

## The Roles and Functions of Support Teachers for Secondary School Learners with Visual Impairment

■ Prayat Phunong-ong



**Abstract.** The purpose of this study was to investigate the roles and functions of the Support Teachers (ST) of the visually impaired (VI) in Thailand. Being a blind man, I rely largely on reading from my fingertips. The literature review was based on the study of all available English language printed materials that are transcribed in Braille, such as Braille printed copies of books and articles. In this particular study, in order to conduct the interviews, my principal advisor kindly supported me by doing the field work together. The setting involved purposive sampling that was used to identify 30 participants who had experience of the Support Teacher's role and function in the education of the VI students in three schools at Nakohn Ratchisima, Northeastern Thailand. There were four focus group interviews. Interview data and document review were integrated to answer the main research questions and specific researcher questions. Based on "Deep Listening Coding", the findings were presented in nine categories. Four categories were integrated to describe the roles: (1) Supporter's role, (2) Coordinator's role, (3) Trainer's role, and (4) Counselor's role. The other five categories were integrated to summarize the functions of the Support Teachers: (1) Provide Material as needed, (2) Orientation and Mobility (OM) for all blind students, (3) Facilitate IT support, (4) Assist Physical and Mental tasks, and (5) Coordinate stakeholder Support. The research reported in this study made a significant contribution to our knowledge of the important roles and functions that Support Teachers play in Thai education system, especially for visually impaired (VI) and revealed the benefits to the society, as well as to the Support Teachers, school administrators, and policy makers.

**Keywords:** Visual Impairment, Disability, Blind, Support Teacher, Human Rights, Education System in Thailand

### Introduction

Education for All is a goal set by the UNESCO, to be reached by the year 2015. In Thailand this goal is being pursued, and in the special case of visually impaired students, the best learning conditions must be found. In the world, there are presently roughly 6,000 million people. It is estimated that there are over 600 million persons with disabilities in the world today. Two-thirds of them, 400 million persons, live in the Asian-Pacific regions (UNESCO, 2005).

The numbers in Thailand are in proportion to the world figures. Considering different methods of census, up to about 1 million of the population are visually impaired. A sizeable proportion of them are at school age. Given the size of this population and significance of the issues and challenges that they face, further efforts must be made to support Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in order to reduce the socio-economic gap that exists between disabled and non-disabled persons.

"Advanced technology and the advent of globalization have pressurized many countries, including Thailand, to compete on the world market. Advantages include an educated population, high calibre human resources, competitive-edge potential and wisdom. Education is the most important factor in evolving the human mind towards quality and calibre. Thailand has long contemplated developing and modernizing its antiquated education system and evidently, with the launch of the new



Education Act B.E. 2542, it is now constructing a national competitive edged foundation of enhanced capacity. As a result, this pioneering platform will assure Thais the opportunity of embarking on a new scenario full of promise.”

(*THE NATION*: Wednesday 7th, June 2000, page A6. Found in the internet, accessed in 2005)

In Thailand, there are 11 schools for the visually impaired throughout the country, two schools run by the government and nine schools run by the private sector. Two government schools are school for the Blind in Chiang Mai located in the North of Thailand and school for the Blind in Surat Thani which is located in the South of Thailand. Of nine Private-run schools, there are four in the Central region (Bangkok, Chonburi, Lopburi, Petburi), three in the Northeast region (Khon Kaen, Nakorn Ratchasima, and Roi-Et ). Two schools are in the North of Thailand, (Lampang and Prae) and one in the South (Hat Yai).

Children with disabilities have been marginalized by the school systems all over the world until recently, and in some cases, up to now. Marginalization is a threat to society. Education for all is still a goal that our society is about to accomplish. “Education for All” was the ultimate goal of the Jomtien Conference of 1990. This promotes the idea that the right of every child to an education is proclaimed universal declaration of human rights and forcibly reaffirms in the world declaration on Education for All by the year of 2000. In order to further objectives of education for all, a world conference on special needs education was organized in Salamanca, Spain, 1994 by the government of Spain in cooperation with UNESCO, there were more than 300 participants representing 92 governments and 25 international organizations. The adoption of the Salamanca statement and framework for action proclaims, “We call on all governments and urge them to adopt as a matter of law or policy, the principal of inclusive education, enrolling all children in regular schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise”. Special needs education bridges the gap that can be observed throughout the world between need and services available has prompted revision of the strategies for education of children with disabilities and learning problems. More particularly, it has been shown that special schools and centers are incapable of meeting the educational needs of most disabled children.

Such recommendations are the impetus of this study to investigate the role and function of the Support Teachers (ST) of the visually impaired (VI) in Thailand.

