

## Immigrant Children and Their Opportunity to Gain an Education: A Case Study of Myanmar Community in Phetchaburi, Thailand

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### ABSTRACT

Affirming ASEAN Vision 2020, Thailand and other ASEAN members agree on several aspects of cooperation including creating “A Community of Caring Society”. This cooperation could lead to sustainable future of the region. Education is expected to be one means for the objective. This reflects in ASEAN Charter stating “To develop human resources through closer cooperation in education and life-long learning, and in science and technology, for the empowerment of the people of ASEAN and for the strengthening of the ASEAN Community”. The empowerment of the people of ASEAN would not be possible as long as the right to basic education of children, the future of ASEAN, including disadvantaged immigrant children in the region is not assured. This paper endeavours to explore the current state of opportunity to gain education of Myanmar immigrant children in Ban Laem, Phetchaburi, Thailand.

There is an unskilled labour shortage in Thailand resulting in an influx of legal and illegal immigrant workers from neighbour countries, especially Myanmar. The number of Myanmar immigrants in Thailand is growing rapidly, especially children. Ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Children to basic education, the Thai government provides 15-years of free education for all children in the country including the children of immigrants. Although the number of immigrant children is increasing greatly each year, the number of immigrant students enrolling in public schools in Thailand at less than 10% of their population is still underrepresented. This research explores the extent of immigrant education in one district of Phetchaburi, Thailand that is densely populated by Myanmar immigrants working in the fisheries industry. Findings illustrate challenges for the immigrant children to access the basic education in Thai public schools. Also suggested are proposals for community participation to promote educational opportunities for the local immigrant children.

**Keywords:** *immigrant children, education, case study*

### I. INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of the 1990s, the number of migrant workers in Thailand has increased steadily. The largest group of immigrants came from Myanmar and a vast majority of them were undocumented. (Kanchai & Kaung, 2002) The increased number of immigrant workers results in a higher number of immigrant children. Thailand ratified the International Convention on the Right of the Child in 1992. 7 years later, the Thai National Education Act ensured the right of all children born in Thailand to a free basic education for at least 12 years including children who are illegal immigrants. However, very few of the migrant children attend mainstream Thai schools. The Ministry of Education still lacks information about the Myanmar immigrant children. The purpose of this study is to explore directions to develop educational management for Myanmar immigrant children in Banlaem, Thailand. To accomplish this, the paper begins with an overview of immigrant education. These sections are followed by a discussion of the research findings. The paper concludes with a proposal for the directions for the educational management for the

Myanmar immigrant children with community participation.

### II. IMMIGRATION AND IMMIGRANT CHILDREN' EDUCATION

UNHCH (1994) (cited in Adams & Kirowa, 2006) indicates that more than half of the immigrants are children. Adams & Kirowa suggest that educators working with immigrant and refugee children should recognize the difficulties in society, economic, and health care areas that the children and their families are facing. Moreover the educator should also realize the challenge in the education system that needs to be adjusted. Many countries are facing a rapid increase of the immigrant population while native birth rates are decreasing (Kirowa & Adams, 2006). This indicates that the schools at present and in the future need to improve their practice due to the constant population increase. The practice needs to encourage immigrant parents' participation in their children's education. Moreover, for a qualified education process, it is required that schools, teachers, and school personal become more flexible. There is a need for critical change in the teacher's curriculum. This change is necessary if teachers are expected to do teaching service with knowledge, skills, atti-

tude, and a belief that all children have the right to a qualified education.

### III. IMMIGRANT EDUCATION

Theory of human capital investment (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964) suggests that there is a difference between native-born workers and immigrant workers in transforming education into income. Immigrants may not be able to transfer human capital accumulating from their original country to job markets in the labour receiving country. The transferring of skills, which is called International Transferability of Skills, is similar in job markets of a labour sending country and a labour receiving country. The skills are regulated by education and language (DeBburman, 2005). Education has 2 components. The first is what they learned in one country, and the second one is transferred skills across the country. These two components are different depending on the level of education and their academic achievement. Countries that use same languages tend to have similar quality of education and skill training on the job. Similarities and differences between languages of a labour sending country and a labour receiving country affect the transferring of working skills.

