

การมีส่วนร่วมของศูนย์การเรียนรู้ผู้อพยพย้ายถิ่นคาทอลิก (MLCs)
ของอัครสังฆมณฑลกรุงเทพฯ สำหรับการจัดการศึกษา แก่เด็กผู้อพยพย้ายถิ่น
ชาวเมียนมา ในจังหวัดสมุทรสาคร ประเทศไทย

The Contributions of Catholic Migrant Learning Centers (MLCs) of
the Archdiocese of Bangkok for the Myanmar Migrant Children's
Education in Samut Sakhon Province in Thailand

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บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพฉบับนี้มุ่งศึกษาบทบาทด้านการศึกษาของศูนย์การเรียนรู้สำหรับแรงงานข้ามชาติคาทอลิก (Catholic Migrant Learning Centers - MLCs) ซึ่งดำเนินการโดย อัครสังฆมณฑลกรุงเทพฯ ที่มีต่อเด็กแรงงานข้ามชาติชาวเมียนมาในจังหวัดสมุทรสาคร ประเทศไทย โดยใช้การสัมภาษณ์แบบกึ่งโครงสร้างกับนักเรียน 30 คนจากศูนย์การเรียนรู้สำหรับแรงงานข้ามชาติ 3 แห่ง และการสังเกตการณ์ในชั้นเรียน งานวิจัยนี้ได้รับรู้ถึงความท้าทายสำคัญที่ส่งต่อการเข้าถึงและผลลัพธ์ทางการศึกษา ได้แก่ ความไม่มั่นคงในอาชีพของผู้ปกครองแรงงานข้ามชาติ ความยากจน ความไม่สอดคล้องระหว่างอายุของนักเรียนกับระดับชั้น อัตราการออกกลางคันสูง อุปสรรคด้านภาษาและวัฒนธรรม การขาดแคลนงบประมาณ และทรัพยากรการเรียนการสอนที่จำกัดในศูนย์การเรียนรู้ แม้จะเผชิญกับอุปสรรคเหล่านี้ ศูนย์การเรียนรู้สำหรับแรงงานข้ามชาติยังคงมีคุณค่าทางการศึกษาที่สำคัญ ด้วยหลักสูตรแบบองค์รวม ห้องเรียนที่มีอุปกรณ์การเรียนครบถ้วน ความร่วมมือกับกรมการศึกษานอกโรงเรียนและการศึกษาตามอัธยาศัย บริการแนะแนวเป็นระยะ การสนับสนุนด้านสุขภาพ กิจกรรมข้ามวัฒนธรรม และโครงการพัฒนาครู งานวิจัยสรุปด้วยข้อเสนอเชิงยุทธศาสตร์เพื่อพัฒนาโครงสร้าง หน้าที่ และประสิทธิภาพของศูนย์การเรียนรู้สำหรับแรงงานข้ามชาติ โดยมุ่งสร้างสภาพแวดล้อมการเรียนรู้ที่ครอบคลุมและยั่งยืนสำหรับเด็กแรงงานข้ามชาติ

คำสำคัญ : ศูนย์การเรียนรู้สำหรับแรงงานข้ามชาติคาทอลิก; เด็กแรงงานข้ามชาติชาวเมียนมา; อัครสังฆมณฑลกรุงเทพฯ; การศึกษาสำหรับแรงงานข้ามชาติ; การเรียนนอกโรงเรียน

Abstract

This qualitative study investigated the educational contributions of the Catholic Migrant Learning Centers (MLCs), operated by the Archdiocese of Bangkok, to Myanmar migrant children in Samut Sakhon province, Thailand. Through semi-structured interviews with 30 students across three migrant learning centers and classroom observations, the research identified key challenges affecting educational access and outcomes. These included migrant parents' unstable employment, poverty, students' age-grade mismatches, high dropout rates, language and cultural barriers, underfunding, and limited teaching resources

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of the migrant learning centers. Despite these obstacles, the migrant learning centers demonstrated significant educational value through a holistic curriculum, well-equipped classrooms, and partnerships with the Department of Non-Formal Education, periodic counselling services, health support, intercultural activities, and teacher development programs. The study concluded with strategic recommendations to enhance the structure, function, and effectiveness of migrant learning centers, aiming to create inclusive and sustainable learning environments for migrant children.

