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Authors

Sumalee Sungsri and Chusak Prescott

Series Editors

Michael Osborne and Shalini Singh

Introduction

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Authors

Sumalee Sungsi and Chusak Prescott, 2026.

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Series Editors

Michael Osborne and Shalini Singh

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NATIONAL POLICIES OF ADULT AND LIFELONG LEARNING AND EDUCATION: THAILAND

Authors: Sumalee Sungsi¹ and Chusak Prescott²

Series Editors: Michael Osborne, University of Glasgow, UK and Shalini Singh, Helmut Schmidt University/ University of the Federal Armed Forces, Germany

General Historical Background of ALE and LLL

In the past, before the education system was established, Thai people obtained knowledge and skills for their day-to-day living and occupations from their families and relatives in the form of informal learning. Until the year 1871, the first formal education was introduced in the form of a school for the civil service officers. After that, a number of schools were established for school-age people. After providing formal education for school-age people for some time, it was found that working-age people or adults also need some kind of education. Therefore, the Adult Education Division was set up within the Ministry of Education in the year 1940 to provide adult education, which is now called non-formal education. (Sungsri,2018). Since then, both formal education and adult education have been developed in every period to serve the needs of the people and society. When UNESCO introduced and broadly promoted the significance of lifelong education to the world, Thailand was one of the countries which response to this concept. So, the concept of lifelong education has been introduced to the educational system of the country. Lifelong education has been strongly promoted from 1999 onward, when the National Education Act 1999 was promulgated. According to the Act, formal, non-formal, and informal education are regarded as the key components of lifelong education. After the Act had been implemented, a number of policies, plans, and guidelines for providing education to promote lifelong education were introduced, and participation of all sectors was encouraged.

Reaching the goals of the acts, policies, plans, and strategies designed for promoting and providing lifelong learning for all is a big and challenging task. Therefore, the difference,

¹ *Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Pak Kret, Thailand.*

² *Walailak University, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand.*

the nature, and the needs of each target group should be the main focus. The learning activities provided for each group should be useful, applicable, and associated with their social and environmental circumstances in order to enable them to improve their occupations and quality of life. Moreover, cooperation from all sectors at all levels, such as educational administrators, education providers, related agencies, local administrators, and local communities, is essential. However, the most important factor is the recognition of the significance of lifelong learning and the participation of the learners themselves.

Current relevant national legislation pertaining to adult and lifelong learning (ALE) and lifelong learning (LLL)

In Thailand, the National Education Act of 1999 serves as the primary reference for promoting and implementing Lifelong Learning (Office of the National Education Commission/Office of the Prime Minister, 1999). It is based on the principles of providing lifelong education for all through the participation of all segments of society. This Act was amended in 2002, 2010, and 2019. The amendments were primarily focused on adjusting administrative structures. For example, in 2002, the Ministry of Culture was set up to oversee arts and culture. In 2010, primary education and secondary education, which were overseen by the same educational service area, were categorized separately as the primary educational service area and the secondary educational service area. In 2019, the Higher Education Commission, which was under the Ministry of Education, was separated to become the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation. According to this Act, individuals of all ages have the right to, and are encouraged to pursue, lifelong education, which includes all forms of learning: formal, non-formal, and informal education.

In addition to this Act, several related plans and policies designed to support lifelong learning have been issued over time: the 20-Year National Strategy (2017-2036), the 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2023-2027), and the National Scheme of Education B.E. 2560-2579 (2017-2036). The National Strategy (2018-2037) (National Strategy Secretariat Office, Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2018) is the country's first national long-term strategy, established pursuant to the Constitution. It covers six key strategies for developing the country in various aspects. One among them, no. 3, is human capital development and strengthening. For this key strategy, lifelong learning and lifelong self-development are the main focuses. The 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2023-2027) and the National Scheme of Education B.E. 2560-2579 (2017-2036) were developed under the framework of the National Strategy, and they

are related to each other. Next to the 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2023-2027) and the National Scheme of Education B.E. 2560-2579 (2017-2036) are policies and plans from each related department or agency, such as the policy of the Office of Non-formal and Informal Education Promotion.

The 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2023-2027) (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, Office of the Prime Minister, 2023) has 13 milestones; milestone 12 focuses on human resource development and is integral to achieving the nation's goal of having a high-capability workforce that is committed to lifelong learning and can adapt to future developments.

The National Scheme of Education B.E. 2560-2579 (2017-2036) (Office of the Education Council, 2017) sets the vision that all Thai people obtain quality education and lifelong learning, which is responsive to the principles of the sufficiency economy philosophy and the changes of 21st-century society.

