

Educational Services for Students With Disabilities From Moving-In to Moving-Out of Chiang Mai University

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Abstract

The research objectives were to examine the state of educational services that Disability Support Services Center at Chiang Mai University (DSSCMU) provided to students with disabilities in compliance with the four strategies of education for individuals with disabilities in higher education under the Office of The Higher Education Commission. There were 59 participants in the study, who consisted of the DSSCMU staff and students with disabilities (SWDs). Research tools included 1) a questionnaire, 2) an interview form, and 3) a focus group form. Analyzed research data was reported using frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviation, and content analysis. The findings on the state of educational services offered to students showed that the DSSCMU was in compliance with all four outlined higher education strategies for individuals with disabilities. With respect to Strategy 1 – Providing Opportunities, the results showed that the SWDs had been recruited into Chiang Mai University by special projects (58.62%) and general exams (41.37%); Strategy 2 – Individual Educational Services, that most services which SWDs received were tutoring services (70.68%); Strategy 3 – Special Education Development, that DSSCMU disseminated knowledge about disabilities by encouraging and providing opportunities for students with or without disabilities to engage in activities together; and Strategy 4 – Employment Reaching-out, that collaborative projects with successful entrepreneurs or individuals helped inspire SWDs to develop themselves in order to meet the needs of the labor market.

Keywords: Students With Disabilities, Chiang Mai University, Disability Support Services Center

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Introduction

Thailand government sees education as an important factor that will increase opportunities for people with disabilities to pursue careers and become self-reliant with dignity. Therefore, it aims to provide thoroughly and equitably both basic and higher education to people with disabilities so that they receive quality education. Higher education, the last level before leaving for a career, is especially important because people with disabilities require more effort than non-disabled people to be able to graduate under limited potential, as well as to provide education that may not be conducive to their limitations. For this reason, the Office of The Higher Education Commission or the Office of The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation has established four strategic frameworks of education for individuals with disabilities in higher education. Strategy 1: Providing opportunities, to allocate educational opportunities for potential students with disabilities to attend higher education institutions, Strategy 2: Individual Educational Services, to develop 1) support services system for SWDs in higher education institutions, 2) special education personnels, and 3) appropriate curriculum and learning processes for SWDs, Strategy 3: Special Education Development, to conduct research and new knowledges on people with disabilities and Strategy 4: Employment Reaching-out, to promote supportive cooperation in careers of graduates with disabilities (Office of The Higher Education Commission, 2006). Therefore, in order to achieve the above strategies, higher education institutions in Thailand have established the Disability Support Service (DSS) to provide comprehensive support services for SWDs from entry to graduation. (Tongsookdee & Chaichompu, 2016-2017). Naturally, SWDs are less likely to succeed in higher education, earn their degrees, and often take more time to earn their degrees than the able-bodied majority. These students face stigma related to their disability and lack of acceptance among their peers and professors (Heyer, 2017). According to Simon (2020), SWDs academic abilities can be improved when their self-efficacy has improved and their positive experiences become greater when the accommodations are consistent and reliable. Cunninghame, Costello & Trinidad. (2016), also noted that if SWDs receive appropriate support, there is a high probability of achieving higher education.

In 2016, only 34 percent of Thai universities had DSS, while the number of SWDs increased more than 10 times during the year 2003-2016 (Office of the Higher Education Commission, 2017). The increasing numbers shows that development of DSS services to accommodate the diversity of needs of SWDs is needed. This is in line with Peterson (2016) which stated that providers in DSS must be proactive and reactive because existing solutions may not meet the needs or suit 2 students with the same disability. Additionally, Scott, Markel, Wessel & Desmond (2018) said that optimizing support services for SWDs brings significant benefits for them. This includes education, future careers, and also contributes to increase knowledges about disability services.

Chiang Mai University, the first public university in northern Thailand, has focused more on education for people with disabilities for a long time. In the academic year 2021, DSSCMU, with 11 staff, which is the largest number of staff among universities in the Upper North Region, provides educational support services to 5 groups of SWDs including 1) Visual impairments 2) Hearing impairment 3) Physical or movement or health impairments 4) Learning disabilities and 5) Autism. It has many characteristics that allows SWDs to receive comprehensive and timely services and contributes to several positive attitudes towards one's own disability (Jarunondrakul, 2022), which is one of the key factors for people with disabilities to equally live with others in the community and also live with dignity. Therefore,

the researcher was interested in studying DSSCMU's service conditions to reflect the quality of the services in supporting educational management for SWDs in Chiang Mai University. It is hoped that the results of the study will give other DSS guidances for educational services development for SWDs to gain more effective results. Moreover, the researcher also hope to provide information for relevant agencies at a high level to formulate policies to support and help SWDs succeed in higher education which will help increasing opportunities for people with disabilities to live in society with quality, equality and human dignity according to the potential of each person.

