

Lifelong Learning Policies in Thailand: A Comprehensive Analysis and Reform Recommendations

SUWITHIDA CHARUNGKAITTIKUL

Abstract

The advancement of lifelong learning (LLL) is a crucial agenda for many countries, especially for Thailand. It meets the rising demand for continuous learning which is mainly focused on economic drivers that improve the quality of life. This study applies a qualitative research approach with the primary objective to analyze and synthesize various documents using an integrative literature review and a content-based approach for identifying promising LLL policies in Thailand. The paper is comprised of four main parts: providing an overview of the Thai educational system; defining terminology, and specifically the terms that explain LLL in Thailand; analyzing the status quo (opportunities and challenges) of LLL policies in Thailand; and providing recommendations to strengthen the role of LLL in Thailand. The study further demonstrates an understanding of Adult Learning and Education (ALE). It concludes that every sector should develop and promote LLL, making it an evolving and integrated kind of education for life and learning society. It also articulates that LLL has now become a vital tool to promote economic and social development in Thailand. While the advancement towards a LLL society will continue, Thailand has a number of actions to implement before it can proclaim the achievement of education for all by 2030. Lessons learned from the preliminary findings may help to identify the key facilitating factors as well as bottlenecks that can be useful in the formulation of comprehensive and applicable LLL opportunities for all.

Keywords: Lifelong Learning; Lifelong Learning Policies; Policy implications; Thailand

1 Introduction

Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia without a history of colonial rule. It is composed of seventy-six provinces. The current population of Thailand is 69,834,119, 51.1% of the population is urban (35,698,325 people in 2020) based on the Worldometer elaboration of the latest United Nations data. Thailand is the world's 50th largest country by total area. The country faces transitioning from rural areas to an urban

society. As a result of the compartmentalized development of urban and rural areas, there is an imbalance in the development of rural communities (e. g., uneven development of economy, unequal distribution of learning resources, the infrastructure of information technology systems, and exclusive public services). The society faces several obstacles that include the low quality of education in several regions; an unequal opportunity of access to learning of people who live in some rural areas; and lack of skills and ability to adapt upgraded knowledge into practice, which results in low labor productivity (Charungkattikul et al, 2013; National Economic and Social Development Board, 2017; Pongpaiboon, 2007). Consequently, it indicates an urgent need to provide LLL opportunities to all and to balance national developments (Charungkattikul, 2019).

Within this context, the Thai government has announced several national development policies aiming to build a learning society, including the 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan 2017–2021; the National Education Act 1999 and its amendment; the National Education Act Amendment (Issue 2) 2002; the Non-formal Education and Informal Education Act 2008; and Thailand's 20-Year National Strategy and Thailand 4.0 Policy (a digital economy and social development strategy). These initiatives have collectively helped lay a significant foundation for the development of building a learning society. These related LLL society policies represent an important opportunity to help the education system deal with global change. The government has emphasized greater efforts towards the building of a LLL society, which acts as a major mechanism for the national economic and social development (Charungkattikul, 2016a, 2019). At the same time, it helps ensure LLL opportunities and enhance access to education and quality education on a national scale.

The aforementioned consideration indicates the country-wide benefits of continuously searching for proper strategies to enhance LLL development, to in-depth investigate the understanding and practices of LLL from a different angle, particularly the practices that drive individual learning, organizations, as well as the learning society. It is essential to investigate the potential of the LLL concept for the personal and collective development of people in general and future societies. Additionally, this study aims to propose a practical application of LLL policy as a critical vehicle for locally and regionally creating a sustainable LLL society using an integrative literature review to find out and propose feasible recommendations for bringing this idea to reality, as well as strengthening the role of LLL in Thailand and other countries. This study makes an effort to clarify the concept of LLL, to review its application in the local context, and to consider the most appropriate policy options to pursue the goal of building a learning society in the changing global situation.

Research Objectives, Methodology, and Procedure

An integrative literature review is a form of research that “reviews, analyzes, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated” (Torraco, 2005, p. 356). The extensive background to this paper consists of national policies and documents

(ONIE, 2019; Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2017; Office of the Education Council, 2003; ONIE, 2008; Stiglitz and Greenwald, 2014; UIL, 2019), and recently conducted research studies by the author (Charungkaittikul, 2011, 2016a, 2016b, 2019; Charungkaittikul & Henschke, 2014; DVV International, 2020). In each research procedure stage, the data will be analyzed utilizing content analysis by the researcher using an analysis form.

The author's intention in this article is to provide an overview of the current situation of LLL in Thailand (i. e., terminologies, the current system, and challenges), to indicate several key aspects that can be useful in the formulation of comprehensive and applicable LLL opportunities for all in the local context, and to derive from this practical strategies and appropriate policy initiatives for promoting learning activities toward building a dynamic LLL society in Thailand.

2 Background on Thailand and the Educational System

The Kingdom of Thailand (Thailand) is located in the heart of the Southeast Asian mainland. With a total population of 69.7 million (UN, 2019) that comprises 55 million adults, it is the world's 21st most populous country, and the fourth most populous nation in ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) after Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. The country has one of the world's fastest aging societies. Its literacy rate in 2015 was 92.87% (World Bank, 2020). In recent years, the Kingdom has increased education facets in other areas as a result of a high literacy rate. For example, the Kingdom's human resource initiatives have been its highest priority, i. e., national economy maturity. Its economy depends on agriculture, with 70% of the workforce in the agriculture sector and 60% of all export products being agricultural (International Trade Center, 2015). Thailand is gradually progressing from a primarily agricultural society to a manufacturing, industrial, and service society, and on to becoming a learning society. The country demands to offer its people more LLL opportunities and support to continuously upgrade their lives (Charungkaittikul, 2019).

