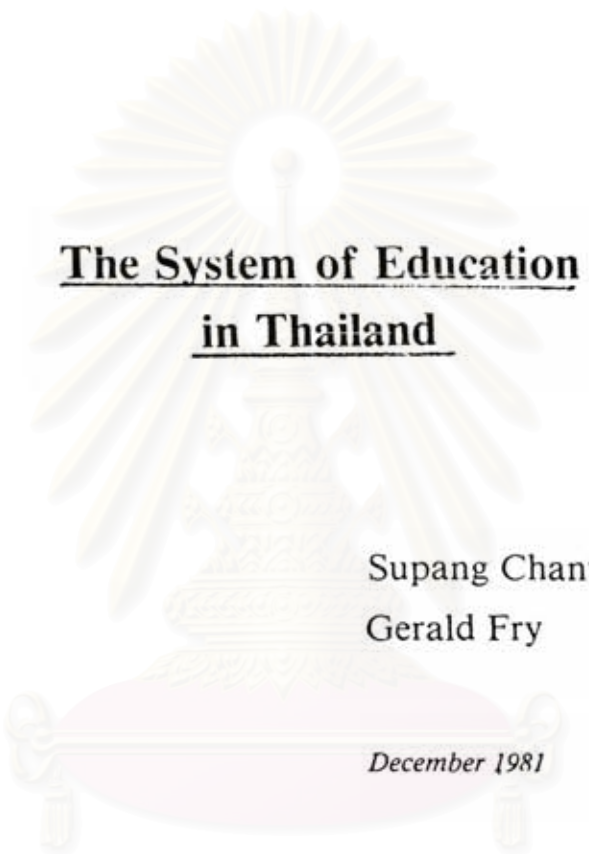


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**The System of Education  
in Thailand**



Office of the National Education Commission  
Office of the Prime Minister  
Bangkok, Thailand.



**The System of Education**  
**in Thailand**

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*December 1981*

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จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

## Preface

This article was written for the International Encyclopedia of Education : Research and Studies, an international work of reference and review on current knowledge of education compiled by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) to be published in 1983. Professor Dr. T. Neville Postlethwaite, IEA Chairman and an Editor-in-Chief, has kindly allowed the article to be published by NEC before the publication of the Encyclopedia.

The authors therefore would like to express their sincerest thanks and appreciation to Professor Dr. T. Neville Postlethwaite for his kindness and to Professor Dr. Sippanondha Ketudat who read and gave fruitful comments on an earlier draft of the article. Also they would like to thank Dr. Sam-ang Hiranburana who helped edit the article and Miss Kulvitra Bhangananda and Mrs. Vena Sotpihabnukul who helped gather necessary information.



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## The System of Education in Thailand



An education reform movement initiated in 1974 has significantly altered Thailand's school system. Today, more than nine million students are enrolled in primary and secondary schools; and universal primary education is expected in 1986. Institutions offering specialized skills, open universities, and special nonformal educational programs, have been established to meet development needs. Despite regional disparities in educational standards and facilities, the teacher-pupil ratio in primary schools has improved dramatically. A new curriculum aims at education for life and society and utilizes a reformed more flexible examination system. Thailand is currently attempting to reduce educational disparities, to promote greater deconcentration in administration, and to work toward quality improvements and relevance at all levels of education.



*(American spelling)*

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## **1. Background Data on Thailand**

### **(i) Geographic and Historical Context**

Thailand, meaning land of the free and formerly known as Siam, is a tropical Southeast Asian country approximately the same size as France. As one of the few developing countries never to have been colonized, Thailand's educational system has not been dominated by any foreign power and Thai is the language of instruction.

### **(ii) Demographic Context**

Thailand has a population of approximately 47 million (40% under 15). The 50s and 60s were characterized by rapid population growth of slightly over 3.0 percent per year, largely resulting from marked improvements in public health after World War II.