Chiswick (1988) describes that investment in education is influenced by parental investment. There are 4 factors contributing to parental investment in child education including the parents' education level, family income, family size, and mother time. The researcher believes that parent investment of child education is influenced by ethnicity as different ethnics have different views on family size and woman participation in labour. The motivation for immigrant parent's investment in child education is low when there is a possibility of moving back to their origin country. Immigrants from some countries have high level of education and high income. This supports the investment in child education. However, immigrant parents with a low level of education, large family size, and low income tend to have little investment in child education. Moreover, ethnic groups differ in women's participation in labour, which contributes to children enrolment in schools, especially for small children.

Ethnography of education in immigrant children shows that the immigrant children of ethnic groups face problems and learning difficulties more than native born children due to language barrier and education background (Vidali & Adams, 2006). Adams & Shambleau (2006) mentioned that immigrant children often lack experience in schools at their most critical time. Most of them cannot read or write in their mother languages and lack memory strategies and high order of thinking skills. Findings of more than 4 decades from sociology studies pointed out that children of parents with low level of education tend to have a low level of education as well. Then when the children enter labour age, they are more likely to be low wage earners. Parents who have a low level of education tend to have limited knowledge and learning experience, therefore the parents cannot support their children learning and homework. Moreover, the parents do not have an effective way

of interacting with schools, teachers, and administrators for the education of their children (Hernandez et al., 2010).

### IV. EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD)'s report (2010) on "Closing the gap for immigrant students: Policies, Practice, and Performance" suggests that parental involvement and community participation in education management for immigrant students is important. The report indicates that most schools have communication problem with immigrant families. Moreover the education system lacks the support for immigrant students whose parents cannot help with their learning such as homework. For immigrant parents to participate in their children learning and communicating with schools, they need proficiency in school language. Immigrant parents with limited education and low proficiency in school language are unable to help their children's homework. They need support from the schools and communities. Schools and all stakeholders in the community should provide language teachers, ethnic mentors, and vocational training. These supports could be possible if the government encourage schools to approach immigrant parents and immigrant communities.

In order to increase academic achievement in immigrant students, ethnic community is resourceful. Many schools in OECD's reported countries invite ethnic minority mentors having similar background with immigrant students to help them with their homework. German creates the original program called "Educational Support for Children and Youth with Migration Background". The objective of the program is to support immigrant children's learning and to prepare the ethnic minority mentors to be teachers for diverse ethnic classrooms in the future. Moreover, local organizations can also contribute to immigrant children development. For example, local organizations in German join "National Integration Project" such as building partnership between business sectors and schools to provide vocational training for immigrant children, requiring community projects to involve immigrants' participation in decision making and processing. Sweden has learning centers near schools to help immigrant students with school activities, home works and recreation.

### V. MYANMAR IMMIGRANT CHILDREN EDUCATION IN THAILAND

In 2004, the Thai government registered children under the age of 15 years that are accompanying their families for labour purpose. It was found that 82% of the children are of Myanmar origin. In addition to the registered immigrant children, there are undocumented children immigrating to Thailand by themselves for labour jobs near boarder areas and in several locations in Thailand. Some of them were abused in human trafficking such as the sex business. Including the undocumented immigrant children, the number of immigrant children in Thailand is more than the registered number. The unidentified number of immi-

grant children in Thailand effects the educational management for this group of children.

Many immigrant children in Thailand have the risk in being a victim of human trafficking, drug trade, and several kinds of crimes. Education is one means of developing immigrant children so that they have knowledge and healthy life skills (Vungsiriphal, 2010). Immigrant children in Samutsakorn province, the most Myanmar labour populated area in Thailand, can get non-formal education from religious institutions but the number is very small compared to Myanmar children population in Thailand (Amaraphibal & Worasaen, 2010) Although the Ministry of Education has allowed immigrant children to study in Thai schools since 1992, there were only 20 Myanmar children in Thai schools (Muangmee, 2005) At present, the number of immigrant children enrolling in Thai schools is very low. There is an estimation that less than 10% of registered immigrant children are studying in Thai schools. Including undocumented immigrant children, the number is even smaller (Vungsiriphal, 2010) There are 3,679 registered Myanmar immigrant children age 1-15 years old in Samutsakorn province, though the number is far from reality due to many undocumented children, only 95 children enroll in Thai schools (Vungsiriphal, 2010).

