



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



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ABSTRACT

This research: 1) explored information on basic education policy for the ethnic groups in the Thai highland and border areas, 2) identified factors that influence the education policy for ethnic groups, and 3) provided a mechanism and process of basic education for ethnic groups in the Thai highlands and border areas. The research was conducted by studying three variables: ethnic group societies, educational management for ethnic groups, and the formulation of educational policy for ethnic groups. This was a mixed method study. The research findings revealed that the actors for advocacy policy in basic education for ethnic groups consist of: 1) the primary education service area, 2) community, 3) NGOs, 4) scholars, and 5) schools. This study indicated that the provision of basic education policy for ethnic groups must consist of knowledge from communities such as ethnic life styles integrated in the curriculum, and a special education mechanism and process for Thai ethnic groups, including facilitation of ethnic group participation in the abovementioned actors by various means.

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Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

Research Objectives

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

Research Framework

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

Methods

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

Population and Key Informants

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

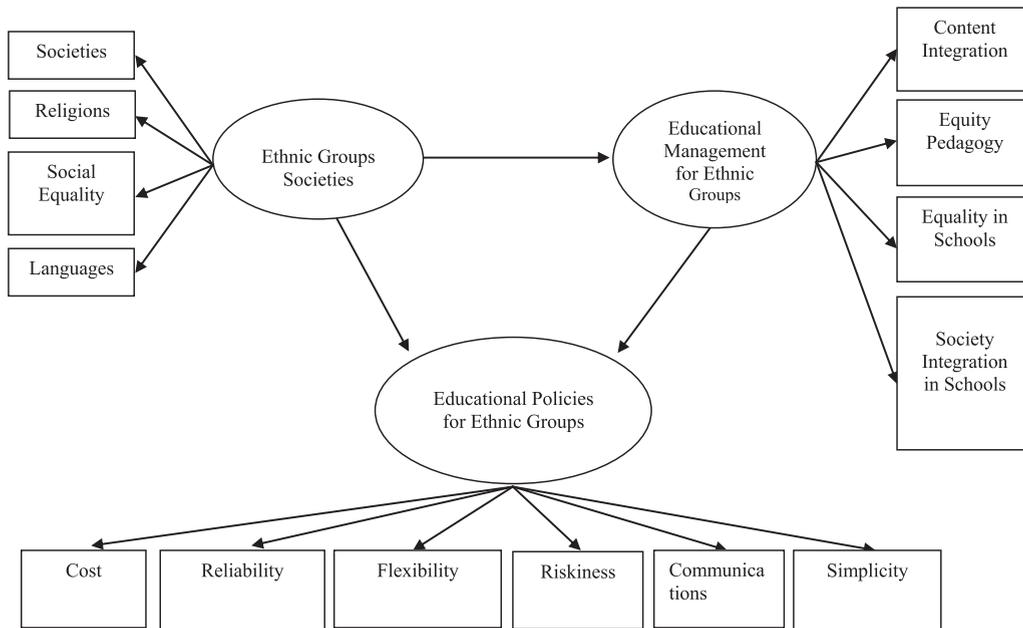


Figure 1 Research framework model of the management of basic education for ethnic groups in the Thai highland and border regions

the three districts. A primary interviewing method called snowball sampling was used to conduct telephone interviews with these informants. These were conducted by assigning the officers in the Primary Education Service Area offices who were presenters for ethnic students whose responsibilities included providing information in the education areas, including groups of teachers and instructors who had experience in teaching groups of ethnic students more than five years, which resulted in selecting six people. In conclusion, twelve participants took part in this study.

The sample for the quantitative research was chosen using multi-stage sampling (Sarantakos, 2013) and stratified sampling. The sample was about 20 times the number of variables (Aungkuchod, Vichitwanna, & Pinyopanuwat, 2011) from the assumed structural equation model of basic education for Thai ethnic groups. Fourteen variables were observed. The sample size was 20 multiplied by 14, representing 280 people. The participants were teachers in the schools offering the basic education curriculum. The sample consisted of 47 people in Kanchanaburi province, 80 people in Chiang Mai province, and 173 people in Chiang Rai province.