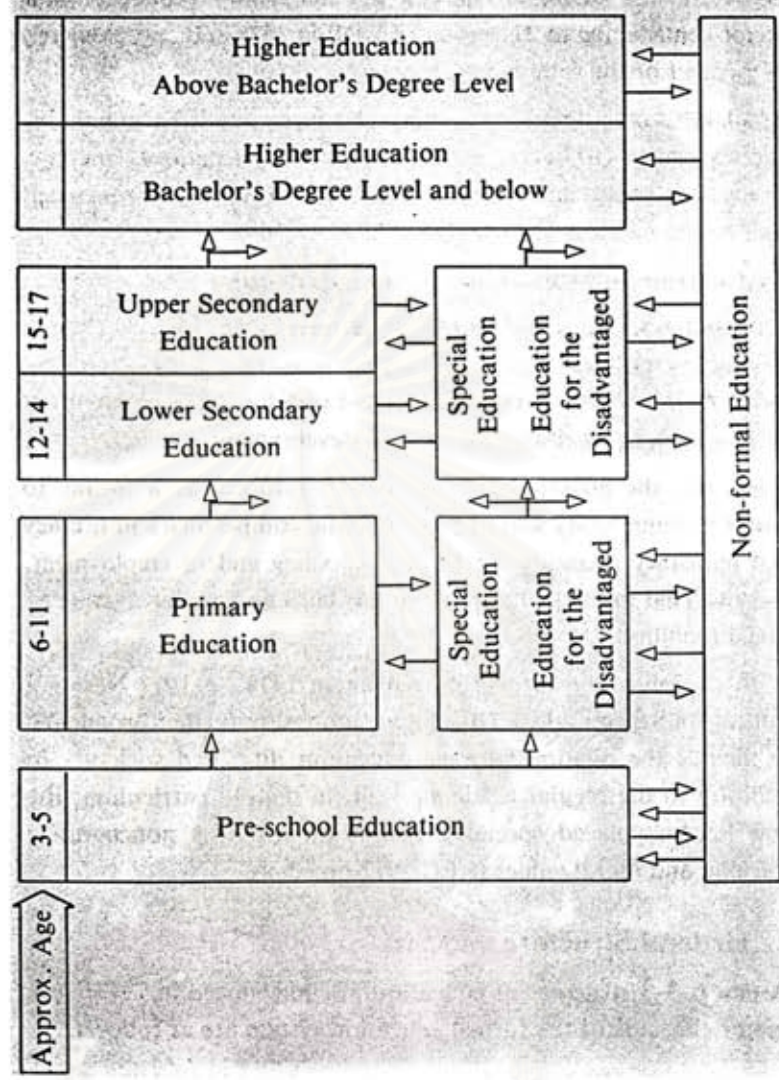
The 70s, however, have rate of growth of approximately 2.0 percent with a further reduction of 1.5 percent expected by 1984. A major school mapping project initiated in 1978 has already found striking drops in early primary school enrollment resulting from the fertility decline.

### **(iii) Occupational and Social Class Structure**

Thailand has a stratified occupational and social class structure. Traditionally, high social prestige has been attached to government employment and the government sector has been the major source of employment for the more educated. Historically social mobility has been high, but more recently socioeconomic background and the formal schooling which it facilitates has strongly influenced the allocation of individuals into highly desired modern sector jobs (Fry 1980).

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**CHART 1 Educational System**



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**(iv) Structure of the Economy**

Agriculture is Thailand's largest and most important economic sector contributing to 27 percent of GDP in 1978 and approximately 74 percent of the total labor force.

Thailand's manufacturing sector, however, has been expanding rapidly and in 1977 accounted for 25 percent of national income. Trade with import and export transactions constitutes approximately half of the national income (OPM 1979 p. 169).

**(v) Government Structure and Goals of Education**

Thailand became a constitutional monarchy in 1932. Though having no political role, the current monarch, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, is widely revered and beloved with his strong commitment in Thai people's welfare and to rural development.