Keywords : Catholic Migrant Learning Centers; Myanmar Migrant Children; Archdiocese of Bangkok; Migrant Education; Non-formal Learning

Introduction

“No one is a stranger in the Church, for she embraces every nation, race, people, and tongue” (Rev. 7:9). This was stated in the Final Document of the International Congress, “Towards a better pastoral care for Migrants and Refugees in Asia,” held in Bangkok in 2008 which underscores the Catholic Church's mission to serve all, including migrants and refugees. In line with this vision, the Church considers care for migrants an essential aspect of its pastoral and social mission (Pontifical Mission Societies, 2008).

Thailand has long served as a destination for migrants seeking safety, economic opportunity, and better living conditions, particularly from neighbouring countries such as Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos. As of April 2023, over 2.5 million documented migrants were residing in Thailand, with Myanmar nationals comprising the largest share (Lindgren, 2023). Recent studies indicate that Samut Sakhon Province is home to Thailand’s largest fishing and seafood processing port market, and there are approximately 660,000 migrant workers in Samut Sakhon, 60% of whom are undocumented. Out of these 660,000 migrant workers in the province, 400,000 come from Myanmar. Including undocumented populations,

this number rises significantly. The primary reasons for Myanmar migration include economic hardship, political instability, human rights abuses, and armed conflict.

The Catholic Church in Thailand has played a vital role in bridging this gap. Rooted in the principles of human dignity and the common good, the Church has committed herself to the educational mission among migrants. The Archdiocese of Bangkok, in particular, has established Migrant Learning Centers (MLCs) in Samut Sakhon province, a region with a large Myanmar migrant population. These centers provide non-formal education and support services to children who would otherwise be excluded from mainstream schooling.

Previous studies have found that many migrant families prefer MLCs over Thai public schools due to linguistic and cultural familiarity, affordability, and flexible learning approaches (Wongsaengpaiboon, 2013; UNICEF, 2023). Moreover, the Archdiocese's Social Department has aligned its pastoral mission with national and international frameworks to uphold the rights and dignity of migrant children.

Despite Thailand's recognition of the educational rights of all children under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Myanmar migrant children in Samut Sakhon province continue to encounter numerous barriers in accessing quality education. These obstacles include unstable parental employment, poverty, language and cultural differences, and lack of formal recognition of MLCs by state authorities. Furthermore, the operation and sustainability of Catholic MLCs, while impactful, are challenged by underfunding, resource shortages, and limited teacher training opportunities. This study investigated: a) How do Catholic MLCs contribute to the education of Myanmar migrant children in Samut Sakhon Province? b) What are the principal challenges faced by these MLCs and their students? c) What improvements can be made to enhance the MLCs' structure, curriculum, and service delivery to meet the complex needs of migrant children more effectively?

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Research Objectives

This study is dedicated to achieving the following objectives. First, it aims to present the current educational contributions of Catholic Migrant Learning Centers of the Archdiocese of Bangkok to Myanmar migrant children in Samut Sakhon province of Thailand. Second, it examines the challenges faced by these MLCs in imparting education to the migrant children. Third, it suggests recommendations for better-organized structures, functions, and educational contributions for Catholic MLCs of the Archdiocese of Bangkok.

Literature Review

The literature review discusses previous research on the education of Myanmar migrant children, highlighting both the contributions and challenges faced by MLCs in this context. The literature review also points out how MLCs support academic achievement, psychosocial development, health, and community integration among migrant children and their families. This section also incorporates universal and Thai Catholic Church documents and social doctrines regarding the education of migrant children.

Catholic Church's Stand on Migrant Mission

Grounded in the teachings of Jesus Christ, the Catholic Church maintains a firm commitment to serving migrants across its ministries—pastoral, social, educational, and advocacy. The Catholic Church asserts that public authorities must uphold migrants' rights and dignity (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2000). Pope Paul VI emphasized that humanity's shared future requires collective effort and solidarity (Populorum Progressio, 1967). Pope Francis further reminds the faithful of their duty to promote inclusion, warning against "the globalization of indifference" (Evangelii Gaudium, 2013). The Church views its ministry among migrants not as charity but as solidarity, consciously standing with the marginalized in their struggle for dignity and belonging (Noddings, 1995).

