

*The Study of Primary Educational Students with Immigrant Worker Parents in Sa Kaeo Province, Thailand*

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**Abstract**

This study aimed to investigate current conditions, problems and obstacles in primary education for students with immigrant worker parents in Sa Kaeo Province, Thailand. A qualitative study was used with an in-depth interview technique. The participants were 20 students, 20 student's parents, and 6 teachers who taught in the selected school. A purposive sampling technique was employed in this study. A content analysis technique was used to analyze the data. It was found that most of students were Cambodians where the parents' occupation was mostly mercenaries. They used their own local languages at home and Thai language at school. They had high intention in class. The teacher tried to teach and take care of all students equally, but sometimes teachers did not attend them equally according to the thoughtful of Thai parents. All students reported a preference to study and work in Thailand more than in their homeland. The problems and obstacles for them were the movement of their parents to find a job where most of them had to move with their parents; hence they quit their study. The language barrier was one of the communication problems among these students. It is recommended that the Ministry of Education of Thailand should create a central course or international course for students from other countries, since the education in primary school through higher education should include the training of ASEAN language for Thai teachers.

Keywords: Primary educational students, immigrant worker parents, Sa Kaeo Province, Thailand

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## **Introduction**

By the year of 2015, ten Southeast Asian countries (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam) will have been completely stepped into the “ASEAN Economic Community.” ASEAN Economic Community or AEC was established and purposed by the Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) of the economical agreements to have the collaborative market and production base, goods transportation, collaborative investment, and free flow of skilled labors that were considered as one of the key factors that made the economics driven. According to the MRAs, eight occupations including engineering services, nursing services, architectural services, surveying qualifications, accountancy services, dental practitioners, medical practitioners and tourism, agreed to freely work among ten countries members according to the MRAs. Beyond eight occupations, the others are expected to prepare the culture context and language proficiency for the smooth collaborative working and the travel hospitality providing in the future (Siritipakul, 2015).

According to the MRAs, the free flow skilled labors were expected and assigned the proper qualifications to work freely among the ten countries in the future. The issue of unskilled labors flowing in Thailand was a result of the sections that the Thai government created to support the labor market; for instances, section 9, section 12, and section 13 which made Thailand has immigrant workers around 1,443, 474 and nationalities (Cambodian, Laos, and Myanmar) proving around 989,374 workers in total (Official of foreign workers administration, 2015).

Sa Kaeo is one of the provinces located in the eastern part of Thailand and has its eastern borderline adjacent to Cambodia approximately 165 kilometers. Therefore, most of the immigrant workers are Cambodian rather than those from Laos and Myanmar. According to the agreement of government cabinet about the permission of allowing immigrant workers actively work in Thailand (2015), the numbers of the official immigrants workers in Sa Kaeo on June, 2014 are approximately 232, which categorized into 181 of Cambodian (78.02%), 48 of Laos (20.69 %), and 3 of Myanmar (1.29 %) respectively. Conversely, these numbers of the official immigrant workers are seen as the few numbers when compared to the larger amount of unofficial immigrant workers who currently and actively worked in Thailand. However, both official and unofficial immigrant workers are considered as the factors that caused on economic, social, or healthy problematic.

Nowadays, children in the immigrant worker parents were considered one of the major problems in Thailand since they lacked of living carefulness and fundamental education (Charoenmukkayananta et al., 2013). Supporting the above claim, Ramajitti Institute presents that there were more than five million underprivileged children in Thai educational system and 250,000 children in the immigrant worker parents and around 200,000 - 300,000 of unidentified nationalities children still had no opportunities to access into Thai educational system. The problem of children in the immigrant worker family that could not access into the Thai educational system because of various caused; for instances, lacked of literacy in both Thai culture context and theirs own context, school dropout, transmigration of their parents, health problem, or traffickers fostering (Manager Online, 2014). Although there were no definite numbers of immigrant-born children at the moment, the statistics of the

official unskilled immigrant workers have shown that there are 93,082 of 0-15 years old children in 2003 and approximately 250,000 of 5-18 years old Cambodian, Laos and Myanmar children around Thailand in 2005 respectively because of their parents as well as the border conflict issues. Despite the fact that some of these children were born in Thailand (Wantanasombat, 2013), these students were not confirmed that they were educated properly (Sa Kaeo, 2014) such as a third of the total numbers of immigrant born children in SamutSakorn had the opportunities to access into the educational system while there were still 4,000 - 5,000 children left.

