



Educational Reforms Amid COVID-19 in Thailand

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OPEN ACCESS

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Specialty section:

This article was submitted to
Digital Learning Innovations,
a section of the journal
Frontiers in Education

Received: 27 March 2022

Accepted: 11 April 2022

Published: 12 May 2022

Citation:

Pongjinda W and Pathak S (2022)
Educational Reforms Amid COVID-19
in Thailand. *Front. Educ.* 7:905445.
doi: 10.3389/feduc.2022.905445

Education is essential for any country to secure its future, but COVID-19 has caused considerable difficulty in Thailand. The COVID-19 pandemic harms the education of the students. The online education system is adopted in almost all parts of the globe. However, the pandemic has been impacting the overall quality of the education system. This research explored the experiences of law students in Thailand by analyzing several factors which affect their intellect. The methodology adopted for this study was a multiple method study. The sample size of 330 law students selected from leading Thai universities was analyzed qualitatively through Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat (SWOT) analysis and regression model for the quantitative analysis. The findings revealed that factors including internet availability, accessibility to own gadgets, online resources, government, social media, and classrooms have a significant impact on the education system of Thai law students. The study paves way for further microanalysis of the educational system in Thailand with the perceptions and experiences of teachers and parents.

Keywords: education, COVID-19, constitutional reforms, Thai constitution, sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

Every child has the right to an uninterrupted education, but COVID-19 has jolted education throughout the globe. Thailand has been growing in the past few decades. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a jolt to the progress of Thailand (Fry and Bi, 2013). Young minds are facing several challenges in the learning process. The legal framework in Thailand does exist and provides for a quality education system in Thailand. This was adversely affected by the pandemic hitting hard upon education, with inadequate measures adopted at the governance level. Digital technologies have been incorporated at various levels of the Thai education system with an online or hybrid system of teaching and learning processes (Yu and Jo, 2014; Huang et al., 2020).

The Thai constitution provides for the rights, and responsibilities and ensures the adequate functioning of a State. The rights are comprehensive, and each right is related to the overall aspect of the constitution. This study focuses on the experiences of the Thai laws students by analyzing several factors which affect the intellect of the students in Thailand. The analysis was done with the educational advancement to ensure an in-depth understanding and analysis of the gaps within the Thai laws. Several factors provide for collaborative impacts on the Thai population in terms of diminishing their education right including geographical, political, social, environmental, and cultural factors (Laikram and Pathak, 2022).

The government structure in Thailand is not well-defined with monarchy still prevalent. Under the Thai constitution, monarchy is adopted, "Thailand adopts a democratic regime of government with the King as Head of State." (Chapter I, section materials and methods, p. 4). The constitution

in Thailand is being adopted as the supreme law for the State which is headed by the King along with a democratic structure of elected government. Section results of the Thai constitution defines,

“Sovereign power belongs to the Thai people. The King as Head of State shall exercise such power through the National Assembly, the Council of Ministers, and the Courts in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution. The National Assembly, the Council of Ministers, Courts, Independent Originations, and State agencies shall perform duties in accordance with the constitution, laws, and the rule of law for the common good of the nation and the happiness of the public at large.” (Chapter I, section results, p. 5).

Accordingly, dual governance poses irregularity in the adequate implementation of the policies. Similarly, public dissatisfaction is prevalent due to the multiple government structure leading to anarchy and chaos during the COVID. The recent decades have seen the military coup in Thailand. These coups result in reduced human rights and international collaboration (Constitution B.E. 2560, 2017). In the years 2006 and 2017, the military coup directly affected the diplomatic collaboration, human rights, and implementation of constitutional laws in Thailand (Kunnamas, 2020).

However, the constitution of Thailand is the epitome of the education framework in Thailand. The constitution protects the rights of the people both in terms of human rights and education laws. The constitution protects the rights of the Thai population, “Human dignity, rights, liberties and equality of the people shall be protected. The Thai people shall enjoy equal protection under this Constitution (Chapter I, section discussion, p. 4).”

The constitution is the prime legal document that governs the Thai social, economic, and education systems. The constitution is unofficially translated into the English language by the office of the council of the state, however, the translated document provides for accurate policies and implications of the sections of the constitution.

“The Constitution is the supreme law of the State. The provisions of any law, rule or regulation, or any acts, which are contrary to or inconsistent with the Constitution, shall be unenforceable. Whenever no provision under this Constitution is applicable to any case, an act shall be performed or a decision shall be made in accordance with the constitutional conventions of Thailand under the democratic regime of government with the King as Head of State. (Chapter I, section conclusion).”