The selection and number of experts for audit and verification of policy alternatives was based on Armstrong (2001) who indicated that generally 5–20 experts were needed to prepare Delphi. This study used 12 experts who were skilled in the management of basic education for Thai ethnic groups, as well as leaders who implemented education policy. The expert sample was selected using purposive sampling.

Research Tools

The qualitative research used structured interviews that contained four types of questions: a) personal information;

b) social information about ethnic groups; c) information about the management of education for Thai ethnic groups; and d) information about the formation of educational policies for Thai ethnic groups.

The quantitative research used questionnaires. The data were synthesized until there was saturation of the empirical data according to the first purpose. It was then defined as a quantitative research tool by classifying the variables in each factor to be used for creating questionnaires for studying opinions on issues relating to the education management of ethnic groups. It consisted of five parts: personal information, ethnic group societies, the education management of ethnic groups, educational policies for ethnic groups, and open-ended questions for giving opinions. From the information obtained from the reliability test, Cronbach's alpha was applied by taking the questionnaires to be used with the samples and the schools in the areas of Primary Education Service Area offices which were close to the samples. The overall level of reliability was 0.96, representing an excellent level of reliability.

Data Analysis Methods

Qualitative data analysis: the data obtained from the observations and interviews with key informants were analyzed using the following methods:

- (a) Open Coding involved reducing the data to ensure it is concise. Redundancies were removed by separating the data into the main points about each factor in order to identify the core of the data.
- (b) Axial/Theoretical Coding involved building relations between new data groups and data subgroups. It focused on contexts relating to ethnic group societies

and the management of basic education for ethnic groups by compiling the code data into the same category.

- (c) Selective/Focused Coding was a key process in the qualitative data analysis. It involved linking all the codes together to provide an overview or a story to explain the phenomenon under review and the condition of the contexts of ethnic societies that affect educational management. It contributed to policy formation for the management of basic education for Thai ethnic groups.

Quantitative data analysis: A statistical program was used to determine the Structural Equation Model (SEM). The data analysis process included an analysis of descriptive statistics, which involved using a statistical program to describe general information to be consistent with the research purposes. It also involved auditing the structural equation model and the basic education management model for ethnic groups in Thailand with a continuity measurement index of the structural equation model and the empirical data.

Verification of Policy Alternatives

Verification methods for auditing and policy alternatives were used which consisted of two stages: 1) preparation of post-research method: this method explained the factors, variables, lessons, causes, attitudes, and opinions found in the research; and 2) analysis of policy alternatives using the Delphi technique of comparing the viewpoints of respondents, who were representatives of such viewpoints and reflected a consensus (Linstone & Turoff, 2002).

Questionnaires were sent out that had passed the focus group in the first stage and then the experts for audit and verification in a second round. In the first round, the questionnaires were sent to be audited and verified regarding the policy alternatives for the management of basic education for Thai ethnic groups, together with analysis of median and interquartile ranges to produce the values to record in the questionnaires in the second round. When the experts had audited and verified the same answers in the second round, the questions were selected based on the score numbers. The experts could change the ratings and give reasons or additional suggestions as well.

Results

The results of the study can be concluded in accordance with the research objectives as follows.

Qualitative Findings

Ethnic Group Societies

The ethnic group policy experts, including scholars, perceived that the context of each Thai ethnic group greatly affected the management of their education. The ethnic groups in the highland and border regions had special characteristics, which differentiated them from the rest of society, who had different languages, cultures, and identities. Scholars in government agencies and in academia

agreed that the context of ethnic group societies affected the management of their basic education. They pointed out that the languages used for communication in daily life require teaching processes of Thai language for ethnic students with the concordant information from many sectors. In other words, the languages used for communication between students and teachers should be improved so that the education will be effective and appropriate for ethnic communities and surrounding societies.