Catholic Church's Global and Local Commitment to Migrant Education

The Catholic Church globally affirms its commitment to the rights and dignity of migrants, including their educational rights. Papal documents such as *Populorum Progressio* (Pope Paul VI, 1967) and *Evangelii Gaudium* (Pope Francis, 2013) call on the Church to promote integral human development and social inclusion, especially for the marginalized. In the Thai context, the Church's mission includes operating MLCs, offering pastoral and educational services rooted in Catholic social teaching (Pontifical Mission Societies, 2008).

Caritas Thailand, through its branches—the Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees (COERR) and the National Catholic Commission on Migration (NCCM)—coordinates Catholic responses to migration issues, including education (Westerby, 2023). These organizations align with Vatican directives to ensure that migrant children in Thailand receive education that matches Thai standards (Pope Francis, 2017). This approach is also influenced by Freire's (2000) pedagogy, emphasizing solidarity, empowerment, and the formation of critical consciousness among learners. Catholic institutions, including MLCs, foster moral, intellectual, and social development to cultivate peace and global citizenship (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013; Catholic Education in Thailand 2022-2023).

Migrant Children's Education in Thailand: Challenges and Barriers

Thailand is an economic powerhouse in Southeast Asia. As its economy develops and wages rise, the demand for migrant labour to fill jobs has grown significantly. The migration of Myanmar nationals to Thailand, particularly in provinces such as Samut Sakhon, has raised significant concerns regarding the education of migrant children. These children typically fall into three categories: (1) those who migrate with their families, (2) unaccompanied minors or those migrating with peers, and (3) children born in Thailand to Myanmar migrant parents (Adhikari et al., 2014). Despite Thailand's legal frameworks guaranteeing education for all children, such as the 1999 National Education Act and its

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adherence to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Myanmar migrant children still face obstacles in accessing quality education.

A key challenge remains their undocumented status. An estimated 1 to 2.5 million migrant workers in Thailand lack legal documentation, directly impacting the educational rights of their children (IOM, 2024). Approximately 140,000 migrant children, or 35% of the migrant child population, are excluded from formal education and are often compelled to engage in labour to support their families (Westerby, 2023). Moreover, widespread societal perceptions view migrants as a threat to national stability, which restricts their integration into the Thai public education system and perpetuates segregation in educational settings.

Poverty among migrant families compounds the challenges. While MLCs such as those operated by the Catholic Church offer free or low-cost tuition, associated costs—uniforms, transportation, school materials—remain unaffordable for many families. Consequently, this economic strain often results in poor school attendance, child malnutrition, or premature entry into the labor market (Asian Research Center for Migration, 2022).

The Status of Catholic Migrant Learning Centers

Catholic MLCs in Samut Sakhon are non-formal educational centers established and managed by the Archdiocese of Bangkok to provide learning opportunities for underprivileged migrant children, focusing on community development and enhancing the quality of life. MLCs, such as those operated by the Archdiocese of Bangkok, have emerged as crucial educational providers for these marginalized children. However, many of these centers lack formal recognition by both Thai and Myanmar educational authorities, limiting the transferability of their curricula and the future educational or vocational prospects of their students (Dowding, 2015). Additionally, societal prejudice influences educational policy and public opinion. A UNICEF survey conducted in Thailand found that only 33% of Thai parents fully supported equal educational rights for

migrant children, preferring instead that these children be taught in separate facilities (Chulalongkorn University & UNICEF Thailand, 2022).

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the educational contributions of Catholic MLCs operated by the Archdiocese of Bangkok, as well as the challenges faced by these institutions and the students they serve (Moser A, 2017). The research was conducted at three MLCs located in Samut Sakhon province: St. Ann Catholic Center for Migrants (ACCM), St. Joachim Catholic Center for Migrants (JCCM), and Marist Center for Migrants (MCM). These centers were selected based on the following criteria. Firstly, all three were officially administered by the Archdiocese of Bangkok. Secondly, they accommodated the largest number of Myanmar migrant students among MLCs under the Archdiocese. At last, they were the oldest MLCs operating in the province.