There have been many incidents and unfortunate events in the past which adversely affected the Thai population’s educational rights. The inadequate capacities of the government channels to aptly implement the stated rules and regulations among the policies and ordinances at the school and university level results in adverse effects upon the rights of the people. The well-defined structure does pave way for an adequate educational framework in the country. However, several factors, as discussed in the research, curtail the proper adaption of all the written legal policies and ordinances at the local levels of governance in Thailand.

Constitution has been drawn from the French word “constituer” signifying to build or construct. The constitution

defines the rules and regulations of a State. The basic governance is through the various articles and sections of the Constitution. The constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand has been amended between 1974, and 1997 and the current version is from 2017. The major governing body remains to be government, however, with several incidences of the military coup and political instabilities the Thai people suffer from diminished and ineffective legal rights. Thailand revised the educational reforms in 1999 with the adoption of a learner-centered approach, however, a lack of reforms was found after the pandemic (Connors, 1999; Tongpoon-Patanasorn, 2011). The situation of legal protection is declining due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Thailand is equipped with the Thai education laws in the constitution (Article 54 and 250) as well as the National Education Act of B.E. 2542 (1999) which defines education as the right of all Thai people (Article 6). However, these have become redundant due to the COVID-19 pandemic due to changing scenario of education dissemination procedures (Dwivedi et al., 2020). The non-equipped students are not able to receive their right to education due to several factors arising due to COVID-19 implications (Hussain et al., 2020). The local administrative guidelines (Article 250) in the constitution do provide for quality education, however, implementation is lacking at the local levels of Thailand. Thus, it becomes essential to review these sections to provide for the COVID-19 pandemic scenario.

Thailand has been struggling in terms of educational rights and legal freedom due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the revolutionary youth movement in 2020. However, the constitutional law does not provide for the protection of the education rights and other rights of the dissatisfied population. The rights suspended by Prime Minister Gen. Prayut Chan-Ocha’s policies and governmental ordinances including the freedom of expression and arbitrarily arrested resulted in the enhancement of the revolution in Thailand.

Thailand has various streams of education provided by leading and world-ranked universities (Wintachai et al., 2021). The National Educational ACT was implemented in 1999 in Thailand (Kantavong and Nethanomsak, 2012) however, with the new normal scenario due to COVID-19, the government is required to implement reforms. The Thai students are known to be humble, respectful as well as critical in their approach to education. Thai Law students are more inclined toward the implication of the educational system and reform required to enhance educational rights (Mujtaba et al., 2010).

The Commission of Higher Education (CHE) is working under the Ministry of Education toward educational reforms and providing higher standards for the education system in Thailand. The CHE regulates both public as well as private universities through the Office of National standards and quality assessment, National Institute of Educational Testing Services, and Science and Technology Postgraduate Education and Research Development Office under the second 15 year long-range plan on higher education as guided by the Ministry of Education. The Times Higher Education QS World Universities Ranking (THE-QS), and Shanghai Jiao Tong University Global Ranking (SJTU) are adopted by several Thai universities to

ensure the quality of education. However, the ground-level implications lack in the implementation of these regulations.

Therefore, this study aimed to identify, understand, and analyze the various factors that are to be included in the educational reforms through the amendments in the legal framework and constitution to provide for sustainable development and ensure educational rights to all in Thailand. The explicit research questions are as follows:

- What are the various factors directly affecting the educational rights of Thai law students?
- What is the relationship between selected factors to ensure high levels of legal framework and rights of Thai students?
- Which stakeholders are required to adapt and implement the legal framework, policies, and enhanced educational rights of Thai law students?

Educational rights are essential to ensure quality education for all. Thailand has been struggling in terms of the educational measures to be implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic among the universities. The stress of balancing the education quality as well as financial resources resulted in mismanagement and an unbalanced approach toward education framework and regulatory policies since 2020. This study would provide the direction and research-based strategies toward enhanced and effective education rights. The immediate beneficiaries will be the students and universities; however, the long-term beneficiary would be the Thai economy and legal system.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology adopted for this study is a multiple method study. The study area was selected among the leading Thai public universities with an emphasis on law degree programs (Woodrow, 2014). The university was selected based on both public-private stakeholders involved with the law degree program in Thailand and equipped with educational reforms and mock court experiences among the students. The sample size of 330 law students was selected from a leading Thai university. The sampling technique of random purposive sampling was adopted to ensure the self-interest and learning process among students. The students were among the regular students who are pursuing their bachelor's degrees.

