

Thailand

Curriculum planning, development and reform

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Estimated population (1995)	58,200,000
Public expenditure on education as percentage of Gross National Product (1995)	4.1
Duration of compulsory education (years)	6
Primary or basic education	
Pupils enrolled (1995)	5,961,855
Teachers (1995)	–
Pupil/teacher ratio	20 : 1
Gross enrolment ratio (1995)	
—Total	87
—Male	–
—Female	–
Net enrolment ratio (1995)	
—Total	97
—Male	98
—Female	97
Estimated percentage of repeaters (1995)	12
Estimated percentage of drop-outs (1995)	20,000
School-age population out of school (1995)	
Secondary education	
Students enrolled (1995)	3,794,290
Gross enrolment ratio (1995)	
—Total	55
—Male	–
—Female	–
Third-level enrolment ratio (1995)	20.1
Estimated adult literacy rate (1995)	
—Total	94
—Male	96
—Female	92

Source: UNESCO statistical yearbook, 1998, Paris

INTRODUCTION

The year 2000 will be a year of learning reform in Thailand. In the previous decade, economic growth based on industrial production was rapid, but did not enhance the overall quality of life for the majority of the population. The current economic crisis has heightened the need for educational reform so that citizens are better equipped to cope with present socio-economic demands.

GOALS

Primary education in Thailand aims at developing the *quality of life* of learners so that they can properly serve society, assuming their roles and responsibilities as good citizens under a democratic constitutional monarchy. To achieve this goal, each learner is to be equipped with the basic knowledge and skills necessary for: daily living; adjustment to social changes; good physical and mental health; effective work and happy, peaceful living.

THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM

The objectives of the primary curriculum are to provide: (a) basic education for all; (b) experiences useful for daily living; and (c) education for national unity with common purposes. In this context, local authorities are given the opportunity to develop part of the curriculum—rendering it suitable for local conditions and needs.

The curriculum experiences provided for learners comprise five areas:

1. *tool subjects*: Thai language and mathematics;
2. *life experiences*: the process of solving social and daily life problems (with an emphasis on scientific process skills for better living);
3. *character development*: activities necessary for developing desirable habits, values, attitudes and behaviours leading to an acceptable character;
4. *work-oriented experiences*: general and practical work experiences and basic knowledge for career preparation;
5. *special experiences*: activities based on learners' interests.

Area 5 is provided for learners in grades five and six only. Experiences provided may include knowledge and skills selected from the other four areas or activities based on learners' interests, i.e. English for everyday life. Schools may select as many activities as desirable. The curriculum

aims to develop the following skills, knowledge and attitudes in learners,

1. Basic learning skills, retention of literacy and mathematical skills;
2. Knowledge and understanding about self, the natural environment and social changes;
3. Ability to take care of personal and family health;
4. Ability to identify causes of personal and family problems and to apply scientific reasoning skills to suggest ways and means of solving them;
5. Pride in being Thai, unselfishness, fair-mindedness and the ability to live happily with others;
6. Habits of reading and lifelong learning;
7. Basic knowledge and work skills, good work habits and the ability to work co-operatively with others;
8. Knowledge and understanding of social conditions

and changes at home and in the community; ability to carry out the roles as a good family and community member; a sense of responsibility to conserve and develop the environment; to promote religion, arts and culture in the community.

Time allotments

The total time allotment for the primary curriculum is about six academic years, with not less than forty weeks for each academic year and not less than twenty-five hours or seventy-five periods per week. The time allotted for each period is twenty minutes. Collectively, learning periods cannot be less than 200 days or 1,000 hours. See Table 1 for details.

TABLE 1. Approximate time allotments in the primary curriculum

Approximate time allotments: primary curriculum						
	Grades 1–2		Grade 3		Grades 5–6	
	%	Periods/year	%	Periods/year	%	Periods/year
Tool subjects	50	1,500	35	1,050	25	750
Life experiences	15	450	20	600	25	750
Character development	25	750	25	750	20	600
Education for work	10	300	20	600	30	900
Total	100	3,000	100	3,000	100	3,000
Special experiences	—	—	—	—	—	600

Note: There are three periods of twenty minutes in one hour.

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

To achieve the educational aims, curriculum orientation guidelines have been established as follows:

1. Organizing teaching/learning activities that:
 - Are relevant to conditions and needs of the communities by providing opportunities for local authorities to develop part of the curriculum, as well as instructional aids appropriate to their localities that are learner-centred, making the activities relevant to the learners' needs and living conditions and providing equal opportunities for them to develop according to their respective abilities;
 - Maximize linkages and integration of subject matter, the learning experiences within each area and between different experience areas;
 - Emphasize learning processes, logical and creative thinking and group processes;
 - Promote learning by doing and emphasize development of concepts in all areas of experience.
2. Organizing research studies, follow-up and continuous remedial teaching;
3. Regularly integrating moral education and desirable values into the teaching/learning process, as well as in extra-curricular activities;
4. Organizing an environment and general climate within the school conducive to learning and to the practical activities of learners.