Formerly, the government considered education as a means to foster national unity and to provide basic competencies in literacy and numeracy necessary for further schooling and/or employment. For the Thai individual, schooling has been as a major avenue of social mobility.

With the education reform movement in 1974, in 1977 National Education Scheme, the goals of education were further broadened to include the relation between education, life, and society. In addition to the regular academic skills in the old curriculum, the new Scheme placed special emphasis on instilling noncognitive learning and moral values (NEC 1977 pp. 3-4).

**2. General Structure and Size**

A new 6-3-3 structure of education was introduced in 1978. The major elements of the formal education system are as follows:

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Preschool education



Work education in primary school

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**(i) Preschool education**

The private sector and local communities are encouraged to set up kindergartens and early childhood centers to serve local children throughout the country. Only 1.7 percent of all preschool centers are run by the Ministry of Education, and they are for demonstration and experimental purposes.

**(ii) Primary education**

Primary education is free provided universally by the government. It emphasizes literacy, numeracy, communication skills, and abilities relevant to future occupational roles. Major problems at this level relate primarily to quality and equality.

**(iii) Secondary Education**

Secondary education aims to provide appropriate academic and vocational knowledge consistent with the learner's age, needs, interests, skills and aptitudes which ultimately will be beneficial to the individual's career and the larger society. There are both public and private secondary schools. The government makes efforts to promote secondary education and to guarantee equal opportunities. More emphasis is now put on vocational training.

**(iv) Higher education**

Higher education aims at the full development of human intellectual abilities, the advancement of knowledge and technology and the provision of high level academic and professional manpower needed for national development. Admission to major universities is based on performance on a competitive joint entrance examination.

Considering enrollment by levels of education, the increase in enrollment (in millions) from 1961 to 1980 was as follows : preprimary, from 0.05 to 0.36; primary, from 4.09 to 7.45; lower

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Secondary students practice growing rice in agricultural period.



University students help build school in rural area during summer vacation.

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secondary, from 0.25 to 1.35; upper secondary, from 0.08 to 0.58; and higher education, from 0.05 to 0.22<sup>1</sup> (NEC 1980). Enrollment by levels of education is illustrated in Chart 2.

Enrollment ratios in 1980, were 13.5 for preprimary, 95.7 for primary, 28.5 for secondary, and 3.4 for higher education. The aggregate ratio for all levels was 43.4 (NEC 1980).

An overview of the enrollment indicates that in 1978 the transition rate from primary to secondary is 62.13 and from secondary to tertiary is 39 (NEC 1980). Thailand has successfully implemented numerous programs and interventions to reduce disparity and inequalities in education. The proportion of female enrollment is over .42 at all levels (NSO 1978).

Major elements of the nonformal education system are as follows :

**(v) Origins and Philosophy of Nonformal Education**

Nonformal education started forty years ago. Its primary aim was to develop and conduct literacy programs for adults over fifteen years old who were not in the formal school system. Later on, vocational training became another prime objective when functional literacy programs were developed which related literacy to occupational skills. In the Thai nonformal education program, there has been emphasis on a process known as “Khit-pen,” an approach designed to encourage harmony between individuals and their environment. “Khit-pen” means critical thinking, rational thinking, and problem-solving.