Management of Education for Ethnic Groups and Educational Institutes

The content of subjects in the core curriculum should be shortened. Content from local communities should be inserted instead, in order to provide students and communities with an appropriate education. However, according to the local operational workers, problems teachers have encountered in integrating the curriculum could arise because they have no experience in the preparation of such a curriculum or instructional procedures. The overall results indicated that the key issue with policies and practice was the integration of curricula which were in accordance with local communities and met the requirements of students the most.

Education Policy Formation and Thai Ethnic Groups

Policy-makers should adopt a decentralized approach to the education management of Thai ethnic groups. The implementation of personnel policies requires more incentives in order to decrease the problems caused by educational staff changing jobs every year. For the audit and verification processes using the Delphi technique, the opinions of the 12 experts were consistent, that is, main actors were required in the following areas: 1) Primary Education Service Area offices, 2) local communities, 3) scholars, 4) civil society organizations, and 5) schools or educational institutes. This could be conducted by involving communities in adjusting local curricula to suit the area. The relations of the actors are represented in Figure 2.

The structure of the five actors represents the key policy formation roles in the public areas because the process of policy formation would be initiated by bringing the traditional knowledge of communities into the curricula of schools in the highland and border regions. In practice, communities could not develop or apply the curricula directly as they lack the required experience and expertise in researching. The actors who were experts in educational policies and the schools were required to play roles as developers and create knowledge from information and theoretical concepts as a foundation. Afterward, the key actors could participate in public area policy via the Primary Education Service Area offices, communities, and educational policy experts. They must open educational policies for participation by community members and scholars. The information would be provided from research results as reliable references.

This public area policy formation needs to be controlled by legislation or regulation in order to meet the requirements of each sector. While the results of the policy formation were obtained from public areas, the key actors were civil society organizations. These had relations with

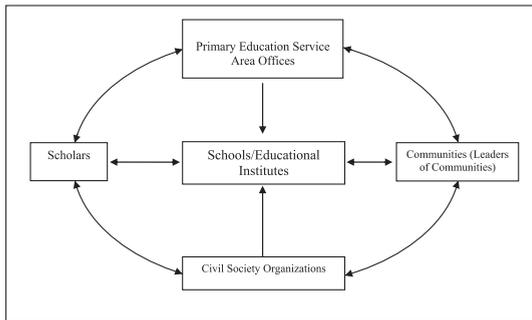


Figure 2 Actors related to basic education policy formation for Thai ethnic groups

the communities in the areas as they would continually carry out activities. In practice, scholars who were expert in educational policies did not survey continuously so that they could not push the concepts or methods of development. As a result, civil society organizations must lead the way in pushing policy implementation together with Primary Education Service Area office staff and the schools in the targeted areas.