The data was collected through a survey questionnaire and key informant interviews. The survey questionnaire was shared among the law students to understand their perception and experiences education system in Thailand. The survey questionnaire provided the detailed demographic, perceptions, and needs of the law students. The key informants were selected among the students, teachers, and parents who were directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure the detailed experiences and understanding of law degree programs and the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on educational rights. The database was collected from the university and then respondents were selected randomly along with their acceptance to be key informants and respondents. The gaps, requirements, and offers from the educational framework in Thailand have

been extensively discussed and recorded throughout the data collection phase. The respondents were asked about their experiences, perceptions, understanding, and interpretations of the education system in Thailand, especially with the enhanced vulnerabilities of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The collected data was analyzed qualitatively through Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat (SWOT) analysis and regression model for the quantitative analysis. The strength, weakness, opportunity, and threats analysis provided for the understanding of the factors and stakeholders' role in the educational reform in Thailand (Helms and Nixon, 2010). The SWOT analysis provides for the strategic measures to be adopted by analyzing the current scenario of the educational reforms in Thailand with inclusive governance opportunities within the existing legal framework (Learned et al., 1969; Cohen et al., 2017). This provided for the results sections and provided the ground level findings toward the policy level recommendation through this research.

The quantitative analysis involved the backward regression model which analyses and eliminated the insignificant factors to provide for the significant factors (Yu and Jo, 2014). Several independent factors including the internet availability, accessibility of own gadgets, law study, online resources government, social media, and hybrid classrooms were analyzed with the dependent factor of educational reform. These factors were selected based on previous literature and the COVID-19 impacted the educational sector in Thailand (Ali, 2020; Ferri et al., 2020; Adarkwah, 2021).

RESULTS

The results included both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The collected data provided the real experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of stakeholders toward the education sector. The findings revealed that factors including internet availability, accessibility to own gadgets, online resources, government, social media, and hybrid classrooms have a significant impact on the education of Thai law students.

Internet availability is one of the major concerns for most Thai law students. The absence of internet in far-flung areas or remote locations results in disruptive classroom sessions. The students complained about the internet speed affecting their learning capacities (Kew, 2018). Similarly, accessibility of own gadgets such as laptops and i-pads at their home resulted in diminished productivity for their lessons, assignments, and overall learning process.

Students found it difficult to access online resources due to the first two factors i.e., internet availability, and accessibility to own gadgets. The students in Thailand are adaptable to these changes (Teo, 2014), however, the lack of government assistance, the online classroom system was found to be ineffective. Social media is impacting the studies of the student as a resource whereas the hybrid classroom was found to be inadequate as teachers were not able to teach and include all the students at the same time.

Table 1 shows the association between demographics and educational reform. From **Table 1** it was noticed that the men

TABLE 1 | Demographics for the educational reform.

Demographics	Age limit	Total population	Z score	P
Age	18–25	330	1.230	0.120
Gender	Female	150	3.965	0.000*
	Male	180		
Married/unmarried	Married	50	1.204	0.035
	Un-married	280		
Level of education	BS students	330	3.205	0.000*
Education Discipline	Law	330	2.569	0.000*

* $P < 0.005$.

TABLE 2 | Correlation among proposed variables.

	Educational reform
Internet availability	−0.882***
Accessibility of own gadgets	0.665***
Law study	−0.068
Online resources	0.556***
Government	0.598***
Social media	0.963***
Hybrid classroom	0.889***

***Correlation is significant at $p < 0.01$.

TABLE 3 | Backward multiple regression analysis.

Factors	Value
Internet availability	−0.382**
Accessibility of own gadgets	0.365**
Law study	0.048
Online resources	0.384**
Government	0.328**
Social media	0.163*
Hybrid classroom	0.389**
F-Statistics	16.895**
Adjusted R-Square	0.652

**Significant at 0.05.

*Significant at 0.1.

are found more inclined toward reforms than women. Similarly, unmarried demographics have been more profound toward educational reforms than married ones. For this study, the data was collected from the students enrolled in the law studies domain under the age of 18–25 which was not separately tested under different age groups.

The results of **Table 2** show that educational reform is strongly related to internet availability, accessibility to own gadgets, online resources, government, social media, and hybrid classrooms in the context of law students. But the law study has not been found as related to educational reforms. The results are supporting the previous findings from the researchers.