MEASUREMENT, EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP

School administrators and classroom teachers are responsible for measurement, evaluation and follow-up in order to determine mid-year and end-of-year learner promotions. Teachers are expected to carry out formative and summative evaluations periodically based on subject content and experiences, in conformity with the Ministry of Education's prescribed evaluation regulations. However, for the area of *special experiences*, measurement and evaluation are designed to assess learners' involvement in activities and are not used as criteria for class promotion.

SECONDARY EDUCATION

Goals and aims

Secondary education also aims to improve the learner's quality of life and serves as the basis for further education. It should: (a) help learners discover their own abilities, aptitudes and interests; (b) provide a general education as the basis for securing honest occupations or further education; and (c) respond to the needs of the localities and the nation. Based on these aims, the curriculum is designed to permit learners to develop the following characteristics:

1. Knowledge and skills in general education subjects and the ability to keep up with academic advances;
2. The ability to maintain and enhance personal and community health and hygiene;
3. The ability to analyse community problems and choose suitable alternatives for solving them—taking into account various limitations;

TABLE 2. The secondary curriculum

1. Compulsory courses: 57 learning units (credits)		Credits
Core compulsories		39 units
Thai		12 units
Sciences		9 units
Mathematics		6 units
Social studies		6 units
Health and physical education		3 units
Art education		3 units
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1.2 Elective compulsories: 18 units (credits)		
Social studies		6 units
Health and physical education		6 units
Work education		6 units
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2. Free elective courses: To be selected from the following—33 units		
2.1	Languages	
	Thai	
	Foreign languages	
2.2	Sciences/mathematics	
	Sciences	
	Mathematics	
2.3	Social studies	
2.4	Personality development	
	Health and physical education	
	Art education	
2.5	Work and vocation	
	Vocational education	
3	Activities in accordance with the Ministry of Education’s regulations are to be organized in educational institutions under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education	
3.1	Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Red Cross Youth, Girl Guides	
3.2	Extra-curricular activities	
3.3	Guidance/remedial education or academic development activities	
3.4	Independent activities	

- 4 Pride in being Thai; ability to live in peace with others and to willingly help others—within the limits of one’s capability;
- 5 Creativity, ability to devise and improve practices which will bring about individual and community progress;
- 6 Good attitudes towards all kinds of honest occupations; love of work and ability to choose occupations relevant to one’s aptitudes and interests;

- 7 Basic skills for carrying out honest occupations; skills in management and in working co-operatively with others;
- 8 Understanding social conditions and changes in one’s community; the ability to suggest ways of community development; pride in assuming one’s roles, duties as a good community member; knowledge of how to conserve and develop the environment, religious and cultural heritage of the community.

IMPLEMENTATION CRITERIA

This revised edition of the lower secondary school curriculum has the following main features:

Duration

The full course requires approximately three years or six semesters. Each academic year is divided into two semesters, with twenty weeks per semester. A school may offer a summer semester, as deemed appropriate. Each week consists of no less than five learning days, at least seven periods per day (one period is fifty minutes long). At least thirty periods per week are to be allocated to regular teaching/learning in accordance with the curriculum.

Learning units/credits

One unit is given to any subject requiring two learning periods per week per semester. Subjects requiring more or less than two learning periods are assigned appropriate proportional units.

Compulsory courses/free elective courses

The learners must take compulsory *and* free elective courses as specified in the structure of the curriculum. Learners may choose only one foreign language.

Evaluation of learning

Evaluation of learning and transfer of credits must conform to the Ministry of Education’s regulations.

Criteria for course completion

The completion requirements are: (a) ninety units of compulsory and free elective courses as specified in the curriculum and satisfactory learning outcomes for all subjects; (b) passing the Thai language and social studies core compulsories; (c) obtaining a minimum of eighty units; (d) participating in the curriculum specified activities with at least 80% attendance and having satisfactorily achieved all the major objectives of the activities.

Organizational structure

Table 3 provides an overview of the key agencies involved in curriculum development and implementation at each level of the system as well as their respective roles and responsibilities.

TABLE 3. The curriculum: who makes which choices?

