

A Critical Analysis of Barriers to Quality International Education - Case Study of Burma-Thailand Migrants -

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Abstract: The research aimed to investigate the barriers to quality international education to Burmese migrant children in Thailand. The approach to migrant education within the international development concept has been of great concern to many scholars. Only the non-formal migrant schools and the formal Thai schools options are accessible to Burmese migrant children studying in Thailand despite the availability of other schooling options. This paper analyses the possible barriers such as policy differences between the two countries, curriculum design and language used, international funding, freedom of choice as well as conflict are some of the factors that determine access to education. The study employs the theory of capability as a form of presenting an understanding towards international development and education.

Keywords: Education, Migrants, International development, Education policies

Introduction

The challenge of migrant education in the Asian countries has been highly contested (Sohn, 1984). For example, migrant students studying in Burma and Thailand border at primary level only have two options of studying systems, which are the non-formal migrant schools, and formal Thai schools. However, the majority of these students are unable to fulfil their full rights to education. Most of the migrant schools lack a comprehensive curriculum and are limited in offering recognized accreditation such as degree certificates. This issue creates a barrier to most students in having the desire to continue their education beyond the primary level (Bassett & Maldonado-Maldonado 2010). Most Burmese students with certification from Thai schools find it challenging to transfer into a formal system in Burma when they return to their home country. The limited opportunities for good education after the primary level limit the options for attaining skilled employment, which makes it challenging for the migrants.

One of the largest problems associated with migrant education is the lack of recognized accreditation. Because of complex requirements and procedures, most of these migrant schools are unable to register fully as education institutions (Štrba, 2012). This becomes a big barrier to accessing education by student migrants. Most of these institutions hold a semi-legal status that limits them in offering accreditation to students. Without proper certification and qualifications, students often find it difficult to access higher and post-

primary education within the formal systems of either Burma or Thailand (Oduaran & Bhola, 2006). For the students studying in Thai schools, certification received from Thai Ministry of Education is not transferable to the Burmese formal system. Finishing school with only a primary level certification makes it difficult for the young migrants to find any skilled employment

The focus of this study was to study explores the barriers to quality international education to Burmese migrant children in Thailand. This is a viable area for study and research as it touches on important aspects concerning migrants, international development, and education policies. The right to education has been a major concern for several organizations such as the United Nations, United Nations Development Programs (UNDP), non-government organizations in Thailand, and educational organizations (Ruiz, 2013). It is important to appreciate how these organizations have contributed to ensuring migrant children receive a quality education. It also shows the aspect of the conflict in how it affects access to education for victims in war-toned countries including Burma and Thailand.

Methods

The research methodology employed in this study, which facilitated collection, analysis and presentation of findings was that of secondary research. Data sources included conference proceedings, journals, books, government publications, and reports. Secondary research is a low-cost less-time approach to research since archival information from published manuscripts provides ready information and thus there is no need to assemble research respondents for data collection (Goes & Simon, 2011; Tariq & Woodman, 2013).

The study was specific to Thailand as a country meaning that it was a case study. As a descriptive case study, the paper sought to describe the phenomenon under investigation in its natural setting as much as possible (McDonough & McDonough, 1997). Furthermore, in order to avoid bias and misinterpretation, multiple sources were referred to in this study (Yin, 2009). (Zainal, 2007) explains that a case study is important in providing a narrow focus yet revealing an in-depth investigation on a subject over a limited geographical boundary, which helps to overcome the problem of generalized assumptions.

Conceptual Framework

The Capability Theory

The study adopted the capability theory to provide an understanding of education in the context of international development. According to Sohn (1984), the theory has two major claims, including the claim, that freedom to well-being is of moral importance, and the right to achieve well-being should be understood

in people's capabilities approach. This presents people's opportunities to do and have what they value most. This approach has been developed and analyzed in different theories such as social justice and development ethics. The approach develops ideas about human rights, social development, and peacebuilding together with their implications in education practice and policy (Ruiz, 2013).

