

## ปัจจัยต่อการตัดสินใจเรียนกวดวิชาของนักเรียน ระดับมัธยมศึกษาตอนปลายและความเหลื่อมล้ำ ทางการศึกษาในประเทศไทย

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### บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาปัจจัยที่มีผลต่อการตัดสินใจเรียนกวดวิชาของนักเรียนระดับมัธยมศึกษาตอนปลายในกรุงเทพฯ โดยมุ่งเน้นไปที่ความแตกต่างระหว่างฐานะทางสังคมและความเหลื่อมล้ำในการเข้าถึงโอกาสทางการศึกษาโดยเฉพาะระบบกวดวิชาที่มีมายาวนานควบคู่ไปกับระบบการศึกษาไทย การวิจัยนี้เป็นการศึกษาเชิงคุณภาพโดยการสัมภาษณ์นักเรียนระดับมัธยมศึกษาตอนปลายจำนวน 15 คน ผลการวิจัยพบว่า การตัดสินใจต่อการเรียนกวดวิชาของนักเรียนมีความแตกต่างกันขึ้นอยู่กับปัจจัยทางสถานะของครอบครัวเป็นสำคัญ นักเรียนที่มีฐานะทางเศรษฐกิจและสถานะทางสังคมที่ดีกว่าจะมีโอกาสมากกว่านักเรียนที่มีทุนทางสังคมและฐานะทางเศรษฐกิจอยู่ในระดับต่ำ ข้อมูลที่ค้นพบจากงานชิ้นนี้จึงเป็นการ

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## Factors Affecting Students' Shadow Education Participation and Educational Inequality in Thailand

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### Abstract

This study deals with the shadow education system of private supplementary tutoring in Thailand, aiming to highlight the perceptions of students from different social backgrounds for the decision-making of shadow education. While a number of studies have examined the economic and policy implications of shadow education, few have undertaken thorough research of the sociological factors in Thailand. This study is primarily concerned with the relationship between social origin and discrepancy of educational opportunities of shadow education particularly to the students involved. The research was conducted through semi-

structured interviews and focus groups as a foundation for its qualitative research. Students from grade 10 to 12 were purposefully chosen for the data collection. The findings indicated that the decision is strongly influenced by social origin and economic, social, and cultural status (ESCS) which exert a particularly high influence on the likelihood to choose shadow education particularly to those with more financial resources. The research contributes to the awareness of shadow education that benefits students' learning while also bringing disadvantages showing implications of cram schooling which relate to students' family socio-economic situations.

**Keywords:** Shadow education, Education system, Inequality, Thailand

## Introduction

Thailand has succeeded its ambitious goal by moving away from a largely agrarian society and becoming a middle-income nation with a relatively diversified economy. Besides the socioeconomic development, improving the education system is also a key element in the government's ambitions of achieving “inclusive and equitable quality education for all” (Padkuntod, 2017). In the effort to enhance the basic education quality, Thailand has embarked on an ambitious series of reforms to its education system; nevertheless, it seems that the implementing changes have not yet been fulfilled and many persisting serious problems have been identified on every level of education. A broad array of critics believes the failure was due to the issue of discontinuity of authority concerned; a lack of nonpartisan, strong leadership, and independent organizations advocating for education; administrative errors; combinations of political interference; and unsuitable or mismatched syllabuses in the schools (Sangnapaboworn, 2018; Hallinger, 2012). The weaknesses in Thai education system are well documented, with O-Nets, Timms, Pisa, and World Bank reports all highlighting the utter lack of progress and the urgency with which reforms are needed. Public statements have been highlighting to focus on the major problematic areas in Thai education system which caused a major public debate in terms of equality of opportunity, quality of education and educators

received at public school system. Among these challenges which reflect the shortcomings of Thai education system, there is a greater demand for a support system to assist students in their learning process and achievement. Thus, shadow education is seen as a supplement to the formal school system that reflects deficiency of the state that has failed to provide fair and efficient education to all its subjects (Pomrin, 2017).