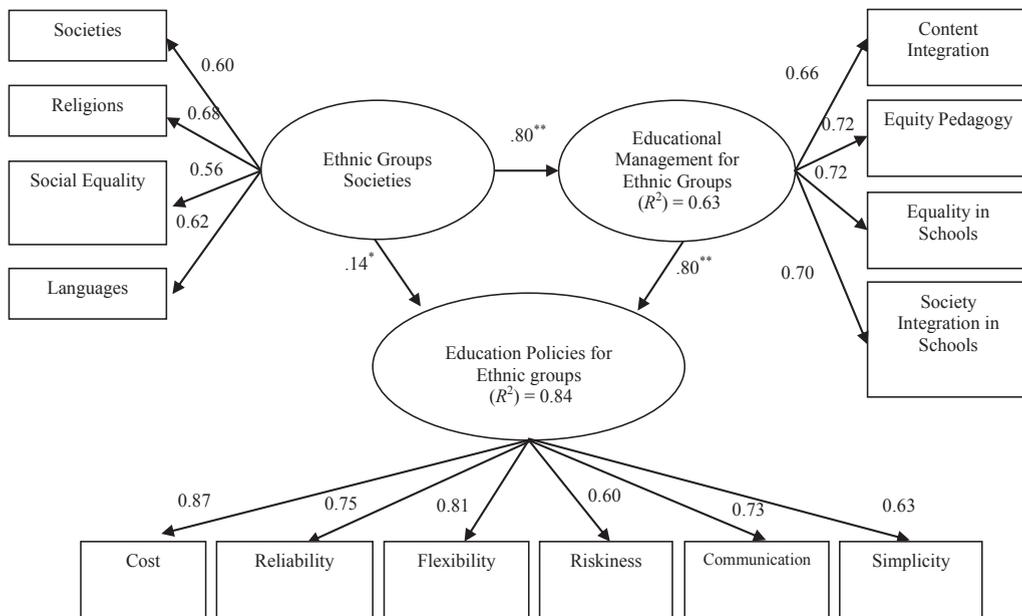
Quantitative Findings

All pairs of variables were statistically significant at the .01 level. All pairs of correlation values were positive in the range .205–.742. Two pairs of variables had the highest correlation, consisting of worthiness of policy (COST) and probability of policy (DOABLE) with a correlation of .742 and they were associated at a high level.

The worthiness of policy (COST) and flexibility of objective (FLEX) had a correlation of .708, and were associated at a high level. Variables with low correlations were political risk (RISK) and the social equality of ethnic groups (EQUAL), which had a correlation of .205 and were associated at a low level. The 14 variables under review were correlated in a positive direction.

When auditing the structural equation model of basic education for Thai ethnic groups, it was found to be inconsistent with the empirical data as determined by the *p*-value with a statistical significance of .001. The determined value must be greater than .05, to meet the criteria. The value of chi-squared (χ^2/df) was 3.64, which did not meet the criteria. The average standard error of measurement (SRMR) was 0.02, which met the criteria. The goodness-of-fit index (GFI) was 0.89, which did not meet the criteria. The adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) was 0.09, which did not meet the criteria. However, the comparative fit index (CFI) was 0.90, which met the criteria.

Finally, the suitability of sample size (HOELTER) was 99 at a level of .05, which did not meet the criteria. As with the study results, the structural equation model of basic education for Thai ethnic groups was adjusted. The model was consistent with the empirical data, as determined by a *p*-value with a statistical significance of .06. The determined value must be greater than .05, which met the criteria. The value of χ^2/df was 1.29, which met the criteria. The SRMR was 0.01, which met the criteria. The GFI was 0.96, which met the criteria. The AGFI was 0.93, which met the criteria. The CFI was 0.90, which met the criteria. Finally, HOELTER was 285 at the significance level of .05, which met the criteria. All the results are presented in Figure 3 below.



(***p* <= .001, **p* <= .05) chi-squared = 76.298, chi-squared/df = 1.293, df = 59, *p*-value = .064, GFI=0.963, CFI=0.991, RMR = 0.013, RMSEA = 0.032.

Figure 3 Analysis of the structural equation model for the educational management for Thai ethnic groups

The direct, indirect, and total effects of the factors under review on the formation of educational policies for ethnic groups were considered. The direct and indirect effects of ethnic group societies (ETHNIC) on the educational management of ethnic groups (EDUCATION) resulted in a coefficient of direct effects of 0.80 with a statistical significance of .001 without indirect effects. The coefficient of total effects was 0.80 with a statistical significance of .001.

The effects of ethnic group societies (ETHNIC) on the formation of educational policies for ethnic groups (POLICY) had a direct effect coefficient of 0.14 with a statistical significance of .05. There was also a transition of effects over the educational management of ethnic groups (EDUCATION), and the coefficient of indirect effects was 0.63 with a statistical significance of .05. The coefficient of the total effects was 0.77 with a statistical significance of .05.