The study was conducted under the supervision of St. Ann Church, Tha Chin, which oversees the three centers. Most students enrolled in these MLCs are Myanmar migrants or were born in Thailand to Myanmar migrant parents.

Research Participants

The total student population across the three centers during the 2023–2024 academic year was 548 students. Refer to Table 1 below for the breakdown of the student population.

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Table 1 Number of migrant students and teachers in three MLCS as per their gender

MLCs	Students			Teachers		
	Male	Female	Others	Male	Female	Others
ACCM	106	97		3	7	
JCCM	61	124		1	5	
MCM	75	85		1	5	
Total	242	306		5	17	
Grand Total	548			22		

Note. Office of ACCM, JCCM, and MCM MLCs, March 2024.

Participants for this study were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals who could provide in-depth and relevant insights (Patton, 2002). Participants were chosen based on their communication skills, educational level, and willingness to participate. They represented a range of age groups, genders, and educational levels, consistent with the centers’ enrolment. Following this method, thirty students -10 from each MLC – were selected to participate in the research.

Data Collection

The data were collected using semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, conducted between October 2023 and May 2024.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The primary data collection method was semi-structured interviews. Following Heath’s (2023) recommendations, open-ended questions were used to elicit detailed responses about students’ experiences with the MLCs, the challenges they faced, and the perceived effectiveness of the education they received. Moreover, addressing the educational challenges faced by migrant children can be emotionally sensitive. Semi-structured formats foster rapport and trust, allowing participants to express themselves more openly.

Prior to conducting interviews, the researcher visited each center to establish rapport with participants. Interviews were conducted with the assistance of teachers who served as interpreters due to the researcher's limited proficiency in Thai and Burmese. All interviews were transcribed with the help of interpreters. Responses were later emailed to the researcher for further study.

Classroom Observations

To enhance the insights gained from the interviews, classroom observations were conducted. This approach aimed to examine teaching methodologies, the learning environment, and student engagement. Through classroom observations, the researcher was able to witness teaching styles, learner participation, peer interaction, and the actual learning environment firsthand. This provided valuable insights that interviews alone could not offer. Additionally, the researcher reviewed annual academic activity plans and institutional records supplied by MLC directors, coordinators, and teachers as supplementary observational tools to support the findings.

Data Analysis

Data were coded thematically using inductive coding to identify recurring themes and patterns across interviews and observations. Triangulation of sources (semi-structured interview, classroom observation, document review) ensured data credibility. The collected data were synthesized and categorized to validate and extend understanding of the research questions. All analysis followed ethical standards for confidentiality and informed consent.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical standards for research involving human participants. Verbal and written consent was obtained from all participants. To maintain confidentiality, no identifying information was collected or reported. Sensitive topics, including discrimination and economic hardships of the migrants, negative attitudes towards migrants, and painful memories of past

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history, were approached with care to protect participants' emotional well-being. All responses were anonymized and securely stored to ensure participant privacy.

Research Findings and Discussion

In alignment with the research objectives, this section systematically presents the key findings derived from the study. The findings further provide a brief historical context of the Catholic MLCs, identify the challenges they currently face, and highlight their key educational contributions to Myanmar migrant children.

The MLCs Administered by the Archdiocese of Bangkok

Guided by the Gospel call to "welcome the stranger," the Archdiocese of Bangkok established ACCM, JCCM, and MCM MLCs for enhancing Myanmar migrant children's education. These MLCs serve as social safety nets by protecting the migrant children from becoming street children, engaging in child labor, or dropping out of school, thereby supporting the protective role of community learning centers. Initiated in 2010 by Fr. Theeraphol Kobvithayakul and his volunteers, these centers serve marginalized Myanmar migrant children, most of whom were born in Thailand and practice Buddhism. The MLCs are funded primarily by the Archdiocese of Bangkok and Caritas Bangkok. Saint Ann Church oversees these MLCs, and the Parish priest manages the finances, directing funds to benefit migrant children. Donations and minimal contributions from parents help support these MLCs.

The vision of these MLCs is to empower migrant children with inclusive, quality education, fostering moral, intellectual, and cultural growth for peaceful integration into Thai society. And the MLCs' mission is to deliver non-formal, value-based education addressing academic, emotional, and social needs while advocating for child rights, health, and family engagement.

