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# Management of basic education for ethnic groups in highland and border regions of Thailand

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## ABSTRACT

This research: 1) explored information on basic education policy for the ethnic groups in the Thai highland and border areas, 2) identified factors that influence the education policy for ethnic groups, and 3) provided a mechanism and process of basic education for ethnic groups in the Thai highlands and border areas. The research was conducted by studying three variables: ethnic group societies, educational management for ethnic groups, and the formulation of educational policy for ethnic groups. This was a mixed method study.

The research findings revealed that the actors for advocacy policy in basic education for ethnic groups consist of: 1) the primary education service area, 2) community, 3) NGOs, 4) scholars, and 5) schools. This study indicated that the provision of basic education policy for ethnic groups must consist of knowledge from communities such as ethnic life styles integrated in the curriculum, and a special education mechanism and process for Thai ethnic groups, including facilitation of ethnic group participation in the abovementioned actors by various means.

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## Introduction

Currently, Thai educational policy is being implemented from the centre to the outer regions and localities using a “top-down” approach (Ministry of Culture, 2011). The same methods are used for all groups of Thai and multi-ethnic students despite the students being very diverse in terms of culture, language, and the areas they have come from. Some areas have one ethnic group, and other areas have one or two ethnic groups in their schools. According to the document approved by the Cabinet on August 3, 2010, the policies and practices of recovery of Karen's livelihood show that the problem of the Thai education system is its incompatibility with the beliefs and way of life of the Karens. The curriculum of basic education does not include Karen cultures and lifestyles (Ministry of Culture, 2011).

The management of education for ethnic groups may be implemented into an area where there is a mixed culture with the surrounding area. History courses in Thailand have explained the antecedents of wars between Thailand and other countries but the context of the antecedents has transformed the curriculum and led to conflict between Thai students and Thai ethnic groups who were not all from the same culture, and so did not share the same religion, beliefs, or attitude (Keawsomnuk & Mangonsangkeaw, 2012). Consequently, the problem consists of educational programs not working for ethnic groups in Thailand. Therefore, the management of education for ethnic groups in Thailand has run into a significant problem. Just as current world focus is on the integration of public involvement, the Thai government has given precedence to policies increasingly conducted by public involvement. Reinhold and Tatjana (2016) noted that participation was an element of active citizenship that developed into a prominent project of international and national educational policy. This includes the educational management of

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schools in the highland and border regions, where many ethnic groups live. This will allow policy-makers to identify the real problems, leading to the formation of more specialized education in the schools and educational institutes in the highland and border regions that cannot implement a completely centralized approach to educational management.

Previously, most teachers who came to teach in the highland and border areas, where the Karen communities live, would not be local people. The role of the schools could not be aligned with the roles of societies and cultures of the ethnic groups of Karen because of the lack of knowledge, comprehension, and motivation required for successfully working in areas with different cultures. Collaboration between the communities and the schools was thus difficult (Ministry of Culture, 2011). The education of ethnic groups in Thailand poses many issues for each type of school, as they have students from a variety of different ethnicities and cultures who speak a number of different languages. In the remote areas in the highland and border regions there are different terms and conditions for each school. Some schools may have students from a single ethnicity and use a single language, so their solutions and the way they promote cultural identities will be unique as well. Likewise, if they have multi-ethnic students then the way their education is managed will vary according to the context of the tribes in each area.

The education management solutions for ethnic groups in the highland and border regions are through identifying methods of researching or conferring with the people involved. Management of basic education for ethnic groups is crucial to the management of the schools and educational institutes in the highlands and along the borders. This may lead to the formation of policy alternatives for the basic education of these ethnic groups. As an example, Joseph (2008) studied the impact of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity as well as student perceptions of educational outcomes in a north Virginian public school. The research found that these schools were racially diverse. A number of factors affected teaching and learning in these school, including the curriculum, the society, and the atmosphere in the classroom. Addressing these factors helps students from different ethnic groups to respond to teaching better. Consequently, the curriculum and teaching style influence the learning of ethnic groups or a diversity of culture within the schools.

Furthermore, this study investigated the management of basic education for ethnic groups in the Thai highland and borders regions to be used as a reference when building a model to analyze the management of basic education for these groups and to construct a mechanism and basic education process for ethnic groups in the highland and border regions of Thailand. The research questions were whether or not the factors of ethnicity had any correlation with the management of basic education in the schools and whether or not the factors of ethnicity were consistent with the principle of education to multicultural societies and appropriate to basic education policy for ethnic groups in the highland and border regions in Thailand?

### *Research Objectives*

- 1) To explore information about the basic education policy for ethnic groups in the highland and border regions of Thailand.
- 2) To identify factors affecting the basic education policy for ethnic groups in the highland and border regions of Thailand.
- 3) To provide a mechanism and basic education process for ethnic groups in the highland and border regions of Thailand.

### *Research Framework*

This research focused on examining related theoretical factors including public policy, ethnic group, and multi-cultural education. As shown in Figure 1, the section on educational policies for ethnic groups focused on cost, reliability, flexibility, risk, communication, and simplicity (Patton & Sawicki, 2013). The section on ethnic groups focused on societies, religions, social equality, and languages (Musigakama, Maitthai, & Sinlapakon, 2000). The section on educational management for ethnic groups focused on content integration and equity pedagogy, as well as equality and social integration in schools (Bennett, 2007).

### **Methods**

This research used a mixed-methods approach Qualitative and quantitative (Creswell, 2014) research methods were used: 1) to investigate the management of basic education for ethnic groups in Thailand via qualitative methods such as document analysis and information reclamation, surveying sites, in-depth interviews, and participant and non-participant observations in the target areas; 2) to identify factors affecting the basic education policy for ethnic groups in the highland and border regions of Thailand using quantitative methods such as structural equation modeling (SEM); and 3) to provide a basic education mechanism and process for ethnic groups in the highland and border areas of Thailand by analyzing the results with the Delphi technique twice in order to audit and verify policy alternatives.

### *Population and Key Informants*

The selection of samples for the qualitative research was conducted using in-depth interviews with two subgroups of informants, consisting of six key informants at the policy level. They were selected from the informants using purposive sampling to ensure that they were critical of the agencies and organizations that implemented the educational policies and policies related to ethnic groups. This method identified the demographic groups who could provide key information about the objectives. The other six informants were people working at an operational level at the Kanchanaburi Primary Education Service Area offices in

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