Thai Education System

As stipulated in the National Education Act of 1999 and its amendment, the National Education Act Amendment (Issue 2) of 2002, the Ministry of Education (MOE) is the leading agency responsible for promoting and overseeing the provision of education at all levels. These levels include basic and higher education and all types of education, i. e. formal, non-formal, and informal education. In a similar vein, formal education is divided into two levels: basic and higher education. Basic education in Thailand refers to six years of primary education (G1-G6), three years of lower secondary (G7-G9), and three years of upper secondary education (G10-G12). The National Education Act has established that compulsory education shall be extended from six to nine years, covering six years of primary education and three years of lower sec-

ondary education (G1-G9). Students having completed compulsory education are eligible to choose between two parallel tracks: general or academic education and vocational education. The act also specifies that not less than twelve years of education shall be provided free of charge. Moreover, an initiative to provide three years pre-primary up to the completion of upper secondary education free of charge was initiated in 2009. The Thai education system has since provided 15 years of free basic education (Office of the Education Council, 2017). Vocational education offers are structured in three tiers: upper secondary level, leading to lower vocational certificates; post-secondary level, leading to higher vocational certificates; and tertiary vocational education, leading to bachelor's degrees. Higher education is provided at a diploma or associate degree level, and degree levels, ranging from bachelor's degrees to doctoral degrees (Office of the Permanent Secretary, 2017).

Administrative and organizational structures of the Thai education system

Considerable changes in the structure of management and administration have taken place in order to auspice the key teaching and learning changes stipulated by the act. The emphasis is on the decentralization of administrative responsibilities to the local level with the consolidation of education planning at the central level. The reformation process of the Thai Education System led to the establishment of 175 Education Service Areas in 2003, and this number augmented to 185 in 2008. A new structure for the organization of the Ministry of Education at the Central Level has been reinforced since 2002 (Office of the Permanent Secretary, 2017). Thailand's new Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation has recently been appointed to advance a concentration on research and innovation integration. The new ministry plans to emphasize the promotion of research endeavors for commercial purposes, producing human capital and resources in response to future needs, and developing innovation on a full-cycle basis, as well as to promote education and training to strengthen each learner's occupational skills and LLL.

Toward Thailand 4.0

Education is a crucial sector in the Kingdom's progress to Thailand 4.0, as established by the National Strategic Reform for Thailand 4.0. It aims to dispense citizens who have the necessary skills to develop the nation, possess critical thinking skills, and the ability to deal with change, endorse LLL and be good citizens overall by 2036 (Office of National Education Council, 2016; Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2017; Maesincee, 2020). According to the recent "Stability, Prosperity and Sustainability" policy 2020, the country needs collaboration commitment, and concerted efforts from all sectors in order to achieve the goal (National News Bureau of Thailand, 2016). Due to a fast-changing environment including lifestyles, learning and work culture, population structure and limitations of the present educational system, there is a need to drive the country into a LLL society direction promoting LLL for people and providing an ecosystem for LLL as a tool for developing the quality of life.