Research objective

The purpose of this study is to examine the state of educational services that Disability Support Services Center at Chiang Mai University (DSSCMU) provided to students with disabilities in compliance with the four strategies of education for individuals with disabilities in higher education.

Research Methodology

In this study, a mixed-methods approach, both quantitative and qualitative data collection, is adopted. The methods including survey questionnaires for DSSCMU staff and SWDs, semi-structured interviews for DSSCMU staff and then focus group for SWDs are deployed.

Participants

1 DSSCMU staff assigned by director and 58 SWDs who applied for educational services from DSSCMU in academic year 2021 participated in this study. Samplings were 1 DSSCMU staff for semi-structured interview and 1 SWDs from each categories of disabilities, 5 totally, who voluntarily attended focus groups.

Instruments

The researcher studied concepts, theories, laws, and related researches to design data collection tools. After completion, there are four data collection tools: 1) Google Forms questionnaire for DSSCMU staff; consist of a check list, a rating scale, and open-ended questions. 2) Google Forms questionnaires for SWDs, which is a check list, a rating scale and open-ended questions, 3) a semi-structured interview for DSS staff, 4) a focus group for SWDs. The draft of the four instruments were presented to the thesis advisor for review and appropriateness of the questions and improvements, and then the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) were scored by 3 experts. The four conformity indexes range from 0.66 to 1.00.

Data Collection

Data was collected in three phases. The first phase included:

1. Conducting a questionnaire of DSSCMU Staff. The questionnaire consisted of a total of 53 questions, with check list, rating scale and open end questions through Google Form. The questions were to examine the state of educational services that DSSCMU provided to SWDs in compliance with the four strategies of education for individuals with disabilities. The questionnaire was conducted from 4th January 2020 through 16th February 2020.

2. Conducting questionnaires of SWDs. The questionnaires consisted of a total of 84 questions, with check list, rating scale and open end questions through Google Form. The questions were to examine the satisfaction of SWDs toward educational services provided by DSSCMU. The questionnaire was conducted from 4th January 2020 through 24th February 2020.

The second stage of data collection included focus group 2 SWDs. The researchers extracted data from the first stage results to create focus group guides. The focus group were held on June 2020 via ZOOM application and were conducted 40-55 minutes.

The third stage of data collection included semi-structured interviewing 1 DSSCMU Staff. The researchers also extracted data from the first stage results along with data from focus group to create interview guides. The interviews were conducted to obtain more in-depth data on August 2020, and interviews were conducted onsite and lasted 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analyzed using computer programs including frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation. The content analysis used for qualitative data section, are summarized inductively according to the objectives of the research and presented descriptively in accordance with strategic framework 1-4.

Findings

The survey findings comprise four parts as follows:

Part 1: State and barriers of DSSCMU divided by four strategies of Education for Individuals with Disabilities