Results

The research provided significant knowledge into the barriers to quality international education to Burmese migrant children in Thailand. This section discusses the notable key themes, which include access to education, international organizations and access to education, conflict as a barrier to education access, policies that have influenced the education system, and the education system

Access to Education

Access to education has been defined as a human right and a fundamental need for all people. Everyone, irrespective of nationality, age, gender, religion, ethnic background, and location should enjoy it (Zajda, 2015). Most of the nations have formulated various ways to allow their citizens access education such as offering free learning where most of the services are catered for. They provide books, accommodation, and food to most of the students in marginalized areas to ensure that these amenities do not limit them from accessing education. However, in the developing countries, resources are scarce, and the government is unable to cater for all the unprivileged children. This limits them in accessing good education, which further affects their social and professional lives (Wiseman & Anderson, 2014). This is illustrated in the capability theory that illustrates the freedom to have. It is the right of a human being to have freedom in accessing education. However, this freedom is violated in cases such as Burmese migrants who are offered low-quality education that is not sufficient in sustaining them economically (South, 2008).

Thailand's increasing responsibilities to provide high-quality education has led to significant changes in the policies (Mundy et al. 2016). This is aimed at helping the migrant students in the country. However, despite the changes in policies, the Burmese migrant children still face challenges in accessing quality education in reality, which results to an underrepresentation of Burmese students in Thailand's educational statistics (Oduaran & Bhola, 2006). The students lack and miss on major opportunities that are found in Burma and Thailand because of lack of qualifications. According to Pyne (2007), one of the major and largest Burmese migrant populations is located in Takua Pa, the district of Phang Nga province in the south of Thailand. It lies just south of the Thaninthanyi border with Burma, which results in an influx of migrants. Most of these migrants are observed to be school going students out of the approximately 20,000 observed.

Pyne (2007) illustrates that the two main industries that exist for the migrant communities are found to be rubber plantations and fisheries. These areas are remote and restrict access to education, which limits the children from fulfilling their freedom and right to education. There are only two options available for the migrant children to access education. These are the Thai formal system or the non-formal migrant schools. In this case, there are only two migrant schools in the whole province (Štrba, 2012). Therefore, the core need for the migrant students to integrate into the available formal systems becomes heightened. Although the migrant parents are eager for their children to attain the primary level education, issues are observed when they attain the working age (Provençal, 2009). In this case, parents are seen to prioritize the paid work as opposed to quality education. This is to illustrate that parents also contribute to the lack of education for the migrant children.

Work is often prioritized over the secondary education provided in Thailand, which prevents the children accessing full education. In this case, it becomes important for most of the policies to consider the opportunities to access secondary education, which should be available and convenient (Pyne, 2007). The biggest problem that is recognized within the migrant education systems is a lack of a well-recognized accreditation that is offered by the migrant schools (Jolliffe, 2016).

International Organizations and Access to Education

According to Bartlett and Ghaffar- Kucher (2013), various international organizations have chipped in to help solve the problem of lack of quality education for Burmese migrant. There are international and local organizations that work with the students through the provision of basic commodities and funds for the school fees. For most of the international organizations, they understand that the marginalized and weakest people in the world need education the most (Charney, Yeoh, & and Kiong, 2003). This is because good education would help them uplift themselves in different aspects of life. One such organization is the United Nations that advocates highly for the right to good and accessible education. One such instance is the UN Special Rapporteur on education that also followed the adoption of an Incheon Declaration at a world education forum in 2010 (United Nations Department of Economic, 2010). The forum mainly focused on strategies that address the inequality that affects girls and women, migrants, children in conflict-affected areas, ethnic minorities, and people living in urban slums and rural areas. In this case, UN has concentrated on one specific case that is the vulnerable group that has been denied their freedom and right to quality education. This involves then children caught up with forced migration along the Thai-Burma border (Smith, 2009).

Conflict as a Barrier to Education Access

Exposure to domestic and international conflicts affects children in several ways ranging from injuries and killings. Most of the families in war-torn countries are forced to migrate to neighbouring countries in search of refuge and social amenities (South, 2008). These conflicts have direct effects on nutrition, schooling, health, and future opportunities for education, and employment. Most of the children's access to good education is often compromised by direct exposure to violence and limited access to food, shelter, and clothing. According to UNESCO, in the conflicted countries, over 20% of the children are school-going (Unesco, 2011). In this case, the likelihood of children dropping out of school due to war and conflicts is higher in the conflicted regions than other parts of the world (Ford, Lyons & van Schendel, 2012). For example, the Burmese migrants are directly affected by having to live in another country due to conflicts.

