

Awareness, Access and Appreciation of/to Education in Working-Class Bangkok

Dr. Diana Martinez

Stamford International University

diana.martinez@stamford.edu

Jacob Martin

Stamford International University

jacobmartin.writer@gmail.com

Jindaporn Asairat

Research assistant, Stamford International University

asairat.j@gmail.com

Abstract

Education is the tool that allows citizens to achieve their personal and professional dreams. The purpose of the present qualitative study was to find out whether the access to education has increased from generation to generation in Bangkok or not, what the opinion of the citizens is in regards of the importance of education for a better future and the kind of education Thais dream of. Fifty citizens from several working-class neighbourhoods in Bangkok, Thailand, were interviewed. Their answers showed that younger generations have more access to all levels of education thanks to the help received and the available educational supply. Furthermore, they see that education can lead them to better standards of living and they wish to follow international curricula, giving ideas to current academic institutions about how to design their pedagogical and andragogic methods to meet those needs and dreams.

Keywords: Education, Human Rights, Education Management, International Education, Thailand

Introduction

The concept of education has vastly varied throughout the centuries. Centuries ago, children were expected to help to provide for their families; thus, their education consisted of learning survival and hunting skills rather than literacy and the modern primary education. As stated by Gray (2008) “children in hunter-gatherer cultures learned what they needed to know to become effective adults through their own play and exploration. The strong drives in children to play and explore presumably came about, during our evolution as hunter-gatherers, to serve the needs of education”. Citizens, decades ago, had a more short-term perspective than today and they wanted to meet the present needs, such as being able to afford food to eat, shelter to live, clothes to wear and money to pay for any health complications.

Education was an investment that not many could afford on top of satisfying those basic needs. Like many things in life, people do not know what they have until they lose it. When individuals are used to having something every day, they do not value it that much. But when they do not, they dream of it. “The idea and practice of universal, compulsory public education developed gradually in Europe, from the early 16th century on into the 19th. It was an idea that had many supporters, who all had their own agendas concerning the lessons that children should learn” (Gray, 2008).

As Kofi Annan (n.d.) once stated, “Knowledge is power, information is liberating, education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family” (BrainyQuote, n.d.). In 1948, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed, article 26 stated that access to primary education is a human right that should be enjoyed by every citizen (The United Nations, n.d.) Even though primary education is essential for the development of a person, it should not end there. As stated by Roser and Ortiz-Ospina (2017), “Education is widely accepted to be a fundamental resource, both for individuals and societies. Indeed, in most countries basic education is nowadays perceived not only as a right, but also as a duty – governments are typically expected to ensure access to basic education, while citizens are often required by law to attain education up to a certain basic level”.

Things have improved with time and it seems that access to both primary and higher education will keep increasing around the world as mentioned by Marmolejo (2010). Unfortunately, not many people have access or can afford higher education. Having the possibility of secondary education, or dreaming of a bachelor or a master degree, is something that many around the world cannot enjoy; “although the number of higher-education students will increase, unfortunately, it looks as though higher education will remain primarily elitist as it is today” (Marmolejo, 2010).

In most developed countries, if its young citizens were asked the following question, “*do you feel lucky for having access to higher education?*”, they, probably, would not have thought about it that much before since attending primary, secondary and tertiary education is something available and expected from them. According to data shown by the World Bank (2016), places like the European Union, North America and Central Asia are the ones with the highest gross enrollment ratios in tertiary education for both sexes.

These ratios decrease in many other parts of the world such as South East Asia and the Pacific and North Africa among others where many citizens not only do not have the opportunity to attend higher education, but in many occasions, not even secondary nor primary school (World Bank, 2016). Places like Thailand have shown a great improvement not only in regard to access to education, but also in reference to what people believe education can bring to their lives. The objective of this research study is to investigate the differences between previous and current generations in Bangkok in reference to their access to education, their opinion on what education means in their lives and the kind of education they would like to receive in their future.

The following conceptual framework shows a summary of the structure of the present study:

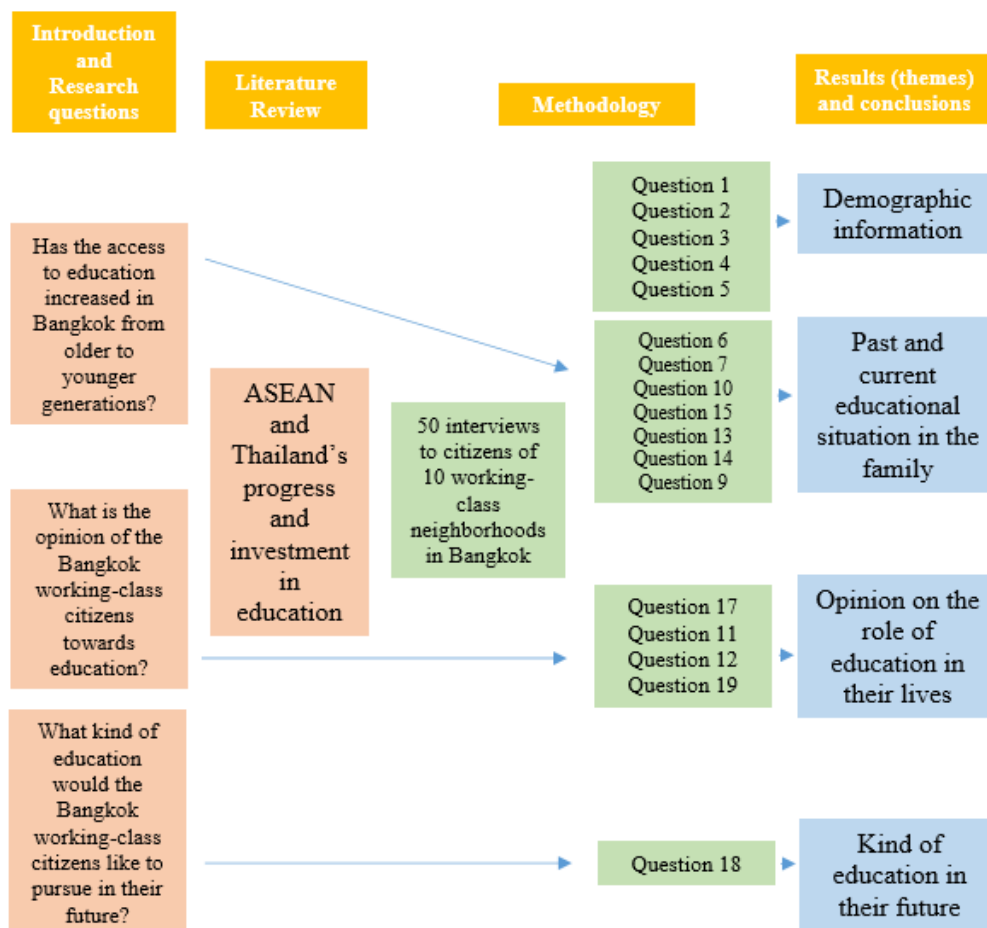


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Literature review

Thailand has a relatively favourable position among its compatriots in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) trade pact. The World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Competitiveness Report has Thailand ranked third among ASEAN nations in overall competitiveness and 31st of the 144 nations measured. The country has a growing economy, low unemployment and “continues to do well in the financial development (34th) and improves its already strong showing in the market efficiency pillar” (Schwab & Sala-i-Martin, 2014, p. 44). While economically and financially sound, Thailand is deficient in one notable category when compared to other ASEAN nations and countries with similar economic profiles—education.