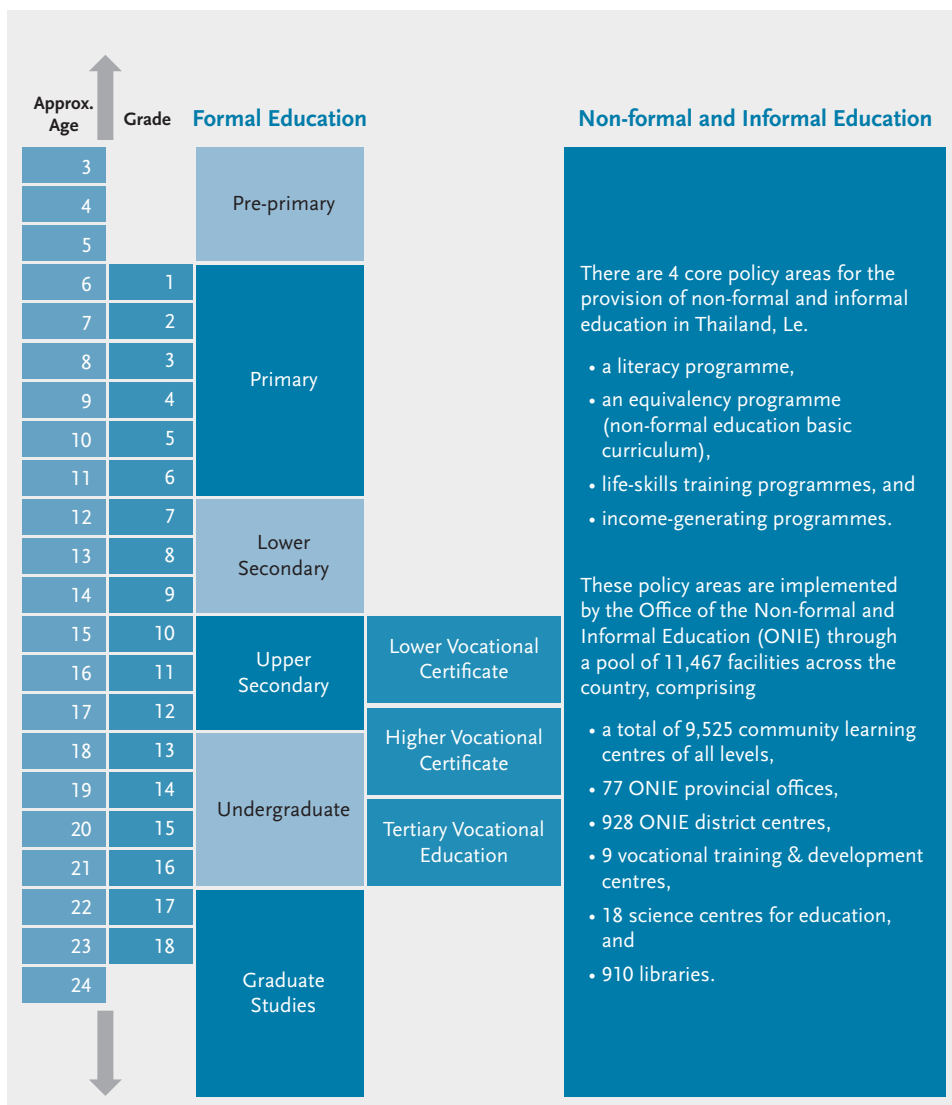


Figure 1: The Thai Education System

3 Definition of key terminology: Adult Learning and Education (ALE), Non-formal Education (NFE) and LLL in Thailand

The following section provides differentiated definitions of key concepts (LLL, ALE, NFE) and policies and analyses how these are put into practice in Thailand, including an analysis of the socio-historical backgrounds and relevant actors in the field. The concept of LLL is deeply entrenched in Thai culture and tradition (Charungkaititikul, 2019). The evolution of LLL in Thailand can be drawn back to the Sukhothai period (1248–1438) before the law on compulsory education. During this period, education was provided in the temples, mostly for boys, in the King's palace and individual scholars' houses, mostly for princes, princesses, the children of nobles, and courtiers. The Inner Palace became a school for women and girls, usually of the middle class, whose parents sent them to live in the palace so that they could gain kinds of education in craft and etiquette in the family. Girls were taught by their mothers and relatives. Their education included arts of handicraft, weaving, sewing, cooking and helping in the fields, etc. in terms of informal learning and leisure activities. Thai local wisdom plays a prominent role in enabling LLL in Thai society. It strengthens the community's economic situation on the basis of self-sufficiency. LLL also boosts moral values and local culture among community members. Local wisdom is defined as basic knowledge, abilities, and skills gained from living in balance with nature and accumulated through many years of experiences, learning, development, and transmission. This wisdom and culture have helped to solve people's real-life problems, uplifted the community's economic situation, and contributed to the development of the way of life by the changing time and environment.

Thailand has a long-standing history of giving priority to adult and non-formal education as a means of providing LLL opportunities to the out-of-school population. Non-formal education services were initially aimed at literacy and primary levels; it has expanded significantly into secondary and vocational levels.

ALE is perceived as part of continuing lifelong education and LLL in the context of Thailand. It is known as Non-Formal Education (NFE), and Informal Education (IFE) for adult learners which provides equal access to educational opportunities addressing people's needs in their daily lives, and decentralizes governance to enable a variety of organizations and networks to participate in conducting educational programs and activities. It was officially introduced in Thailand in 1940 when the Adult Education Division, Department of General Education, Ministry of Education, was established. The work on adult education has been conducted since then with changes along the way to respond to evolving contexts of modern and historic Thai society. Thailand has been promoting and developing ALE in terms of educational opportunities and improving the quality of education for more than a decade. ALE in Thailand has developed through the collaborative efforts of various government organizations, NGOs, and development actors in the private sector. These ALE actors

work in a coalition with one of them coordinating programs and activities at the national, regional, provincial, district, village, and community levels.

According to the study entitled “The role of adult learning and education in Cambodia, Laos PDR, Vietnam, and Thailand – Country studies” (DVV International, 2020), ALE has played a massive role in the Thai education system. Nevertheless, the terminology and its notion have been increasingly incorporated into LLL. The concept has also been integrated into non-formal education curricula at some higher education institutions, such as King Pradjadhipok’s Institute, Top Governance Training (*Nor-Por-Sor*), and continuing education curricula conducted by universities. At the community level, Community Learning Centres (CLCs) are a local educational institution set up and managed by communities themselves to provide various adult learning opportunities with the support of the government, NGOs, and the private sector. Literacy, post-literacy, income generation, life skill programs, and basic education are provided at CLCs. The learning programs as well as the size of CLCs, vary according to local needs and contexts. In Thailand, there are various types of CLCs located in numerous different places, such as district administration offices, temples, schools, community halls, local elders’ houses, factories, and prisons. In 2013, there was a total of 8,764 CLCs all over the country (Office of the Non-formal and Informal Education, 2013). Thailand has been expanding the number of CLCs, in order to reach out to more people in an effort to provide better literacy, vocational and life skills (UNESCO Bangkok, 2015). There are CLCs established in particular target areas, including ones for ethnic minorities such as the Mlabri people (Phi Tong Luang), the Mogan (Surin Islands) as well as Pondok schools in southern border areas populated by ethnic Malays (UNESCO Bangkok, 2013). In addition, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has initiated a new literacy promotion project to develop community reading houses (or the smart book houses) to assist local people throughout the country in the pursuit of LLL. Currently, the total numbers of these reading houses are 21,350 in 77 provinces around the country. In 2020, the report by ONIE’s Data Management Information System (DMIS) showed that there are approximately 3,271,209 people using the services. 24,579 activities were organized and 1,441,400 people participated. Moreover, 1,480,549 printed books were distributed to each community reading house (DMIS, 2020).

Different stakeholders have carried the responsibility of managing, administrating, and coordinating ALE within the MOE over time. They have worked with the Department of Non-Formal Education (DNFE) from 1997 to 2003 and the Office of the Non-Formal Education Commission (ONFEC) from 2003 to 2007, and from 2008 to the present time. ONFEC became the Office of the Non-Formal and Informal Education (ONIE) in 2008. This action constitutes a promotion for both the office as well as the role of informal education in Thailand, which was done according to the country’s educational and bureaucratic reform at the same time. The 2008 Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act later declared education to be a lifelong process. Participants of LLL are from a wide range of backgrounds, such as individuals, families, communities, local organizations, NGOs, private sector actors, vocational or

ganizations, religious institutions, entrepreneurs, and other social sectors. The non-formal and informal education system aims to translate the principle of LLL into effective practices to enable people to continuously improve their quality of life (ONIE, 2008). Thailand strives to develop a learning society promoting local wisdom in this manner because it is assumed to make the country internationally competitive.