The effects of education management for ethnic groups (EDUCATION) on the formation of educational policies for ethnic groups (POLICY) had a direct effects coefficient of 0.80 with a statistical significance of .001 without indirect effects. The total effects coefficient was 0.80 with a statistical significance of .001. The statistical values are shown in Table 1.

Discussion

For the survey of the management of basic education for Thai ethnic groups, schools were surveyed that were located in the highlands and border regions. Transportation was difficult because of the nature of the region's valleys and steep cliffs, especially in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai provinces. A car was used to survey the schools located in valleys or between mountains. The most common ethnic groups were in Kanchanaburi—the Mon people, who mainly found in Sunkraborti district. Most ethnic groups in Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai were Chinese Yunnan, Burmese, or Karen. Most ethnic groups lived in the highland and border regions. The instruction management approach used by the schools in the highland and border regions was consistent with the core curriculum of the Thai Ministry of Education. This consists of eight subjects: (1) Thai language; (2) mathematics; (3) science; (4) social, religious and cultural studies; (5) health and physical education; (6) art, (7) careers and technology, and (8) foreign languages.

Table 1

Direct, indirect, and total effects of the studied factors on the formation of educational policies for ethnic groups

Dependent variable	Influence variable					
	Ethnic			Education		
	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE
Education	0.80**	–	0.80**	–	–	–
Policy	0.14*	0.63*	0.77*	0.80**	–	0.80**

(** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$) Index of consistency, chi-squared = 76.298, chi-squared/df = 1.293, df = 59, p -value = .064, GFI = 0.963, CFI = 0.991, RMR = 0.013

RMSEA = 0.032, EDUCATION (R^2) = 0.63, POLICY (R^2) = 0.84. ETHNIC = Ethnic group societies; EDUCATION = Management of education for ethnic groups; POLICY = Formation of educational policies for ethnic groups

An interesting issue arose in the Kanchanaburi schools, which used Christian instructions and Japanese teaching styles to combine the cultures of each tribe. This enabled students to communicate in more than one language, such as Thai, English, Japanese, Chinese or their own tribal language. The key actors in the formation of educational policies for Thai ethnic groups consisted of: 1) Primary Education Service Area offices; 2) local communities; 3) scholars; 4) civil society organizations; and 5) schools or educational institutes. According to Eóin and Lisa (2012) actors mapping includes: 1) NGOs and interest groups; 2) institutions, advisors, and bureaucrats; 3) informal, personal relationships; 4) media; and 5) target decision makers.

The main obstacles to education management in the highland and border regions were a lack of comprehension of the social and cultural integration of ethnic group communities into school curricula. Another issue was that teachers found transportation in the highland and border regions difficult, which caused them to move away from these areas. However, this problem was consistent with Suwannasuan, Chaityakit, Markshoe, and Thamrongsoththisakul (2013) who studied patterns in education management for disadvantaged children in the highlands of northern Thailand, and suggested human resource management needs to be addressed due to the lack of teachers in these regions. The lack of teachers in these areas is a big problem because students cannot learn if teachers refuse to work there. The government must therefore change its human resource management policy to address this issue.

The structural equation model of the management of education model for ethnic groups was consistent with the empirical data. It indicated that the ethnic group society factor influenced the education factor for ethnic groups. The educational management factor for ethnic groups also influenced the formation of educational policies for ethnic groups at a very high level. The formation of educational policies for ethnic groups in the highland and border regions should give precedence to Thai and tribal language skills. They should include the cultures of these communities by integrating them into the curricula, which will encourage students to take pride in their own tribes and also to preserve the cultural heritage of their tribes. The indicators of the formation of educational policies for ethnic groups in the highland and border regions indicated there they were highly cost-effective in formulating policies that considered the satisfaction of communities and leaders of ethnic groups as on graduation, students could work in careers that were accepted and had socioeconomic status. This could assure policy effectiveness. In other words, the worth of governmental policies should be measured not by numbers or profit centers, but by the satisfaction of the people using these public services.