## VI. THE STUDY

### 6.1 Rationale of the Study

Banlaem, a district in the north eastern part of Phetchaburi, Thailand, has been facing a rapid increase of Myanmar labourers as other parts of the country have. Most of the immigrant labourers in this district work in the fishery industry. As Myanmar immigrants tend not to practice birth control, they are the ethnic group that produces the highest birth rates in the city. The increased number of immigrant workers also results in a high number of immigrant children. For the case of Banlaem, there is no study on the education of Myanmar immigrant children. Therefore this research is a pioneer work on directions of educational management with community participation for Myanmar immigrant children

### 6.2 Objectives

- 1) To understand the context of Myanmar immigrant children' education in Banlaem.
- 2) To explore the community participation in Myanmar immigrant children' education in the local area
- 3) To find directions for educational management with community participation for the Myanmar immigrant children in Banlaem

### 6.3 Method

This study is qualitative. Data collection is conducted through observations, in-depth interviews, and focus-group discussions.

### 6.4. Research Context

Banlaem is situated in the north eastern part of Phetchaburi province. It consists of 10 sub districts (tambon). The total area is 189.885 km<sup>2</sup> and total population is 54,068. Population density is 290.7/km<sup>2</sup> (752.9/sq mi). Sea fisheries along the shore and muddy shore provide a rich seafood resource. The fishery business brought foreign labour and merchant immigrants to live here. Thus, Banlaem residents now are a mixture of Thais with different ethnic backgrounds including Chinese, Muslim, Indian, Burmese, and Mon.

### 6.5. The participants

Criteria for selecting the participants are the introduction from reliable person in the community and on voluntary basis. The informants are from the following groups.

- 1) Schools administrators
- 2) Thai teachers from 3 elementary schools
- 3) Myanmar immigrant students, 10 years old or over, from the 3 elementary schools
- 4) Myanmar immigrant parents of the students in the 3 schools
- 5) Myanmar immigrant children, less than 15 years old, working in fishery business
- 6) Myanmar immigrant parents whose children do not study in Thai schools.
- 7) Municipal administrators
- 8) An Immigration officer
- 9) Village heads
- 10) Thai and Myanmar in the community
- 11) School board committees
- 12) NGO staff
- 13) Non-formal education office staff

### 6.6. Data collection and analysis

This research collect data from Banlaem district in Phetchaburi province where is highly populated with Myanmar immigrants. The analysis method for the study is content analysis. The data used for the analysis is documents, interviews, field notes, and other relevant material. The data analysis leads to the following themes and sub themes.

### 6.7 Findings

An analysis of the context of immigrant children education has been based on interviews and focus group discussions with the participants. Four major themes emerge: Discrepancies between policy and implementation, Schools, Family, and Community. In addition, these themes are followed by related sub-themes.

#### 6.7.1 The context of immigrant children education

- 1) Discrepancies between policy and implementation

Thai government has confirmed educational right for all minority groups including immigrant children in the National Educational Act since 2004. However, the number of Myanmar immigrant children enrolling in Thai schools in Banlaem is very small. According to the statistics from Phetchaburi Primary Educational Service Area Office 1, there are only 32 Myanmar children enrolling in Thai schools. The number relates to the following sub themes indicating the discrepancies between the policy and actual practice of educational management for immigrant children.

a) No database of Myanmar immigrant children

Not only the number of Myanmar immigrant students in Thai schools contrast to the policy, but also the lack of database of Myanmar immigrant children from immigration registration office cannot provide information for school age immigrant children. The problem with immigration registration of Myanmar children are from several reasons such as parents' illegal status, parents' constantly moving for temporary labour, no birth certificate, etc.

b) No actual practice guideline

Educational personal in the district indeed realize the rapid increase of school-age immigrant children. These children do not have access to education. Most of them help their parents work in fishery works even younger than 15 years old. They pointed out that the policy to provide free basic education to all children including Myanmar immigrant children is not effective due to the lack of an implementation guide line and organizations in charge of promoting education in Myanmar immigrant children. Therefore, the child's right to education of this ethnic group in the district is still not protected. One school principal said:

*"There must be law or regulation. We have Compulsory Education Act for Thai citizen. The government provides basic education for free to them (Myanmar) as well".*

c) Child labour

Myanmar labours working for small fishery business usually take their children to workplace with them instead of sending the children to school. When the children are about 9 or 10 years old, they become the labour there. Though labour law does not allow child labour younger than 15 years old, the enforcement of the law is ineffective. Most 12 or 13 years old Myanmar boys work in fishery ships at sea for 1-2 weeks then come back to the land. This practice of child labour closes the opportunity of acquiring education.

2) Schools

a) Administrators' strategies and vision

Schools in Baanlaem district that welcome Myanmar immigrant students are smaller schools rather than medium or large schools. This is because of the low birth rate of the Thai population. According to the Ministry of Education's criteria, small schools that have students' enrol-

ment of less than 120 will be closed. Therefore, small schools turn the crisis into opportunity when the government provides right to basic education to immigrant children. This strategy depends on the school administrators' vision of education for all and cultural diversity. One school principal voiced his/her idea:

*"I had an idea to select Burmese as a second language here for this school. I would like to recruit Myanmar teachers to teach our kids, Thai and Myanmar children"*

b) Teachers

Teachers have important roles in Myanmar immigrant students because they are the first school personal that has direct contact with the children. Many immigrant children whose parents do not have information about the school system gain the chance to access Thai schools when Thai teachers conduct their survey for Thai children enrolment in the community. Each year schools will get a list of Thai children from the district that schools have to survey and make sure that children will go to school for compulsory education. Myanmar parents who can speak Thai and are interested in sending their children to school get the opportunity from the survey. Some immigrant children even ask for the chance to go to school by themselves. One teacher shared her experience:

*"We went to survey Thai children and we found Burmese children. They asked us if they can study at our school. They are afraid to come by themselves. We told them that we welcome them. We want many students."*

c) Communication

Most Myanmar parents in Banlaem district may be able to communicate with Thai employers and Thai workers at work but they cannot communicate with Thai teachers about education opportunity and the information. They cannot read and write in Thai and do not understand school system and the requirement such as official documents. On the other hand, Thai teachers do not speak Burmese. Therefore, the only chance that Myanmar children can get the opportunity to study in Thai school is through Myanmar students who can speak Thai. The communication between schools and parents went through immigrant students who can read and write in Thai. The students sign their parents' name in official documents such as enrolment, financial aid from the government, etc. The followings are teachers' comment about communication problem:

*"The problem that Burmese children do not come to school because teacher cannot communicate with them in Burmese"*

*"Their parents' speech in Thai is incomprehensible. They don't understand Thai"*

d) Myanmar students' learning achievement

Most of Myanmar students study in small schools. The school environment is positive for learning due to many factors. First, the class size is less than 20 students per



classroom; therefore, teachers can take care and pay attention to all students. Second, teachers do not have bias and do not discriminate against Myanmar children. They treat all students equally the same. Thai teachers report that most Myanmar students' academic achievement is similar or even higher than Thai students. The reason that most Myanmar immigrant do well in Thai schools is because they start first grade when they are older than 7 or 8 years old. Some of them enrol in first grade at the age of 10 years. Therefore, most Myanmar students are more mature than their Thai classmates. Some Myanmar students experience 3 or 4 years in elementary school in Myanmar before they immigrate to Thailand and start first grade in Thai schools.