Therefore, the above issues made the researchers who worked in educational fields have interested in study about the primary educational students of immigrant born children, especially children who currently lived in Sa Kaeo province, with the purpose of developing the proper educational issues of these children in the future.

### **Brief Literature Review**

An immigrant workers in Thailand is defined as a person without a Thai nationality (Royal Thai Government Gazette, 2008, p.25). In Thailand, the annual registration of immigrants workers started in 1996 by allowing these people to work in Thailand temporarily. The temporary permission expanded every year since Thailand lacked unskilled labors. Therefore, the immigrant workers recognized as one of the factors that strengthen Thai economic nowadays. Immigrants in Thailand categorized into four minor groups as follows:

(1) The registered immigrant workers who past a health check will get a work permit certification to work in Thailand. These workers will get an ID number starting with 00 from the Ministry of Interior. The total number of these workers in May 2012 was approximately 886,507.

(2) The Nationality Verification (NV) immigrant workers from Cambodian and Laos workers in 2006 and Myanmar in 2009 respectively because the Thai government needed to promote the unofficial workers into the official workers. These workers needed to pass the national verification system.

Lao workers got a temporary passport from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Laos PDR while Cambodian got the certification of identification from the Ministry of Labor in Cambodia.

On the contrary, the nationality verification workers at Myanmar started in 2009 with the complex stepped and took a long time to get the work permit. However, the Myanmar government accepted by settle the nationality verification office in 5 provinces of Thailand: Bangkok, Samutprakarn, SamutSakorn, Chiangmai and SuratThani. The Myanmar immigrant workers who past the nationality verify got the passport and ID card from Myanmar government.

Consequently, the immigrants who past the nationality verification meant that they were the official workers that traveled around Thailand, went back their country and the office did not restrain back to their country. Additionally, in case these workers wanted to travel back to Thailand, they needed to file the complaint to the migration officers after they came back to their country. However, these workers needed to

show up at the migration office every 90 days and they allowed to work in Thailand for 4 years (2 years/2 times). After 4 years pass, they left to their country for 3 years before returned to work in Thailand again. The total number of these workers in May 2012 was 653,174.

(3) The immigrant workers in Thailand with the Memorandum of Understanding or MOU between Thai government and Cambodia government in 2002 and Thai government and Laos PDR government in 2003 considered as the official workers: 1) These workers got the social assurance to access their health interest and others interests like Thai workers and NV workers. 2) these workers called as the “Import Workers.” The total number of these workers in May 2012 was 100,507.

Additionally, the Cambodian and Laos PDR workers imported due to the cooperative agreements since 2005. Conversely, Myanmar workers additionally needed 7 years to follow the agreement by sending the Myanmar workers to Thailand since 2012. Similarly to the NV workers, these workers worked in Thailand for 4 years (2 years/ 2 times) and needed to go back to their country before entering back to Thailand.

(4) Unofficial workers meant the workers without work permit or any certifications. However, the total number of these workers was changeable. Additionally, these workers were afraid of being caught and sent back to their country (Mahidol University, 2015).

The effects of immigrant workers did not limited only for adults but for children as well because the children who acrossed the boarder line with their parent were mostly uneducated, dropout from school for helping their parents work which led to the problem of child labor in the Thailand. The problem of child labor considered as one of the challenge task that Thai government and international organizations needed to pay carefully attention on because of its complexity and sensitivity, especially the unofficial children workers who illegally followed their parents to Thailand. Unfortunately, these children workers considered to be used as the slaves and work in bad and risk conditions for children. According to the list goods produced by child labor or forced labor from the ministry of labor in US, some Thai products such as shrimp and fish freezing, sugar cane products, clothing or the pornography were considering as the products from child labor system that Thai government needed to pay carefully attention and removed this issue out of the country (Ministry of Labor, 2015). The Labor Protection Act in 1993 stated that every employee (Thai or foreign) had their right to work with undiscriminating feeling from their employer and the employer did not hire the workers that aged below than 15 years old. If the child labor is found, the employer will be jailed a year or fined for 200,000 baht. However, the problem of the immigrant workers and child labors are considered as the complexity and sensitive problem, Therefore, the solutions assigned from the cooperative work from government, private section and private developmental organization section to fix this problem clearly and properly.