### Research Questions

In Thailand over the ten years from 1995 until 2005 many students with VI have dropped out from high schools before completing their course. The grade average of those who have persisted in secondary school is often very low. A study conducted by the researcher in nine schools in 2005 found that, of 200 high school students with VI enrolling, 60 dropped out over their schooling during this decade, with grade-point averages below 2 points. The majority had a grade point of lower than 2.5. In this situation, I believe that one of the main issues is how the people who are working closely with these students support IV students . This study focused on the roles and functions of Support Teachers (ST).

1. What is the role and function of the Support Teachers (ST) of the visually impaired (VI) students in Thailand?
2. What are the competencies of the Support Teachers (ST) as facilitators of the changing processes of education of the visually impaired (VI) students?

### Literature Review

#### Disability Rights are Human Rights

There are several national surveys that have included questions regarding disability. The National Statistics Office, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and the Ministry of Education have all conducted official data on the disability population.



According to the Ministry of Public Health, the number of people with disabilities has increased in the past five years. Motor vehicle accidents, which injure approximately 900,000 people per year, are a significant factor in that increase and are the third largest cause of disability. Work and factory related accidents are another factor, reportedly injuring 50,000 people per year. Physical disability appears to be the most prevalent disability type, with estimates ranging from 46.6% to 56.9% of people with disabilities. Based on survey results, congenital disabilities, illness and traffic accidents are the three main causes of physical disability. Today there are over 1,000,000 (One Million) disabled persons in Thailand (IDRM, 2005).

The Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act establishes a general definition of disability and five medically based disability categories. Section 4 of the Act defines a “disabled person” as “a person with physical, intellectual or psychological abnormality or impairment as categorized and prescribed in the Ministerial Regulations.” Ministerial Regulation No.2 A.D.1994 (B.E. 2537) classifies disabilities into five categories: physical; hearing and communication; intellectual and learning. The terms generally used to refer to people with disabilities are demeaning. For example, “Pigan,” the term used for people with physical disabilities, can be translated into English as “completely broken,” implying that one cannot function, work or be productive. “Kon ta bord” is used to refer to people who are blind. This terminology is derogatory and reflects widespread public opinion that such an individual cannot see and therefore cannot learn. The word “Bi” is often used to describe people who are deaf and literally translates into English as “mad.” Official translations into English also tend to use problematic language. For example, the English versions of several pieces of legislation use the terms “handicapped,” “deficient” and “mental infirmity” to describe people with disabilities. These translations have been retained within direct quotations.

### **A Historical Overview of Education of the Persons with Disability in Thailand**

Thailand’s 62 million citizens (i.e., 81% of the population) live primarily in rural locales. The disabled are part of the “third world” of Thai society. Of about 4 million disabled persons in Thailand, there are about 964,000 Visually Impaired Persons, and about 180,000 of them have severe eye deficiencies up to total blindness. Most disabled, 87%, live in rural areas (Chonlatanon, 2005a, 2005b).

In 1993, 238,039 (22%) of the disabled persons were school-aged but the vast majority was under-educated. The Ministry of Education indicated that only 7,242 of these school-aged children attended an educational institution. Under present circumstances, it will be necessary for certain groups, especially those with multiple disabilities, to be kept in institutions where staff and facilities are concentrated. The better method is integration of the disabled into mainstream society and into mainstream education (Chonlatanon, 2005a, 2005b).

The Christian Foundation for the Blind in Thailand (CFBT) is one of the biggest non profit organizations for the Blind in Thailand. This organization supports an Inclusive Education (IE) or Integrated Education in Thailand and South East Asia. CFBT works with the channels that are available. For Vietnam, this is the Blind School in Hanoi. For Laos PDR, this is the Ministry of Health. For Cambodia and Myanmar, these are private NGO’s. CFBT take account of different political systems existing in these countries with respect different understandings and different forms of government. CFBT contacts the people, our partners, in an informal way. After doing the tour to the policy-makers, we train educators, volunteers, teachers, technicians, and so forth. The educators, the teachers, and all the others in these countries will then take over and teach the visually handicapped in their communities. Thus CFBT transfer their knowledge, functioning as multipliers, to be the more effective in accomplishing the mission. (Punong-ong, 2002a; Vitsomboon & Thavorn, 2009).

### **VI Students in Thai High Schools**

Panek (2002, cited in Joseph, 2010) describes blindness and visual impairment as complex. The sense of sight interacts with other senses and has an impact on the physical and psychological aspects of a person’s development. Panek stated that “a well functioning person uses all the senses and body



functions as an integrated whole when interacting with the environment” (p. 157). Visual impairment is defined in terms of visual acuity and residual field of vision. On the other hand, Blindness is defined as “the total loss of sight”. However, for the purposes of this study visual impairment will be used in reference to all individuals who are considered to be legally blind and not those who are considered to be totally blind.