Moreover, the Office of Non-formal and Informal Education Promotion, now the Department of Learning Encouragement (effective from May 2023), the primary agency responsible for providing lifelong education in the country, develops an annual policy for action to serve the aims of the National Scheme of Education B.E. 2560-2579 (2017-2036). It also plays a pivotal role. For example, the 2022 annual policy of the Office of Non-formal and Informal Education Promotion aims to promote and enhance lifelong education for all age groups, focusing on extending educational opportunities to school-aged children who are unable to obtain education in the formal school system, establishing suitable occupations for the working-age population by empowering them with re-skills, up-skills, and new skills, providing the elderly with necessary life skills, and promoting them to be active aging people. The disabled, homeless children, and other disadvantaged groups will also benefit from the scheme.

The Learning Encouragement Act, 2023, focuses on the developmental needs of individuals across all age groups, aiming to equip them with basic knowledge and skills (learning skills, professional skills, and life skills) consistent with global development.

Processes for gathering evidence to create policies

Each Act, policy, and plan mentioned earlier has been developed by a special committee of representatives from all relevant sectors. The baseline data for developing these Acts, plans, and policies came from surveys, research, analyses, and synthesis of information regarding the current situation, problems, and trends at both national and global levels in

various fields, including economics, social environment, science and technology growth, population demographic changes, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 2030), and 21st-century work skills and workforce demands.

These data and the drafted policies underwent public hearings, enabling stakeholders and citizens from across the country to participate in the process, providing feedback for further refinement and improvement. The process included the following steps: the special committee developed drafts of policies or plans, the drafts were verified several times by the committee and representatives of related agencies, the drafts were presented to experts in the fields for suggestions, and public hearings were organized in every part of the country in order to obtain feedback from local organizations and people.

People are also encouraged to give feedback through online channels.

Identified Challenges and Priorities for Action

Despite the government's significant efforts to provide lifelong education across all age groups, several challenges remain. The following issues present obstacles for the government and relevant departments to address:

1. **Educational Opportunity.** The government has implemented various policies to promote and support national education, particularly for the school-age population, including the underprivileged, educationally at-risk children, and those with special needs. However, not all children in need receive these opportunities, and high dropout rates continue to be a concern. While there is increased educational support for the working-age population, many individuals still have education levels below the lower secondary level. To ensure equitable and sustainable development, it is crucial to provide opportunities for higher-quality education to children and people of all ages. Additionally, the overall quality of national education must be improved, as it is vital for the country's economic and social development.
2. **Educational Quality.** At present, educational quality is inadequate, with student learning outcomes at the basic education level falling below domestic averages and significantly lower than those in other Asian countries. Furthermore, there is a pressing need to enhance the morals and ethics of the youth. The study reveals that the educational qualifications of the working-age population (ages 15 and up) do not align with labor market demands. Enrollment in vocational schools is lower than in higher secondary education, resulting in a shortage of middle-level skilled labor. Conversely, the number of higher education graduates is rising, yet many do not meet labor market requirements and possess skills that are not in demand, contributing to

mass unemployment. To better align education with employment needs, students and skilled labor must receive improved preparation and development. A workforce demand analysis should be conducted to inform educational management goals and ensure that the job market is supplied with well-prepared candidates.

3. **Instructional Effectiveness, Administration, and Management of Educational Budget.** National education faces structural and administrative challenges, particularly in the management of small schools, which require prioritization to enhance educational quality and reduce costs. Although national spending on education is relatively high compared to other countries, much of the budget focuses on learner development and instruction, with insufficient investment in teacher development. Greater integration of educational information technology in administration is required, especially in small schools. If executed in collaboration across all sectors to promote and support education, this may ultimately lead to reduced government expenditure and a reformed educational budget system.

These challenges have been analyzed and addressed via the establishment of targets, plans, and operational strategies outlined in the *National Scheme of Education B.E. 2560-2579 (2017-2036)*. The implementation is divided into phases, each lasting five years. In addition, there are annual operational plans in place.

Vision statements for ALE and LLL

In general, all the Acts, Plans, and Policies mentioned earlier have a vision and mission aimed at enabling all Thai people to learn throughout their lives in every manner and setting. The following are the details of each of these Acts, Plans, and Policies:

The National Education Act, 1999, has the principles that education provided for people should be lifelong education, encouraging all societal segments to participate in organizing education, and the development of content and learning processes should be ongoing (Office of the National Education Commission/Office of the Prime Minister, 1999, p.3).