According to the National Education Act of 1999 and its amendment, the National Education Act Amendment (Issue 2) of 2002, “lifelong education” as education resulting from the integration of formal, non-formal, and informal education is meant to facilitate continuous lifelong development of quality of life (Office of the Education Council, 2003). The Act further prescribes that all learners must have access to formal, non-formal, and informal education. The results of the non-formal education implementation activities reported by ONIE (ONIE, 2019) indicated that there are 2,016,991 Thai citizens who have been involved in the continuing non-formal education activities, e. g., 78,952 for literacy development, 381,175 life-skill activities, 942,178 career development (through community learning centers: CLCs), 345,092 NFE social and community development, 192,150 sufficiency economy learning, and 77,444 for non-formal education for hill tribes, and other similar demographics. However, other non-formal education, such as the non-formal basic education has also received better rates of graduates with 98,669 in the first semester and 112,110 for a second semester. In total, there are approximately 210,779 qualified students passing a certain degree of basic education (ONIE, 2019). In Thailand, CLCs have been the main driving force for fostering various learning opportunities for local people. CLCs support empowerment, social transformation, and improvement of the quality of life of the people. The main functions of CLCs are to provide education and training, community information and resource services, community development activities, and coordination and networks. Most CLCs in Thailand apply the sufficiency economy philosophy, a method of development based on moderation, prudence, and social immunity, one that uses knowledge and virtue as guidelines in living.

On the other hand, other educational institutions, families, communities, community organizations, local administration organizations, the private sector, private entities, social institutions, and all relevant parties are required to collaborate in making learning readily available to everyone, regardless of time and location (Office of the Education Council, 2003).

The term “lifelong learning” is widely used in different contexts (Charungkaittikul and Henschke, 2014). LLL shares two primary meanings for the Thai community. The first meaning is the education that precipitates throughout people’s lifetime, starting from the first day to the last day of their lives (“cradle to grave”). In addition, LLL with the consideration of the first meaning is also regarded as being a part of people’s daily lives. The second meaning of LLL is a combination of the different systems of Thai education which helps people continue to develop their lives. It can be observed that the role of educational institutions and agencies is to provide several educational activities for people in society. However, it is often overseen that the

emergent stage of LLL depicts the deep learning propensity of a self-directed, autonomous, and independent 'active learner', that focuses on an individual's learning as lifelong human development or LLL pathway (Charungkaittikul, 2016a). Therefore, LLL should rather be seen as an overarching framework that recognizes a lifecycle perspective as a firm foundation for an integrated system of all models of education and modes of learning that people should be encouraged to continue throughout their lives (UNESCO, 2015).

Strategies for establishing this framework in Thailand include developing a range of life skills through distance learning, establishing workplace learning and CLCs, and promoting the joint sharing of resources with the formal school sector. In order to support the promotion of a LLL culture in the non-formal education sector, internet connections have been made increasingly accessible in all areas and system improvements have been implemented to provide recognition of prior learning and facilitate credit transfer.

Further, the development of the LLL society in Thailand is also based on the proactive partnership approaches of various networks which are willing to organize LLL activities. Those networks hold the right to and responsibilities in organizing LLL. Meanwhile, a holistic and integrated approach needs to be applied in order to create a balance in organizing LLL activities. Learning is aimed to be integrated with the citizens' ways of life and it should address different needs of different target groups as well as the social conditions of each target group. Finally, it has been recommended that curricula be adjusted to be in line with the changes in the economy, society, politics, administration, and environment in order to develop the nation in a sustainable way (Charungkaittikul et al. 2013).

However, the terms described in this section have been utilized by various stakeholders with different meanings in separate contexts. To effectively develop LLL in the country, the establishment of an applied framework and outcome-based goals are crucial requisitions. In Thailand as elsewhere, lifelong education and learning increasingly play an essential role in national development and reform agendas, which has an impact on various stakeholders across key sectors of the society and economy. Appropriate public funding and general support are relevant to all citizens. Based on the current national policies (e. g., the 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan 2017–2021; the National Education Act 1999 and its amendment, the National Education Act Amendment (Issue 2) 2002, the Non-Formal Education and Informal Education Act 2008, and Thailand's 20-Year National Strategy and Thailand 4.0 Policy: A digital economy and social development strategy), Thailand is moving forward to promote and support LLL activities among organizations and communities by engaging in basic informal education, literacy promotion and continuing education, developing educational resources and educational technology in all types of education (formal, non-formal, and informal), and implementing research and activities among members of all backgrounds (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, 2017).

Thai LLL has historically been associated with adult learning and education and non-formal and informal education, yet the conceptualization of LLL has developed and gone beyond those concepts in terms of expanding the education system and integrating various types of approaches. Policies and laws are supposed to help ensure that non-formal education and informal education support LLL for all and that all people have opportunities to learn and develop their potentials. Research and activities in the fields of LLL would pertain to the further development of the national human potential and the sustainable development of the country. Based on these reflections, the vision of LLL in Thailand thus needs to include strategies for the development of a knowledge-based and learning society. It can be recommended to emphasize the promotion of human resource development for integrity, knowledge, and resilience, where different kinds of learning will be developed throughout life in groups of all ages. In the Thai context, it is recognized as essential to also include aspects of local wisdom and local culture in future LLL since this has played a substantial role in the national economic and social development (Charungkattikul, 2011).

4 An analysis of the opportunities and challenges of promoting LLL policies in Thailand

The country has faced several opportunities and challenges of promoting LLL at all levels which will be discussed here in detail against the background of the previous analysis. The challenges include, for instance, the climate crisis, technological changes, shifts in demography, population displacement, educational equality and accessibility as well as changing patterns of consumption and production. These challenges, combined with the growing complexity and uncertainty of modern life and work, demand a population that is adaptable, resilient, and sensitized to learning and a system of LLL that both fosters and embodies these qualities by providing opportunities for adults to learn throughout life (UNESCO, 2016). Therefore, Thailand needs to focus on four priority areas: review curricula and set common standards for students, build the capacity of students at all levels, prepare teachers and school leaders, and improve teachers' skills in technology and foster rural internet access. Moreover, other suggestions include having a clearly structured system of education administration, dynamic, innovation-driven education management of international quality, pre-school education as the strong foundation for the country's development, and basic foundation education (K-12) should reach international level quality. It should also encompass teacher training of high quality (Office of National Education Council, 2016). Further, there is a need to increase and widen participation in ALE, particularly for the least advantaged people, investing more and doing more to raise demands while improving data on what works and which groups are being left out (UIL, 2019). The central challenge for Thailand is bringing about the change that is envisioned.