The educational reforms are depending upon government initiatives which were found to be limited in Thailand. Both students and government bodies have no common platform to provide for the required necessities. This was one of the major hurdles to bringing about needed reforms at the policies levels due to inadequate political interventions.

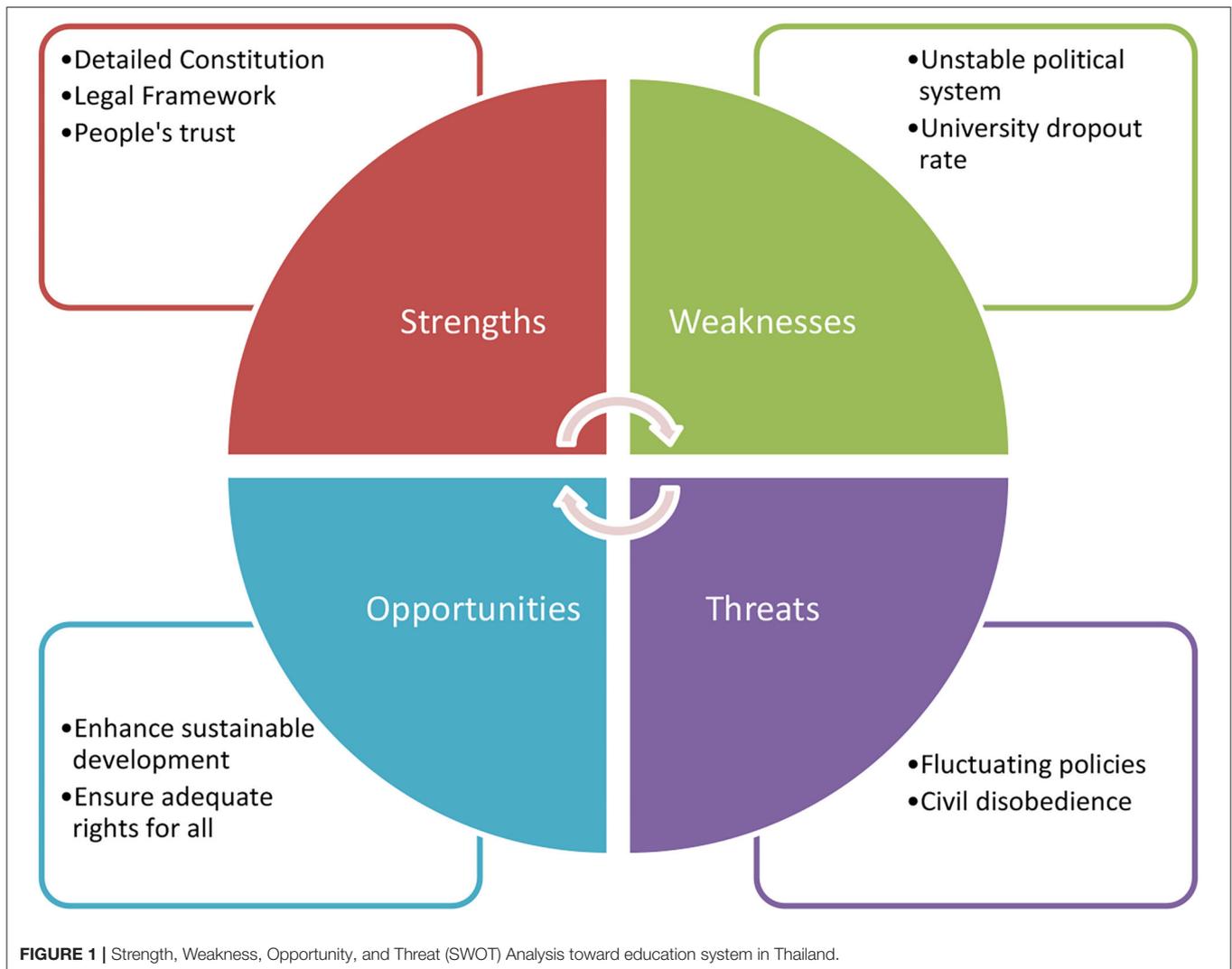
As suggested by previous authors, the backward regression method was used to remove the insignificant factors from the proposed research model. The results are presented in **Table 3**. The p -value for the F-statistics of the proposed model is significant at the level of 0.005. The model has the $F = 16.895$, $p < 0.005$, $R^2 = 0.652$. Meanwhile, it was noticed that the proposed variables for the theoretical model are related to educational reform. As the results indicated except for law study all of the proposed factors are the factor responsible for the educational reform.