Table 2 Number of migrant students in three MLCS as per their age group

Age Group of the students	ACCM	JCCM	MCM	Total
3-5 years old	12	33	5	50
6-8 years old	38	65	33	136
9-12 years old	97	58	70	225
13-15 years old	47	27	44	118
16-18 years old	9	2	8	19
Total	203	185	160	548

Note. Office of ACCM, JCCM, and MCM MLCs, March 2024.

The total number of enrolled students across the three MLCs is 548. In terms of age distribution, students aged 3–5 represent 9.1% of the population, those aged 6–8 account for 24.8%, students aged 9–12 make up the majority at 41.0%, those aged 13–15 comprise 21.5%, and students aged 16–18 represent 3.5%. The gender ratio is as follows: 44.2% male and 55.8% female. This data indicates that most children fall within the late childhood and early adolescence age groups. Additionally, it is important to note that the teacher-student ratio is around 1:25, which exceeds the optimal level.

Saint Ann Catholic Centre for Migrants (ACCM)

The ACCM, founded in 2010 under the Archdiocese of Bangkok, serves as a key educational institution for migrant children in Bang Ya Phraek, Tha Chalom, Tha Chin, in the Mueang Samut Sakhon district of Samut Sakhon Province. By offering daily classes to over 200 students, conducting family outreach through home visits, and maintaining a stable teaching staff with extensive experience in migrant education, the center effectively addresses barriers to schooling and fosters an inclusive, supportive learning environment. The reports of the ACCM states that, since its inception, it has educated 415 children, many of whom are migrant children from Myanmar. The success of ACCM has also inspired the

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establishment of two additional centers, thereby expanding educational access and improving the quality of life for migrant children in the region.

Marist Center for Migrants (MCM)

The MCM, established in 2011 under the Archdiocese of Bangkok, operates in the Mahachai district of Samut Sakhon Province. It addresses the educational and social needs of Myanmar migrant children, particularly in Khong Khru and Mahachai districts. The center offers Thai language instruction, healthcare education, moral development, and life skills training. Its team includes experienced teachers, volunteers, and religious sisters from the Congregation of St. Joseph of the Apparition, supported by staff from both Thailand and Myanmar. Approximately 160 students attend the MCM each day.

The information about the Catholic MLCs is explained in Figure 1 below.







Information about Three Catholic MLCs			
Characteristic	ACCM	MCM	JCCM
 Foundation Year	2010	2011	2013
 Location	Bang Ya Phraek, The Chalom, The Chai	Khong Khru, Mahachai district	Ban Ua Arthorn, Soi Tha Chin
 Administered By	Archdiocese of Bangkok	Archdiocese of Bangkok	Archdiocese of Bangkok
 Daily Attendance	200	160	185
 Key Activities	Language classes, family outreach	Thai language, healthcare, life skills	Anti-trafficking, child protection
 Staffing	Religious nuns, Teachers, and Volunteers	Religious nuns, Teachers, and Volunteers	Religious nuns, Teachers, and Volunteers

Figure 1 Information about the MLCs administered by the Archdiocese of Bangkok

Saint Joachim Catholic Center for Migrants (JCCM)

Founded in 2013 by Caritas Bangkok and currently administered by the Archdiocese of Bangkok, the JCCM is situated in Ban Ua Arthorn, Soi Tha Chin, Mueang Samut Sakhon District, Samut Sakhon Province. Formerly known as the Catholic Commission for Human Development, the center continues the mission by promoting anti-human trafficking awareness, child protection, and livelihood

development. Currently administered by Dominican Sisters from the Philippines, teachers and volunteers from Thailand and Myanmar, JCCM serves approximately 185 migrant children daily, comprising both Myanmar-born and Thai-born students. In addition to educational activities, JCCM provides transportation services for students, ensuring safe access to learning opportunities and fostering a nurturing and secure environment.

Table 3 Number of migrant students in three MLCS as per the grades in which they study

Grades of the students	ACCM	JCCM	MCM	Total
Kindergarten	95	110	45	250
Elementary Level (Grades 1-3)	83	68	91	242
Elementary Level (Grades 4-6)	25	7	22	54
Lower Secondary (Grades 7-9)	0	0	2	2
Total	203	185	160	548

Note. Office of ACCM, JCCM, and MCM MLCs, March 2024.