The Office of Non-formal and Informal Education (ONIE) is a critical agency in charge of promoting LLL among Thai people. Its mission is to ensure that all Thai citizens are given LLL opportunities as well as professional training in order for citizens to find quality jobs in the present and future markets. It assumes that this will help create permanent employment as well as a knowledge-based society (ONIE, 2011). However, ONIE is facing several challenges. A central problem is how to transfer and/or recognize credentials, study results, and/or experiential outcomes between formal, informal, and non-formal systems of education. In contrast to formal education contexts, non-formal education in Thailand involves even more comprehensive or more significant learning needs, more diverse target groups, and the shortage of complete or up-to-date database systems to assist education managers with this process. For instance, ONIE (2011) recognizes that some supporter networks are neither motivated nor have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The Office of the Educational Council (2010) ascertained that learning results of learners in the non-formal system remain below standard. Similarly, the National Education Plan (2009–2016) recognizes the related problem that this system is currently unable to meet the demands of many key target groups. Therefore, the vague association between non-formal education and LLL held by some stakeholders is also a source of confusion for many public and private organizations trusted with the responsibility of promoting more effective lifelong education (and thus a learning society) in Thailand (Charungkaittikul, 2016a).

The wealth of the nation and the educational agenda have to be aligned. Many studies (e.g., Hencharoenlert et al, 2016; Charungkaittikul, 2019; Maesincee, 2020; Lerttaweepornkul, 2020) have stressed the need for the government to create an information and LLL ecosystem that is quickly and widely accessible to all people and that is providing them with current information about in-demand work and life skills. Also, the policies that promote a transformation of a nation into a learning society are markedly different in various countries; as noted above, especially in terms of the distinction between developed and developing countries. One area that would also be important for developing countries such as Thailand concerns the link between education and the challenges of an emerging global economy. This link is central for many Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, such as Australia, Canada, Finland, Sweden, Japan, Korea, United Kingdom or the United States, to promote the concept of a learning society. Operating successfully in the knowledge economy requires mastery of assets of knowledge and competencies (Callieri, 2001; OECD, 2002), such as acting autonomously, using tools interactively, and functioning in socially heterogeneous groups. The concept of competency has several features. It is strongly related to contexts that combine interrelated abilities and values, is teachable (although it can be acquired outside the formal education system), and is displayed as a continuum. Achieving these goals requires a fundamental change in the way learning takes place and in the relationship among the different stakeholders.

Thailand has been working on ASEAN integration, specifically since the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015. ASEAN citizens are now easily able to transfer labor, goods, technology, services, and cultures to other member countries. The country needs collaborative and concerted efforts from all sectors to achieve its goal, according to the policy dimension “Stability, Prosperity, and Sustainability”. There is a need to engage national policymakers and stakeholders in a dialogue on LLL, helping governments formulate visions and concrete action plans to establish both LLL and innovation frameworks appropriate to each country’s context.

Due to a rapidly changing environment including lifestyles, learning, and work culture, population structure and due to limitations of the present educational system, there is a drive to direct the country into a LLL society that promotes LLL for all people and to provide an ecosystem for LLL as a tool for developing the quality of life. Charungkattikul (2019) pointed out that Thailand needs to reconsider the current national policies and strategies in this new normal to meet the growing diversity of economic and societal imperatives and to ensure positive learning outcomes. Future policies of a LLL society in Thailand could thus be oriented towards typical policy responses other countries have used (Peterson, 1979; Tuckett, 1997; Roth, 2001; Leader, 2003; Han, 2011; UNESCO, 2014; UIL, 2017; 2019), including improving access, quality and equity, ensuring foundation skills for all, recognition of all forms of learning not just formal courses of study, mobilizing resources, rethinking resource allocation across all sectors, settings and over the life-cycle, and ensuring collaboration among a wide range of partners (OECD, 2010).

In relation to the example of a future Lifelong Learning Promotion Act, Charungkattikul et al (2013) have identified that the central problem to be tackled is how the scope of LLL remains generally unclear to the broader society in policy as well as in the practice. The authors propose that a new, improved version of the act should also focus on encouraging a better understanding and practice of the process of LLL as well as provisions such as learning resources or opportunities in a lifelong context. It is based on whether it is acknowledged that there is a lack of clarity between the concept of LLL and lifelong education. That is, Charungkattikul et al (2013) point out that the LLL process needs to be encouraged independently from both the notion of educational management and also from the related confusion between formal, non-formal, and informal systems of education. They recommend an amended policy by including organizational and educational management as well as legal and transformational dimensions. Charungkattikul et al (2013) further recognize that cooperation of all parties and relevant partnership networks is required. Effective national policies of LLL, therefore, need to achieve a convergence between economic imperatives and the societal demands as to promote social cohesion by providing long-term benefits for the individual, various organizations, and society more generally. Implementing a LLL system is complex, and many aspects should be taken into consideration, including prerequisites for policymaking, educational tradition, demographic structure, educational content, economic parameters, individual choices,

preferences, and needs. Under such circumstances, implementing LLL policies is incremental. The challenge is to ensure the implementation of an incremental approach within an agreed framework for the long-term realization of LLL.

There is a general policy agreement in the practice that Thailand should promote LLL and encourage the emergence of a related LLL society. The country has continued to face significant global and internal changes and other dynamic phenomena that may either pose threats or provide opportunities for the nation's development. A key challenge is to ensure equitable opportunities for access to quality education. A related issue is the need to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the education system and raising standards. This scenario will be key to producing a more skilled workforce and strengthening the competitiveness of the nation within the global context. Therefore, there is a need to clarify the concept of LLL, to review its application to the local context, and to consider the most appropriate policy options to pursue the goal of becoming an effective learning society within the new global situation (Charungkaittikul, 2019).