As Schwab & Sala-i-Martin of the WEF (2014) noted, “Another concern is the mediocre quality of education at all levels (87th, down nine) and the still low level of technological readiness” (p. 44). The state of the Thai education system has been a topic of local and international research. Limsawetkul (2007) put it well when he wrote, “It is widely acknowledged that the Thai educational system is not up to the standards of certain other countries at the same economic level and this has had a negative impact on development” (p. 9).

With what seem like ample resources and the necessary government support for reforms and expansion, the improvement process in the country's global education deserves special attention. Before delving further into reasons for the state of the Thai education system when compared to other sectors, it is important to establish a baseline understanding of what the current system is and how it operates. Prior to 1932, education for the average Thai was provided via monks at temples, and for royalty and nobility, it was arranged in palaces or privately (Kotkam, 2000). In 1932, the establishment of a formal primary education system became a national project (Kotkam, 2000). This is significant in that it suggests that the majority of the population has had a maximum of only four to five generations of exposure to the concept of formal education.

The development of a national education system (while still a somewhat below average one by current global standards) has seldom been neglected in modern Thai history or policy. In Thailand "basic education" has long been provided free of charge (Kotkam, 2000; UNESCO, 2009). The most recent reform, the 1999 National Education Act, expanded compulsory education from six to nine years and the available limit of free education to twelve years (UNESCO, 2009). The breakdown of available free education looks like this: "Basic education in Thailand is divided into 6 years of primary schooling, (Prathom 1 to 6) followed by 3 years of lower secondary (Mattayom 1 to 3) and 3 years of upper secondary schooling (Mattayom 4 to 6). In 2003, compulsory education was extended to 9 years, with all students expected to complete Mattayom 6" (Bureau of International Cooperation, 2008, p. 3).

The 1999 National Education Act and its implementation have been monitored and reviewed by both government bodies and a number of academic studies. The purpose of the 1999 Act was not only to improve access to and the duration of compulsory education, but to move the pedagogy from a by-rote to a student-centred approach (Hallinger & Lee, 2011, pp. 139-140). This marked a significant development in that the efforts at education reform focused not only on funding, but on curriculum redesign and renovation.

Thailand has the means to improve education and has attempted to make use of them. Tangkitvanich (2013), President of the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI), reported, "The government's budget for education has sharply increased from about USD 3.5 billion in 2003 to nearly USD 14.7 billion in 2012, and Thailand's public spending on education constituted 4 per cent of its GDP in 2011, while Singapore's equivalent is just 3.2 per cent of its GDP" (para. 1). It should also be noted that Thailand's nominal GDP is 387.2 billion USD while that of Singapore's is 177.1 billion USD—a 210.1 billion difference (Schwab & Sala-i-Martin, 2014). So the Thai investment is actually much larger at face value. However the WEF Global Competitiveness Report 2014-2015 also notes that the Thai population is 68.2 million, while Singapore is home to only 4.7 million (pp. 296, 360). So a direct comparison between the two nations may not be apt or prescriptive of actual dollar per student investment in terms of educational funding as a percentage of overall GDP.

Tangkitvanich (2013) goes on to note that Thai students receive the lowest scores in all of South East Asia on the Programme for International Assessment (PISA) tests and notes that while schools now receive more funding, and thereby teachers higher salaries, there is little accountability for student performance. His TDRI (2013) proposes more efficient assessment and funding of individual students as a means of opening access to education, as opposed to institutionally controlled funds. These recommendations may be promising. Certainly, in recent history, the monetary commitment to education has not been disregarded. The amount of funding allocated to education under the various Thai governments over the past two decades is far from meagre and has been representative of the increasing importance of education reform at both a societal and political level. As Buracom (2011) noted, "Education accounts for the largest share of government expenditures" (p. 113). He further elaborated:

[A]fter the financial crisis in 1997, basic education in Thailand has been expanded from nine to twelve years as required by the constitution. And of the entire education budget, 70 percent is spent directly on primary and secondary education. A student loan program for students of low-income families at upper secondary and tertiary levels has also been launched in 1997. And in 2009, the government has launched a fifteen-year free education program to reduce financial burdens of parents and to enable their children to have equal access to education (p. 115).

It seems the investment in improving the Thai education system cuts across political lines and is consistent throughout modern Thai policy. Buracom (2011) noted from 1982 to 2007 public spending on social services (with education at the forefront) steadily increased. That timeframe includes over ten prime ministers from vastly different political factions, who—as a majority—saw fit to consider education a matter of primary concern for Thai society (BBC, 2015). At the time of writing, acting Prime Minister Gen. Prayut Chan-o-cha has announced he will head an “education super-board” (The Nation, 2015).

Thus far, these attempts at education reform and increased funding have been based on sincere sentiments and egalitarian intentions buttressed by the financial support to affect serious change. The following study employs a qualitative approach, looking at a sample group of working-class Thai adults in Bangkok with school-aged children. It addresses these systematic deficiencies from a street-level perspective—rather than a political or administrative one—attempting to name the most common observations from average Thais about the educational system they participate in.

Methodology

This study started in November 2014 and lasted until September 2015. During almost twelve months, the researchers visited several neighbourhoods around the city of Bangkok inhabited by middle and low social classes with the purpose of finding the desired target group: families with low incomes whose children go to primary, secondary and/or university in Bangkok. The sample of this research is 50 people (50 interviews were given although in more than 75% of the cases whole families were attentive to the responses of the chosen participant and intervened in some questions).