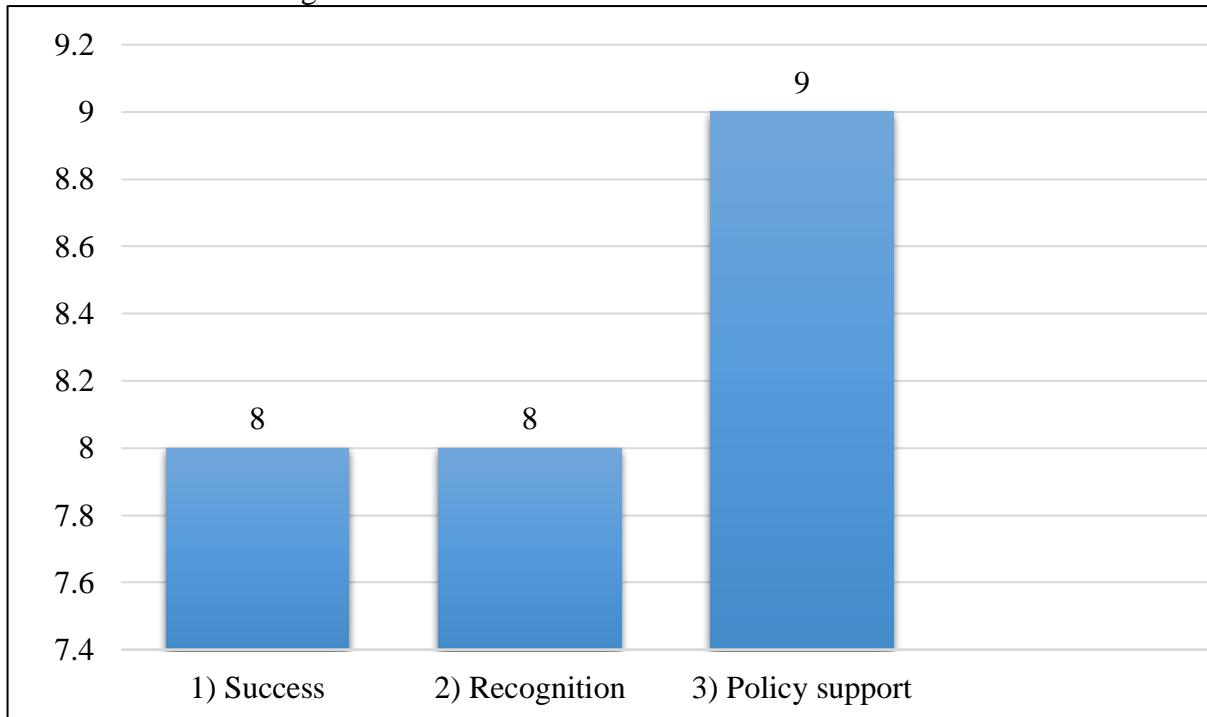
Strategy 1: Providing Opportunities	
State	1) Chiang Mai University recruits SWDs through special projects (58.62%) and general exams (41.37%). 2) DSSCMU promotes admissions information through its website and proactively conducts further study guidances to high school SWDs.
Barriers	1) Some groups of SWDs do not yet have or are less likely to pursue higher education. 2) A number of SWDs requested to transfer during the academic year.
Strategy 2: Individual Educational Services	
State	1) DSSCMU is capable of being a consulting agency in all items. The most counseling service for SWDs is Planning for study and travel issues. 2) DSSCMU divides SWDs into small groups with 5-6 members and assign all staff to lead the groups. Each staff responsible for listening directly to problems or needs from SWDs within the group in order to reduce the process and duration of response from DSSCMU. 3) All DSSCMU staff can work interchangeably in all positions. Enhance work continuity and efficiency. 4) The management of Chiang Mai University consider the importance of educational management of SWDs as equal as general students, and participates and fully supports the work of DSSCMU. 5) DSSCMU provides tutoring services, materials production with repairment services, assistive facilities, accommodations and training on university life skills. 6) SWDs service requested the most was tutoring services (70.68%)
Barriers	56.89% of SWDs do not use material services and 41.38% do not request for assistive facilities that DSS provided.
Strategy 3: Special Education Development	
State	DSSCMU organizes or sends staff to seminars related to disabilities, provides opportunities for faculty members and staff to exchange information and views on disability together, and provides opportunities for students with and without disabilities to engage in activities together.
Barriers	Only a few SWDs are involved in creating knowledges about disabilities for other students and university.
Strategy 4: Employment Reaching-out	
State	DSSCMU inspires SWDs by providing opportunities in meeting people with disabilities who have achieved motivational work and recruit disabled graduates to work at university.
Barriers	Only a few graduates with disabilities are employed to work at university.

Table 1: State and barriers of DSSCMU divided by four strategies of education for individuals with disabilities

Part 2: Attitudes of DSSCMU staff to their work

DSSCMU staff expressed attitude by scoring based on 3 defined topics: 1) Success in helping SWDs 2) Recognition of the DSSCMU work from students, staff, and university personnels and 3) Policy and budget support from managements. Total score is 10 points. The results shows that DSSCMU staff scored between 8-9 out of 10 which mean their attitudes toward their work are in EXCELLENT level.

Figure 1: Attitudes of DSSCMU staff to their work



Part 3: Satisfaction of SWDs in Chiang Mai University to DSSCMU services according to the 4 strategic frameworks (N = 58)

SWDs satisfaction rate to the educational services received, with respect to the four strategies of education for individuals with disabilities in higher education under the Office of The Higher Education Commission, are rated HIGH in every strategies.