	CENTRAL LEVEL CURRICULUM CENTRE	REGIONAL LEVEL EDUCATIONAL REGIONS	SCHOOL LEVEL TEACHERS
AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Ministry of Education, establishes goals and aims.	In each educational region, a local syllabus experience component is designed (for primary level) and work-oriented education (for lower secondary level); the objectives and contents relate to each other, but do not conflict with aims and objectives at the central level	
CURRICULUM PLAN	Curriculum Development Centre, Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development, Ministry of Education, establishes structure and time allotment.		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All teachers make detailed teaching plans for each semester or each academic year. The contents cover only topics and main points. 2. Teachers make their own lesson plans for each hour to cover: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 Behavioural objectives; 2.2 Detailed contents that relate to objectives and apply the scope of contents to suit local situations (based on the community, environment and daily life—including local employment). 2.3 Teaching and learning activities are related to objectives and contents; focus on learning by doing as in: experiments, reading, writing, mathematics skills, public speaking and workshops. External trainers are necessary; they can be selected by the community.
METHODS AND APPROACHES TO LEARNING	Curriculum Development Centre, Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development, Ministry of Education, works on guidelines for implementation to achieve the aims.		
MATERIALS	Ministry of Education supports purchase of expensive materials, such as laboratory equipment, reference books, computers, audio-visual and workshop equipment, reading books for students	Some communities support more expensive equipment, such as audio-visual, television and video players	Learning supports: reading books, pictures, word cards, CD-ROMs, cassettes, tapes and videos are provided by teachers. Some other teaching materials can be produced by the teachers.
EVALUATION AND EXAMINATION	The evaluation regulations are prescribed by the Ministry of Education		School administrators and classroom teachers are responsible for measurement, evaluation and follow-up to improve teaching and learning and to determine mid-year and end-of-year promotion for learners, according to their abilities. They should also carry out periodic formative and summative evaluations of contents and experiences.

CURRICULA ADAPTATION: OUTCOMES AND ISSUES

Implementation

The most important problem here is how to change learning and teaching behaviours. According to the curriculum orientation guidelines, teachers should be focusing on: (a) integrating content from daily life; (b) making greater use of activities, rather than textbooks; (c) using different learning materials in a variety of ways; (d) making students the centre of learning activities; and (e) reducing explanation and helping students *construct* knowledge from various sources. But in the real classroom situation, the teacher-centred approach still dominates. Basically, teachers still dictate to students and still place emphasis on textbook content. Few teaching materials are used.

Some of the reasons for this are: (a) teachers are afraid that students cannot obtain the necessary fundamental knowledge through activities; (b) current assessment techniques still emphasize knowledge and understanding; (c) entrance examinations to the secondary level and higher education is still based (mainly) on summative knowledge, as opposed to other abilities; and (d) it takes more time to prepare and teach according to the designated teaching/learning curriculum orientations. It is anticipated that all these problems will be solved in the forthcoming process of reforming curriculum and learning activities.

Follow-up

The follow-up of curriculum implementation is not being adequately undertaken because of an insufficient number of external supervisors. In fact, this task is poorly implemented, because the external supervisors' innovations and methods do not relate well to real school situations. There are some *internal* supervision problems as well; the school principals have little understanding of curriculum and teaching methods, and they tend to pay less attention to academic development. Furthermore, most of the teachers have negative attitudes toward internal supervision.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

The Thai primary and lower secondary curricula have now been in use for over twenty years. Since (in principle) curriculum development is related to socio-economic conditions, this means that the curricula in use still relate (for the most part) to the social conditions prevailing in 1978—the date when they were initially adopted. (Notwithstanding, there were two subsequent revisions to the lower secondary curriculum in 1990). As mentioned at the outset, it is in this context that Thailand plans to implement major reform of the curriculum and learning activities, beginning in 2000.

The post-reform education system

Goals. The reforms will emphasize:

- Providing basic education for all (especially *the equality of being*);
- Providing education for adjusting oneself placidly to the changing society and creating social learning;
- Providing education that embraces *international* norms (i.e. using high technology, respecting human rights; being generous to children, women; facing new problems, etc.).

Structure. To achieve the objectives, the structure of the school system will be reorganized, in concert with reforms to the basic education curriculum and learning activities. It is expected that the class levels will be grouped into the following four sections:

- first grade-third grade;
- fourth grade-sixth grade;
- seventh grade-ninth grade;
- tenth grade-twelfth grade.

Curriculum. The basic education curriculum will focus on developing the learners' emotional, physical, social and mental capacities, resulting in the following characteristics for each individual:

- high ethical conduct and values, and the ability to work and live happily in both Thai and global society;
- good health, well-rounded personality and a sense of aesthetics;
- the ability to think, solve problem and adopt a very broad vision;
- knowledge, good skills and capacity for lifelong learning;
- a sense of nationalism and good citizenship (for a system based on a democratic monarchy);
- creativity, ability to participate competently in the global society.

Curriculum orientations. There will be four main orientations: (1) *learning details*: self-development, art education, social studies, Thai language, mathematics, science and technology, work-oriented experiences, foreign languages; (2) *organizing learning details*: focused on basic and selected local needs—also on knowledge, skills ethics and values; (3) *projects*—this is a *key* component consisting of project work for learning and meeting students' interests; (4) *social* activities focused on social development.

Teaching/learning approach. The main thrust will be on effectively using the *child/student-centred* approach. Teachers will design relevant activities by which students can themselves construct and follow up knowledge. This will include activities designed: (1) to cater to individual students' needs and abilities; (2) to permit students to select options according to their own interests; (3) to organize extra-school and classroom-based teaching and learning activities; (4) to facilitate student-lead learning activities with teachers acting as advisors and facilitators; (5) to evaluate individual student progress (based on authentic assessment, as well as student self-assessments).