**(vi) Types of Nonformal Programs**

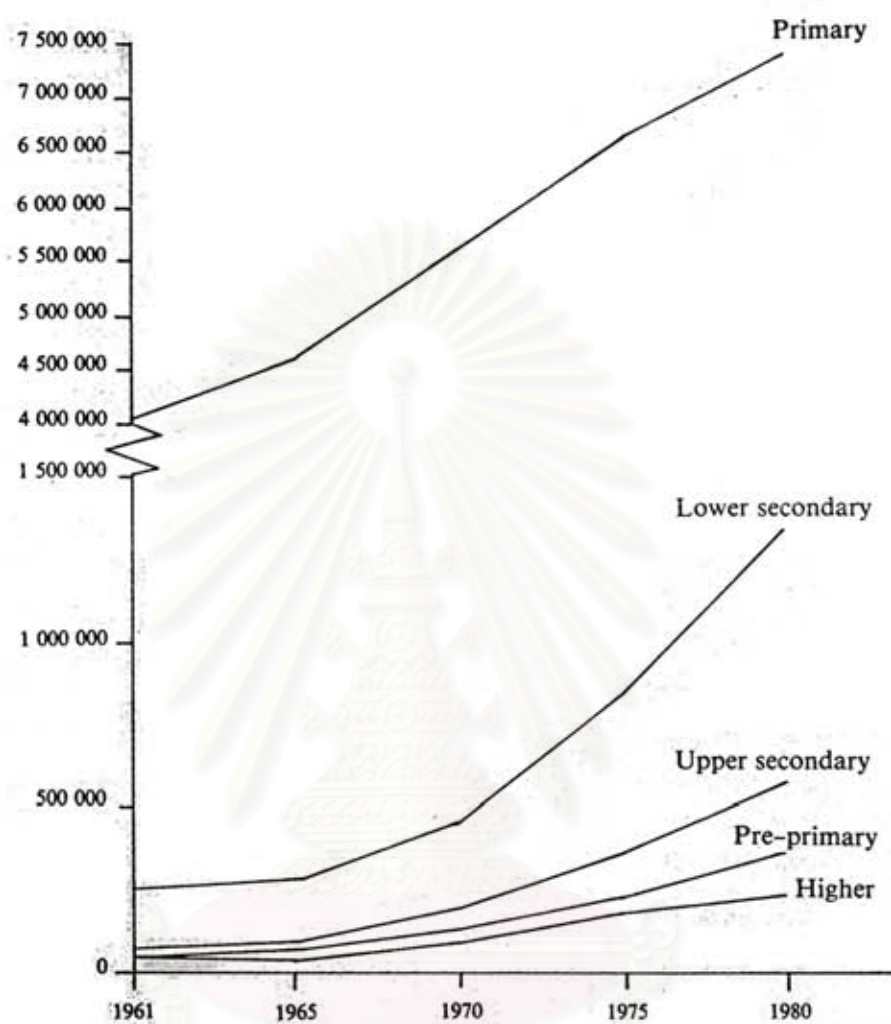
The Department of Nonformal Education is directly responsible for formulating nonformal education policy. Also several other

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<sup>1/</sup> Excluding .4 million enrollment in the open university.



Chart 2 Enrollment by levels of education 1961-1980 (Thailand)



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Nonformal program : dress making



Functional literacy program

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ministries and departments conduct nonformal education. The following are various programs in nonformal education : 1) continuing education at five levels providing academic equivalency; 2) short vocational courses of up to 12 months, including, for example, mobile trade schools; 3) functional literacy, including critical thinking, problem-solving, numeracy, and vocational subjects; and 4) informational programs such as village newspaper reading centers and public libraries.

In 1970, Thailand established an open admissions university. More recently, an open university utilizing multi media distant learning system has also been founded in 1978. These institutions provide more opportunity for secondary graduates with university education.

### **3. Administrative and Supervisory Structure and Operation**

Four Ministries were responsible for education until 1980. The Ministry of Interior (MOI) was in charge of nearly all primary schools in rural areas. The Ministry of Education (MOE), however, was responsible for secondary education, post-secondary vocational-technical education, teacher training as well as providing supervisors and curriculum materials for both levels. The Office of University Affairs (OUA) which has ministerial status, was responsible for university education. Finally, the National Education Commission (NEC), in charge of educational policy making and planning, is part of the Office of the Prime Minister. The excessive centralization and complexity of the administrative structure became a major issue in 1974 with the establishment by the Cabinet of the Educational Reform Committee. While the Reform Committee reviewed all aspects of education, a major focus was on the administrative structure of the Thai educational

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system. Basically, the Reform called for unifying diverse educational organizations under the MOE and for greater deconcentration of authority to the local level.