The 2001 “Report of Disabled Persons” of the National Statistical Office of Thailand informs that, of a total Thai population of 62,821,000, as many as 1,100,761 (1.8 percent) were categorized as “disabled” persons. Of these 123,157 (11.2 percent) were persons with visual impairment (VI) ranging from total blindness to varying degrees of partial sightedness.

In 2001 the National Statistics Office of Thailand estimated that the number of disabled school-aged children in the age bracket of 0 – 14 years was 96,469, while there were 143,628 disabled persons between ages 15 and 24. Among the disabled persons, 123,157 or 11.8 % had visual impairments. The number of children and young persons aged 11-18 with VI is therefore estimated to be about 10,000. In 2004 government statistics indicated that the total number of persons with VI in Special and Public Schools, including non-formal education, was 2,225, out of 42,560 who were registered at the Public Provincial Welfare (TAB, 2004). What is not known from research is how many of these children are in attendance at secondary school or the factors affecting their persistence and academic success there. For the most recent figures available, we find that, as reported by the Committee on Education for VI in Mainstream Education in 2005, there are 220 high schools having 3 to 12 VI students throughout the country. Altogether, about 925 VI students are in these schools.

Many principals and teachers of the schools that provide IE have problems in encouraging children with VI to achieve or to continue their studies. The principals express their pity by allocating what are referred to as ‘mercy’ grades to allow them to continue studying. Some educators in Thailand believe that mercy grades should not be used.

### Research Design

This section presents the rationales for the interviewing research design of this study. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) stated that the purpose of the research design is to set up overall aspects on what, how, with whom and where the research is to be conducted.

In their article, “Overview of qualitative research interviewing”, Kvale and Brinkman (2009, p. xvii) stated that:

“If you want to know how people understand their world and their lives, why not talk with them? Conversation is a basic mode of human interaction. Human beings talk with each other, they interact, pose questions, and answer questions. Through conversations we get to know other people, learn about their experience, feelings, attitudes, and the world they live in”

Symon and Cassell (2004) proposed that qualitative research interviews vary in methodological features such as length, style of questioning, and participant numbers (i.e. group or individual). They identified three types of qualitative research interviews: (1) realist interview, (2) phenomenological interview, and (3) social constructionist interview.

The main advantages of group interviews include that they are low cost and rich in data.

Focus group interviews allow the saving of time by interviewing a group of people at the same time instead of interviewing different individuals at different times, and the elements of group dynamics and of discussion among the participants are highlighted when group discussions are conducted (Flick, 2006, Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

In the current study, focus group interviewing was used because : **First**, the issues that need to explored and need a complex, detailed understanding of the issues. The details were established by talking directly with the group of participants, **second**, the main advantages of group interviews include that they are low cost and rich in data **third**, of the need to save time and money madeand **fourth**, I also want to understand the context and setting in which participants in this study address any problems or issues.



## Data Collection

### Setting of the Study

There are three schools at Nakohn Ratchisima Province in Northeastern Thailand: (1) Boonwattana School, (2) Korat Pittayakom School, and (3) Nakorn Rachasima School for the Blind

### Participant Selection

The key participants in this study were Support Teachers who were currently working in the province. However, I needed to select other participants in order to confirm my findings and to make my data saturated. Thus, I selected Resource Teachers, staff who are working in Blind School at Nakohn Ratchisima and current Visually Impaired students. Finally, there are 4 focus groups totaling 30 participants. In addition, I had a meeting discussion with the group of administrators in the Basic Education Division of the Province to gain more information that was related to my study.

The main steps in the interview process were: preparing for interviewing, conducting the interview, and recording the interview. Maykut and Morsehouse (1994) suggest that the interviewer should gather the materials and equipment that the interviewer will need to conduct the interview, including tape recorder, batteries, interview guide, Braille paper and writing frame or Braille slate/ stylus, pen and paper for note taking.

In the *first step* of the interview, the interviews were identified through the purposive sampling method. All participants were informed that the participation in the project was on a voluntary basis and that, if they did not want to join the projects, they could refuse. They also were advised that, even if they had decided to join the project, they could stop at any time, if they wish to do so. The *second step* of the interview involved recording the interview. A tape recorder was used with each group interview and individual interview throughout the data collection process. It should noted here that my principal advisor and my assistant assisted me in this matter. In each focus group interview, my principle adviser is not only advised me , but kindly acted as my note taker. My assistant kindly documented the setting with photographs.