*"Burmese students are older than our children. Their ages are second or third grade but they first enrolled in our school so we place them in first grade. They learn fast so in second semester we pass them to second grade."*

(School teacher)

### 3) Family

#### a) Poverty

The Myanmar immigrant students at the three Thai schools are from economically disadvantaged families. Even though the government provides education at no cost to all children both Thai and minorities, with free lunch, financial aid for school uniforms, books and school materials, the labour families are struggling with other expenses to send their children to schools. The expenses are such as breakfast, commuting cost and extra curricular activities. Many Myanmar families cannot afford these expenses; therefore the immigrant students drop from elementary schools before they finish the sixth grade and become labours like their parents to support their families. Studying in Thai schools with the same support that Thai children gain from the government such as free milk and lunch is the motivation that Myanmar parents send their children to schools. The immigrant students prefer going to Thai schools because they receive better food at schools than at their home. In addition, as the schools situate in Buddhist temple area, Thai Buddhists usually come to the temples to make merit and host delicious lunch for the students. One teacher provided her observation as the following:

*"Food at schools is better than food at their homes so they like coming to schools"*

#### b) Parent education level

Most Myanmar parents have learning experience in primary education in Myanmar.

Some of them graduate primary schools but some of them do not finish primary education. Very few of them went to junior high schools. They can read and write in Burmese but not in Thai. They can only sign their name in Thai for official documents. Though they can read and write in their mother language, they do not consider reading at home important. All of the immigrant students men-

tion that their parents never read Burmese literature to them and there is no reading activity at homes. In stead, the parents rely on the immigrant students for reading utilities bills and medicine instruction.

#### c) Thai language and interaction with Thai community

Myanmar immigrants communicate in Burmese in daily life and at work. They mostly contact with their own ethnic group. Myanmar labours that do not have contact with Thai usually do not speak Thai well even after more than 10 years of living in the Thai community. The immigrant students whose parents do not speak Thai and live in ethnic enclave have strong influence of their first language on Thai. However, the strong accent of Burmese in their Thai speech does not impede their studying at Thai schools. The interaction between Myanmar labours and Thai community are mostly limited to the labours and their employers or Thai workers at the same workplace. Besides the work, the immigrants need to rely on their employers for communicating with Thai officials, immigration registration, health care, and their children enrolment in Thai schools. One teacher gave the following comment on the immigrant students' second language (Thai) and their learning at school.

*"They (the immigrant students) speak Burmese at school. I told them to speak Thai at school because here is not Myanmar. Sometimes their Thai speech is difficult to understand. Sometimes I need to ask them to repeat 3 times until I get it. But they learn well and their hand writing is good."*

#### 4) Community

##### a) Myanmar community

There are many Myanmar houses in sub-districts in Banlaem, which develop into ethnic communities. The community is very crowded as a large size family living in the same one- room house. Therefore the hygiene and environment around ethnic community is deteriorating. Moreover, the Myanmar house communities are perceived by local Thai as unsafe and scary for outsiders. The most scary scenes for Thai local are the labours gathering drinking groups and turn to serious fighting when they are drunk. However, for the labours, they perceive that their lives in Banlaem are comfortable and good for income. Thai parent and Myanmar parent gave the following perspective.

*"They go to the sea for many days. Once in a while they come back from the sea. The neighbour near Myanmar houses is in trouble. They drink and fight. Sometimes they kill their drinking mates" (Thai parent)*

*"Life in Thailand is good. I have job everyday and I earn money." (Myanmar parent)*

##### b) Thai community

Environment around communities in Banlaem have changed since there has been a flood of Myanmar labours into the district and rapid increase of birth rate of Myan-

mar children. Perceptions of local Thai depend on their contact with the labours. Thai employees, Myanmar house landlord, and Thai merchants who do business with the labours gain the most benefits and are positive about them.

*"Most Thai employers like Myanmar labours because the labour cost is cheap. This is a problem if the employers use illegal labours. These illegal labours become social problem. Our people are too selfish." (School principal)*

However, for Thai workers, though they do appreciate Myanmar labourers hard work, they feel threatening and insecure for their jobs.

*"Now we do not have OT (overtime job) because Myanmar labours replace us. They live near the factory. The employers hire Myanmar because they can cut costs for labour transportation. We live far from the factory. The employers have to provide the transportation. But for Myanmar, there is no transportation cost"*

For local Thai who do not have contact with the labours, some of them do not like the environment around Myanmar houses, most of local Thai are impressed with Myanmar strong faith in Buddhism and their practice of merit making based on Buddhist principles.

*"Each year they offer Kathina to every temple in Banlaem" (Thai parent) "Their good point is that all Myanmar love merit making" (Thai parent)*

Thai parents, though they do not have direct contact with Myanmar, they have worried if there are many Myanmar students in Thai school.