According to the information of workers from the department of protection and welfare, it found that the number of child labor in 2011 was 19,074 and 2012 was 14,972. Additionally, the information of young government workers from the Social Security Office in 2011 was 50,239 and decreased to 20,465 in 2012, which conformed to the statistics from the National Statistical Office that the young private

workers also decreased from 227,013 in 2011 into 189,633 in 2012. From the previous information, it found that the workers in age of 15-18 years old were decreased from the labor market. Conversely, the problem of child labor was still existed in Thailand and made the total number of the child labor was changeable and uncertain due to the transmigration of their parents. Subsequently, this problem led to the increasing number of child labors in Thailand in the future (Ministry of Labor, 2015).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child or CRC was defined the word “Child” as the person whose age below 18 years old. Since every children were seen as one of the major factors that made their country developed effectively when they grew up in the future as the saying that ‘The child was father of the man’. Additionally, children were recognized as the resource to develop the economics and socialistic for the country in the future. Therefore, children were also seen as one of the people who had human right and freedom as well as the adults. As a result, the CRC was established from the agreement of the countries members in United Nation as the role model for every country to use as the protection law for children. With the children rights that were assigned under Universal Declaration of Human Rights or UDHR in 1948 and other international rules, children were considered as the people who had the rights to be protected more than the others because the physical and mental abilities of children were not in the same level as adults. Consequently, children needed to be carefully protected to have the proper physical and metal development, which make this stage become the stage of learning and life development of children. On the contrary, if the children were not treated in the way they should, they were believed to grow up as the ineffective people in the future. As a result, the children protection was recognized as the sensitivity phenomenon that the government and private section require to cooperatively work and paid carefully attention on (The secretariat of the house of representatives, 2012, p.12).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purposes of this study were as follows:

1. To investigate current situations about the primary educational students with immigrant worker parents in Sa Kaeo province, Thailand.
2. To study the current problems and obstacles.

### **Research Methods**

This study employed a qualitative research was designed by using an in-depth interview as an instrument to collect the data. The key informants of this study were 20 students with immigrant worker parents, 20 immigrant parents, and 6 teachers. The participants were selected by using a purposeful sampling technique. The data were analyzed by using a content analysis technique.

## **Research Findings**

From the study of the primary educational students with the immigrant worker parents in Sa Kaeo province, Thailand, this study aims to investigate the current educational situation about the primary educational students with immigrant worker parents in Sa Kaeo province, Thailand and also to study the current problems and obstacles were found that:

### **Current Situations;**

Generally, the students were mostly Cambodian whose parents were also Cambodian workers who crossed the border line to work in Thailand and needed to go back and visited the relatives at Cambodia at least once a year according to the interview of the informants that “I need to go back to Phnom Penh once a year” (p.8). (p: meaning was person)

The parents were mostly the agriculturists as the informants stated in the interview, “I worked in the sugarcane’s field with the husband” (p.13).

Most of the students were living with their parents at the rented house where they needed to live with others Cambodian family tightly as one of the informants said in the interview “Our house was the rented house where many family were consisted in one house. It was suched a crowded and tightly” (p.10).

About languages, the students spoke Thai at schools and Cambodian at homes, which made some of them speak Thai fluently, and some could not spoke Thai. According to the interview from one of the informants who said that “the students who came to school to speak Thai fluently because their parents worked with Thai people. They spoke Cambodian as well, but their Cambodian will not be heard from the outsiders” (p. 14).

