level. Due to these reasons, when there is a national education evaluation, we often see that children in Northeastern and Northern region tend to have lower total score that children in the Central region or Bangkok and metropolitan area. Another factor that cannot be avoided in causing educational inequality in Thai society is the culture of patronage system, which can be seen in every region of the country. This culture has been with Thai society for so long and has been deep-seated in all areas including educational field.

Table 3: Household structure: The rate of marriage registration and divorce registration during 2007-2010

Source: Office the National Economic and Social Development Council

Household Structure			2007	2008	2009	2010
Number of households (thousand households)			18,178	18,994	19,579	19,741
Type of households	Total		100	100	100	100
	Single family	total	53.9	53.3	53.1	52.3
		Husband and wife	14.8	14.4	14.4	15
		Husband and wife and children	31.9	31.5	31.1	29.7
		Husband or wife and children	7.2	7.4	7.6	7.6
	Extended family		34.5	34.6	35.1	34.5
	Families who live alone		11.2	11.6	11.4	12.6
	Families living with someone who is not relatives		0.4	0.6	0.4	0.6

Patronage system is when students in a family that has relationship with some powerful persons or someone with contribution to the educational institution often receive educational supports more than others in terms of applying for school, selection process, and decision evaluation. This highly causes inequality in Thai educational system.

This is an important reason that we can make a conclusion that characteristics of family's culture and way of living in different regions, as well as patronage system



affect the educational equality and opportunity of children in each region. If we look carefully, we will find that culture and way of living of family with less social capital affect children's education directly. These cultures will create the way of living foundation for the children automatically by living in such family with lower opportunity to study. This is what we need to learn and make change to this value urgently.

### **Solutions to Solve the Problem of Educational Inequality of Thai Children**

The problem of educational inequality in Thailand may not be solve very soon, but it is a problem that educational personals in Thailand and all Thai people are required to take part in solving the problem. The first important factor is to speed up a serious educational revolution in many directions. This can be said that we can adjust educational value in Thai society by emphasizing on creating more morality and ethic on students rather than creating smart people who can become successful in their profession or degree. It is required to give more importance on psychology, otherwise most graduates and educational providers tend to focus on their own benefits and ignore quality of education for Thai children. Learning Management should be emphasizing on practicing and application of the knowledge in solving problems rather than memorizing. The content or methods should be organized for students to be able to apply to the real-life situation as most. By doing so, it will create substantial equality of educational management.

The second factor is the allocation of teachers and educational personals to different region of the country equally and relevant to the needs of community and society in different region. This is in order for teachers with a degree to pass on knowledge and experience received from higher educational institution to develop children in their region.

The third factor is reducing inequality of income and distribution of income to different region equally is important duty of governmental sectors that can take part in supporting. This can be done by enforcing policies to distribute income to families and communities in different regions in order for them to make a living and have enough income to support the education of their children. Moreover, allocating budget and scholarships to support schools in remote areas is needed in order for students in theses schools to have equal opportunity with students in the developed area.

Lastly, fostering correct values to families in Thai society by passing on and encouraging the correct ideas on education to parents in order for them to see the importance of education of children in their family. So, these children can utilize knowledge and experience gained to support family in the future at their best capacity. Even though, these methods for solving problems we have suggested may not be able to eliminate all problems of educational inequality in Thai society in the near future, they are important methods that can be part in presenting and suggesting interested persons related to education to utilize it in developing and solving problems of educational inequality in Thailand.

## **Conclusion**

These problems caused by 3 important factors; economic factor specifically on income and household economy that affecting on education rate and examination results of Thai students, social factor that emphasizing on competition, family's social status, and giving value on modernity and convenience of teachers and educational personals, and factor on culture and way of living which shows that family's condition affects educational support and opportunity, as well as patronage system culture that plays an important role in obstructing the educational development and equality of Thai children. All these 3 factors are important for causing educational inequality in Thai society. The important solution that can help solving educational inequality soon is when governmental sector and public sector to corporate in solving this problem by speeding up educational revolution in terms of educational management system, allocation of teachers and educational personals equally in different regions, distribution of income, strengthening household economic, and fostering correct values on education to the families. These aforementioned methods are an important guideline to reduce problems of social inequality and develop Thai educational system to be equivalent to civilized countries soon.

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