### **Shadow education in Thailand**

Shadow education, also known as cram school, a phenomenon that is common in many Asian countries, is elaborately defined by Bray (2009) as private supplementary tutoring beyond the hours of formal schoolings. It is indicated that shadow education is the most common form of tutoring that closely follows the curricular of mainstream education system and engages in homework support, test preparation and cramming schools (Stevenson & Baker, 1992; Bray, 1999). Shadow education in Thailand is regulated within the Ministry of Educations' Office of Private Education which has a subdivision designated as the 'Non-formal Education Unit' that formally organizes and oversees private tutorial schools (Lao, 2014). There are various forms of cram schools among Thai context, such as, individual or one-to-one tutoring, group tutoring, online tutoring and lecture-type tutoring either live or video recorded. In general, shadow

education is divided into two types: academic and non-academic. Academic tutoring offers basic academic support, private one-on-one tutoring, enrichment lessons or the preparation for tests and entrance exams. Non-academic is often related to school subjects in the arts, sports or other non-academic fields. In this study, the chief focus is on academic subjects such as languages, mathematics and science.

Thailand is among the societies with particularly high rates of cram schools. An increase in the investment in shadow education has grown and spread rapidly since the early 1990s along with the educational reform. The number of cram schools accelerated from 334 in 2007 to 565 in 2013 in Bangkok and increased from 744 in 2007 to 1777 in 2013 in other provinces (Charoenkul, 2018). In 2019, there were 2,652 cram schools across the country, 697 of which are located in Bangkok while the remaining 1,955 are in the provinces (OPEC, 2019). Since Thai education system is tied closely with high stakes examination at almost every level of education, this examination-oriented culture lead Thai students of all ages are extensively involved in out-of-school educational activities. This fact characterizes Thai education system possessing a dualistic structure consisting of regular school and tutorial school. With a strong belief in the value of education, a large scale of student consumption of tutorial academies has been increasing in order to achieve higher scores and improve

their chances in college entrance examination for the top-ranked universities. It is perceived that the demand for extra tuition is partly driven by negative perceptions of national education system in many regards and the belief that extra lessons and intense preparation before the transition to higher education are essential for academic success (The Express Tribune, 2012). However, the prevalence of shadow education increases the concerns of social inequalities between rich and poor and between urban and rural areas (Tuptimsuwan, 2015). Shadow education is likely to maintain and exacerbate social inequalities since some families can afford extensive and high-quality support while others can secure only limited and low-quality support and yet others are deprived altogether (Bray, Kobakhidze & Kwo, 2020). Consequently, shadow education has become a vehicle for the reproduction of social class inequalities (Zhang & Bray, 2016).

### Research Objectives

The overall objective of this research is to examine factors that influence students' decisions concerning a resort to cram schools and provide insights into the relationship between social origin and discrepancy of educational opportunities particularly to Thai upper-secondary school students from different socio-economic backgrounds. Hopefully, this will create a whole picture that will allow for a better understanding of how



students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds perceive shadow education and particularly how students from less well-off families struggle over social class and educational attainment.

## Literature Review

With the expansion of worldwide shadow education, research about shadow education steadily increased. The study by Xue & Ding (2009) showed that the level of cram school expenditures for students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds is generally greater than for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. It revealed that the opportunity for a student to receive cram schools in China is closely related with the families' economic, social and cultural status (ESCS). In addition, the investment on supplementary tutoring is significantly greater for students from high-quality schools than it is for students from average and lower-performing schools. The same also holds true in Hong Kong. Shadow education has been used and rigorously studied in Hong Kong. Bray et al. (2014) researching supplementary tutoring among middle school students in Hong Kong clarified that the market of cram schools has regenerated social inequality in the mainstream education system. Household income is a major factor influencing Hong Kong students between Grade 9 and Grade 12 when it comes to whether or not to take extra tuition; compared to students from elite government schools, those from low

banding schools have much less opportunities to receive tutoring. Bray (1999) asserted that nature of mainstream educational system, culture and the structure of economy are the significant factors of the expansion of shadow education, resulting to diverse implications in terms of academic achievement alongside with social stratification and backwash on mainstream education (Yung & Bray, 2017).

Due to growing concern regarding social and educational inequalities in relation to students' shadow education activities, an increased research can be observed also for Thailand. Lao (2014) analyzed the Thai state policy response to regulate cram schools and provided a reference point for policy makers to introduce intervention policies of this growing type of industry. The research draws on qualitative method including documentary analyses and semi-structured interviews with Thai policy elites, to understand the Thai state policy on the issue. The researcher emphasized that students should be able to get equal access to quality education outside the school system. If the school does not have the competencies to teach certain subjects, the students should have the choice to study elsewhere and receive accreditations (Lao, 2014, p. 10). This clearly illustrates the bureaucratic understanding that state public education is insufficient in many substantive areas which reflect structural inequalities within Thailand's socio-economic demographics. Moreover, in discussion of Pomrin (2017) the

researcher exploring the insights on Thai education system and the rise of cram school phenomenon indicated that the growth of tutorial business allowed wealthy citizens to gain higher achievement in terms of social mobility, thus widening the social and economic gap between rich and poor. It is also shown that the gradual growth of cram schools reflects deficiency of the state education that has failed to provide fair and efficient education to all its subjects.

