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A comparative study of teacher's opinions relating to inclusive classrooms in Indonesia and Thailand

Pennee Kantavong^{a, *}, Sujarwanto^b, Suwaree Rerkjaree^c, Budiyanoto^b

^a College of Local Administration, Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen 40002, Thailand

^b State University of Surabaya, Indonesia

^c Faculty of Education, Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen 40002, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This research compared the work and opinions of regular school teachers teaching in inclusive classrooms in Indonesia and Thailand. These teachers were drawn from schools participating in an in-service training program to enhance the capacity of students with special needs in regular classrooms. A sample of 172 teachers in primary schools in Thailand and 165 from Indonesia answered a questionnaire based on Friedman's concept of teacher burnout. Eighty percent of the Thai teachers had bachelor's degrees, but only 1 percent were in special education, whereas 77 percent of the Indonesian teachers had bachelor's degrees and 13 percent were in special education. Teachers' opinions on four areas were investigated: inclusion, support from various parties, work environment, and exhaustion. There was no correlation between background variables and teachers' exhaustion and fulfillment. There was a correlation between the number of students in a class and a teacher's de-personalization at the .01 level. When considering social dimensions and exhaustion, there was a correlation at the .01 level. There was a correlation between self-fulfillment and exhaustion at the .01 level. There was no correlation between the organizational, psychological, structural and support dimensions, and exhaustion. In general, teachers reported that they received support from various parties. Most of them expressed positive opinions of students with special needs.

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Introduction

The situation of special needs education in Indonesia and Thailand may not be much different from other countries in Asia. Both countries began by creating separate schools for students with each disability, such as schools for the blind, for the deaf, and for the mentally-limited. However, these are not the only groups of children with special needs. There are more learners who find it hard to access both schools for specific needs and normal schools. In

recent years, there has been an increased awareness in the governments of both countries that government should provide education for all groups of children. In Thailand, the policy of the government shifted to a target of education for all. While "children with special needs" is a rather new phase in Thailand, based on the philosophy of "education for all," the Thai constitution was enacted for the people's right to education in Thailand. Around the same time, the National Education Act was implemented in Indonesia. It aims to provide equal educational opportunity for every child. Both Acts cover some forms of discrimination against disability.

This can be seen in the 1999 Thai National Education Act, Chapter 2, which specifies the rights and duties of Thai

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: pennee@kku.ac.th (P. Kantavong).

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citizens in education. The education system has to provide an equal opportunity for every citizen for basic education, guaranteed not less than 12 years. Furthermore, the government has to supply special education for the underprivileged, the mentally and the physically disabled. This chapter also emphasizes that special education has to be provided in an appropriate form according to individual needs, which are defined in Chapters 8–14, 22, 24, 28, and 29 (*Office of the National Education Commission, 1999*). Generally in Thailand, inclusive education is regarded at the national level as being primarily about disability; however, a broader concept of inclusive education with regard to including ethnic minorities is understood at some regional levels, such as in Southern Thailand (*UNESCO, 2012*).

The 1999 National Education Act requires the national system to turn its schools into inclusive schools, which should recruit all children into their classes without discrimination. As a result, schools needed to adjust greatly in order to accommodate children with diverse needs.

In 2009, the Ministry of Education of Indonesia defined inclusive education as an education system that provides opportunities for all students with disabilities and intelligence potential and/or special talent to receive education in an environment with students in general schools. In practice, inclusive education aims to provide opportunities to students with diverse needs, non-discrimination for all students regardless of their physical, emotional, and mental disabilities, as well as social disadvantages, to obtain quality education in accordance with their needs and abilities. In Indonesia, the operation of inclusive education is based on the following principles: 1) equality and the improvement of quality; inclusive education is a philosophy and strategy to gain equal access to educational services and improve the quality of education for all children, with respect for diversity; 2) diversity and individual differences in terms of abilities, talents, interests, and needs of the student participants; education should be pursued to meet the needs and characteristics of individual learners; 3) meaningfulness; inclusive education should create and maintain a welcoming classroom community, receive diversity, and respect the differences and independent learning of all learners; and 4) sustainability; sustainable inclusive education should be conducted for all types of lines and levels of education (*Budiyanto, 2011*).

The situation in Indonesia is not very different from that in Thailand. *Hadis (2005)* concluded that inclusive education is a new orientation for Indonesia as well. Inclusive education mandates encouraged Indonesia to reform its educational system for children with disabilities. Only a small number of regular schools, however, are willing to recruit students with disabilities, especially those with intellectual disabilities.

Tsaputra (2012) said that “The development of inclusive education in Indonesia is indeed a bit left behind compared to progressive implementation of inclusive education in other countries. It is seen in the limited resources, knowledge, and skills required for the successful implementation of inclusive education. The existing curricula of general education have yet to fully accommodate the different needs of children with disabilities”.

From 2015, Thailand and Indonesia will join the ASEAN community; sharing knowledge in the area of education development is one important approach that both countries can use to set the stage for future collaboration. As a *UNESCO (2009)* report pointed out, inclusive education and the enrolment of children with disabilities and other special education needs has helped to improve the quality of education for all children. School policies, support, and practices are important factors which will facilitate the development of all learners. Sensitive and responsive teachers are also a key factor in effectively educating children with disabilities.

Literature Review

Olson (2003) found that overall, special education and general education teachers have positive attitudes towards inclusive education. The teachers in her study indicated that a continuum of service needed to be provided in order to meet the needs of students with disabilities. *Elhoweris and Alsheikh (2006)* found that teachers had a positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in general classrooms. Some educators (*Lim & Quah, 2004*) have observed the problems of integration and inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream schools. The problems arise in the attitudes of others towards the inclusion of students with disabilities, because the inclusive class involves attitudinal and behavioral change on the parts of teachers, administrators, and students.

Often, teachers have no information or knowledge related to managing an inclusive classroom. In the past, medical treatment was considered the best option for students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties, and they were separated from the normal students. It is only relatively recently (*Konza, 2004*) that educators have reclaimed responsibility for the educational management of such students. *Forlin (2008)* pointed out that an increased understanding of teachers' concerns regarding inclusive practices will provide a substantial base upon which to implement new methodologies for the classroom. Besides teachers' theoretical and practical knowledge, their willingness to engage in inclusive practices is vital to its implementation for the inclusive classroom. *Forlin* found that teachers in Western Australia were concerned with their own expectations regarding their role during inclusive practice. They perceived their lack of knowledge and ability to cope with a child with a disability. Teachers perceived that they lack the necessary skills to provide adequate help to children with a range of disabilities. *Hadis (2005)* also pointed out that schools in Indonesia claimed that there were not enough trained teachers and a lack of special facilities for children. *Changpinit, Greaves, and Frydenberg (2007)* reported that Thai educators working with special needs children and who had majored in special education had relatively positive attitudes towards inclusive education and had good knowledge of inclusive education. Teachers who had positive attitudes and high levels of knowledge regarding inclusive education employed productive coping strategies and other approaches in their teaching. *de Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert (2011)* reviewed the literature related to teachers' attitudes towards inclusive

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