Due to the school context, it can be found that these students studied in the same classroom with Thai students. They were well welcomed from both of their teachers and classmates. Additionally, their learning proficiency were in the high level as well as their humble manners. According to the interview of one informant who said that “Their learning proficiency was good, maybe better that Thai students. Their tested result were considered as the top of the class but their manner was good, they were humble which was better than Thai students because they thought that they have limited right and freedom. So that’s they reasoned why they needed to be humble” (p.12).

On the school activities attendance, it can be found that these students were set at the back of the classroom with their Cambodian classmates as well as the school activities that they were sat at the back row because they felt considerate to Thai parents who came to see their children at the school. According to the interview from one of the informants, it found that “They sat at the back row because they felt considerate to Thai parents who came to see their children’s performance although the Cambodian students’ performances were better than some of Thai students. But they teachers blamed if they let the Cambodian students sit in front of Thai students. ” (p.20).

## **Problems and Obstacles;**

In this study, the data revealed that the problem that was mostly about the immigrant workers parents did not let their children continue their education in the primary school level. Some of them dropped out of schools and did not graduate Prathomsuksa<sup>6</sup> because of the transmigration of their parents. Some families were forced to leave Thailand because they were categorized as the unofficial workers. According to the interview with an informant, it was found that that “Because their parents were migrated illegally, so they needed to move to others area with their parents. They were a lot of children who needed to dropout and moved with their parents. Currently, there were two sibling students that their parents were now official and legal workers. So that’s why they decided to study here permanently” (p.16). This statement supported with the interview from another two informants that their family’s economics were too short of money to support their children’s education “...and there were some students that their parents needed them to drop out because they were lacked of money. Actually, the tuition fee was free but their parents suggested that their children were older enough to help them by working in the cornfield. As a result, there was no one who can be reached to the secondary level” (p.10). Additionally, the other informants supported that “As I said, when the students studied until Prathomsuksa 5, their parents came and dropped them out from the school for helping them work. Actually, I felt so pity because some of them were good at studying, some of them were good at sport and some of them were diligent. But well, we could do nothing if their parents won’t let their children to study” (p.11).

However, these students were having the problem of communication between their parents and teachers because some of them could not spoke Thai, which made it too difficult to communicate effectively. As the interview from one of the informants who said that “There were problems of communication if their parents cannot speak Thai” (p.18).

## **Discussions**

According to the result of the study, it can be found that the parents of the immigrant workers students did not support and encouraged their children to continue their study until the end of primary levels, Prathomsuksa 6. Some students were dropped out from school when they studied in Prathomsuksa 5 because their parents were illegal immigrant workers in Thailand and needed to transmigrate to other areas or the parents who needed their children to work and support family’s finance instead of education which made them lacked of opportunities to continue their study in both of basic educational level and high education in the future. This statement was supported by the study of Sa Kaeo (2014) and Sirinan et al. (2015) that most of the students from immigrant workers’ family will not be supported and encouraged to continue the study from their parents’ decision since their parents needed them to work and support the financial of the family which can be led to the problem of child labor in the future. Additionally, Kamsuwan and Choktanukul (2015) also stated that the problem of school drop out of the immigrant students was come from the lack of knowledge and educational awareness in their parents. They needed to be provided about the importance of the educational system and how educational made their life better. Therefore, they also lacked of support from their Thai employer and government to help and encourage their children to continue their study. Moreover,

Thai government also lacked of proper educational system to provide these students to study, which made the educational system of these students, were considered as the ineffective system in nowadays.

### **Suggestions**

According to the study, it can be found that Thailand did not provide proper education for the students of immigrant workers' parents. We suggested that the educational and related organizers should collaborative work for providing the basic educational system for these students, managed the legal workers hiring systematics, provided the birth certification for these children, acknowledged the parents about the importance of educational system and provided the financial supported for the students with the restriction of school drop out.

Additionally, this study also found that Thai teachers had communication problems with their Cambodian students. Therefore, we suggested that teachers who taught in school with the immigrant teachers should learn Cambodian or other ASEAN languages for providing the possibilities on teaching to the students. Also, the school should add these languages as the third language of the school.

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