The concept of lifelong learning society indicates a collective entity (society) that develops institutional and organizational structures to promote relevant learning opportunities for all members of that society. Thus, reflecting on the needs of different stakeholders among policymakers – government, providers, and learners shall help to develop appropriate policies, planning strategies, and funding allocations (Charungkaittikul, 2019). Concisely, it is a challenge for the government, for the domestic and international policymaking community, and stakeholders across sectors. These bodies need to put LLL (through embracing all forms of learning, including formal and informal, and of people of all ages) at the center of all efforts to achieve sustainable economies and societies and recognize its vital role in developing integrated, holistic solutions to the problems faced, as well as facilitate the prosperity and the well-being of its people. As Stiglitz & Greenwald (2015) deduce, the link between everyday experiential learning and the wider social learning of regular knowledge building is the key to a society that can also achieve sustainable as well as innovative development. Building a LLL system is not limited to “adding” adult and continuing education (as well as non-formal education) on top of the existing school system. It requires a fundamental process of the structural adjustment of the whole national education system from the perspective of the systems approach. As Han (2001) identifies, this requirement involves various ‘border-cross’ challenges of integrating diverse educational domains within a whole learning ecosystem. The right policies to assist this process are thus crucial.

There is a need for proper lifelong policies with effective implementation through the flexible delivery of various activities and services, governance and measures, and coordination mechanisms that are most likely to be relevant to Thai culture and local learning habits. A lifelong learning system to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote LLL opportunities for all; this concept is depicted in Figure 2.

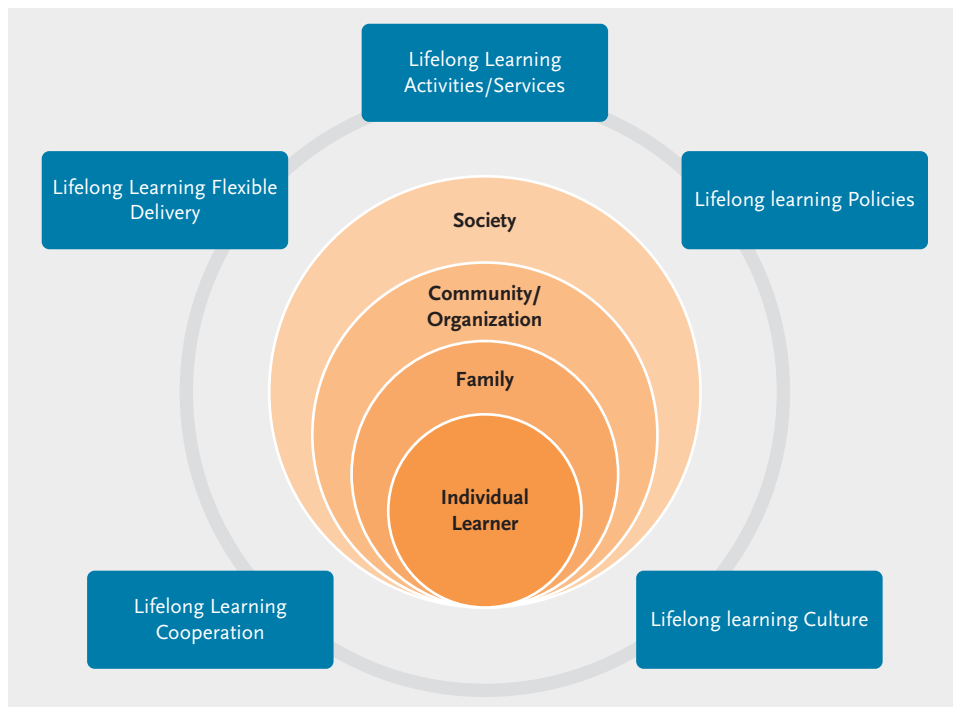


Figure 2: Lifelong Learning System

5 Recommendations for the operationalization of LLL

LLL in Thailand aims to focus on the triangle of knowledge, skills, and mindset that enhance employability, personal development, active citizenship, and social inclusion. To strengthen the role of LLL, this study puts forward the following recommendations.

Building an understanding internationally and fostering a local LLL mindset: The right perspectives of LLL require a personal interest from the learner to grow at every stage of their career, supported by constant encouragement and motivation from leaders, management, and an environment that is conducive to learn. This initiative needs to include the role of local agencies and international organizations. For instance, The International Council on Adult Education (ICAE) aims to create an open stage for international opinions where policymakers and implementers of adult education can exchange their experiences and learnings and build-up a common interest and understanding on LLL.

Extending of the definition, target group, and dimension of adult education: ALE is an integrated LLL system. In order to respond to the learning and skills training needs of the Thai adult population, the definitions and meanings of adult education, as well as the extent of adult education programs, should be reviewed and redefined.

Besides, flexible adult learning and education systems that enable learners to move within and across education, training, and employment, and informal learning should be applied to provide learning opportunities for all people.

Sharing and strengthening suitable practice lessons: Various significant learnings are related to the designing of learning programs through the application of innovative/technological media, promoting learning effectiveness among adults who have different social backgrounds, creating associate networks, participating in adult learning by various sectors of society, managing basic and administrative structures in promoting LLL for adults, applying legislative measures to promote significant participations among associate networks, and supporting the promotion of adult learning and education or LLL for adults, etc.

Training and development of LLL providers and facilitators: The lack of high-quality teachers and other education personnel remains an essential limitation to the quality of education, especially regarding the educational achievements of learners. Therefore, the government should emphasize the training of teachers and concerned facilitators.