The National Strategy (2018-2037) covers six key areas with the aspiration for Thailand "to become a developed country with security, prosperity, and sustainability in accordance with the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy" (National Strategy Secretariat Office, Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2018, p.1). The aim is to maintain national security, enhance people's welfare, boost multidimensional national competitiveness to ensure consistent economic growth, empower human capital throughout all life stages to manifest a competent and moral citizenry, broaden opportunities for social

equality, promote environmentally friendly growth to improve the quality of life, and develop governmental administrative efficiency for enhanced public benefits. Aspects relating to ALE and LLL are embodied in key strategy 3: human capital development and strengthening. It emphasizes the empowerment of human capital at every life stage to cultivate skillful and moral citizens by encouraging lifelong learning and the development of desirable habits.

The National Scheme of Education B.E.2560-2579 (2017-2036) has the ultimate vision that

“All Thai people achieve high quality and meaningful education and engage in lifelong learning as well as live with happiness based on the principles of a sufficiency economy philosophy and develop themselves continuously.” (Office of the Education Council, 2017, p.16).

The 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2023-2027), milestone 12, states the following targets for developing and maintaining an adaptive high-capability workforce devoted to lifelong learning (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, Office of the Prime Minister, 2023). These include:

- Target 1: Develop Thai people of all age groups to their full potential, ensuring they are equipped with the necessary capacity for the modern world; are imbued with qualities like social norms, integrity, and ethics; are resilient to global disruptions; and can coexist harmoniously within society.
- Target 2: Ensure the Thai workforce possesses capabilities aligned with the needs of target manufacturing sectors and can create future-oriented jobs.
- Target 3: Guarantee access to lifelong learning for all population groups.

The 2022 annual policy of the Office of Non-formal and Informal Education Promotion adheres to the guidelines of the Non-formal and Informal Education Promotion Act, 2008. The essence of this policy is the principle of providing non-formal and informal education to promote lifelong education for all individuals.

The Learning Encouragement Act, 2023, upgraded the Office of Non-formal and Informal Education Promotion (NFE) to the Department of Learning Promotion. The department's primary responsibilities include organizing, promoting, and supporting learning in three dimensions: lifelong learning, learning for self-development, and learning for academic qualifications.

Strategies for Implementation and Targets

The following are strategies for implementation and targets of each act, plan, and policy.

To achieve the targets of lifelong education for all and enable the Thai people to develop in every aspect and live harmoniously with others, the National Education Act, 1999, with amendments in 2002 and 2010, outlines in Section 9 that the organization of education systems should observe principles such as: (1) unity in policy and diversity in implementation, (2) decentralization of authority to educational service areas, educational institutions, and local administration, (3) resource mobilization, and (4) partnerships with individuals, families, communities, organizations, local administration, professional bodies, religious institutions, and other social organizations (Office of the National Education Commission/Office of the Prime Minister, 1999, p.3)

The National Scheme of Education 2017-2036, with the targets of letting all Thai people obtain quality lifelong education, live happily with a sufficiency economy, and adjust themselves properly to the changes in the world, details six strategies (Office of the Education Council, 2017). These are:

- Strategy 1: Educational management for the strength of the nation and society. This strategy focuses on encouraging Thai people of all ages, in every part of the country, to respect the democratic system under a constitutional monarchy, obtain quality education, and ensure life safety.
- Strategy 2: Development of research and innovation workforce to enhance national competitiveness. Key factors within this strategy are that the national workforce possesses essential skills and capabilities that meet the requirements of the job market and the needs of national economic and social development. Educational institutions and organizations produce graduates with expertise and specialization in specific fields.
- Strategy 3: Developing proficiency for people of all ages and promoting a lifelong learning society. Key factors within this strategy include enabling learners to possess the skills and characteristics of Thai citizens, along with other necessary skills and qualifications for living in the 21st century. Learning centres, textbooks, educational innovations, and learning media are of high quality and standards, and people should be able to access these resources without limitation.
- Strategy 4: Creating opportunities for people and equality in education. Key factors within this strategy are that all Thai people receive opportunities and equal access to education, including education through media and digital technology.

- Strategy 5: Educational administration to enhance the quality of an eco-friendly life. Key factors within this strategy are that people of all ages are environmentally aware, have morals and ethics, and are capable of putting the philosophy of the sufficiency economy into practice. Curriculum, learning centers, and learning materials enhance the quality of an eco-friendly life, morals, ethics, and the application of the philosophy of the sufficiency economy.
- Strategy 6: Developing competency for educational administrations. Key factors within this strategy are that educational administration is efficient and effective, yielding good results in the quality and standards of education. Every social group is involved in educational administration to serve the needs of people in the regions.