In Thailand, shadow education is not a new phenomenon, but it has not been carefully researched and its implications have not been adequately discussed. Various types of literature mainly focus on national public education and its shortcomings, the meta-structural studies of Thai state education policy vis-à-vis tutorial schools or the market factors of tutorial schools. It is hardly seen the studies regarding the concern over shadow education in terms of the socioeconomic gap in accessing to shadow education among high school students. In doing so, this study attempts to fill a needed gap in Thai educational issue concerning shadow education that exacerbates social and educational inequality in Thai society.

### Theoretical Background

The rational theory of educational decision making derives from Raymond Boudon in Education, Opportunity and Social

Inequality (1974) which extends Bourdieu's cultural reproduction perspective. Boudon believes that class position and educational attainment are interlinked and students make different choices according to their position in the stratification system (Boudon, 1974). The choice-making process is shaped and constrained by socioeconomic status, cultural capital, identity, and rationality in shaping students' choices in higher education. Boudon argues that inequality of educational opportunity is produced by a two-component process; primary and secondary effects. Primary effects of stratification are class differences in academic performance generated by cultural inequalities. Primary social reproduction occurs through the direct influence of a family's cultural capital on the child and his or her ability to achieve in school (Liu, 2018). For example, students from professional families or culturally rich families tend to choose academic pathways and select fields of study in elite universities or attend supplementary education to strengthen their cultural advantages, whereas students without rich cultural resources, such as those from working-class families, are more likely to select vocational courses or less prestigious institutions (Thomsen et al., 2013). However, Boudon does not regard cultural advantage as the only factor involved or even necessarily the most significant. Social reproduction also occurs through secondary effect of social origin. According to Breen & Goldthorpe (1997) Secondary social reproduction is the impact of

family's social class which is mediated by choices students make about their educational careers and these choices influence their future educational outcomes. It occurs through social class differences in the educational decisions made by students, and that these decisions are influenced by differences in objective conditions, not cultural differences between classes (Thompson, 2016). For example, different social classes have different educational aspirations, which results in different cost-benefit considerations (social as well as economic) and thus, educational decisions vary according to social origin (Becker & Lauterbach, 2010; Maaz, 2010). Evaluation of the costs and benefits of possible alternatives depends on the constraints and opportunities that people face, including opportunity costs such as lost income; the likelihood of success at the next level; and the benefits and value attached by the individual and their family to the possible outcomes of the decision (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). The relative contribution of primary and secondary effects influences the decision for shadow education and thus the educational pathway and future social status of students (Enrich, 2018).

## Research Methodology

### 1. Research instruments

Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews was obtained from 15 students by face-to-face interview and phone-

call interview through the researcher's personal connection. The interviewed questions concerned the factors influencing Thai upper-secondary school students to study or not to study at cram schools. The interview consists of two main parts; The first part concerned the background information of the students. The second part was divided into two sections with two different groups of participants. The first section was involved students who received tutoring lessons which mainly asked about the motive and perception of taking supplementary lesson. The second section was about the students' motives for not participating in shadow education or using different types of tutoring.

## **2. Sample**

### **2.1 Selection of participants**

Since tutoring in academic subjects is especially important in education system dominated by high stakes examinations (Bray & Lykins, 2012) and these examinations are particularly prominent at the end of upper secondary schooling, students from ten to twelve grades were the primary concern of the study. The target participants were divided into two group of students from different class backgrounds; male and female with tutoring and male and female without tutoring. The target participants belonged to a group of professional-class students where the family was employed as a professional in a job normally requiring

at least higher education, while the target participants of students without tutoring would be a group of working-class family.