## Data Analysis

Patton (2002) stated that there is no precise point when data collection ends and data analysis begins. This data analysis began right away after data collection in order to facilitate later data collection phases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), although Creswell (2007, 2009) claimed that data analysis acutally is done simultaneously with data collection to shape and focus the study as it proceeds.

## Coding

Coding is organizing the raw data into meaningful categories. It is how the investigator differentiates and combines the data that have been collected (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Saldana (2009) reviewed 28 manual coding techniques to help researchers clarify what manual coding is suitable for a study and concluded that there are two coding cycles: First Cycle methods are those processes that happen during the initial coding of data and are divided into seven subcategories. Most First Cycle methods are fairly simple and direct. Second Cycle methods are a bit more challenging because they require such analytic skills as classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting, conceptualizing, and theory building.

A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language- based or visual data. The portion of data to be coded during First Cycle coding processes can range in magnitude from a single word to a full sentence to an entire page of text to a stream of moving images. In Second Cycle coding processes, the portions coded can be the exact same units, longer passages of text, and even a reconfiguration of the codes themselves developed thus far (Saldana, 2009).





In conclusion, there are many different ways how to analyze the data. Some scholars argue that one of the most difficult skills in learning qualitative analysis is the ability to see what is in the data. However, after discussion with my principle advisor we found that there has no manual coding or any software program that suitable in this study as I am a Blind. Finally, we came up with our strategy of coding from focus group interview. We call this kind of coding is “*Deep Listening Coding (DLC)*”.

### What is Deep Listening Coding?

I would like to start the process of deep listening coding by demonstrating one of the data collections. For example on January 2011 my principal advisor, my assistant and I want to conduct the focus groups with 30 participants. We divided them into 4 groups to be interviewed.

During the data collection, as the principal advisor took notes, my secretary took pictures as needed, and I listened to what the participants said. All interviewees and interviewers performed as we had planned.

After finishing the focus group, on the same day, we: the principle advisor and I then have a discussion using my principle advisor’s notes and my memory. We summarized what we learned. I would like to name this conclusion as “*Summary 1*”.

Then I send the tape record to have a transcribed. After that we, the principle advisor and I have another discussion using the “*Summary 1*” and the transcribed note and my memory. We summarized of what we learn. I would like to name this conclusion as “*Summary 2*”.

Then the process continues of another mean of data collection. We, the principle advisor and I, get together to have a discussion of what we learned via the email and mobile phone and we summarized of what we learned using summary 2 and my memory. In this time, my assistant supported me by reading what my principle advisor and I have done (see figure 1 below). We always kept in mind the research questions. I would like to name the conclusion of this step the “*Summary 3*”. The “*summary 3*” finally became the research themes.



Figure 1. Reading support from my assistant at the same time using my finger follows the Braille alphabet.

### Findings and Discussion

The findings were extracted from focus group interviews. There were about 30 participants, selected by using purposive sampling. The findings were codes by “*Deep Listening Coding*” from 4 focus group interviews with my principal advisor who facilitated me on the field work at all times and then developed concepts and categories. A composite table of categories of meaning which emerged from interviews appears below as Table 1.



Table 1. Coding categories developed to describe IV process support

Categories		
1. Role and Function Support of Teacher (ST)		
2. Finance Resource Support		
3. Material Resource Support		
4. Government Policy Support		
5. Royal Family Support		
6. IT Resource Support		
7. Physical and Mental Support		
8. The Voice of Support Teachers		
9. Suggestion from Support Teachers		
Total	9	Categories

**Response to Research Question One:*****“What is the role and function of the Support Teachers (ST) of the visually impaired (VI) students in Thailand?”***

In responding to this research question, nine categories of findings were identified as being related. Four categories were integrated to the roles: (1) Supporter's role, (2) Coordinator's role, (3) Trainer's role, and (4) Counselor's role. The others five categories were integrated to the function of the Support Teachers: (1) Provide Material as needed, (2) Orientation and Mobility (OM) for all blind students, (3) facilitate IT support, (4) Assist Physical and Mental, and (5) Coordinate stakeholder Support. Findings for the role and function of Support Teacher of the visually impaired (VI) students in Thailand were divided into two interrelated themes that have emerged as follows:

**Theme One: Roles of Support Teachers:****1. Supporter's role**

The data emerged in this study. For example, the Support Teacher conducted or assigned a person who will send the children every morning to the mainstreaming school and fetch them in the afternoon. They also have counselor in public school to access information related to their studies. They attaches greater importance to the raising the status of teaching the blind in various subject including measures for the teaching. In addition to that, an important function of RT is to give Orientation and Mobility for all blind students who attend in regular schools to be able to walk normally in the campus

In short, Teacher preparation is an important factor in the effective teaching of children with special needs. Gearheart, Weishahn and Gearheart (1992) proposed that three general types of knowledge are necessary for teachers to be effective in teaching exceptional students: (a) an understanding of the history of education for individuals with disabilities and the legislation that supports service delivery; (b) specific information about disabilities and how the characteristics of each disability impact upon a student's instructional needs; and (c) knowledge of and skills in the instructional strategies that are effective with special needs students. So that administrative structures and lines of responsibility need to be clear. Policy needs to be clearly stated and communicated from



the central to local level so that parents of children with VI understand their rights and school understand their applications. The detail in implementation and the role of the support system must be clearly understood by all concerned, and widely understood by the community.