The research method chosen was mainly qualitative and there were several techniques used for it. The first one was a semi-structured interview. The appendix shows the letter of consent and questions that participants were asked. Out of 19 questions, the first four are considered structured ones since they had the purpose to finding out about the demographic background of the respondents. The rest of the questions allowed both the interviewer and the interviewee to have more freedom to interpret the meaning of the questions and get into more detail when answering. “The flexibility of this approach, semi-structured interviews, particularly compared to structured interviews, also allows for the discovery or elaboration of information that is important to participants but may not have previously been thought of as pertinent by the research team” (Gill et al., 2008).

Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. The researchers had a Thai research assistant who helped translate the questions and the answers when necessary. She was present in every single interview with the purpose of reaching a high probability of mutual understanding between interviewers and interviewees and of asking initial questions to citizens to make sure they fit the right target group. The participants were chosen based on their age (according to appearance) and whether they were surrounded by children or not.

As it was previously mentioned, the target group was working adults with kids or teenagers. Overall, the researchers did not encounter major obstacles when asking people for being interviewed. In fact, Thai citizens were very friendly and they seemed to like talking about education and their life. There were only a few cases where people said no, and even then, they were very polite. In those cases, they were busy having a snack in the park or relaxing so they did not want to be disturbed.

The second qualitative technique used by the researchers was ‘descriptive exploratory methodology’ to some extent. As it was stated by Schneider and Whitehead, (2016), “Descriptive exploratory methodology is not so much a specific approach, but more a ‘general’ approach that usually adopts common aspects of all qualitative approaches. In effect, descriptive exploratory researchers collect rich narrative data from small sample populations and analyse that data using broad ‘free-form’ thematic/content analysis methods”. This methodology, as showed in the previous conceptual framework, along with the semi-structure interviews allowed the interviewers to group the interview questions into different themes, analyzing past and present educational situations, as well as thinking of their possible academic future. “Exploratory research ‘tends to tackle new problems on which little or no previous research has been done’. Unstructured interviews is the most popular primary data collection method with this type of research” (Research Methodology, 2017).

This study’s methodology also applies some quantitative methods as shown in the following section where the results are presented. When the researchers analyzed the data, they looked for common patterns and themes, shared backgrounds, comparable experiences, similar opinions and alike dreams. This way the results could be presented in percentages for more definite analysis and conclusions. To comply with the qualitative research ethical guidelines, the participants were asked to carefully read and sign a letter of consent before starting the interview (see Appendix). There was no problem with any participant. Everyone was eager, not only to sign, but also, to take a picture/video with the researchers and/or the research assistant. The data collected were inserted in an Excel spreadsheet on the same day of the interviews so useful comments could accompany the answers given to fully comprehend the key qualitative aspects of the answers.

The areas that were chosen for the interviews were low and middle class neighborhoods and were selected after careful secondary research of those and continuous conversations with Thai citizens who knew them well and recommended them to the researchers as accurate locations to find the required target group for the interviews. The names of those areas are not disclosed in the present paper for sensitivity reasons.

Results

The appendix shows the questions asked in the interviews. For a valid and accurate rate of response, the questions were not asked in order but mixed with the purpose of achieving the most transparent and sincere information. For a clearer understanding of the results, they will be shown in the order the researchers had in mind when developing the interview questions to be able to find common themes and to answer the initial three research questions. First, the current educational situation will be shown, then the interviewees’ opinions towards education and finally the interviewees’ desires when thinking about the relationship between education and their future. In summary, during the interviews, the participants had the chance (without noticing) to go on a journey that started with the educational situation of their previous generations compared to their current one and finishing by thinking of their future and dreams related to the field of education.

Starting with the most relevant questions in regard to the current educational situation of the interviewees, questions 6 and 7 gathered information in regards of the access to education among the minors in the family.

- 6 - How many of your kids go to school?
- 7 - Out of those who go to school, how many are in the right level?

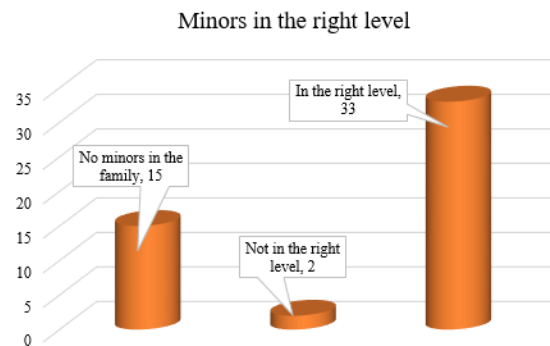


Figure 2. The number of minors in the family attending school and their level of education

When combining these two questions, the results show that the children of the majority of respondents were attending school and in the right level. Only 4% (2/50) of the respondents informed that they were not in the right level, one of them was 20 years old and was still in high school and the other one did not provide with the exact reasons. Of the respondents 66% (33/50) claimed to be in the right level, from kindergarten to university level, where 81% (27/33) were attending public education. Out of the 50 respondents, 15 said that there were no minors in the family at the moment so they could not add any information to this question.

While asking these two questions, the researchers perceived that even though the interviewees felt comfortable answering how many children in the family attended school, some of them either refused or felt a bit uncomfortable when asking about whether they were in the right level or not. There were some instances where the researchers had to explain how the primary and the secondary system works in Thailand since some of the interviewees seemed a bit confused on how to answer this question. This led the authors to believe that some families might not fully know at what age each school level should be taken. Of the few respondents that admitted that some children were not attending the right level, they did not wish to elaborate on the reasons why this happened; thus, the researchers decided not to continue asking very personal questions.

To find out more about the current situation in the family and understand the differences between the old and new generations when it comes to the access to education, question number 10 was addressed to the parents of the family

- 10 - Parents: what is the highest level of education that you completed?

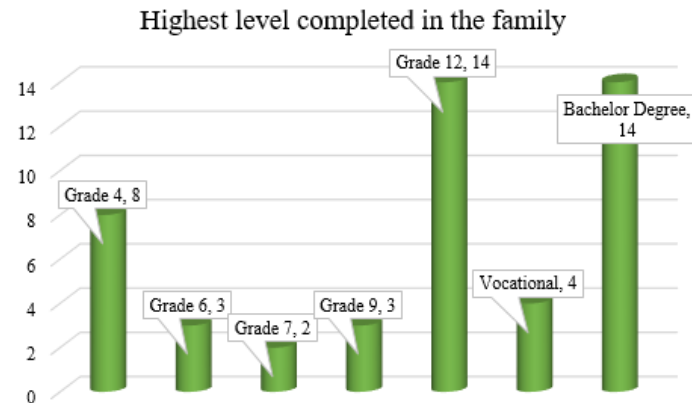


Figure 3: The highest level of education completed among the family members

The results showed that the majority of them, 62.5% (30/48 respondents) had attended high-school but only fewer than half of them had completed it. In the interviews the respondents confirmed that their access to education was more limited than what is now since work began earlier for all the family members. The respondents that claimed to have access to vocational courses and university level education were usually of younger ages (parents between 30-40), showing that the newer generations not only have more access to higher education but also more willingness to pursue higher studies. The interviewers perceived a different feeling when asking this question to younger generations than when asking it to older ones. The ages of the participants varied between twenty and sixty years old. Older generations, even though most of them admitted their level of education being either primary or lower than primary school for the majority, somehow showed, through their answers and their non-verbal communication, that they wished they had studied longer. Several of these senior participants discussed the situations of the younger generations in their families and how proud they felt that their children and their grandchildren were able to attend university. To continue investigating the difference between generations, question number 15 focuses on the access to higher studies (university level):

15 - Does any member of your family go to university? If so, which one?