Ensuring public-private partnerships: All LLL involves collaboration among a wide range of partners. Establishing linkages and forging partnerships are critical. Bringing together government, NGOs, businesses, and private sectors, communities, and other stakeholders is a challenging but necessary task. The convergence of actions and strategic partnerships could pave the way for more effective LLL responses, and the results can be expected to be powerful.

Applying research outcomes: Although there have been many studies focusing on the access to educational opportunities, the efficiency, and achievement of strategies on educational services, or the quality of the delivery approach system, several units in the MOE still lack a sound system of synthesizing research findings. Collaboration, as well as unity among agencies, could be improved to support the data for further LLL development in all dimensions.

Developing different LLL policies and programs: In the development of education today, Thailand has materialized the necessity of making services more accessible to the people by means of coverage, equality, equity, and quality under efficient management and administration. The country needs to put more effort into developing appropriate LLL policies and programs. Although the Thai government is finding new and innovative ways of engaging individuals to learn, the country is required to enhance the participation of learners through different networks, innovative grants and contribution projects, innovative funding arrangements, awareness-building activities, and to elaborate new strategies by developing or implementing new, comprehensive, strategic adult-literacy plans and frameworks.

To effectively promote LLL for all citizens, the country must have a systematic policy for LLL, a holistic and integrated approach to creating an overall LLL development that helps balance LLL activities and address different needs of diverse target groups. The proposed transformation cannot be successful without the cooperation of all related parties and effective law enforcement as well as various partnership net-

works that will help manage education. It is appropriate to identify clear responsibilities regarding LLL for specific organizations. The organizational dimension and education management aspects are also essential to manage and promote LLL that is relevant to Thai society. In addition, there should be systematic measures and indicators, as well as guidelines to make LLL possible. Ideally, a way to enhance policy coordination and coherence between the different partners involved is to create LLL institutions for policy formation and program delivery country-wide. The proposed institution can act as a coordinator, an advisory body, or an actual policymaking body. Many aspects must be considered, including the prerequisites for policymaking, educational tradition, demographic structure, educational content, economic parameters, individual choices, preferences, and needs. The challenge is to ensure that an incremental approach is planted and implemented within an agreed framework for the long-term realization of LLL opportunities for all. The central government needs to create a space for meaningful and representative engagement to build trust and a shared understanding of respective responsibilities with all education actors.

Within this uncertain world where disruption is a new normal, it is the opportunity for each individual as a learner to transform themselves to become an active LLL with the support of real-life systems in a dynamic LLL environment in society.

6 Conclusion

Throughout the past decade, Thailand has continued to conduct research on the best and most innovative measures and good practices to promote the development of LLL among people as well as supporting the participation of all concerned sectors in society. The research, development, and innovation of LLL targets two crucial issues. First, to find a system that promotes the development of a universally accessible high-quality education with an inclusive framework for disadvantaged groups. Second, to find an effective way to develop the quality of education and learning as education or learning opportunities that help people to lead a decent life in terms of health and well-being, culture, spirituality, and in all considerations that contribute to personal development and dignity.

To transform the current policy, the Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act B. E. 2551 to the Lifelong Learning Promotion Act, it is essential to define the national scope of lifelong education and the overall picture of LLL in terms of philosophies, concepts, and strategies. Basic information about the transformation should be promoted to society to see a clear direction of the proposed action through legal channels. Finally, people and systems must be fully prepared to adapt to future changes and reap future benefits by keeping up with globalization, building resilience, and developing LLL societies to enhance the well-being of individuals and society. This study offered unique insights into the current state of LLL in Thailand and assessed its contribution to SDGs. It recommended actions to be taken in order to ensure SDG 4 which states – ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’.

References

- Callieri, C. (2001). The knowledge economy: A business perspective. In D. S. Rychen & L. H. Salganik (Eds.). *Defining and selecting key competencies*. Göttingen: Hogrefe & Huber, pp. 228–231. Retrieved 31 August 2020 from <http://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv:18652>
- Charungkaittikul, S. (2011). *The scenario of a learning society model toward promoting a positive paradigm shift for communities*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University.
- Charungkaittikul, S. (2016a). Thailand as learning society and policy implications of lifelong learning. In C. Richards & S. Charungkaittikul (Eds.). *The eight pillars of lifelong education: Thailand studies*. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn Publishing Center, Chulalongkorn University, pp. 27–35.
- Charungkaittikul, S. (2016b). Transformation in Lifelong Education in Thailand. *Journal of International and Global Studies*, 8(1), pp. 56–67.
- Charungkaittikul, S. (2019). Building a Learning Society: Perspective from Thailand. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2019(162), pp. 25–36.
- Charungkaittikul, S., Pathumcharoenwattana, W., & Sujiva, S. (2013). *An evaluation of the non-formal education implementation based on the non-formal and informal education act B. E. 2551 (2008)*. Bangkok: Office of Non-formal and Informal Education, Ministry of Education.
- Charungkaittikul, S., & Henschke, J. A. (2014). Strategies for developing a sustainable learning society: An analysis of lifelong learning in Thailand. *International Review of Education*, 60(4), pp. 499–522.
- DMIS (Data Management Information System) (2020). *The Number of community reading houses divided into provinces in 2020*. Retrieved 9 August 2020 from http://202.29.172.133/book63/district/summary_book.php
- DVV International (2020, in press). *The role of ALE in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Vietnam, and Thailand – Country studies*. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press.
- Han, S. (2001). Creating systems: Lifelong learning in Asia. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 2(2), pp. 85–95.
- Han, S. H. (2011). Introduction to Building a Learning City. In J. Yang & R. Valdés-Cotera (Eds.). *Conceptual Evolution and Policy Development in Lifelong Learning*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, pp. 209–221.
- Hencharoenlert, N; Sripradit, T; and Nurarak, P. (2016). *New Frontier of Learning: Education 4.0*. Bangkok: Learning Innovation Center, Chulalongkorn University.
- International Trade Center. (2015). *Country Profile Thailand*. Retrieved 12 May 2020 from <http://www.intracen.org/exporters/organic-products/country-focus/Country-Profile-Thailand/>
- Leader, G. (2003). Lifelong learning: Policy and practice in further education. *Education and Training*, 45(7), pp. 361–370.
- Lerttaweepornkul, P. (2020). *Lifelong learning key to future economy*. Retrieved 20 May 2020 from <https://tdri.or.th/en/2020/04/lifelong-learning-key-to-future-economy/>