Regarding the mechanism and process of basic education for ethnic groups in the highland and border areas of Thailand, this research indicated that the community must have knowledge from within by the inclusion of ethnic lifestyles in the curriculum. However, teachers cannot integrate the knowledge of these ethnic groups because they do not understand the culture or lifestyle of those ethnic groups. Moreover, the implementation of basic education for ethnic groups does not have the support of

scholars within the community. While scholars in schools are important actors to drive policy, NGOs have proved to have a stronger relationship with Thai ethnic groups. Therefore, scholars who do not know about Thai ethnic groups need to coordinate with NGOs. Accordingly, Maddison and Denniss (2009) suggested that a concerted

effort between these different actors in formulating and implementing the policy for ethnic groups is needed. In other words, the basic education policy for Thai ethnic groups should focus on the street level with emphasis on looking into the stakeholders of education in the highland and border regions. Finally, this research elaborated that

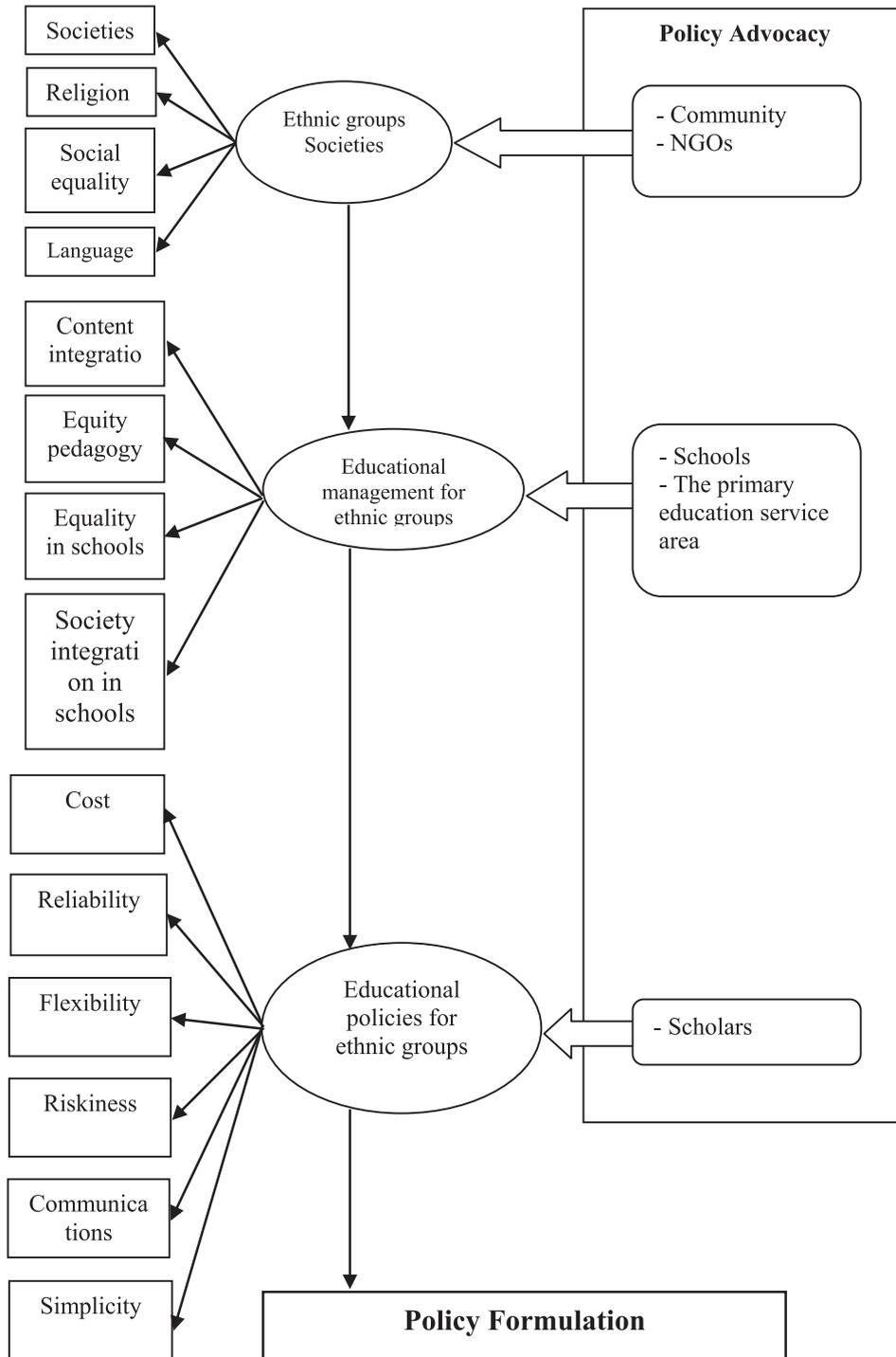


Figure 4 Basic education mechanism and process for Thai ethnic groups

the lack of a basic education policy for Thai ethnic groups as mentioned above is the main obstacle in implementing the policy (Figure 4).

The policy implications revealed that the basic education policy for ethnic groups was hampered by the geography in the areas where they lived which was mountainous or deep forest, and so was difficult to reach. The research showed communication was further impeded by inaccessible terrain. Communication should be directly between the primary education service area leaders and community leaders. Therefore, community leaders should have devolved power in deep forest and mountainous areas. Finally, geographical risks can be addressed through material management such as employing teachers from the local area, using new media such as the Internet, and by an increased budget.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research found that basic education for Thai ethnic group still has several deep-rooted problems. For example, the curriculum is not consistent with the culture and beliefs of Thai ethnic groups in the highlands and border areas. Problem with personnel shortages in education in the highlands still persist. In addition, teachers do not understand the ethnic lifestyle, which has proved to be the main obstacle. Consequently, the