This plan is implemented in four steps, each step going through the five-year educational development plan and yearly action plans.

The 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2023-2027) has five main development targets. They are: 1) restructuring the manufacturing and service sectors towards an innovation-based economy; 2) developing human capital for the new global era; 3) creating a society of opportunities and fairness; 4) ensuring the transition of production and consumption towards sustainability; and 5) enhancing Thailand's capability to cope with changes and risks in the new global context. In order to translate the main targets into action, 13 development milestones were set up. Among them, milestone 12 focuses on developing a high-capability workforce, committed to lifelong learning, that is responsive to future developments, with the following development strategies (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, Office of the Prime Minister, 2023, pp. 109-118). This includes:

- Strategy 1: Ensuring that Thai people of all age groups are developed in all dimensions
 - Sub-strategy 1.1: Developing children from conception to early childhood for balanced development and good character
 - Sub-strategy 1.2: Equipping learners at the primary education level with self-recognition, digital skills, and necessary competencies for learning, living, and working
 - Sub-strategy 1.3: Providing learners in higher education with required competencies for the professional world of the future and innovation
 - Sub-strategy 1.4: Equipping working-age learners with capabilities necessary for, and relevant to, future work
 - Sub-strategy 1.5: Developing the elderly into valued citizens

- Strategy 2: Developing a high-capability workforce
 - Sub-strategy 2.1: Developing a high-capacity workforce in line with the needs of target manufacturing sectors and with an ability to create jobs of the future
 - Sub-strategy 2.2: Increasing the quality of the workforce to develop target manufacturing sectors
 - Sub-strategy 2.3: Developing smart entrepreneurs with the capability to create, design, and use technology and innovation throughout the manufacturing, service, management, and marketing processes
- Strategy 3: Promoting lifelong learning
 - Sub-strategy 3.1: Developing an ecosystem for lifelong learning
 - Sub-strategy 3.2: Developing learning alternatives for those who cannot attend formal education

The 2022 annual policy of the Office of Non-formal Education and Informal Education Promotion outlines key working strategies as follows: Office of Non-formal and Informal Education Promotion, Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education (2022, pp.1-4).

- Reviewing and adjusting the roles of NFE and IFE centres at every level to increase efficiency in the organization of lifelong education in local areas
- Upgrading sub-district NFE and IFE centres, and hill-tribe learning centres to serve as the primary lifelong learning spaces of the community
- Adjusting the learning activity formats in public libraries to increase reading ratios among the population
- Organizing lifelong education that emphasizes developing necessary skills for people in every age group, developing short courses for creating new skills, up-skilling, and re-skilling in response to labor force demands, providing education to promote elderly people to be an active ageing workforce, and organizing education to develop needed skills for the disabled, street children, and disadvantaged groups
- Creating NFE volunteers to support the network for organizing and promoting lifelong learning in each community

The Learning Encouragement Act, 2023, specifies in section 9 that the Department shall provide, promote, and support lifelong learning using the following guidelines:

- Encourage individuals to pursue knowledge and cultivate their independent learning capacities by utilizing advanced information technology systems. Ensure they can

learn at any time and at their own pace by providing convenient access to a variety of learning resources without undue expenses.

- Provide and develop learning resources for individuals to conveniently learn throughout their lives.
- Provide or collaborate with network parties to encourage reading and learning habits within families and communities and provide reading and learning resources.
- Promote and support experienced local wisdom and network parties to participate in learning management and the dissemination of local wisdom for lifelong learning.

Extent of devolution of powers in ALE and LLL to regions and cities, and to social partners

The Department of Basic Education is responsible for basic formal education at both primary and secondary levels and oversees schools in all provinces. For the higher education level, vocational colleges throughout the country operate under the Department of Vocational Education, providing education at the certificate level, and some also offer bachelor's degree programs. Additionally, several universities offering undergraduate and graduate programs have been established throughout the country.

For non-formal and informal education, the key organization is the Office of Non-formal and Informal Education Promotion (NFE), known as the Department of Learning Encouragement since May 2023. This department is responsible for organizing, promoting, and supporting learning in three forms: lifelong learning, learning for self-development, and learning for academic qualifications. Lifelong learning focuses on all kinds of knowledge and skills to improve people's quality of life, while learning for self-development focuses on occupational and working skills. Learning for academic qualifications emphasizes basic education as a foundation for further education. Although the name of the department has changed, the administrative structure for implementing policies and activities remains largely the same.