## **2. Trainer's role**

One of the important roles of RT is to train Orientation and Mobility (OM) for all blind students who attend regular schools to be able to walk normally in the campus. Punong-ong (1998) stated that in Thailand there are preparation programs to prepare the students with visual impairment before entering high schools. Students learn, e.g., Braille grade 2 and 3 for foreign languages, French, English, and scientific symbols, mathematical symbols/mathematics, geographic symbols, how to use the tools such as calculator, and abacus. Then the peers in class learn to understand the problem of blindness, their weaknesses and strengths and how their peers in school can be helpful. In addition to that, they practice O & M to familiarize walking about in the school compound, learning directions and the walkways to different buildings, as well as social and daily living skills in the Thai style. Punong-ong (1998) also points out that the important thing that needs to be considered is activities. Each school has a curriculum objective, like the traditional National Day, religion day, and others. The blind children need to be introduced to them as soon as they register at the school. The teachers should follow the regular curriculum and only allow adapting some ways of teaching, such as painting, drawing, sculpturing, and changes in the method of producing the objects by assembling pieces of clay or other kinds of materials. In sports, fighting with swords will be replaced by boxing or wrestling, or swimming.

## **3. Coordinator's role**

The Resource Teacher (RT) is the teacher who is assigned to be the resource person coordinating among teachers in public schools, to the parents or blind students, and the school for the blind. His or her duty is to check the homework and to give advice for the blind students from regular school, including the materials particularly for their learning daily activities. RT also conducts or assigns a person who will send the children every morning in mainstreaming school and fetch them in the afternoon. They also have counselor in public school to access information related to their studies. They attaches greater importance to the raising the status of teaching the blind in various subject including measures for the teaching. In addition to that, important function of RT is to give Orientation and Mobility for all blind students who attend in regular schools to be able to walk normally in the campus.

## **4. Counselor's role**

The emerged data from focus group interview elaborates the role of the counselor. The counselor is responsible for the education of VI students in regular school, he/she should have things necessary for individuals, giving advice about the process to all who involve in the process on various type of educational provision for VI and facilitate among blind children, peers and their teachers, seeking for information. In addition to that, the counselor, working as coordinator for education, materials, funding to be undertaken and should be responsible for each aspect. Joseph (2010) point out that individuals who are visually impaired are at a major risk of experiencing depression, social isolation, and emotional distress, due to the stress they encounter throughout their lives. In the study of Johnson (1989 cited in Davis 2011) the author critically examined 35 years of literature on group counseling of people who are visually impaired. Group counseling has been utilized to assist consumers with visual impairment and blindness to improve self concept, personal adjustment to disability, and interactional skills. More importantly, group counseling is one of the primary methods of treatment that is utilized in combating psychosocial problems encountered by persons who are visually impaired. Punong-ong (1998) concluded that an interesting issue is about the environment of





the schools, as counselors may need to learn and understand the environment in order to give more efficiency in counseling. The environment, where it is accessible by the blind students, for instance the library, dining hall, sports compound, and the children's playground, is crucial for the VI person's learning.

## **Theme Two: Functions of Support Teachers:**

### **1. Provide Materials as Needed**

Public donations to the blind school are important for it to provide text books in Braille, and for teacher training. This can be a mechanism for raising the status of teaching material for the blind students and the teachers that contribute to the assurance. The ultimate aim is development of the learners. Students use Braille books and other devices for reading using their finger tips. Examples of necessary materials include computers with special programs, CCTV for the low vision students and some equipment which can help the VI students.

However, from data emerged it has become clear to many professionals that there are some academic subjects that are particularly difficult for Braille reading students. These are science, mathematics and geography, much of the learning materials for these subjects are in specifically format, and Braille is the most efficient when read in the linear manner. The school for the blind is beginning to offer algebra, geometry, biography, general science, and geography for blind students from local schools that cannot get these classes in an accessible manner in these local school districts (Mongkolsrisawat, 2004; Punong Ong, 1998).