The table indicates grade-level enrolment as follows: Kindergarten has 250 students (45.6%), Elementary grades 1–3 have 242 students (44.2%), Elementary grades 4–6 have 54 students (9.8%), and Lower Secondary grades 7–9 have two students (0.4%). Statistical summaries demonstrate a high concentration of primary-aged learners, with marked challenges in progression beyond Grade 6. These results depict a significant drop in enrolment after the primary level, highlighting the need for continuity in the curriculum and improved pathways to higher education.

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Educational Contributions of Catholic MLCs of the Archdiocese of Bangkok

This section presents the major educational contributions of ACCM, JCCM, and MCM MLCs in the areas of creating academic and career opportunities, overall childhood development, student welfare and health promotion, integration of family and cultural aspects, and teacher professional development. The results of the findings show that the MLCs contribute significantly not only to academic growth but also to psychosocial development, health, and community bonding.

Academic and Career Advancement Opportunities

The non-formal educational curriculum provided at the MLCs covers Thai, Burmese, English, Mathematics, Science, Computer Science, Arts, Physical Education, language development programs, and subjects related to living skills and ethics. They also provide modern teaching facilities, including smart TVs, computers, projectors, Sigkha Asia Mobile Library Service, textbooks and notebooks, and mini libraries to enhance learning effectiveness. MLCs collaborate with Thailand's Department of Non-formal Education to facilitate pathways for higher education and employment for students.

Holistic Child Development

MLCs deliver periodical counselling and therapy services focused on healing trauma and promoting emotional well-being. They try to maintain a safe and supportive learning environment for migrant children. MLCs are vital for the holistic development of migrant children, addressing not only their academic needs but also their safety, well-being, and cultural integration.

Student Welfare and Health Promotion

The MLCs provide daily nutritious meals along with hygiene care practices. They conduct regular health education sessions that address hygiene, communicable diseases, and natural family planning. They distribute essential items such as soap, toothpaste, and toothbrushes during home visits, especially to improve the poor living conditions of many migrant families. Through

collaborations with healthcare providers, including St. Louis Hospital, public and private healthcare centers, they also facilitate access to free medical check-ups and medications periodically.

Family and Community Engagement

The MLCs offer educational programs in Thai, English, and Computer Science for Myanmar migrant parents. They promote active parental involvement through regular home visits conducted by teachers and volunteers. The initiatives taken by the MLCs improve community awareness and practices about child protection and lawful working conditions and help migrant children flourish academically, socially, and emotionally.

Cultural Integration and Intercultural Awareness

The celebration of major religious and cultural festivals, such as Buddhist Lent Day, Christmas, the annual church feast of Saint Ann, Children's Day, Teachers' Day, Father's Day, Mother's Day, the Loy Krathong Festival, the Waso Robe Offering Ceremony, and the Kathina Robe Offering Ceremony, aim to promote intercultural understanding and harmony among students and the local community.

Teacher Professional Development

The Social Department of the Archdiocese of Bangkok regularly provides training for teachers in various areas such as pedagogy, the Church's social doctrine, ethical education, family counselling, and group therapy. The Parish Priest of St. Ann Church, who is also the director of the MLCs, provides the teachers with annual input sessions and orientation programs on ethics and morality. This training aims to enhance teaching effectiveness and transform the MLCs into faith communities that contribute to creating a more humane, just, and caring world (Oldenski, 1997).

Challenges Faced by the MLCs

This section presents the key challenges faced by the Catholic MLCs in Samut Sakhon and the students they serve, as identified through interviews and

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classroom observations. Eight primary challenges consistently highlighted show that while many children benefit from MLCs, systemic, economic, and social barriers jeopardize their access to and continuity in education.

Unstable Employment of Migrant Parents

Students' education is frequently disrupted by the transient employment patterns of their parents. Unstable work conditions often lead to family relocation, preventing children from completing the academic year or gaining proficiency in Thai or Burmese language instruction. The study shows that job instability in parents leads to psychological stress in some children, resulting in behavioral issues and academic challenges. Frequent absences or relocations negatively affect their emotional well-being and school performance.