Given several political changes, enactment of some important parts of the Reform was delayed. In October 1980, however, major administrative parts of the Reform became law. Control of Thailand's roughly 30,000 rural schools was returned to the Ministry of Education, under the Office of the National Primary Education Commission (ONPEC) who is responsible for its policy-making and planning. Actual day-to-day operations are controlled by 72 newly established Provincial Primary Education Commissions which have flexible control over placement of teachers and location of schools. Elected teacher representatives as well as appointed and ex officio members serve on the governing boards of both the national and provincial primary school commissions.

#### **4. Education Finance**

Public support for education has increased from 1.9 percent of GDP in the 60s to 3.3 in 1970. The private sector who is responsible for 1/8 of total enrollment also contributes, but the amount is unavailable. The total state budget for education has increased from 16.9 percent in 1961 to 19.4 percent in 1981. Currently education budget ranks second only to that of defense.

Table 1 is allocation of the national budget in all levels of education. Over the past two decades more than half of the education budget has been devoted to primary education. Since 1965, there has been a growing proportion of the education budget for secondary and higher education, reflecting the growing social demand for higher levels of education and the high demographic growth rates of the past.

**Table 1 Allocation of the National Budget among Levels of Education**

Level of Education	Year				
	1961	1965	1970	1975	1980
Primary	54.0	58.3	55.5	52.5	53.9
Secondary	17.9	11.9	12.3	13.5	16.4
Vocational	6.2	7.2	7.1	5.0	6.5
Teacher Training	4.4	3.9	5.3	5.3	2.5
University Education	8.2	10.4	12.5	14.4	14.5
Nonformal	0.5	0.4	0.8	1.1	1.8
Other	8.8	7.9	6.5	8.2	4.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Sources : Bureau of Budget, National Annual Budget 1961-1980 Thailand.

In 1979, a new system was introduced for allocating primary school resources more equitably among provinces. Since nearly 98 percent of local primary school funds derive from central government, the national government could reduce regional disparities (Sudprasert *et al* 1978). Under the new budgeting system, a wide range of key subnational educational indicators are used to allocate resources among provinces. The result is a noticeable reduction of regional disparities.

### 5. Teacher Education

Teacher training in Thailand is done at the tertiary level with two major streams of production. Ten Faculties of education in various universities produce teachers at the B.A. and post graduate levels.

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Thirty-six teacher colleges and other colleges for physical, vocational, technical, agricultural education, etc. are responsible for training teachers at the higher certificate and the B.A. levels. In 1978, 13 percent of teachers had a B.A. or higher degree, 45.5 percent a higher certificate, and 4.8 percent vocational training. Relative to international standards, Thailand has a satisfactory student-teacher ratio at all levels of education. The highest is 27.7 at the kindergarten level, and the lowest is 19.6 at the MOE primary level (NEC 1980 p. 82).

The accelerated production of a large number of teachers to cope with the temporary short-term deficiency and population growth during the Third National Education Development Plan (1971-1976) has generated a big number of teachers and graduates' unemployment. Thus, during the Fourth Plan (1977-1981), training of teachers at the higher certificate level will be progressively decreased. The decreasing production of teachers affects severely the roles of teacher colleges. In contrast, given the great demand for vocational teachers, vocational teacher training is currently given highest priority.

A committee to coordinate and to improve the quality of teacher training was established in 1979. The committee has proposed numerous recommendations such as the need for more selective criteria for the recruit of instructors and students in teacher training, revision of curricula, and the promotion of research and development in teacher training.