## 2.2 Site selection

Thailand's most populous city was chosen with the sample of suburb location in Bangkok as well as urban one. The data suggests that rates of cram schools are higher in Bangkok than elsewhere, therefore in this respect the study focused on a particularly important location. The site of the interview will be conducted mainly in well-known tutorial institutions such as Siam Kit Building and Wannasorn Building in Patumwan district. It is referred as lecture-typed tutoring provided by established tutoring centers which are the most common form of tutoring in Bangkok. Moreover, in order to get insights from students who did not participate in such type of shadow education, the interview was conducted in the area of Nong Chok district, the eastern suburb of Bangkok, where tutoring centers were rare and poverty indicator was relatively high compared to other areas of Bangkok, according to secondary data and statistics of poverty indicator (National Statistical Office, 2017)

## Results

### 1. Students' motives for receiving tutoring

From the qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews, seven students including both male and female who

have received cram schools belonged to the first group of selected sampling. The participants were studying in the different leading public schools in Bangkok such as Triumudomsuksa, Samsen Wittayalai, and Yothinburana. All of the parents' participants were college graduates with the majority earning 50,000-100,000 Baht (1,600-3,000 US dollar). The parental occupations were varied such as business owner, entrepreneurs, and engineer. When students were asked about what factors motivated them to attend tutorial academies, the data showed that the improvement of examination scores was the dominant motive for the majority of students who received tutoring. Many of the students commented on the sense of pressure and stress related to inter-student competition. Students and their families sought it in order to keep up with their peers and to secure learning that they did not feel it could be adequately secured if relying solely on mainstream education.

*"I could pass the entrance examination with just going to school regularly. Just pass. But with the help of the extra tuitions, I could get higher marks which means having more chance to get into famous university like Chulalongkorn or Thammasat."*, Grade 12 student said.

When asked about perceptions of cram schools, tutors, and the relation to mainstream education, the majority of students stated that there are significant differences between



regular school classroom and cram schools. This specific group of Thai upper-secondary school students had more positive attitude towards their tutors than their school teachers mainly because they believed that the tutors would help them do well on the university admission examination. The comments showed the remark that certain learning strategies which are more effective are presented in the cram schools and not in the public secondary schools. They felt the tutors were more concerned especially with helping the students to handle the preparation for examination performance, e.g., reading comprehension, speed reading, note-taking, test-taking strategies and study skills. Students in general did not feel self-confident and not considered themselves able to achieve adequately through their regular education.

*“Attending the tutorial schools gives me more necessary knowledge than just learning at school and sometimes in the normal class, I can understand a little bit. When I go to cram schools, I can understand more than in the regular class. The use of cram schools is a necessity because everyone is in competition.”*, remarked by Grade 11 student.

This belief does not only lead to the high level of participation in the out-of-school support but also has negative implications for the quality of the teaching in public schools. In addition, with respect to tutoring expenditures, it is found that in

average students took at least 3-4 courses and the fees can be varied from 3,000 to 8,000 Baht (96-256 US dollar). Some cost of tutoring lessons could be as high as 10,000 Baht (3,200 US dollar) for the whole course (30 hours), as stated by Grade 12 student who specifically aimed to study in international program for higher education. For the hours spent on extra tuition, most students reported that they spent between two and three hours per week on each subject, especially on English, Mathematics and Science. Some students received tutoring every day despite having been already burdened with heavy workloads from the system of regular schooling, as recounted by a Grade 11 interviewee:

*“I normally finish my class at about 4.30 pm, and between 6.00 pm and 9.30 pm I go to tutoring. This routine is from Monday to Friday. On Saturdays I go to tutoring from 10.00 am to 12.00 noon and in the evening from 4.00 pm to 7.30 pm. On Sundays I have to go to tutoring from 8.30 pm to 10.30 pm.”*

These students had to sit in these extra tutorials from dawn to dusk to prepare themselves for the upcoming entrance exams. Apparently, shadow education is costly as participation requires resources in terms of both finances and time. More importantly, given the concern over the perceived formation of educational inequality in relation to shadow education, the respondents raised high awareness of the problem and they agreed that we are living in the society where shadow education has become primary and it

is the fact that the gap of equal access to quality education is wider.

*“Personally, I think shadow education should not have existed at all because as we all know it has created social inequality and still has persisted in today’s society. There is noticeable difference in terms of standards and qualities between public government schools. Not all Thai (government-run) schools are created equal. For these reasons, mainstream education should standardize the quality of the system at every level of education, regardless of where you study. I think all students deserve an equal access to quality education, despite any social backgrounds, financial status or regions. This demonstrates structural deficiencies of the system derived from the Ministry of Education that is simply unable to make the promise, thereby yielding frustration and disappointment.”,* said Grade 12 student.