*"School uses only Thai for instructions. Myanmar children do not speak much Thai. They don't understand much Thai. They understand more in Burmese. If they are in the same class, Thai teachers may have to slow down for them to understand. This can slow learning pace of Thai children too"*

#### 6.7.2 Findings 2: Community participation

Data from the interviews and focus group discussions reveals several major themes related to community participation. The themes and related sub-themes are discussed in the following section.

##### 1) Myanmar parent

Immigrant education research suggests that community participation in immigrant children education plays an important role in their academic achievement and reduce the achievement gap between immigrant children and mainstream children. In the case of Banlaem district, less than 5% of the immigrant population have just began to enter Thai elementary schools in a couple of years, it will take 3 or 4 years to see the first cohort of immigrant children academic achievement when they finish elementary schools. Therefore, the current issue is not the gap of academic achievement but the opportunity to gain access to get education in Thai school. This needs communication

between parent and schools but this does not exist. Also, for all immigrant students at the three schools, there is no parental support for their children learning because most of the parents cannot read and write or even speak in Thai.

##### 2) Thai & Myanmar Communities

Myanmar labourers usually don't have interaction with local Thai except with their employers and Thai workers at workplace. They live in totally ethnic enclave. They can help each other for basic needs, but not for education. Most immigrant children who are studying in Thai schools right now gain access from the help of local Thai who live near by Myanmar community or local Thai who work at the same place with the immigrant labourers. But this is individual basis. Right now there is no support group to extend access for education for Myanmar children in the community

##### 3) Local organizations

Community participation can play more roles on immigrant children education with the support from the local municipal. Right now the municipal is in charge of 5 pre-school programs for all children in the district. This is to prepare their readiness before they go to kindergarten. Immigrant children have right in this service as well. But the immigrant families have no means to access the service. They don't communicate in Thai. They don't know about the information. The parents' illegal status is also a problem. Non-Formal Education provides free basic education to all generations who cannot access formal education including minorities in Thai society. They can provide basic education, vocational training, and necessary skills to live in Thai society. But they have not reached out to immigrant labourers and children because of language barrier and the requirement of official documents.

##### 4) NGOs

Immigrant education research often shows the active role of NGO in immigrant education. However, no NGO plays the role in Banlaem. There was one NGO helping Myanmar immigrant labourers in the community with their health care, such as HIV and disease protection. However, immigrant education is still not its concern. NGO in the community works with Thai hospital for humanitarian purpose in providing vaccine injection to all immigrant infants. The NGO and the hospital seem to be able to communicate with Myanmar labourers but education is not their concern. In the past 3 years, the NGO managed a classroom for Myanmar children. The class was taught by Myanmar staff working for NGO, but Myanmar parents complained that their children still cannot read and write. The parents who have relatives or families in Myanmar tend to send the children to be educated in Myanmar. Right now the NGO has moved to work in nearby province because that province is near Myanmar border and much highly populated with Myanmar labourers.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The opportunity for Myanmar immigrant children in Ban Laem district, Phetchaburi province to gain education in Thai schools could be considered as very limited. This reality is contrast to Thai National Educational Act confirming educational right for all minority groups including immigrant children. This limitation partly originates from the lacking of database of Myanmar immigrant children from immigration registration office. In addition there are several factors involved such as parents' illegal status, parents' constantly moving for temporary labour, no birth certificate, etc. Therefore, the policy to provide free basic education to all children including Myanmar immigrant children is not effective due to the lack of an implementation guide line and organizations in charge of promoting education for the children. This discrepancy between policy and implementation results in no protection of child's right to education and child labour of this ethnic group in the district.

However, the opportunity to gain education in Thai schools among immigrant children in Ban Laem is possible because of schools' administrators' strategies and vision and local teachers' contribution. The low birth rate of Thai population and Thai National Educational Act support the local schools' administrators' strategy in recruiting the immigrant children. Teachers as the first school personal who have direct contact with children through student survey have important roles in promoting education for Myanmar immigrant students in the community. The fact that the Myanmar labour families cannot read and write in Thai, do not understand school system and requirement of official documents, and school personal do not speak Burmese, the communication between schools and parents went through immigrant students who can read and write in Thai. Despite all the challenges and difficulties to access to education in Thai schools, the immigrant students in the local community show satisfactory academic achievement.