These results indicate the need for the educational reforms required at the local level of governance in Thailand. The educational system is robust; however, it is essential to revise the policies to enhance the overall effectiveness of the education system. The quantitative results were supported by the qualitative results which were collected through the key respondent interviews. The qualitative findings focused on the overall scenario of the COVID-19 pandemic impacting the education environment, stakeholders, and what are the possible reforms that are essential to adopt to provide for sustainable development in Thailand.

Strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat analysis provides for the analysis of the significant factors along with the political, social, and technological environment of the educational system in Thailand (Refer **Figure 1**). The strategies and measures to be adopted in terms of the adoption of educational rights during and after the COVID-19 pandemic are to be designed inclusive of the SWOT analysis. The analysis was dependent upon the informant interviews which provided for the experiences and perceptions of the study respondents.

Strengths

Thailand boasts of a robust legal framework with well-defined rules and regulations; however, the ground-level implementations are found to be limited (Sanjaiprom, 2021). The constitution is comprehensive and covers almost every aspect



of copyright and human rights. The judiciary is comprehended toward the maintenance of law and order in Thailand. The people of Thailand abide by the legal system. One of the respondents added,

“Thai nationals follow all the rules and regulations including wearing face masks and vaccinations. The government should investigate supporting our children. It is hard for us to provide for the online class system.”

Therefore, they do deserve all the adequate laws to minimize their vulnerabilities, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The amendments and reforms should be adopted through the existing and implemented exemplary laws from ASEAN to ensure the success of the legal framework (Phusavat, 2008).

Weaknesses

Thailand has one of its biggest flaws in the legal framework in the form of its unstable political system. The unclear authority of the monarchy along with the democratic government and several incidents of military coups in the past resulted

in reduced rights of the people. Though the government promotes various educational policies, however, they fall short of providing the economic, social, and legal protection of its population. The ground-level implementation of the laws is dependent upon the military forces. One of the respondents added,

“The university in our area do not follow the government initiatives. We still need to pay the full tuition fees which is supposed to be reduced in all the universities.”

The influence of stakeholders to resolve the issues relating to pandemic teaching barriers is contradictory to the educational outlook toward education (Mongkolhutthi, 2018). Thailand suffers from the absence of procedural guidelines for the educational system during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the respondents suggested,

“We do not know when to have hybrid classroom. We are worried about the health and safety of the students. Should we test students or it's the personal responsibility of the students? Who will pay for the vaccination and medical aid?”

This hampers the guided learning practices in the educational policy level implications (Naqvi and Sahu, 2020). University dropout rates have been a constant threat to the sustainable development of the education system in Thailand. Therefore, it becomes essential to understand the perceptions of the students as well (Sittichai, 2012; Lerdpornkulrat et al., 2016).

Opportunities

Despite several shortcomings, the reforms in the copyright and human rights laws would ensure long-term growth and enhance sustainable development. The COVID-19 pandemic does provide for better understanding and analyzing the gaps in the education system and provides recommendations (Nuankaew et al., 2021). One of the respondents recommended,

“Hybrid classroom makes more sense. Those who want to have face to face onsite class may choose that, others may study online. The teachers are to be trained to conduct and support these hybrid classrooms effectively.”

The education system will change in the future; therefore, hybrid education is going to be the most adopted method including both physical and virtual classrooms (Azorín, 2020). The amendment in the constitution ensures the laying down of adequate policies. Ensuring adequate rights for all is a must for maintaining the law and order in any country. Thailand is a state which leads not only its economy but also influences the growth and development of the whole ASEAN region. The international collaborations and learning of apt means of implementation of rules and regulations are to be adopted at the national as well as local levels of governance. The state among ASEAN provides an example for Thailand on how, where, when, and who must be utilized to ensure effective law infrastructure.

Threats: The fluctuating policies are the main instigating factor that affects the harmony among the Thai population. One of the respondents proposed,

“Reforms are required at the national level. Ground level implications will be adversely affected if no guidelines are provided.”

The inadequacies found with loopholes in the constitution of Thailand must be revised and adequately reformed. The exemplary evidence and cases from ASEAN and other countries must be carefully examined to be adopted in Thailand (Abidah et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2020; Adarkwah, 2021; Tabatadze and Chachkhiani, 2021). Another aspect is the increasing civil disobedience in Thailand. This is found to be directly proportional to the subdued rights provided to the free people of Thailand. One of the respondents indicated,

“Who will judge the measures of the government? Students suffering in several ways. What about their future? Protests are conducted peacefully. We want the basic rights. Is it too much to ask for education?”