Overall, considering the results obtained from the interview, the data collected from the first group of students clearly showed the high levels of participation to cram schools reflected the widely spread held belief of the importance of knowledge especially for university entrance examination preparation. It is a decision that does not to be considered, as students reported *“Everyone participates in it.”* which means attending cram schools was perceived as the normal practice. This belief also reflected the inefficiency of the educational system to provide adequate

knowledge. The students want something more than their regular schools can offer. If the regular school is unable to provide adequate knowledge and respond to student needs or preferences, it is logical that students seek this knowledge outside of the formal educational system.

## **2. Students' motives for not receiving tutoring**

It may be true that shadow education offers to bridge at least some gaps of public education deficiency, on the other hand it is widen the gap in terms of educational and social inequality. Based on the data obtained from the interviews in the area of Nong Chok district, eight students were reported to received different forms of shadow education and some of them never received it. As agriculture remains the most important part of Nong Chok economy, making it the largest agricultural area of Bangkok. The parental occupations were mostly agriculturalists and sellers. The majority of the parents' participants were below college graduates with the majority earning between 5,000-10,000 Baht a month (160-320 US dollar). Since the use of shadow education is costly as participation requires resources in terms of both finances and time, the data provided evidence that the motive for not receiving extra tuition or receiving different form of tutoring can be attributed to two main factors. The first factor is related to the additional costs to the use of shadow education covering the location between school, living residence and education center.

Students who participate in shadow education experience what Bray (1999) has termed ‘opportunity cost’ in the form of time spent traveling to and from the education center, preparation for the lesson and time in the lesson (Southgate, 2009). The location of a school or residence has an impact on whether or not students participate in shadow education due to the fact that students cannot travel the great distances. Traveling to cram school would be too burdensome on students. It appears that students from distant areas are less likely to access good quality of shadow education or they would only afford tutoring at low prices, whereas students who live in urban areas are more likely to access a better form of shadow education. As shown by Grade 12 student,

*“My family could not afford to send all the three children to cram schools for all six subjects. We had to prioritize the subjects, such as English, Math, and Science. Besides, the transportation costs for all three children may be close to 1,000 Baht a month (32 US dollar), but this is considered too expensive. We could only afford low-cost tutoring nearby the living area.”*

Due to the location of the Nong Chok community where tutoring centers were rare, it is found that there is a relation according to the types of out-of-school lessons and the living area. Over half of respondents heavily relied on mainstream teachers, who usually provided tutoring at school to fewer or more than ten students. As the interviewees stated,

*“Since we live in the distant area and it took at least an hour (50 km.) to get into the center of Bangkok where most of cram schools are located, so we decided not to take it but rather rely on our schoolteachers which provide extra lessons for us after school. It indeed consumes less time and budget.”*

Not only the travel distance that limits educational opportunities, education expenditure also appears to be burdensome to some families, especially low-income families. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are facing the financial limitation that restrict the opportunity to receive quality education equally. The cost of shadow education in well-known tutoring institutions is rather expansive— as much as 3,000-5,000 Baht per course (95-160 US dollar). The price in some institutions can be up to 7,000-10,000 Baht (220-315 US dollar), particularly the preparation course for international test such as IELTS, SAT, TOEFL etc. On the other hand, with respect to supplementary tutoring spending with schoolteachers, the fees were relatively low ranging around 150-300 Baht per hour (5-10 US dollar) depending on academic subjects and some teachers also provided for free. This pattern indicated sizeable differences in the supplementary tutoring investment between two group of students. When asked students *“Have you felt like to attend those well-known cram schools in the center?”*. Most of them said they have always wanted to try like other students in the city, unless budget and time constraints limit those opportunities. As illustrated by

Grade 11 student, *“I wanted extra tutoring. Unfortunately, my parents, both sellers, cannot afford the high fees.”* The students believed that the lack of extra schooling means they would not stand a chance against other students competing to get into a public leading university. Conventional teaching methods in school would never earn them scores high enough in the university admission exam and they would not be able to compete with students from better-off families who had been attending cram schools from a young age. Working-class families face a number of financial hurdles: they have to pay tuition fees, and they will have to live on a considerably tighter budget which hardly spares the money for the investment in additional lessons. It becomes readily apparent that inequalities do not entirely have to do with shadow education participation. Rather, inequalities were also observed in relation to the type of extra tuition, with students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds being more likely to attend the costlier and better-quality type of cram schools, which is considered more effective, as can be tailored to meet the specific needs of the students (Tsiplakides, 2018).