### **2. Orientation and Mobility (OM) for all Blind Students**

Again, one of the important roles and function of ST and RT is to train Orientation and Mobility (OM) for all blind students who attend in regular schools to be able to walk normally in the campus. Punong-ong (1998) recommended there is a very important thing is that teachers, or personnel related to the school function, need to organize a learning workshop to handle the blind students. Then they learn adaptable methods of teaching and acceptable quality of valuation; school computers need to be adapted by installing the computer software designed specifically for students with visual impairment. These things may take much longer than other things. Beside the process of academic study in terms of reading to write, reading to read and reading arithmetic, the blind students need to be taught the skills of learning to type on regular typewriters and using computers to print their reports and doing their homework. Getting to school among sighted peers in Thailand, both environmental adjustments and social attitudes of students with visual impairment towards the public schools and attitudes towards blind students are not routines but must be adapted to make things run smoothly.

One of the data that emerged from the interviews and that is very important in this issue was:

"...Before they enroll in regular school, they undergo to O&M (Orientation & Mobility) training, they familiarize the way of the school campus, way going to their classroom, way going to the comfort room, way going to the cafeteria and other places that would be accessible for them. Using their canes as their guide and also for their safety like stepping on the stairs. Sighted people also sometimes being careful when using the word "visually impaired" and "blind", blind also can be considered as visually impaired but being visually impaired has different eye conditions. It has the low vision and the total blindness. Sighted people can also undergo for the O&M training so we can fully understand the feeling and the life without vision...."

### **3. Facilitate IT Support**

The new invented equipments specially made for the VI now facilitates the tasks of coordination and accessible information that supports the system of education for the students with VI, implementation of the teaching reform, contributes to the raising of the teaching profession standard



and will be an efficient way of development for the barrier free for persons with Visually Impaired. The organization for children with disabilities brings certain equipments to use for their education, tax free from other countries. These encourage the learners to get their potential support.

#### **4. Assist Physical and Mental Support**

It emerged from the data that students should have opportunities for temporary removal of the multiple demands of being in local schools, able to address learning gaps caused by instructional overload, able to provide opportunity for professional collaborations regarding the individual needs of students. It is rare for students to stay at their own home for more than three years, when the students are admitted to the School for the blind. Local schools in surrounding is informed that we will provide specific services based on the needs that they have identified when those needs are met, it is our intension to transition the student back to his or her local school. Loumiet and Levalk (1993) draw attention to factors that need to be taken into account when integrated education is attempted. They note that: In schools that integrate children with VI “an additional curriculum” may be necessary “(usually by the visiting teacher) to meet specific needs of the child. For example, mobility, tactile awareness and life skills”; in terms of social competence interaction with family, peers and others self-concept, recognition and expression of emotions, non-verbal communication, values clarification, personal and social aspects of sexuality, physical aspects of sexual courteous social behavior problems-solving, decision-making and planning scholastic success, personal and civil responsibility, self-care and maintenance of personal environment, dressing, clothing, management, personal hygiene and grooming, toileting and feminine hygiene, eating, in different settings, food management, house-keeping and home maintenance, housing, telephone use, time concepts, obtaining and using money, health and safety, self-advocacy, etc. (p. 698).

#### **5. Coordinate the Stakeholders**

One of the functions that ST and RT must take responsibility for is to coordinate with the stakeholders, such as VI student family, VI student climate, Regular teachers, and administrative staff.

The data that emerged from the focus group showed that there are monthly meetings of the school members in order to support VI students. ST and RT should know the policy and the law, giving them the right to education and making the policy clearly stated in terms of such inclusive education. The government sector must make a commitment on the part of preparation and effective administrative procedures. Guidelines must be made clear that all schools must accept all children with disabilities, administrative procedures for VI groups, including children with disabilities need to be institutionalizing within all aspects of ministries of educations. This would include enrollment, school statistic target, assessment, record-keeping, curriculum, materials, teacher training indicators and any other in this regard the issue of children with VI should be in mainstream in aspect of every department of Ministry of Education which appropriate relevant aspects related to the education of special needs should also be mainstream within other relevant schooling. The administrative structure and links between central policy related to children with VI and practice in schools need to be very clearly established. There is a need for and effective structure within the Ministry of Education which takes responsibility for this implementation, such as special education office. There must be structure at the provincial, district and school levels, which may take the form of provincial or district special education centers. Support centers should work directly with the local regular community schools.