The various wings of the political mindset are a constant hurdle in providing adequate implementation of rules and regulations in Thailand (Buchenrieder, 2017).

The SWOT analysis provides an in-depth analysis of the current shortcomings of the Thai education system. However, due to the existence of an adequate physical framework of education, the policy implementations at the ground level would

ensure the sustainable development of the Thai education system (Phusavat et al., 2012).

DISCUSSION

Education shapes the future of any country by empowering its youth and future workforce (Kremer, 1993; Deem et al., 2008; Hardaker, 2022). Online education has been adopted in several countries around the globe in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The educational shift to the online classrooms inclusive of Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) is seen as a rapid transition and ineffective due to the lack of experience of teachers, students, and parents (Burns, 2020). The parents and students are under the constant pressure of diminishing return value both financially and quality of education. The monetization of education in terms of online education has been a concern in the education literature (Giroux, 2002). The educational reforms are to be adopted and implemented at the local levels of the government to ensure quality and uninterrupted educational rights. The pedagogy for online or hybrid education must involve the consideration, resources, policies, and adequate implementations from the government and other stakeholders (Head, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to revisit and amend the constitutional and legal framework in order to provide a compassionate quality of education to all students.

The sustainable development of Thailand during the pandemic era depends upon the robustness of its education and business sectors. The skill development at the higher education level is necessary along with the new technologies and digital advancements. The Thai education system is prevalent at all levels of governance, however, the students, being the major stakeholders are avoided in the policy formulation and implementation (Srichaiyarat and Lao-Amata, 2020).

The Thai constitution provides for the rights and overall development of the Thai population. However, during the pandemic scenario, several important factors were neglected among the youth and the education system. Education is regarded as an important sector to be controlled and regulated by the government as a public service (Anussornnitisarn et al., 2010). Thailand stands at 59th rank out of 137 countries under the global competitiveness index by the world economic forum. This rank is declining further in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic since 2020. Thus, the result of this study provides for the revisions required to be amended at the constitutional level. The educational reforms were found to be required in terms of both qualitative and quantitative factors with a focus on the digital advancement ensuring the reach of technologies to attain interrupted education along with the inclusion of stakeholders at the ground level policy implementation.

This research provides for an in-depth analysis of the factors and stakeholders governing the educational reforms in Thailand. Previous studies have been rigorously exploring the adequacy of the online education system (Pierna et al., 2009; Yukongdi, 2010; Kainzbauer and Hunt, 2014; Balakrishnan, 2020; Mindzak, 2020; Velle et al., 2020; Tabatadze and Chachkhiani, 2021; Bataineh et al., 2022), however, the gaps remain with the actual need of

the student and role of the governance mechanisms to provide quality education and equity of educational rights for all. The need for social, economic, and educational reforms is paramount to ensure the rights of all to receive quality education during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

CONCLUSION

The demographic characteristics of Thai students have an impact on their learning, perceptions, and experiences while educating themselves at various levels of university life. Age and gender are major factors in reluctance to absorb the new education system. The constant shift and changes toward the onsite, online, or hybrid classroom are one of the factors which diminish the enthusiasm of Thai students toward education. The digital technologies and legal framework are existing at the national level; however, inadequate and obsolete policies are resulting in enhancing the vulnerabilities and barriers to the education system in Thailand. Therefore, constitutional amendments and adequate implementation of the education policies are a must at the ground level in the Thai education system.

Recommendations

Thailand has been revisiting the laws, acts, policies, and ordinances to provide rights to its citizen. However, the study sheds light on the loopholes existing in the legal framework in Thailand. The following are the recommendations for the local and national level legal framework in Thailand.

- The government should amend the sections related to primary, secondary, and higher education in the constitution and policies.

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- The local level of governance should be strengthened to implement the laws of the land.
 - The awareness campaigns and training of stakeholders such as students, teachers, and parents to enhance the educational teaching and learning in Thailand.
 - Creation of public-private partnership at the local level for adequate policy implications.
 - Implementation of digital technologies at universities in collaboration with local government.
- The study paves way for further research into the innovative technologies and student rights to empower the education system in Thailand. Further research may be undertaken for employment opportunities after graduation in times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding authors.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Both authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank the Walailak University for the support toward this research under the research project number WU64251.

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