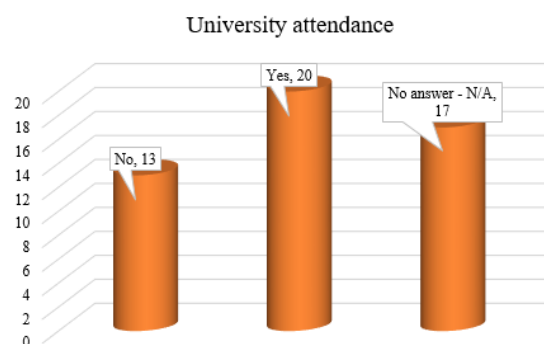


Figure 4. The number of family members that have either attended or are attending university

Only 40% (20/50) claimed to have at least one person in the family that had either attended university or was attending at the moment of the interview. These positive results correspond, for the most part, to the younger respondents and newer generations, in concordance with the results found in the previous question number 12. When this question

was answered by the younger generations, being them the ones that had had or were, at that time, having the opportunity of attending tertiary education, the interviewers sensed a feeling of pride and happiness on their faces. More specifically and as an example, one young woman and two young men who were attending university, they mentioned that they had worked hard to be able to attend it, both academically and financially, and they saw it as a great achievement and as a very good investment.

Once the information was gathered in regard to the kind and level of education existent among the respondents, it was important to understand other factors that affected the attendance rate and the choice of school. Questions 13 and 14 were related to how affordable education was for the interviews and the kind of help they received to make sure that at least the minors of the family could have access to education.

13 - Is education free for your family?

14 - Do you receive any kind of assistance from the government related to education (school fees, books, other material, etc.)?

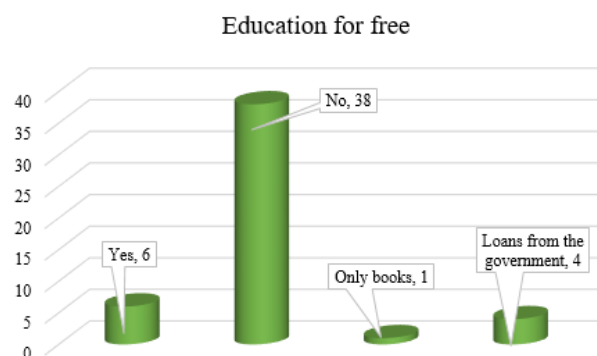


Figure 5. The number of people who have or have not received some kind of help for education.

While only 12% (6/49) of respondents stated that the education their kids receive is completely free (kindergarten and primary school in all cases), there were a few others that confirmed that even though it is not completely free, they received some kind of help such as free text books, uniforms, and/or loans from the government. Of the respondents 32% (16/50) claimed that somebody in their family had received a full loan from the government for the compulsory years of education (mainly primary school).

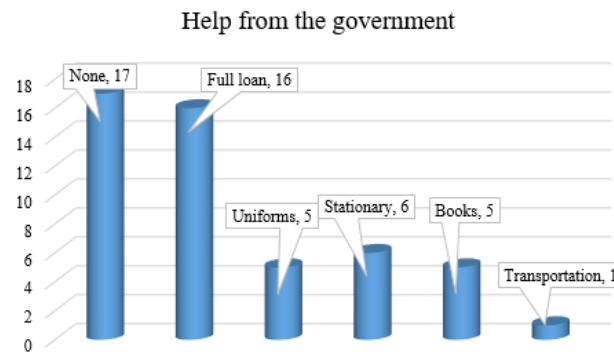


Figure 6. The kind of help that the participants have received from the government for academic purposes.

These two questions in regards of financial information and help received were the most difficult ones to ask when conducting the interviews due to sensitivity reasons. Thanks to the research assistant, the questions were asked in an indirect way finding new words to reach the information required. For example, instead of asking what kind of help they received and leave it as an open-ended question, the assistant saw that by asking more specific questions in regards of the materials such as uniforms, stationary or books, the citizens were more willing to answer and felt more comfortable. When it came to receiving full loan, on the contrary, there was a difference in some of the participants. Some of them felt like it was something to be proud of since the loan had been given as a scholarship; while a few others did not feel that comfortable by talking about it. For those participants stating that they did not receive any kind of help, the interviewers asked them about what they would choose if they could receive something and they said that either transportation or tuition fees would be their preference.

Since Bangkok is fairly extensive in area, transportation is key when it comes to what school to attend since it influences the variable monthly costs of a family. Question 9 was aimed to find out about that aspect of the experience of education:

9 - What kind of transportation do you use if any when they go to school?

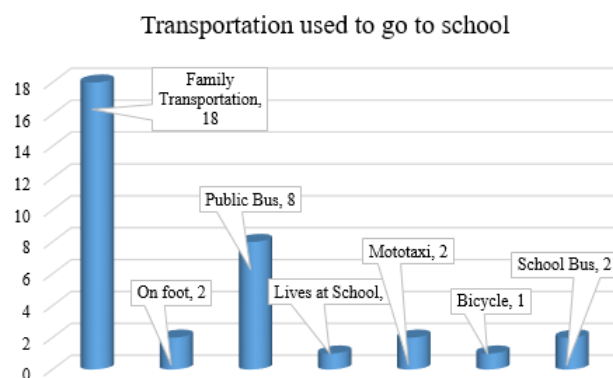


Figure 7. The kind of transportation used by the participants to go to school.

The results showed that the majority of respondents used their own transportation; thus they had to spend money on petrol, or had to pay for either a public bus or a motorcycle taxi. Those represented 82% of the interviews (28/34).