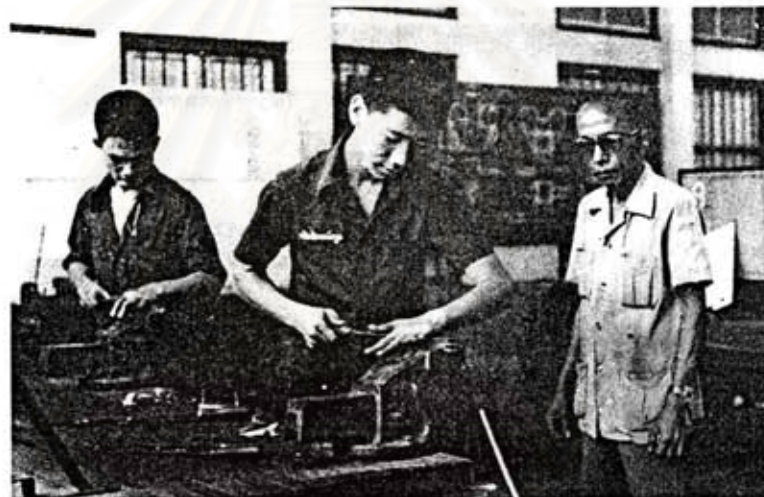
Most of the recommendations were incorporated into the Fifth Education Plan and some are already put into action.

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Teacher training students taking notes at an exhibition



Vocational students in workshop

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## **6. Curriculum Development and Teaching Methodology**

### **(i) Curriculum Development**

School curricula have been modified in accord with the new school structure. The Ministry of Education has major responsibility for the development of curricula at the primary and secondary school levels.

University curricula are decided by individual departments with approval from the University Council for the undergraduate level and from the Office of University Affairs for the postgraduate level. There exist efforts to emphasize relevance in curriculum development.

### **(ii) Scope of the Curriculum**

Primary education has an integrated curriculum comprising four learning areas : basic skills, life experience, character development, and work education. Since students' background in the various parts of the country are different, a basically national core curriculum allows certain flexibility for regional diversification.

Secondary curriculum covers five broad fields : language, science and mathematics, social studies, character development and work education. There is a wide range of exploratory prevocational subjects available. The use of a credit system facilitates flexibility in the teaching-learning process.

### **(iii) Instructional Materials**

The Educational Techniques Department with the assistance of cooperating agencies, is responsible for the production and improvement of learning materials such as lesson plans, textbooks, supplementary readers, and teachers' guides. As soon as the national teaching-learning materials are prepared, regional curriculum



Basic skills learning in primary school



Villagers help teach mat-weaving in community secondary school.

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development teams study them and decide on its diversification and variations to suit a particular region.

**(iv) Curriculum Implementation**

To ensure that new curricula are implemented, a number of steps are taken. Probably most important is nation-wide short term in-service training of teachers, level by level. Also through the Free Textbook Program, the government publishes and distributes new instructional materials to all schools. Finally, regular supervision as well as specific evaluations provide checks to ascertain degree of compliance with standards.

**(iv) Teaching Methods**

Methods of instruction are generally suggested in the syllabus, and teachers are encouraged to keep abreast of educational changes and new teaching methods. The Ministry also sends out supervisors to work with school teachers to help them improve their teaching. Some teachers, however, are still accustomed to using traditional methods of “chalk and talk”.

**(v) Major Problems Related to Curricula and Teaching Methods**

The first problem involves limited school supervision, resulting from shortages of personnel and budget. The second concerns the inadequate availability of textbooks, equipment and qualified teachers, particularly specialized pre-vocational teachers. The third is a lack of readiness for recent curricula changes which has affected the quality of schooling. As for the university level, instruction in some areas is too often related to foreign texts.

**7. System of Examinations, Promotions, and Certificates**

Traditionally, Thailand's examination and promotion system was tightly structured with a major emphasis on end-of-year

examinations to determine promotion to the next level of schooling, with grades 4, 7, 10 and 12 exams administered externally by districts, provinces, regions, and the Ministry of Education (Sudprasert 1977). Each of these grade levels determined a student's educational life chances. Entrance to grade 11, particularly prestigious government and private schools, and a joint university entrance examination are highly selective.