Age-Grade Mismatches

Disparities between students' ages and academic levels were noted in all three centers. Many older students were placed in lower grades due to a previous lack of access to education, which affected classroom dynamics and created social discomfort among peers. Older students placed in younger grades due to interrupted schooling often experience embarrassment, social isolation, and a misalignment of learning levels. These factors can lead to disengagement and bullying.

Poverty and Economic Strain

While tuition at MLCs is minimal or free, supplementary costs—including uniforms, transportation, and school supplies—remain prohibitive for many families. Economic hardship often results in irregular attendance, malnutrition, or early dropout, especially when children are expected to contribute to household income. As a result, some children choose to enter the labor market after or before completing their studies, and others also follow their parents, move to other areas, or return to their own countries.

Language and Cultural Barriers

Language remains a persistent challenge. While the MLCs use Thai and Burmese as mediums of instruction, students often speak diverse dialects. Teachers, especially those unfamiliar with the students' native languages or cultural contexts, reported difficulty in delivering lessons effectively. The shortage of bilingual teachers is also leading to academic struggles.

Some native teachers expressed that language and cultural differences affect understanding between teachers and students.

High Dropout Rates

Although the state stipulates that every student has the right to attend school, not all schools accept migrant children, especially in urban areas like Samut Sakhon, except the MLCs. Upon completing their time at the MLCs, many students do not pursue further education. Instead, they follow their parents into informal labor sectors, such as fisheries or factory work, due to financial constraints or lack of formal recognition of their academic credentials. Thus, high dropout rates lead to lower education completion levels, restricting access to better jobs and economic opportunities, which perpetuates a cycle of poverty.

Unrecognized Status of MLCs

According to research done by the Save the Children International Organization, the registration of MLCs is based only on national security considerations. Sometimes, the local government may need to be made aware of the curriculum taught in the MLCs, leading to confusion in the education system (Dowding, 2015). Some MLCs have yet to be incorporated into the Thai education system. Most of the education courses offered by MLC need to be recognized by the Thai or Myanmar government.

Insufficient Teaching Materials

Compared to formal Thai public schools, the MLCs often lack up-to-date textbooks, educational technology, and enrichment resources. This gap directly affects the quality of instruction and student engagement. Although the MLCs

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have core curriculum textbooks, research indicates they find difficulties in providing supplementary learning materials. During crises, such as COVID-19, MLCs faced significant challenges in transitioning to online or hybrid learning due to their limited digital infrastructure and resources.

Limited Institutional Funding

A constrained budget was frequently cited as a critical issue. Funding shortages limit the number of teachers, classroom facilities, and teaching materials available. This can lead to a significant turnover of staff and directly impact the quality of education, as teachers may lack subject content knowledge. MLCs struggle to increase their capacity due to funding shortages, despite a strong demand for their services.

Recommendations for Better-Organized Structures, Functions, Educational Contributions for Catholic MLCs of the Archdiocese of Bangkok

The research findings offer practical recommendations to policymakers, religious organizations, NGOs, and educational planners on strengthening migrant education frameworks. This aligns with global goals such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), ensuring that no child—irrespective of nationality or legal status—is left behind (Gutierrez et. al., 2024). Based on the study’s findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the structure, operation, and educational impact of the Catholic MLCs in Samut Sakhon. These suggestions are organized into four thematic areas: financial sustainability, development of a better learning environment, community engagement, and pastoral strategy.

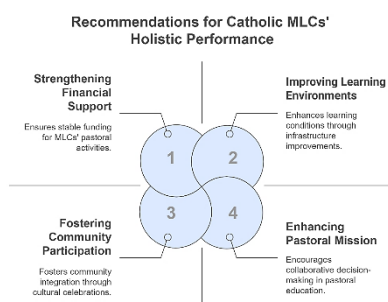


Figure 2 Recommendations to enhance the holistic performance of Catholic MLCs

Strengthening Financial and Institutional Support

The MLCs need to establish partnerships with local and international organizations—including Church-based networks, NGOs, and educational institutions—to secure consistent financial support for the MLCs' mission. The study advocates for partial government recognition and integration of MLCs into national non-formal education policy to access public resources and teacher development programs. MLCs are recommended to offer competitive stipends and benefits to attract and retain qualified teachers and volunteers committed to long-term service in non-formal education settings.