Most of the research has highlighted the causal effect and impact of conflict exposure that leads to a reduction in the total number of years children attend school. This restricts grade progression and makes the children miss colleges and universities. Most of the students, especially in the case of Burma are seen to progress only to the primary level (Štrba, 2012). They lack proper accreditation that can enable them to be accepted into high schools and colleges. This, in turn, affects the overall future prospect of the children such as access to labour health outcomes in adulthoods, and good earnings. In this case, due to these issues, the importance of reforming the education systems offered to migrants in the conflict-affected countries becomes a big agenda. However, the aspect becomes a big challenge for countries with subsequent episodes of conflicts and violence (Smith, 2010).

Policies That Have Influenced the Education System

Most studies show that various policies such as language requirements, citizenship, and teacher s have contributed to how the migrants receive education at the Burma-Thailand border. In this case, the potential for language barriers and discrimination arises as the main barrier to a formal education system (Watkins 2011). For example, most of the Burmese students studying in Thailand are vulnerable to discrimination from the Thai students and teachers (Pyne, 2007). Although there are contradicting views on this aspect, some studies indicate that there are no issues between the students themselves. Most of the conflicts are seen to arise from the school system, teachers, and the migrants (Portes & Fernández-Kelly, 2006.). However, in most cases, discrimination is seen to arise from other Burmese students who do not attend Thai schools (Watkins 2011). They claim that those who have attended the Thai schools have betrayed their system and their culture and identity. This illustrates that what the Burmese community fears and what happens, in reality, are very different (Bekerman & Geisen, 2011). The other barrier to quality education is

described as affordability. This is due to additional costs that arise from books, transportation, uniforms, school meals, and accommodation.

In most cases, the expenses make it unaffordable for the low-income migrant families. Goodhart (2013) rejects this by stating that Thai schools often work out as the cheapest options for the migrant parents. This is because their government intervenes by providing funding based on per student needs. Therefore, students do not have to pay for books, uniforms, and tuition. Migrant schools mostly rely on donors for funding, which is often inflexible, unreliable, and cannot be increased when the number of students increases (Cha et al. 2016). In most cases, most of the migrant schools have been forced to introduce daily and registration fees to cover most of the expenses, which makes the Thai school a bit more accessible regarding affordability. However, this does not make them the most accessible due to the policies set within the institutions (Bekerman & Geisen, 2011). In various studies, language is also named as a key barrier to quality education. This becomes a big problem for the Burmese students who are not familiar with the Thai language. However, the existing migrant schools teach several hours of Thai language every week where most of them involve students who have moved to Thailand or are born in the country (Goodhart, 2013). In several cases, it is observed that the student's Thai language speaking and writing skills were well developed. Louie (2012) illustrates that most students at the migrant schools can communicate in Thai, which rules out that language can be a barrier to integration.

The FED Integration Program has tackled the barrier to integration caused by lack of language skills by students studying in Thai schools. The program takes the responsibility of running Burmese classes to these students who do not have an opportunity to practice their native language (Jolliffe, 2016). Geographic accessibility has been discussed in most instances as another barrier to quality education for the Burmese migrants. In most cases, the two Burmese schools are located in places that are inaccessible to the migrants. Most of the instances are the ones in which the students are required to produce proper documentation to be enrolled in the schools, which lock some of them out (Kao, Vaquera, & Goyette, 2013). For the migrant schools, they are located in remote locations characterized by a sea and mountains. Although both schools have a transportation system for the students, any migrant student who is located outside the bus radius like in the rubber plantations misses these facilities. According to Korinek & Maloney (2010), this makes the schools inaccessible for some of the students. In this case, this limited option for these schools makes it a challenge for the migrant students to fulfil their right to a good and quality education. The same barrier is seen to exist for the case of integration as most of the Thai schools are observed to be inaccessible for students in the remote location.