Qais Al-Said (2010) used a mixed method research design to explore the notion of what constitutes literacy, particularly as pertaining to people who are blind or visually impaired, specifically those that do not use Braille as their primary means to access and produce text. There were four groups of stakeholders - (a) university students, (b) teachers, and (c) professionals, each of whom worked with or were themselves blind or visually impaired, and (d) literacy specialists. The results of the study revealed a very complex understanding of what constitutes literacy but there was a general consensus as to what literacy means across those who were interviewed. They suggested that Braille



was not the only viable approach to accessing text, but because of technological advances, audition is also viable. Qais Al-Said made recommendations as to how this might be accomplished were provided.

According to the findings from the focus group interview, there are the provision of an inadequate additional curriculum, a lack of inclusion in the main teaching and learning process taking place in the mainstream classroom, as well as a lack of communication and adequate planning by the class teacher and teaching assistant. Lack of awareness training at all levels of system that can lead to negative attitudes and rejection of the VI students in mainstreaming school. In the study of Pogrud & Wibbenmeyer (2008 cited in Davis, 2011). Some people become teachers for VI student through transfer from regular education or another area of special education. Others come through an alternative route to certification. The goal of each route is to ensure that all students are taught by professionals that are well-prepared in both content knowledge and pedagogy

However, from my point of view as a blind person, and having conducted several pieces of research which indicate that poor communication between bursary and school level may result in confusion about what schools are expected to do, a support system urgently needs to be established. So far no support system is available which has the resources to carry out the tasks to which they have responsibility. This leads to the participation for the families, schools and the support teachers. Bursary, lack of preparation and training of school principal and teachers may result in negative experiences which reduce motivation and lead to hostility toward changes. Families of children with VI may be unaware of the policy and the right of the children to attend school, unless awareness raising is carried out urban and rural areas. School fees or problems with transport may prevent children with VI from accessing school in spite of the policy.

From the findings and discussion, it is clearly that Support Teachers (ST) are very important human resources. In responding to the main research question of this study, there are four roles of Support Teachers in this study. There are also five main functions of Support Teachers. Integration requires support for students to go on mainstream school. The Nakorn Ratchasima School for Blind supports students to go into mainstream schools. We interviewed students in three different schools, the Nakorn Ratchasima School for the Blind, the Boonwattana School (a regular school), and 12 blind students studying with the full support the blind school in Nakorn Ratchasima. One student showed how to use the Braille typewriter. She was in 6<sup>th</sup> year and ready to go to Thammasat University to study for college. Many blind students studied also in those schools, and others went abroad to study. Others are now working.

#### **Response to Research Question Two:**

***“What are the competencies of the Support Teachers (ST) as facilitators of the changing processes of education of the visually impaired (VI) students?”***

In responding to this research question, three categories of findings were integrated: Government policy, financial support, and competency. Findings for the competency of Support Teachers of the visually impaired (VI) students in Thailand were divided into three interrelated themes that emerged as follows:

#### **Competency of ST as Interpreted from this Study**

From the findings that emerged from the data, the ST and RT need sufficient training. Since we have many faculties of education in various universities, those higher education institutions should assign some staff to train resource teachers for better quality of teaching VI students in secondary schools. This is one of the serious issues in this study. It is about the competency of ST and RT. Some scholars point out that competency is (a) a cluster of related knowledge, attitudes, and skills that affects a major part of one's job; (b) that it correlates with performance on the job; (c) that can be measured against well accepted standards; and (d) that it can be improved via training and development.



Even competent teachers must overcome problems such as inadequate additional curriculum, lack of inclusion in the main teaching and learning process taking place in the mainstream classroom, and the lack of communication and adequate planning by the class teacher and teaching assistant. There is a lack of awareness training at all levels of the system that can lead to negative attitudes and rejection of the VI students in mainstreaming school. Therefore, the competency of ST and RT is very important. Renjan (2002) stated that competency is the combination of knowledge, skills, attitude and personality of an individual as applied to a role or job in the context of the present and future environment, that accounts for sustained success within the framework of the organizational values. Spencer and Spencer (1993), on the other hand, consider knowledge and skill competencies to be relatively easy to develop compared to self-concept, traits and motives because self-concept, trait and motives are the huddle part of person's competency. They conclude five levels of competency characteristics: (1) Motives – the things a person consistently thinks about or wants that cause actions or goals away from others; (2) Traits-Physical characteristics and consistent responses to situations or information; (3) Self-Concept-A person's attitudes, values, or self-image; (4) Knowledge-Information a person has in specific content areas; and (5) Skill-The ability to perform a certain physical or mental task.

In conclusion competency is one of many factors, which covers skills, knowledge, attitude and other elements and may influence performance at workplace. Every role consists of some competence unit as reflection of the function of skills in order to accomplish the work. Every competence unit describes the details of unit and outputs, work condition and level of performance criteria/standard of each element to be achieved. The application of competency based program is to achieve higher performance in various aspects of work processes, such as in training and development, business planning, performance management, career development and other aspects in human resource management especially Resource Teacher or Support Teacher who are need suitable competency for special support of VI students.