Strategy	n	SWDs satisfaction		
		\bar{x}	S.D.	Score
1. Providing Opportunities	58	3.65	0.74	HIGH
2. Individual Educational Services	58	3.78	0.73	HIGH
3. Special Education Development	58	3.98	0.82	HIGH
4. Employment Reaching-out	58	3.70	0.99	HIGH
Average		3.81	0.72	HIGH

Table 2: Satisfaction of SWDs to educational services provided by DSSCMU

Part 4: Attitudes of student with disabilities towards DSSCMU's work and towards themselves (N = 58)

SWDs attitude rate toward DSSCMU's work and toward themselves were expressed by scoring based on 6 defined topics: 1) Equality in University 2) Cooperation from advisors 3) Cooperation from lecturers 4) DSSCMU overview services 5) Confidence in graduation and 6) Confidence in having a job. Total score is 10 points. The results shows that SWDs average scores are all in BEST level.

Strategy	n	SWDs satisfaction		
		\bar{x}	S.D.	Score
1. Equality in University	57	6.70	1.98	BEST
2. Cooperation from advisors	56	7.75	1.81	BEST
3. Cooperation from lecturers	57	7.75	1.73	BEST
4. DSSCMU overview services	57	7.60	2.01	BEST
5. Confidence in graduation	57	7.44	2.36	BEST
6. Confidence in having a job	56	6.82	1.86	BEST

Table 3: Attitudes of SWDs towards DSSCMU's work and towards themselves

Discussion

Based on the findings, the results can be discussed as follows:

DSSCMU service conditions and issues

According to the research, Chiang Mai University recruits qualified SWDs through general exams and recruits individually through special projects. Informations of admission are publicized through the website and proactively visit inclusive schools in northern Thailand to give admission guidances. This help increasing opportunities of SWDs entering higher education. In accordance with the Education for Persons with Disabilities Act. 2551 B.E. higher education institutions in all affiliations are responsible for accepting a reasonable proportion or number of persons with disabilities in accordance with the criteria and procedures prescribed by the Board of Directors (Ministry of Education, 2008) and the National Education Plan 2560-2579 B.E. stated that principles of education are Education for All, and Inclusive Education (Ministry of Education, 2017). It also found that a number of SWDs have requested to transfer their faculty during their studies. This is partly due to the lack or insufficient information about faculty that accepts applications for students with disabilities. As Heyer (2017) says, SWDs achieve higher education and graduate at a low rate and from that rate in many cases it takes longer than fellow non-disabled students to graduate, and Sharma (2017) that says the graduation rate of disabled students is still delayed compared to their peers who are not disabled. One of the key factors is understanding of process of working of DSS from university administrators. If concern person in high ranking prioritize education managements for SWDs without negative attitude or ignorance of support, it will inevitably affect the education of SWDs effectiveness and success of the system. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) said social ecology. (Ecological Framework) driven by 4 systems: Microsystem (small system), Mesosystem (central system), Exosystem (external system), and Macrosystem. (big system) which influences each other. University administrators, who are in a large system, therefore make an impact on other systems. Reasonably, it can be said that the positive attitude from the management has greatly affected the quality of education of SWDs because it is not only promote concrete practices that are in line with the policy but also directly affects the morale of the operator staff to whom many of them have worked under pressure for extended periods of time. In other words, DSSCMU provide quality services to integrated education support at a certain level. This is in accordance with the Regulations of the Board of Education for People with Disabilities on the Management of Higher Education for People with Disabilities. 2552 B.E. article 5 stated that higher education institutions shall be responsible for providing facilities, assistive technology, material services and other relevant educational services for people with disabilities, teaching & learning, measurement and evaluation in accordance with the special needs of each SWDs. (Ministry of Education, 2009) However, the findings also show that 56.89 percent of SWDs

do not use material services and 41.38 percent do not request for assistive facilities from DSS. This may be due to such students having disabilities at a level that does not require these services, or that the materials programs and assistive facilities provided may, in fact, not meet their needs. In terms of promoting employment, DSSCMU was found prepare graduates with disabilities to have employment through a variety of programs, and most SWDs have a high level of confidence in employment. With all that said, it is concluded that after providing the opportunity to attend university, DSSCMU also continues to provide assistance to SWDs until graduation, which is an important and essential role for the educational achievement of SWDs on campus. As Sila (2020) said, there is statistically significant difference in the academic performance of SWDs who engaged with DSS and those who did not use disability services. SWDs who engaged with DSS beyond their initial registration had higher cumulative GPAs regardless of their disability category, gender, and year of study.

Satisfaction of SWDs with DSSCMU services

Overall, SWDs were satisfied with DSSCMU's services at a HIGH level. There is also a HIGH level of satisfaction with the Employment Reaching-out and EXCELLENT level of confidence in having a job. In other words, DSSCMU has successfully provided satisfactory levels of educational support for SWDs. This is partly due to the effective response to SWDs' needs by working interchangeably in a transdisciplinary teamwork manner that increases efficiency and supports the development of collaboration (Dangpala, 2022). Moreover, it is important to have the SWDs perspective of satisfaction with the accommodations and services provided to them from disability related services (Blackwell, 2018) so that DSSCMU and other DSS can use these information, in different contexts at different universities, to plan the allocation of service items in a qualitative rather than quantitative way.