Educational curriculum reform would not be effective without concomitant examination reform. Thus, grades 11 and 12 end-of-year external examinations were abolished in 1975-1976 and 1976-1977 (Sudprasert 1977). The new system emphasizes internal assessment and reduced emphasis on end-of-year examinations. In primary schools a similar reform has occurred with currently increased focus on the day-to-day accomplishment of specific behavioral objectives. As a result of the examination reform,



Students taking university entrance examination

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promotion rates have tended to improve resulting in a much more efficient educational system.

With respect to entrance examinations to upper secondary schools and universities, the traditional achievement tests are revised. Regional universities have also established specific quotas to ensure more representation of students from the major regional areas. Employment opportunities, particularly in Thailand's modern sector, are significantly influenced by credentials. (Fry 1980).

## 8. Educational Research

The establishment of the International Institute for Child Study in Bangkok in 1955 could be considered as the first institutionalization of educational research in Thailand. The Institute, which has now become the Behavioral Science Research Institute, initiated some "basic research". However, over time it has devoted increased attention to applied research work.

It was in the 60s that the Thai government began actively promoting research. The MOE and the NEC established research divisions working on practical problems such as curricula, tests, educational policy, and administration. Research topics were closely related to the specific functions of various line departments.

Research began to be mentioned as one of the formal functions of the university in the 50s. It was not until 1974 when the OUA introduced a new regulation requiring research work for promotion, that research activities became actively and systematically encouraged for the first time. Also the First National Educational Research Symposium in 1979 revealed that little has been done in the areas of research about research and action research. More



research has been done in academic institutes than in ministerial offices. (Saihoo *et al* 1981).

The research agenda for the 80s as specified by prominent Thai researchers and academicians includes : research about classroom realities; means to achieve qualitative improvements in basic competencies with constant or diminished cost, given present resource constraints; and other problems in education beyond pedagogy, such as rural education, nonformal education, and national education for ethnic minorities.

With respect to research methodologies, two trends are emerging : the increased use of an interdisciplinary approach, and the recognition of qualitative methods as a legitimate research approach.

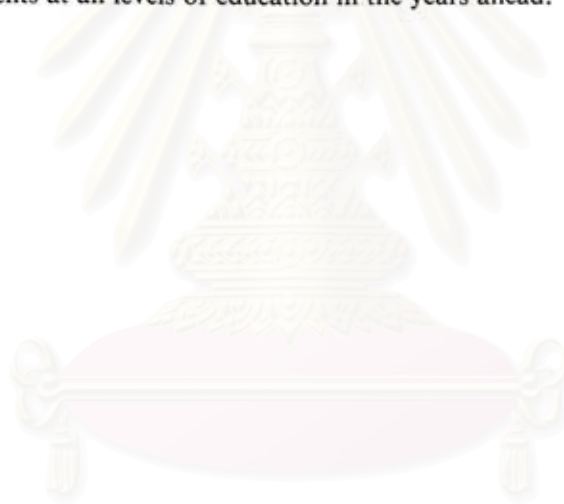
### **9. Major Problems for the Next Two Decades**

During the past decade, 1970-1980, Thailand has achieved considerable success in quantitatively expanding primary, secondary, and higher education. Nearly all children now have access to a primary school near their village or home and increasing number of students are able to attend secondary schools and colleges. Also, the administrative system has become more deconcentrated. Despite such past success, several major problems remain for the 80s and 90s, regarding issues of quality, relevance, equality, and educational resource allocation and finance. Improving the quality of education and its relevance at all levels remains the major challenge of Thai education in the 80s and 90s. Given Thailand's heavy dependence on imported energy, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to increase the share of the public sector's financial support for education. Thus, creative means must be found to increase private support. To achieve more equal access to quality of education, it is important that educational resources be allocated

with the greatest possible equity and efficiency. The new more deconcentrated system of educational administration approved in 1980 and a nation-wide school mapping effort should facilitate such goals.