This supports the previously stated answers when the participants mentioned that if they could choose what help to receive one of their priorities would be transportation. From specific experiences to a more general perspective of the educational awareness within some neighbourhoods in Bangkok, question 17 asked the following to the participants:

17 - Do you feel education is promoted in your neighborhood?

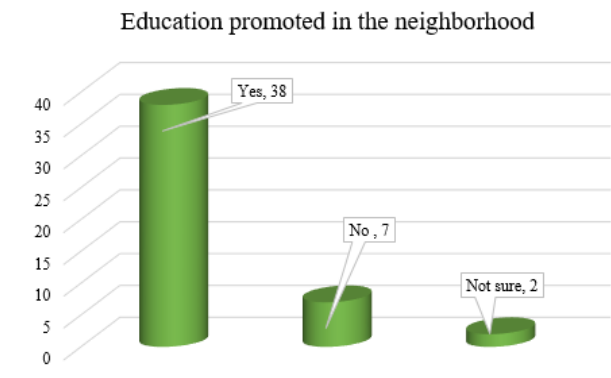


Figure 8. The opinions of the participants on whether education was promoted in their neighborhoods or not.

The results showed that nowadays education is becoming more and more important and citizens from the working class in Bangkok encourage their family members to attend school for as long as they can. Of the respondents from neighbourhoods such as Kwai Kwang, Rachada, Klon Toey, Pathunthani, Khet Lak, Mochit, Makassan, Lad Prao, Rama III, Rama IV, Bangkapi, Onnut, Nonthaburi 80% (38/47) responded with a decisive “yes”, education was promoted around the area where they lived. The pattern found on the aforementioned results was that most people who mentioned that they did not feel that education was promoted around their neighborhood were senior citizens somewhere around their fifty and sixty years old. The researchers attributed this feeling to the possibility that these citizens were not that much exposed to education anymore. The younger interviewees, on the contrary, strongly felt that education was promoted among their neighbors. There were some adult participants that clarified that they had seen a change among their counterparts and around the areas where they lived in reference to a positive attitude toward education; they felt that it was not promoted or not given that much importance some decades ago whereas nowadays topics related to education were very common in daily conversations.

Once the current and previous educational situation of the respondents have been shown, the following questions dig into the topics of what their opinions are towards education and what they think it is useful for their daily and future lives. Questions 11 and 12 asked them about these topics:

11 - Do you think education is important for the future of your family? Why?

12 - Do you believe that if a person studies he/she will have a better future?

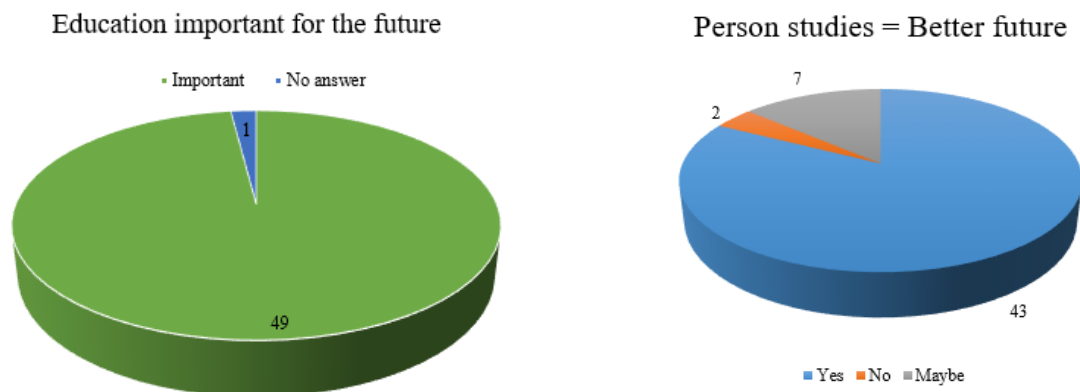


Figure 9. The number of participants who thought that education is important for their future.

Figure 10. The number of participants who thought that the more a person studies the more chances they have to have a better future.

All the participants that were asked whether education is important for their family answered “yes”. Most respondents (24/49) mentioned that education would allow them to develop more skills, thus get better jobs and better opportunities in the future. Others (18/49) related their ideas to self-development, since they saw education as the tool that would allow them to understand the world, to build relationships with other people and to progress as human beings. These two questions were closely related and received some of the longest answers by the participants. It seemed like the interview made them think about the advantages that education had brought to their lives. Some of the exact answers given by some of the participants are the following ones:

Participant 9: “Yes because without education we cannot follow or understand what is going on around the world”

Participant 13: “Yes, education helps us and teaches us how to think critically and make wise decisions.”

Participant 17: “It is important because education brings opportunities to our lives.”

Participant 18: “It is important because the kids will be ready for the AEC.”

Participant 25: “Yes, nowadays technology and society change very quickly and that is why education is important.”

Participant 32: “Yes, because kids have to learn what they write, read and communicate. All of these are basic skills that are needed in the future.”

Participant 49: “Of course, it helps to develop quality of life of family in all areas (poor habits and hygiene in her family - eating with hands).”

Closely related to question 11, question 12 was more specific in regard to how much education could give them a better future. Of the respondents, 86% (43/50) were convinced that the more a person studies, the better future he/she would have. They elaborated this idea by saying that more studies would increase their chance of getting a better job and earning more money, so their living standards for their families could improve in the future.

Only five respondents hesitated, arguing that it would depend on the person's attitude and personality to make things work and not only on the education received. To continue investigating their views on education, the last question of the interview was related to the human right number set out in article 26.

“1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. 2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. 3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children” (The United Nations, n.d.)

Respondents were asked to give their perspective on this human right.

19 - Do you agree that education is a human right? Why?

Forty-eight respondents answered with a decisive “yes” and the reasons given were, for the majority, the fact that education improves their quality of life and makes everybody equal since it gives opportunities to everyone. In several cases the interviewers observed that some of the participants did not know that education is a human right, especially when asking older generations since they had either experienced or knew of somebody in the past that had not enjoyed the access to it. Once that was explained, most participants agreed that education is a human right. Only one person that had to leave before the end of the interview did not have the chance to answer this question and there was another one who said ‘no’, participant 17: *“No. Education is important but without education we can still find the way to survive”*. Out of the interviewees that agreed, a response deserves to be transcribed as a reflection of the real meaning behind having human rights; it was given by Participant 50 who said: *“Agree. If we all have the same level of education we will be able to make decisions and think. This will more likely decrease unfairness.”*

In the last part of the interview, after understanding the educational situation of the participants and their views on the role of education in their lives, the researchers gave the participants a chance to dream about the possibility of having access to any education they could imagine, and say what they would opt for and why.