Educational services guidelines for development of DSS in Thailand

According to the research, DSSCMU supports SWDs from the beginning of admission until graduation, and continues to provide assistances in obtaining employment. In other words, DSSCMU's performance is bound to SWDs throughout their academic life until after graduation. In fact, most SWDs want to finish their studies and be able to take care of themselves independently and equally in society, which are the most tangible ways to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities. By providing quality educational services, it helps SWDs achieve their educational goals and let them have opportunities to live their life that way. For this reason, DSS in Thailand should improve educational services for SWDs beginning with implementation of the selection of high school students with disabilities' goals for higher education that may need to be proactively evaluated in conjunction with teachers and students themselves. For example, DSSCMU used to coordinate with the Department of Arts Education to allow autistic students to sit in first-year subjects in the summer semester. That activity allows students to make suitable decision whether to study in this field or another discipline, etc., which will contribute in reducing the transfer request during the academic year from SWDs. In result, it will reduce the budget for educational investment for SWDs, and will also increase the chances of academic success for SWDs too. As Kobkaew (2015) said that the first important step in providing opportunities for SWDs to have the right to pursue higher education is through coordination between universities and schools that refer them to co-education. Uneven publicity of special projects can result in the closure of educational opportunities for SWDs.

Encouraging university administrators to understand the importance of providing education for SWDs positively is the next important thing that cannot be neglected. If administrators see disability as not a problem but a difference and trust that SWDs be able to learn and achieve educational goal, it will result in SWDs getting opportunities through quality support system and enhance more chances to develop themselves. This can be done by communicate and collaborate more between DSS staff and administrators. In this regard, concern personnels must be aware of the importance of the context around SWDs and find ways to support them in the appropriate environment. By collaborating with all parties to support education management for SWDs, it will bring a broader impact and drive the development of SWDs in society together because all sections of society are influencing each other (Utthayotha, 2013). DSS should encourage researches on facilitating SWDs appropriately and individually in order to be able to provide more effectively support that suits the diverse needs of them. Such researches may help DSS find ways to develop beyond materials, for example, alternative or short courses to enhance competencies and educational opportunities higher than basic education for a number of disabled students who want to attend university but are unable to do so due to various limitations. This "Win-Win" educational arrangement not only increase the chances of SWDs' education but also open up new markets for higher education at the same time.

In terms of promoting employment, considering the fact that disabled graduates are not all employed, this may partly come from the employer's uncertainty that people with disabilities are hardly be able to work then resulted in a large denial of employment of people with disabilities. Therefore, DSSCMU should play an additional role in increasing the employment opportunities of people with disabilities at the national level by inviting the other DSS throughout the country for joining forces as a network calling on the government to actively develop and enforce policies that cover employment for people with disabilities in Thailand. Because if graduates with disabilities are given quality educational opportunities along with appropriate support but cannot find a job, DSS perseverance throughout the academic life of them is completely in vain. It is also considered an unfortunate waste of education too. Pragmatical enforcing the employment laws for people with disabilities will help provide education for people with disabilities as a comprehensive educational arrangement and truly improve the quality of life for them at last.

Conclusion

This research concluded that: 1) Chiang Mai University conducts education for SWDs in accordance with strategic framework 1-4 with DSSCMU provide educational support services from admission until after graduation. Barriers to service include: Some groups of SWDs do not yet have or are less likely to pursue higher education; A number of SWDs requested to transfer during the academic year; More than half of SWDs do not use material services and almost half of them do not request for assistive facilities that DSS provided. 2) SWDs are satisfied with all DSSCMU's services with HIGH level 3) The positive attitude of the administrators towards the educational management for SWDs arises from the constant work with the authorities. DSS itself should also create opportunities for administrators to participate and understand the work of DSS too. 4) DSS should evaluate the higher education goals of disabled students in collaboration with teachers and disabled students and promote researches on facilitating appropriate accommodations and opportunities individually for SWDs, and call on the government to actively develop and enforce comprehensive policies on employment for people with disabilities in Thailand to increase employment opportunities for graduates with disabilities. Consider using Universal Design or UD and Universal Design

in Higher Education or UDHE to provide educational support services for SWDs and promote learning communities for all to create equal and effective access to educational information plus ways of living in daily life.

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