There will be in the next two decades, a serious tension regarding educational resource allocation issues between short-term political pressure for educational expansion at upper levels and more rational long-term needs in accord with Thailand's economic structure. Another concern is the absorption by Thai labor market of rapidly increasing number of college graduates.

Thailand has achieved impressive success in providing the necessary quantitative expansion of schools to meet the needs of a rapidly growing population during the past two decades. In the 80s and 90s, Thailand will have to deal with the even more complex problem of quality. Thailand's recent success in achieving significant fertility decline, together with its potential for reducing energy dependence, provides a positive climate for achieving quality improvements at all levels of education in the years ahead.



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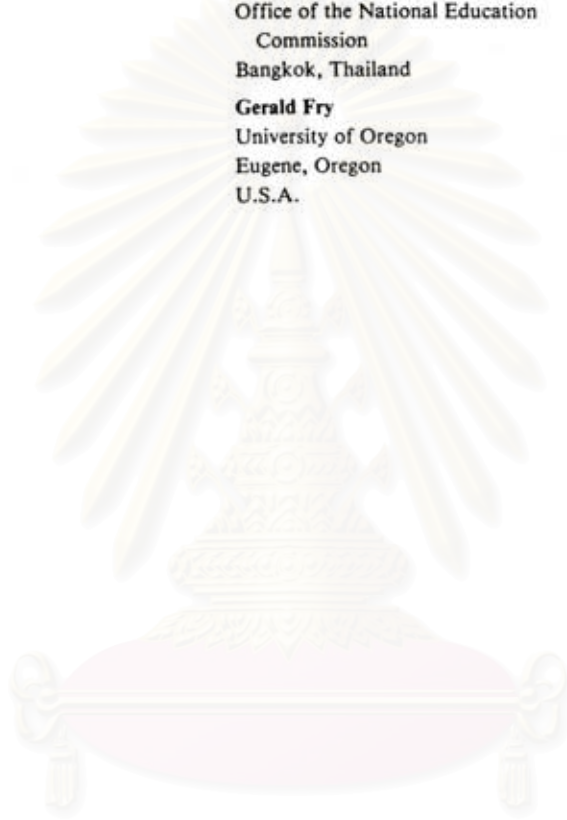
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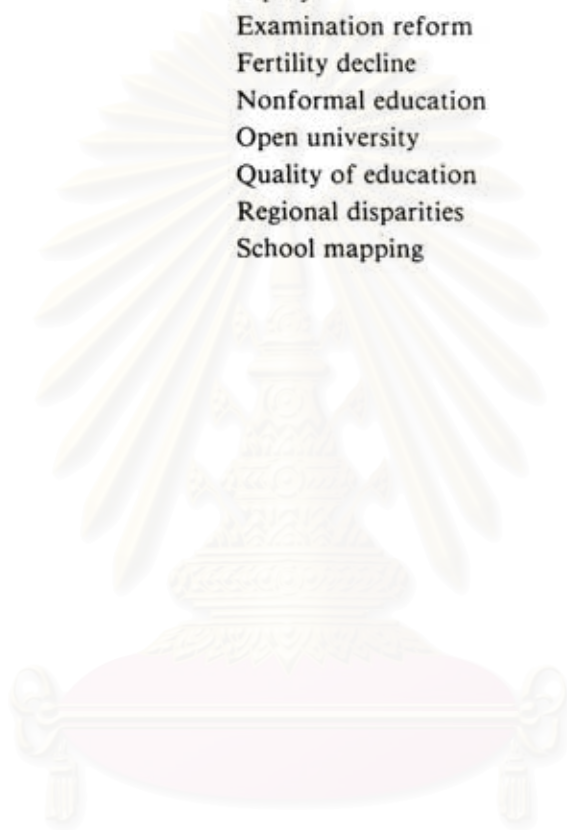


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## Multilingual Glossary

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