18 - If you could afford any kind of education, what would it be (international education in Bangkok, university, study abroad)? Why?

The respondents could give several answers to this question. More than half of the respondents (28) dreamed about having access to an international education, in Bangkok and abroad, because they see it as the way to achieve a better future in terms of job opportunities and networking, thanks to the English language. The interviewees placed more importance on the kind of education (private and international as their favourites), rather than the level of it since only four respondents mentioned higher education such as bachelor and master degrees.

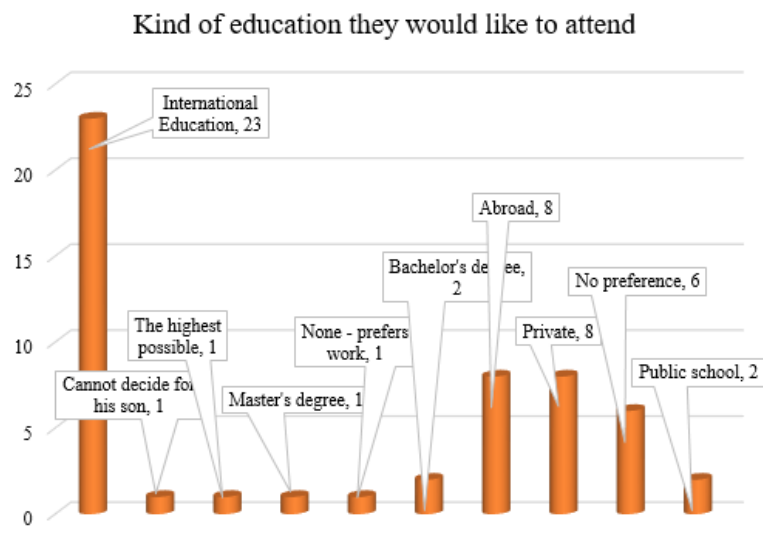


Figure 11. The academic preferences of the participants when choosing the kind of education they would like to receive in the future.

This question was the one which, based on what the researchers could observe, the interviewees enjoyed discussing the most. Somehow the idea of dreaming of their future and of having some minutes to discuss their wishes with people that they did not know brought them joy and hope. The interviewers were foreigners living in Thailand and both of them were lecturers in an international university. When the participants asked them a bit about their background, about the country where they came from, about their jobs in Bangkok, etc., the participants seemed to become very interested in practicing their English language skills as well as talking about travelling to other countries, learning about other cultures and having access to diverse teaching and learning styles. Some of their responses were the following ones:

Participant 23: *“International school because he will have the chance to establish relationships with foreigners.”*

Participant 27: *“Any that is associated with learning and developing foreign languages. If we can speak more than language, it will help us gain more opportunities in the future.”*

Participant 39: *“Private school because they have a better system regarding teacher’s evaluations than public schools.”*

Participant 45: *“International school because it will help us improve our social status.”*

Participant 46: *“Private school because there are many smart and talented people in private schools. Being around them will inspire me to improve myself as well.”*

Analysis

As discussed in the literature review, Kotkam (2000), stated that not over four to five generations have been exposed to formal education in Thailand. The results of this present study proved this statement right by showing that the access and attendance to primary, secondary and higher education has increased from older generation to younger ones in Bangkok. The average highest level achieved by the older family members of the participants was around 4th grade, which in some cases meant that the primary education had not been accomplished. On the contrary, the participants that were young adults, teenagers and minors had achieved primary, secondary and in some occasions higher educational levels.

This improvement might be influenced, as understood from the data collected, by two main factors: the help received and the positive attitudes toward education in general.

Firstly, one factor seems to be the help Thai families receive from the government to be able to afford education in regard to transportation, materials and from a rise in the number of educational institutions available. As discussed by Tangkitvanich (2013) and Buracom (2011), in recent years, the Thai government has been investing more on education and on helping its citizens to be able to access it. The results showed that transportation is one of the biggest burdens for the working-class citizens. A way to assist them in this aspect might be by giving scholarships to attend schools that are not completely free but are the only ones accessible due to distance from the households as well as to continue granting student loan programs as the government has been doing in the last years.

The second factor is related to the positive attitude that Thai society has toward education nowadays. It was in 1999 when the National Education Act was passed as stated by UNESCO (2009), by which mandatory education increased in number of years as well as the shift in pedagogical approaches towards an education more focused on students' needs. By analyzing the responses giving by the participants taking their age range into account, it was shown that the younger generations were actually the ones that had been positively affected by this act in the last eighteen years. When education is promoted, encouraged and a priority among the top spheres of society, it is then when the domino effect starts and it reaches all societal classes. This has affected societal expectations for the younger generation and has encouraged the ambition of getting a good education among Thai youth. Thai respondents, as representatives of their peers, view education as the bridge to a better future; not only in regard to being literate but also in terms of the chance to develop themselves as human beings. Furthermore, they see education as the tool needed to understand what is happening in a globalized world where people need to live together. Many linguistic codes along with diverse moral values, religions, social expectations, ethical standards, etc. are mixed in the multicultural city of Bangkok, where education plays an essential role that allows Thai citizens and foreigners to cohabit successfully.

Furthermore, Thai participants chose private and international schooling when they were asked to imagine the education they would like to have. They believed that the ability to speak English and to have access to an international education, meaning international curricula and international lecturers, would allow them to be successful in their personal and business relationships in the present and in the future. In relation to this result, they also viewed higher education as a "must" nowadays rather than as an option. As is suggested in the results, new generations do not stop studying when finishing primary or high school but feel the need to pursue a bachelor degree in order to have better living standards than previous generations. The aforementioned ideas provide new insights for primary, secondary and tertiary institutions on how to prepare their students not only for the future they want but also to be ready to compete globally and to compare the quality of education among the Thai schools to those around the ASEAN community such as Singapore and Malaysia as suggested by Tangkitvanich (2013).

By (re)designing their academic curricula it would be possible to create partnerships between institutions in different cities to allow students to study for one or two terms in another country, as some of the participants stated when asked about their academic future.

Limitations of study

It could be said that language barrier was the main limitation of the study. Both researchers speak moderate level of Thai and this was the reason why they relied on the research assistant at all times; without her help it would not have been possible to carry out most of the interviews. In order to gain a fuller understanding of the questions and the answers

of the interviews, the researchers were present for all of them, asking the assistant for clarification in situ and reviewing all the answers afterwards with the assistant to make sure enough notes were taken to understand what the interviewees said.