Even though the government provides education at no cost to all children with free lunch, financial aid for school uniforms, books and school materials, the labour families face financial struggling to send their children to schools. The expenses are such as breakfast, commuting cost and extra curricular activities. Many Myanmar families cannot afford these expenses; therefore the immigrant students drop from elementary schools before they finish the sixth grade and become labours like their parents. The parents' educational level which is no more than primary education relates to no reading activity at home, even in their mother language. In stead, the immigrant students help their parents in reading information in Thai. Usually Myanmar immigrants communicate in Burmese in daily life and at work. They mostly contact with their own ethnic group. Myanmar labours who do not have contact with Thai usually do not speak Thai well even after more than 10 years of living in the Thai community.

Myanmar community which is mostly populated by the ethnic group and lacking of appropriate hygiene management makes the environment around the community deteriorating. Moreover, the drinking habit of the Myanmar labours is perceived as unsafe for Thai local people. The perceptions of the local Thai toward the rapid increase of Myanmar population in the district depends on their interest and contact with the ethnic group. Business sector seems to enjoy the benefits of Myanmar immigrant living in the community. For Thai workers, though they do appreciate Myanmar labourers hard work, they feel threatening and insecure for their jobs. Most of the local Thai who do not have contact with the labours do not like the environment around Myanmar houses. However, they are impressed with Myanmar strong faith in Buddhism and their practice of merit making based on Buddhist principles. Thai parents show their concerns if there are many Myanmar students in Thai school because of different family background and cultural socialization, and slow class instruction.

Community participation in the immigrant students is also extremely limited. In order to increase opportunity to gain education in Thai schools, it is necessary to promote communication between Myanmar parents and Thai schools. However, Myanmar labourers usually don't have interaction with local Thai except with their employers and Thai workers at workplace. They live in totally ethnic enclave. Most of the immigrant students in the community gain the access to Thai schools from the help of local Thai who live near by Myanmar community or local Thai who work at the same place with the immigrant labourers. Local organizations including the local municipal and Office of non-formal education have not reached out to immigrant labourers and children because of language barrier and the requirement of official documents. NGO has been trying to extend their participation in the well being of immigrant labourers and children. However, their main concern is health care such as HIV and disease protection, not education. 3 years ago, despite the NGO's initiating in providing education for Myanmar children in order to help the labour parents going to work, the classroom is not well function. The NGO does not have qualified Myanmar teachers; therefore, it cannot provide academic readiness for the immigrant children.

## VIII. SUGGESTIONS FOR DIRECTION

To conclude, the number of Myanmar immigrant students in Thai schools in Banlaem district is extremely small. Moreover, community participation from various groups in the students' education is underrepresented. The limited cooperation among all social sectors for the immigrant children to access to education does not represent "A Community of Caring Society" which is ASEAN Vision. This research find that in order to empower the people of ASEAN and strengthen ASEAN Community, it is necessary to assure the right to basic education of children, the future of ASEAN, including disadvantaged immigrant children in the region.

The followings are proposals for community participation to promote education opportunities for the immigrant children in the district.

1) Policy

Ministry of Education needs to cooperate with Ministry of Interior to require the local registration office to create immigrant children data base so that local schools can reach out to these children. Also, Ministry of Education have to provide information about Thai school system in Burmese and have all documents in the language that school personal can distribute to Myanmar community when they visit students' homes.

2) Local municipal

To help adaptation to Thai institution, immigrant children should be prepared since preschool level. This will support them to be ready in mainstream school and socialization in Thai society. Local municipal should work with Myanmar parents and Myanmar community by inviting volunteers to be teaching assistants for preschool programs.

3) Thai and Myanmar community:

Schools should work with their current Myanmar students to bring Myanmar cultural knowledge to classroom, and to invite Myanmar parents to present their cultural knowledge in classroom. This will establish relationship between two ethnics and two communities, which contribute to mutual understanding and rich human resource for the local future.

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