Improving Access and Learning Environments

To have better learning environments, the MLCs need to increase investment in infrastructure by expanding classroom space, improving sanitation facilities, and providing adequate teaching materials and technology (e.g., smart TVs, computers, and projectors). Development of tailored, age-appropriate curricula to address disparities in student age and academic level, promoting differentiated instruction and inclusive learning, is the need of the time. The study also suggests expanding outreach efforts to raise awareness among migrant families about enrolment procedures, educational rights, and the benefits of continuous learning.

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Fostering Community Participation and Cultural Integration

The study encourages deeper collaboration with parents through regular home visits, bilingual workshops, and community-based learning programs, enhancing family engagement in students' education. Promotion of intercultural events and shared celebrations that foster solidarity among migrant and host communities, in line with Catholic values of unity in diversity, would enhance the migrant community participation in learning. There is a need for training educators and volunteers of the MLCs in cultural competency to enhance the inclusion of migrant cultures in teaching methods. The MLCs are recommended to establish exchange programs between Thailand and Myanmar to enhance mutual understanding of educational and social conditions, involving clergy, educators, and youth leaders.

Enhancing the Pastoral and Pedagogical Mission

The study recommends the implementation of the Archdiocese of Bangkok's socio-pastoral action plan in their MLCs with active involvement from clergy, religious communities, and lay partners. The study also suggests embracing a synodal model of educational ministry, emphasizing co-responsibility and participation by migrant families and students in planning and decision-making processes. The mission of the MLCs reflects the Catholic Church's emphasis on synodality—walking with the marginalized rather than hierarchically serving them (Pope Francis, 2013). The study highly recommends incorporating dialogical teaching approaches, inspired by Paulo Freire, to facilitate reflective, trauma-informed learning that centers students' lived experiences and voices (Freire, 2001).

Conclusion

MLCs in Thailand play a crucial role in providing educational opportunities for Myanmar migrant children who might otherwise be excluded from the formal education system. This study underscores the indispensable role of Catholic MLCs

in Samut Sakhon, operated by the Archdiocese of Bangkok, as critical agents of educational justice for Myanmar migrant children in Thailand. The study holds significant value in the field of migrant education and Catholic pastoral mission in Thailand and highlights the vital contributions of Catholic MLCs, in addressing the educational needs of Myanmar migrant children. Despite facing numerous challenges—including poverty, legal uncertainty, language barriers, and limited resources—these centers have created inclusive, compassionate, and culturally responsive learning environments that serve as lifelines for vulnerable migrant families. Through non-formal education rooted in Catholic social teaching, the MLCs foster not only academic development but also the holistic formation of students, encompassing their moral, emotional, and spiritual well-being. This mission reflects the Church’s broader commitment to human dignity and solidarity.

This research contributes by providing empirical evidence on how these Catholic MLCs are effectively bridging the educational gap for these children. To sustain and strengthen this mission, the study also recommends a collaborative, multi-level response. This includes increased financial investment, policy support, community engagement, and integration of dialogical and intercultural pedagogies. The findings also emphasize the need for strategic investment in teacher training, curriculum advancement, and formal recognition of MLCs to ensure sustainable educational futures for migrant children. With ecclesiastical, national, and international support, the MLCs can continue to serve as transformative spaces of hope, learning, and dignity for migrant children, ensuring that no child is left behind, regardless of nationality, legal status, or economic condition.

By integrating empirical findings with evidence-based recommendations and suggestions, this research study not only enriches scholarly understanding but also outlines a roadmap for potential action. This research work also investigates how MLCs, despite their challenges, can foster educational resilience,

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innovation, and inclusivity in under-resourced contexts. This study highlights the need for continued research to establish standardized curricula, accreditation frameworks, and cross-border cooperation between Thai and Myanmar authorities. Such efforts would enhance the formal recognition of migrant education and ensure continuity for migrant children. Strengthening these areas will not only empower Catholic MLCs in Samut Sakhon but also support the development of inclusive and sustainable educational systems for migrant communities across Thailand and beyond.

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