The four major roles and five main functions of Support Teachers should be considered in the key competency of the person who will be a Support Teacher for Visually Impaired. It should be noted here that without any financial support and without the right direction or the right policy from the government to implementation, we cannot progress further in terms of competency issues, so that I want to discuss more about financial support and policy of Thai government from the findings that emerged in this study.

### **Financial Support**

From data emerged two important financial resources. One is from the Thai government and public donations and the other one is from the Royal family.

The majority of funds are from public donations and some from the government resources. The public school and the parents of the students, including the alumni and members of society, support building up the resources room in each school. These come through professionals and add to the high quality in making effort to develop on a continuous basis through difficulties. Convincing the administrator of the school and community fully joined hands to help the administrator attend to the required quality and professional standards. The administrator's involvement therefore is the main point of the recommendations for and running the process.

In Nakorn Ratchasima there is different case, when the Royal Highness Princess Sirinton visits the public schools and makes generous donations to provide equipment. We consider as honoring the teachers and those who work in the school as outstanding achievers. Regarding the policy recommendations on this work, the Royal Family respected by the Thai people, when they involve achievements established a fund for promotion of education and their support is rewarding the whole community especially for the students with disabilities.



### **Government Policy Support**

Document review in this study shows there is government policy support. In the National Education Act 1999, faculty capacity as the educational policy-making body took preparatory steps to warranty the right for education for all children. The professional teachers designed are those with quality, attached to their position profession, and ready to teach all school children. This law make advance to learn for development and learning process to development which enables the policy recommendations on the teacher production or training. The primary aim is turning out new teachers of quality in accordance with the teaching profession standard. In each school where they have VI, teacher with specialized assigned to the school will serve as a new drive. The policy recommendations met development needs appropriately (UNESCO, 2005).

In Thailand, the law protects the rights of all Thais in the title for education. Teacher education for modernization of Thai society reflects the design to produce teachers of International standards, modeled on those of other countries in Europe and America. Teacher education for a successful new model for education has been aimed at production of professional teachers of VI.

In summary, teacher production in Thailand for the new century has significantly contributed to national unification and creation of community transforming global knowledge into the country, inclusion of the national ideal, and manpower production for civil service, local occupational development, and modernization through provision of more than education.

### **Implications**

#### **Implications for the School**

According to the findings that emerged in this study, there are some problem issues that need to be addressed: (1) There are some regular schools still misunderstand about educational system especially Visually Impaired condition so that they refuse to admit VI students according to no materials and any equipment support. They think the Blind or any VI students should study only in the school for the blind. (2) It is about teaching materials especially about Braille material documents and textbooks. They do not have enough for this. The participants suggest that the government or education administrators may need to do something about this obstacle, otherwise it will have more and difficult to solve the problems.

The schools which have VI study should be given special support from the Ministry of Education. They must evaluate the students whether they perform better and consider enhance learning. They have to consider planning and conducting teacher's trainings and seminars on effective teaching strategies and to continually provide opportunities for the students to apply what they have learned from the instruction.

#### **Implications for the Policy Maker**

The policy maker should be aware of the law and the rights of persons with disabilities to provide the appropriate support and also the curriculum adaptation technology. They must have the coordinating board for seeing the implementation of Integrated Education in each province and set up the fund for the poor blind children in the community or the school. In addition, every role consists of some competence unit as reflection of the function of skills in order to accomplish the work. Competency is one of key factors, which covers skills, knowledge, attitude and other elements and may influence performance at workplace. The application of competency based program is to achieve higher performance in various aspects of work processes, such as in training and development, business planning, performance management, career development and other aspects in human resource management especially Resource Teacher or Support Teacher who are need suitable competency for special support of IV students. According to the discussion, the four major roles and five main functions of Support Teachers should consider in the key competency of the person who will be a Support Teachers for Visually Impaired. Therefore, the policy maker or any regional education administrator may apply this finding into the policy and move forward for implementation and evaluation for the future.





### Recommendations

This researcher recommends that future researchers conduct a similar study using an experimental design to compare the performance of the students, so that they would further assess the improvement of the study. One of the important findings in this study is the importance of the competency of Support Teachers. Further research may need to be conducted, in order to set up the criteria for KPI (Key Performance Indicators) to be used to assess their competencies. Furthermore, this study focused only on the Nakohn Ratchisima area. There are 11 schools all over the country, so that the researcher recommends that further research be conducted in those schools to enable the results of this study to be generalized to other schools for the VI students in Thailand.

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