- Maesincee, S. (2020). *The world changes the adjuster*. Retrieved 20 May 2020 from <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AmaGwWGnLV6aS2AM7RCRX5bixKANLQN4/view>
- National News Bureau of Thailand. (2016). *Thailand's 20-Year National Strategy and Thailand 4.0 Policy*. Retrieved 31 August 2020 from http://thailand.prd.go.th/ewt_news.php?nid=3578
- OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2002). *The role of national qualification systems in promoting lifelong learning: Thematic issues groups*. Paris: OECD Secretariat.
- OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2010). Lifelong learning and Adults, in *Education Today 2010: The OECD Perspective*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (2017). *The Twelfth National Economic and Social Development Plan (2017–2021)*. Bangkok: Office of the Prime Minister.
- Office of the Education Council (2003). *National Education Act B. E. 2542 (1999) and Amendments (Second National Education Act B. E. 2545 (2002))*. Bangkok: Pimdee-karnpim.
- Office of the Education Council (2017). *Education in Thailand*. Bangkok: Prigwan Graphic Co., Ltd.
- Office of National Education Council (2016). *An annual report year 2016 of the Office of National Education Council: The integration to national education plan*. Bangkok: Office of National Education Council.
- Office of the Permanent Secretary (2017). *MOE's Organizational Structure*. Retrieved 2 May 2020 from <http://www.en.moe.go.th/enMoe2017/index.php/policy-and-plan/thai-education-in-brief>
- ONIE (Office of Non-formal and Informal Education) (2008). *The non-formal and informal education promotion Act B. E. 2551*. Bangkok: Office of Non-formal and Informal Education, Office of Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education.
- ONIE (Office of Non-formal and Informal Education) (2011). *Performance report of non-formal and information education*. Bangkok: ONIE, Office of Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education.
- ONIE (Office of Non-formal and Informal Education) (2019). *Implementation and performance report of non-formal and informal education for the fiscal year 2019*. Bangkok: Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education, Office of Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education.
- Peterson, R., & Associates (1979). *Lifelong learning in America*. London: Jossey-Bass.
- Pongpaiboon, P. (2007). *Learning society*. Retrieved 20 May 2020 from <http://learners.in.th/blog/yarnapa2/15632>.
- Roth, J. (2001, October). *Contemporary issues in human resource development: Implications for educational administration*. Paper presented at the Korean Society for Educational Administration, Seoul, Korea.
- Stiglitz, J. & Greenwald, C. (2015). *Creating a learning society: A new approach to growth, development, and social progress*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Torraco, R. J. (2005). *Writing integrative literature reviews: Guidelines and examples*. Retrieved 31 August 2020 from [https://www.homeworkforyou.com/static_media/uploadedfiles/Torraco%20\(2005\).pdf](https://www.homeworkforyou.com/static_media/uploadedfiles/Torraco%20(2005).pdf)
- Tuckett, A. (1997). *Lifelong learning in England and Wales*. Leicester, UK: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.
- UIL (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning) (2017). *Lifelong learning in transformation: promising practices in Southeast Asia*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.
- UIL (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning) (2019). *4 Global report on adult learning and education: Key messages and executive summary*. Retrieved 20 May 2020 from <https://www.bic.moe.go.th/images/stories/book/ed-eng-series/intro-ed08.pdf>
- UN (United Nation) (2019). *World Population Prospects 2019 Highlights*. Retrieved 20 March 2020 from https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019_Highlights.pdf
- UNESCO (2014). *Lifelong learning policies and strategies*. Retrieved from uil.unesco.org/fileadmin/keydocuments/LifelongLearning/en/LLPSCollection.pdf
- UNESCO (2015). *Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development: Goal 4 Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. Retrieved 20 March 2020 from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002456/245656E.pdf>
- UNESCO (2016). *Recommendation on adult learning and education France: The united nations educational, scientific and cultural organization and UIL*. Retrieved 20 March 2020 from file:///C:/Users/user/Desktop/adult%20learning_UNESCO.pdf
- UNESCO Bangkok (2013). *Community Learning Centres: Asia-Pacific Regional Conference Report 2013*. Bangkok: UNESCO Publishing.
- UNESCO Bangkok (2015). *Asia-Pacific Regional Education for All Report: A Synthesis of the National EFA Reports*. Bangkok: UNESCO Publishing.
- World Bank (2020). *Literacy Rate, Adult Total for Thailand*. Retrieved 15 April 2020 from <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/SEADTLITRZSTHA>

Author

Dr. Suwithida Charungkattikul is an International Professor in the Non-Formal Education Division of the Department of Lifelong Education at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand. She also holds a doctorate in Non-Formal Education (Adult and Lifelong Education) from Chulalongkorn University. From 2010–2011, she was a Research Fellow in the Andragogy Doctoral Emphasis Specialty Instructional Leadership Program at Lindenwood University, MO, USA, where she completed her post-doctoral training in Education Andragogy and Learning Society Development. She has been actively involved in and worked for diverse national and international organizations such as the Present Assistant Secretary of the Comparative Education Society of Asia (CESA), Present Advisory Board Member of ELA Journal of Educational

Leadership in Action, Lindenwood University, U. S. A., and UNESCO international consultant for a National Equivalency Program (EPs) framework for promoting life-long learning in Nepal, UNESCO Kathmandu, Nepal.

Contact

Suwithida Charungkaitikul

254 Phayathai Rd. Wangmai Patumwan

Bangkok 10330

Thailand

suwithida.c@chula.ac.th or suwithida@yahoo.com