Another limitation is related to the veracity of the answers given by the participants. The interviewees did not know the researchers who were asking questions about their private life. The truth in the answer was, as much as possible, validated by the authors through constant note-taking on non-verbal communication analysis. The researchers needed to believe in the good faith of the interviewees and investigate the non-verbal communication as well as the specificity of the answers given by the participants.

Recommendations for further research

When using qualitative research methods, the scope for further research is very wide, and that is the case for this present study. How much access do working-class people in Bangkok have to primary and secondary education, how much has that access evolved over the last few years compared to the previous generation, whether education is promoted among several neighbourhoods in Bangkok or not, and what kind of education is the most desired among the Bangkok middle and low class population were some of the points investigated in this study. The first suggestion for further research is to continue using the same technique with a greater number of interviewees and in more areas of the city, different from the ones in this paper.

The second recommendation has to do with the quality of the education primary and secondary school students receive in Bangkok and how schools are preparing students for a potential international education and studies abroad later on. First, public schools could be assessed since the majority of the participants attended them, and then it could be compared to private and/or international schools. Bangkok has been the city selected for this study as the two researchers live there and know the city and its neighbourhoods fairly well. Another possibility would be to conduct the same or a similar research in a rural area of Thailand to investigate not only access to education but also its quality and value for Thai citizens.

The last suggestion is related to the level of education. Primary and secondary education were the main targets of this study. Thai universities are improving their quality standards little by little with the purpose of competing with neighbouring countries such as Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, China, South Korea and Japan. Studying the quality of education in Thai universities for several years might give a clear understanding of the progress in this context, the improvement over time and the success of the vision of the Thai Ministry of Education within the ASEAN community.

Conclusion

The three research questions of the present study are: Has the access to education increased in Bangkok from older to younger generations? What is the opinion of the Bangkok working-class citizens toward education? and, What kind of education would the Bangkok working-class citizens like to pursue in their future? In response to the first and the second questions, the study showed a higher level of access and attendance to the primary, secondary and higher education compared to previous generations that for the most part just had access to primary education. More people seemed to study after high school or had the desire to do so when they finish it. This rise was understood to be made possible by the increase in help provided by the government related to education and by a more positive attitude toward what education could bring to their future.

It seemed as if previous generations were more focused on entering the professional world as soon as they finished primary education, whereas the newer generations see that without a higher level of education, their living standards could not improve. To answer the third question, the participants dreamed of having access to an international environment and better job opportunities. Taking into account that the interviews took place in the multicultural city of Bangkok where many foreigners live, no matter where the participants lived, they saw a very high probability of interacting with people from other countries and of doing business with them, locally and internationally. Their choice of education was, for the majority, an international education in English, and the possibility of learning about the world so they could develop themselves and have better personal and professional opportunities in the future by being able to compare the quality of education received to those of neighbor countries.

In summary, the encouraging results, both in terms of access to education and awareness and appreciation of it, are useful for current educational institutions and educators to (re)design their pedagogical and andragogic education, keeping in mind the personal and professional objectives of the Thai population and preparing them for the international future they would like to have access to.

Reference

- BrainyQuote (n.d.). Knowledge quotes. <https://www.brainyquote.com/topics/knowledge>
Retrieved November 18, 2017
- Buracom, P. (2011). *The determinants and distributional effects of public education, health, and welfare spending in Thailand*. Asian Affairs: An American Review, 38, 113-142.
- Bureau of International Cooperation (2008). *Towards a learning society in Thailand: An introduction to education in Thailand*. (2008). Bangkok: Bureau of International Cooperation with active MINDS.
- FAO, ILO and UNESCO. (2009). *Training and employment opportunities to address poverty among rural youth: A synthesis report: A joint study by FAO, ILO and UNESCO*. (2009). Bangkok: UNESCO Bangkok.
- Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E., & Chadwick, B. (2008). *Methods of data collection in qualitative research: interviews and focus groups*. British Dental Journal, pages 204, 291 - 295 (2008), doi:10.1038/bdj.2008.192
- Gray, F. (2008). *A Brief History of Education*. Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/freedom-learn/200808/brief-history-education> Retrieved November 14, 2017
- Hallinger, P., & Lee, M. (2011). *A decade of education reform in Thailand: broken promise or impossible dream?* Cambridge Journal of Education, 41(2), 139-158.
- Kotkam, C. (2000). *Education in Thailand*. Journal of Southeast Asian Education, 1(1), 202-218.
- Limsawetkul, D. (2007). *The development of the International Basic Education Model for Thailand in the future*. ABAC Journal, 27(2), 9-14. Retrieved 2015, from EBSCOhost.
- Marmolejo, F (2010). *Access, Retention, and Success in Higher Education Around the World*. <http://www.chronicle.com/blogs/worldwise/access-retention-and-success-in-higher-education-around-the-world-are-we-widening-or-narrowing-the-gaps/27599>
Retrieved November 14, 2017.
- Miller, Kristen, (2014). *Cognitive interviewing methodology*. Hoboken, New Jersey: National Centre for Health Statistics, 2014.
- Research Methodology, (2017). *'Exploratory Research'*. <https://research-methodology.net/research-methodology/research-design/exploratory-research/>
Retrieved November 14, 2017.

- Roser, M. and Ortiz-Ospina, E. (2017) – ‘*Global Rise of Education*’. Published online at OurWorldInData.org. Retrieved from: <https://ourworldindata.org/global-rise-of-education> [Online Resource]
- Schwab, K., & Sala-i-Martin, X. (2014). *Global competitiveness Report* 2014-2015. Retrieved August 16, 2015. The World Economic Forum.
http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GlobalCompetitivenessReport_2014-15.pdf
- Schneider Z. and Whitehead D., (2016). *Evolve Resources for Nursing and Midwifery Research, 5th Edition*. Elsevier. (pages 104 - 122)
- Tangkitvanich, S. (2013). *Teach Thais to think* «TDRI: Thailand Development Research Institute. Retrieved August 16, 2015. <https://tdri.or.th/en/2013/09/10045/>
- Thailand profile - timeline - BBC News. (2015, May 19). Retrieved August 16, 2015.
- The Nation, (2014). Lao children are better educated than Thai kids - *The Nation*. (2014, September 11). Retrieved August 16, 2015.
- The Nation, (2015). *Prayut to lead 'super board' on education system reform* -, February 28). Retrieved August 16, 2015.
- The United Nations, n.d. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* – The United Nations <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/> Retrieved October 7, 2015
- World Bank, 2016. *Gross enrollment ratio, terciary, both sexes (%)*. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics. Retrieved November 19, 2017. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR?end=2016&locations=TJ&start=1970&view=chart&year_high_desc=false