Taking into account the perspectives towards the role of shadow education and the relation to national education system, students shared similar views concerning the national education system and the awareness of shadow education, resulting to educational inequality. Grade 12 student added some perspectives

towards tutoring culture that embedded in Thai society, saying that

*“We are now living in the society where education become income dependent. The process of entrance examination system requires a large sum of money for the preparation courses in order to obtain good seat in leading university. This has created the cycle in which one group of students are fortunate to obtain greater amount and better quality of extra tuition classes while another group of students are not having equal access to high quality education. Indeed, education has been the path to better opportunity, but quality education should be available to all students, especially for those that need it and not just those that can afford it.”*

## Conclusions and Discussions

The findings reported above underscore important considerations as regards the roles of shadow education in general and the decision for cram schools in relation with the concern over educational inequality in particular. The explanation of educational differentials within a rational choice perspective has been proven to be necessary in order to understand the class differentials in educational decisions by pointing towards shadow education in Thailand. The present study leads to the findings that the decision for shadow education differs considerably



between two groups of students. The choice-making process that students have is shaped by several determinants including formal education system, disparate family backgrounds, varying qualities of schools, urbanicity, and different cultural settings. The decision is strongly influenced by social origin and economic, social, and cultural status which exert a particularly high influence on the likelihood to choose shadow education particularly to those with more financial resources. Students from professional families in the metropolitan city of Bangkok benefit from rich social, and cultural resources that allow them to develop a confident and clear vision about their decision-making of shadow education and higher education. A higher level of competitiveness among urban students in leading schools also relates to the competitive nature of urban life. Students and parents are actively searching for supplement education where parents are willingly sacrificing their financial security for the education of their children. This indicated that the circumstances in an urban setting might be different from those in non-metropolitan cultural settings. Thus, students with better socioeconomic status seemed to have positive influence on the decision for shadow education which are more likely to use better forms in terms of quality and quantity, whereas this pattern tends to be far less available to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. As for class differences, those from working-class families find themselves constrained by a lack of economic, social capital as well

as disadvantaged by a lack of cultural resources. These disparities appear to disadvantage those on the lower end of the socioeconomic hierarchy. It seems reasonable to assume that the investment in shadow education leads to a higher educational level by taking advantage of the socioeconomic status of a student which consequently fosters educational inequality (Enrich, 2018). In this sense, it is important to note that shadow education should not continue to be framed as a shadow of education, but rather as another legitimate form of education that cannot be ignored (Chun & Jung, 2019).

Since the government is enthusiastic about promoting a transformation from the conventional economy to the digital economy, such goal cannot materialize and be made sustainable without the support of an efficient education system. So far, the government has given a low priority to long-term policies to tackle the root causes of several educational problems that have hindered the country's development. The failure of Thai education impacts disadvantaged students most heavily, creating a widening gap between the poor and those who can afford extra tuition. This leads to another key idea that the strength of demand for cram schools raises the question whether mainstream education is some way inadequate, and therefore need to be considered by teachers and school administrators (Zhan et al., 2013). As to achieve these goals, the development of the quality of the regular school curriculum;

quality assurance; the emphasis on classroom teaching and its monitoring; assessments of the qualifications of educators making qualified teachers available at each school; and provision of additional payment for teachers for additional work in school might be attempted at the initial stage (Charoenkul, 2018). This way, the reform would be achieved if the key mechanism begins in classes and school system, with an active corporation from teachers, students, and various sectors to ensure that teaching staff, facilities, equipment, and materials are of the highest quality possible that can be provided with available funds (Bray et al., 2014). Better policy solutions can be redesigned and the downward trend can be reversed if we understand what factors have played a role in students' circumstances in relation to inequality of education system (García & Weiss, 2017). Above all, we need to admit that these inequalities are inevitable, but can be overcome by the following measures that can provide all students equal rights and opportunities to receive quality education, with no limitations owing to sex, age, family backgrounds, economic status, or social standing, nor with regard to physical, mental, or intellectual disabilities (Hays, 2014). Bridging the education gap is not only about extending equal treatment. It is about leveling the playing field, so that every student has an equal chance of realizing his or her full potential. It is about making sure that no student is left behind.

### Limitations and Suggestions for future research

Since the respondents were recruited from limited number of schools and locations that focused only in particular areas of Bangkok. If possible, the future research should be conducted in different areas or other provinces to gain more reliable results. Also, resulted from time and budget constraints, the size of the sample was relatively small to be suitable representatives of the whole population of Thai upper-secondary school students. A larger number of respondents would probably enhance the reliability of the research. Parents, schoolteachers or private tutors might be included in the future research to get different point of views.

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