The Burmese system has formulated two policies that ensure access to education for the migrants. In this case, the government and local organizations have set two learning institutions, the Unified Learning Centre and the Ban Nam Kem Community Development Centre (CDC) (Smith, 2010). The ULC is mandated with running a project aimed at providing educational opportunities for most of the marginalized Burmese communities in Thailand. It works under the FEDs education program established to ensure children access quality education (Unesco, 2011). However, most of the education offered does not reach the standards of a well-established school as donors fund most of the activities. The lack of funds leads to poor teaching systems due to lack of resources. The school uses the Burmese curriculum where it teaches subjects such as Thai, English, Burmese, Music, Art, Mathematics, Computer, History, Geography, and Sports. The wide range of subjects ensures that students are well equipped for progressive studies in higher education. Myanmar Ministry of Education provides the books for the curriculum (Štrba, 2012).

On the other hand, the CDC was initiated in 2005 to assist victims of the tsunami in 2004. The program started with 10 Burmese children and grew to more than 50 in capacity by 2006 (Korinek & Maloney, 2010). In this case, the school relocated to a bigger site to accommodate more children into the program. The New Light Foundation that is run by a Singaporean director mostly funds the school. The school also applies the Burmese curriculum with other few additions such as sewing for the young girls and technical workshops for the boys. The schools are negatively affected by Thai education policies, as they do not allow children to progress with their studies (Goodhart, 2013). Therefore, most children end up with a primary level education. Where they can progress, most institutions do not recognize or accredit their certificates, which lock them out of skilled labour and international opportunities.

Education System

The curriculum applied in the schools has some differences and similarities. In most cases, the emphasis is put on the type of policies that the two types of schools apply in dealing with their students to achieve results (Watkins 2011). Each kind of school has its objectives and goals. Much of the difference is seen in the type of subjects they offer. According to Higley, Nieuwenhuysen, and Neerup (2011), most of the basic subjects are seen to be similar in all school policies as they prioritize Mathematics, Thai, and English. The migrant school's models recognize the aspect of teaching Thai language skills to their students and English language to enable them to be equipped to find good and skilled employment. The key cause of migration to Thailand by Burma citizens is economic and usually long-term. Most of the migrant workers, families, and communities move to Thailand to look for employment and social opportunities to improve their quality of life (Watkins 2011). In this case, they tend to stay for long periods where they are no longer assumed as

temporary workers. Therefore, access to good education becomes a key priority for them as their children are born and continue to progress.

Conclusion

The capability theory has been applied to analyze how conflicts and international policies have denied many people the right to quality education. Education is an important aspect of today's life that should be easily accessed by every person irrespective of age, gender, ethnical background, religion, or nationality. The case of Burma-Thailand border presents a good case where the theory is applicable. This is because it presents the issue of international development and education. It is seen that school-going children in this are denied access to education due to different factors such as social issues, geographical location, and education policies. Two migrant schools offer learning opportunities to the Burmese children in Thailand. However, due to economic factors, most of them do not allow the children to progress to secondary schools, which limit them to have a good career life. It is seen that freedom to have a well-being is not recognized in this setting, as people in the communities do not understand the moral importance of acquiring education. However, the aspect of international development is portrayed when different international organizations contribute to ensuring children get an education in Burma. This presents people's opportunities to do and have what they value most, which has been developed and analyzed in different theories such as social justice and development ethics.

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تحليل نقدي للعوائق التي تحول دون جودة التعليم الدولي:

دراسة حالة للمهاجرين في بورما - تايلاند

الملخص: هدف هذا البحث إلى التحقق من العوائق التي تحول دون التعليم الدولي الجيد المقدم إلى الأطفال المهاجرين البورميين في تايلاند. فقد كان نهج تعليم المهاجرين في إطار مفهوم التنمية الدولية مصدر قلق كبير للعديد من العلماء. فقط مدارس المهاجرين غير الرسمية وخيارات المدارس التايلاندية الرسمية متاحة للأطفال المهاجرين البورميين الذين يدرسون في تايلاند على الرغم من توافر خيارات مدرسية أخرى. تحلل هذه الورقة العوائق المحتملة مثل اختلافات السياسة بين الدولتين، وتصميم المناهج واللغة المستخدمة، والتمويل الدولي، وحرية الاختيار بالإضافة إلى الصراع؛ هي بعض العوامل التي تحدد إمكانية الوصول إلى التعليم. توظف الدراسة نظرية القدرة كشكل من أشكال تقديم الفهم تجاه التنمية الدولية والتعليم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعليم، المهاجرون، التنمية الدولية، سياسات التعليم.