provision of basic education for Thai ethnic groups must incorporate the following: knowledge of Thai ethnic groups, the management of school, and preparation of education policies for Thai ethnic groups. These factors are suggested to make the basic education policy for Thai ethnic groups more sustainable. The key actors found to be the most important policy drivers and mechanisms to promote basic education for Thai ethnic groups, consisted of: 1) Primary Education Service Area offices, 2) local communities, 3) scholars, 4) civil society organizations, and 5) schools or educational institutes.

Policy Recommendations

A number of suggestions can be made based on the findings of this study.

Personnel Policies

Due to problems with the high teacher turnover rates in the highland and border regions, the Ministry of Education should prepare regulations for assigning teachers. These should focus on recruiting personnel from the communities where they will be working or from the areas in which the ethnic groups live. They should also consider increasing welfare and reasonable compensation for working in the highland and border regions in order to reduce teacher turnover and resolve communication problems between teachers and students, which arise due to the use of tribal languages. This would ensure continuity of instruction, if there are teachers working permanently in these areas.

Policies of Societies, Cultures and Traditions of Ethnic Groups

It was found that ethnic group society factors highly influenced the formation of educational policies for ethnic groups. The Ministry of Education should promote the integration of the cultural heritage of ethnic groups in schools by organizing activities following their traditions. These can be seen as an exchange of learning among different ethnic cultures in order to create awareness. The Ministry of Social Development and Human Security should organize activities with ethnic groups in the highland and border regions to create recognition in the societies and to maintain the identities of the ethnic groups.

Education Management Policies for Thai Ethnic Groups

The Ministry of Education should determine strategic plans for education in Thailand, as the preparation of curricula for Thai ethnic groups is still not consistent with the ways these ethnic groups live. Thus, they should increase the amount of content dedicated to ethnic communities by studying their histories.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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