For the administrative structure, the Department of Learning Encouragement under the Ministry of Education is situated in Bangkok. Under the Department, there are five regional centres situated in each region of the country and 77 provincial centres situated in every province. Within each provincial centre, there are district centres, each located in every district. The Department provides overall policies, administration, and financial and resource support. The regional centres act as academic initiators and academic advisors to the provincial centres within their areas. Each provincial centre acts as an administrative

and supporting unit to enable all district centres within its area to perform as operational units, bringing all kinds of non-formal and informal education activities to reach people in local areas at the district, sub-district, and village levels.

Influence and/or policy linkages to supranational organisations

All the policies and plans mentioned earlier have been developed using baseline data to analyze and synthesize information about the contemporary situation, problems, and trends of related aspects at both national and global levels. Considerations included economic, social, and environmental aspects; growth of science and technology; changes in population demographics; 21st-century work skills; and workforce demand. Furthermore, the policies and guidelines of supranational organizations such as the EU, World Bank, OECD, UNESCO, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 2030) were also studied and applied for developing the framework of the policies and plans. For example, the 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2023-2027) has processed and used well-rounded data in various dimensions such as the global economic and environmental situation, technological development, climate change, ageing society, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Bio-Circular-Green Economy, etc.

Financing of LLL

According to the educational administration structure of the country, there are several departments that take part in providing lifelong education or lifelong learning, which include formal education, non-formal education, and informal education. For formal education, the Office of Basic Education Commission, Ministry of Education, provides primary education and secondary education, and Office of Vocational Education Commission provides vocational education at the associate degree level up to the bachelor's degree level. Moreover, universities and colleges under the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation provide higher education. For non-formal and informal education, the main responsible agency is the Department of Learning Encouragement, which has local units in every province, district, and sub-district. Apart from that, there are a number of government and non-government network agencies that participate in providing and promoting non-formal and informal education. The budget from the government is allocated to each department as mentioned above in each fiscal year. For example, in the fiscal year

2026, the following Ministries and Departments obtained the following budget: Office of Basic Education Commission obtained 68,321,374,500 Thai baht, Office of Vocational Education Commission obtained 17,690,933,000 Thai baht, Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation obtained 55,221,037,500 Thai baht and the Department of Learning Encouragement obtained 5,626,575,700 Thai baht (Royal Gazette, 2025). The private sector and local organizations, they also play a participatory role, assisting with financial resources and in-kind support at both regional and local levels.

The role of sectors and involvement of community stakeholders

To organize and provide non-formal and informal education for lifelong learning in each local area, such as in each province, the Non-Formal and Informal Education Provincial Centre—now called the Learning Encouragement Provincial Centre—establishes a Learning Encouragement Committee at each level. These committees comprise representatives from all related sectors, such as local education institutions, temples, public health offices, workforce development offices, agricultural promotion offices, local administration organizations, local museums, local factories, community committees, local wisdom individuals, and representatives of local people.

The committee is involved in the entire process of providing non-formal and informal education to the target groups in each local area, from initial activities such as the identification of needs through planning and implementation to final steps such as evaluating effectiveness. The staff of the Learning Encouragement Centre coordinates with all related sectors to seek cooperation in organizing non-formal and informal education activities. For example, they may invite teachers from formal schools, vocational colleges, related agencies, abbots, or local wisdom individuals in the area to serve as resource persons. They might also appeal to local temples for the use of their space and facilities for organizing activities. Study trips may also be arranged at selected agencies, such as the local agricultural promotion centre, to enhance participants' learning outcomes.

People in each community are also encouraged to participate in organizing NFE and IFE activities in various ways, such as helping to reflect the needs and problems of people in the community, promoting activities to their neighbors, preparing facilities for organizing activities, serving as resource persons for activities, and providing feedback about the activities at the evaluation step, among others.

The tracking of the effective implementation of policies

Each NFE (Non-Formal Education) and IFE (Informal Education) project and activity is evaluated both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Projects and activities are evaluated in terms of whether the activities have reached the entire population in the community, whether people know and understand the activities made available to them, and whether people have equal opportunities to join the activities. Any given program is also normally evaluated to determine if the activities meet the identified needs of the people in the community, whether the provided activities enable people to obtain needed knowledge and skills, and whether the activities help them improve their occupations, incomes, and quality of life. For example, after people attend short-term vocational training programs, do they apply knowledge and skills to set up new occupations and gain more income?

Problems faced during each activity in the community are also usually evaluated. The results obtained from the evaluation of each project and activity, along with suggestions for improvement, are employed to adjust the activity. They are also reported to the office concerned. Each NFE centre is also required to submit an annual report about its activities during the past fiscal year to the headquarters.

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