Appendix - Letter of consent plus interview questions



มหาวิทยาลัยนานาชาติแสตมฟอร์ด วิทยาเขตกรุงเทพฯ

ทางหลวงพิเศษหมายเลข 6 กิโลเมตรที่ 2

เขตประเวศ กรุงเทพมหานคร

10250

หนังสือยินยอม (Letter of Consent)

จดหมายฉบับนี้ได้เขียนขึ้นเพื่อรับรองว่า นายเจacob มาร์ติน และ ดร.ไดอาน่า มาร์ตินเนซ คณะอาจารย์จากมหาวิทยาลัยนานาชาติแสตมฟอร์ด วิทยาเขตเขตกรุงเทพมหานคร ได้กำลังดำเนินการทำงานวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพอยู่จริง ซึ่งหนึ่งในกระบวนการของการทำงานวิจัยนี้คือการสัมภาษณ์กลุ่มประชากรในหลากหลายพื้นที่ในกรุงเทพมหานคร (This letter certifies that Ajarn Jacob Daniel Martin and Ajarn Diana Martinez are conducting a qualitative research paper that involves interviews to people in several areas of Bangkok.)

โดยการเซ็นชื่อในจดหมายฉบับนี้ เป็นการแสดงว่าคุณ (By signing this letter, you) ได้ยินยอมและอนุญาตให้นักวิจัยจากทางมหาวิทยาลัยนานาชาติแสตมฟอร์ดได้ทำการสอบถามความคิดเห็นทั่วไปเกี่ยวกับการจัดการศึกษาในกรุงเทพมหานคร และความคิดเห็นเกี่ยวกับเรื่องความสุข ข้อมูลที่ได้ทั้งหมดจากการสัมภาษณ์จะถูกนำไปใช้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งในกระบวนการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูลของงานวิจัยในครั้งนี้ (certify that you allowed the researchers to ask you several questions in regard of education and happiness, and those answers will be part of the data collection of the consequent research.)

ขอขอบพระคุณเป็นอย่างสูงในการให้ความร่วมมือในครั้งนี้ (Thank you in advance for your time and help.)

ลายเซ็นของผู้ยินยอมเข้าร่วมสัมภาษณ์ (Interviewee's signature)

ชื่อของผู้ยินยอมเข้าร่วมสัมภาษณ์ (Interviewee's name)

วันที่ (Date)

Education in Bangkok - การจัดการศึกษาในกรุงเทพมหานคร

1. Gender เพศ :
2. Age อายุ:
3. Area where you live in Bangkok ที่อยู่ปัจจุบันในกรุงเทพ ฯ:
4. Occupation อาชีพ:
5. Members in your family จำนวนสมาชิกในครอบครัว:
6. How many of your kids go to school? จำนวนบุตรในครอบครัวที่กำลังศึกษาอยู่:
7. Out of those who go to school, how many are in the right level? ในจำนวนบุตรทั้งหมดที่กำลังศึกษาอยู่ มีบุตรจำนวนกี่คนที่ได้รับการศึกษาในระดับที่ตรงตามอายุ ตัวอย่างเช่น
อายุ 7 ขวบ = ประถมศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 1 :
8. What kind of school do your children go to? (International, private or public)บุตรของท่านเข้ารับการศึกษากับสถาบันการศึกษาประเภทใด ตัวอย่างเช่น โรงเรียนนานาชาติ หรือ โรงเรียนเอกชน :
9. What kind of transportation do they use if any when they go to school? บุตรที่กำลังศึกษาอยู่เดินทางมาที่โรงเรียนโดยวิธีใด ตัวอย่างเช่น รถโดยสาร รถจักรยานยนต์ ทางเรือ หรือเดินเท้า :
10. Parents: what is the highest level of education that you completed? สำหรับผู้ปกครอง : ท่านจบการศึกษาระดับใด
11. Do you think education is important for the future of your family? Why? คุณคิดว่าการศึกษามีความสำคัญต่อความเป็นอยู่ของคนในครอบครัวในอนาคตหรือไม่ เพราะเหตุใด
12. Do you believe that if a person studies he/she will have a better future? คุณคิดว่าการศึกษาทำให้มีคุณภาพชีวิตที่ดีขึ้น ใช่หรือไม่
13. Is education for your family free? คุณได้รับการศึกษาโดยไม่ต้องเสียค่าใช้จ่าย ใช่หรือไม่
14. Do you receive any kind of assistance/help from the government related to education (school fees, books, other material, etc.)? คุณได้รับการช่วยเหลือทางด้านการศึกษา เช่น ค่าธรรมเนียมการศึกษา หรืออุปกรณ์การเรียน จากทางรัฐบาลหรือหน่วยงานที่ดูแลเกี่ยวกับเรื่องการศึกษาหรือไม่
15. Does any member of your family go to university? If so, which one? ในครอบครัวของคุณ มีสมาชิกที่ได้เข้ารับการศึกษาระดับอุดมศึกษา(มหาวิทยาลัย)บ้างหรือไม่
ถ้ามี เป็นสมาชิกคนไหนครอบครัว
16. Does the university help you in terms of transportation or accommodation? ทางมหาวิทยาลัยได้ให้การช่วยเหลือทางด้านการเดินทางหรือด้านที่พักบ้างหรือไม่
17. Do you feel education is promoted in your neighborhood? คุณรู้สึกว่าการศึกษามีการส่งเสริมจากบริเวณชุมชนที่คุณอาศัยอยู่ หรือจากทางรัฐบาลบ้างหรือไม่
18. If you could afford any kind of education, what would it be (international education in Bangkok, university, study abroad)? Why? ถ้าคุณสามารถเลือกการศึกษาระบบใดก็ได้โดยไม่มีปัจจัยเรื่องเงินเข้ามาเกี่ยวข้อง คุณอยากเข้ารับการศึกษารูปแบบไหน (ตัวอย่างเช่น หลักสูตรนานาชาติในกรุงเทพ , การศึกษาต่อในระดับมหาวิทยาลัย หรือการศึกษาต่อในต่างประเทศ)
และเพราะเหตุใดคุณจึงเลือกการศึกษาระบบนั้น
19. Do you agree that education is a human right? Why? คุณเห็นด้วยหรือไม่กับคำพูดที่ว่า “การเข้าถึงทางการศึกษาเป็นสิทธิขั้นพื้นฐานที่มนุษย์ทุกคนสมควรได้รับ” เพราะเหตุใดคุณจึงคิดเช่นนั้น