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The concept of lifelong learning is deeply entrenched in Thai culture and tradition. Gradually moving from a primarily agricultural society toward a manufacturing, industrial and service, and society with the goal of becoming a learning society, Thailand needs to offer its people with more lifelong learning opportunities and support to continuously upgrade their lives. This article presents keys aspects regarding lifelong learning, and reviews several Thai nation policies and initiatives for the development of lifelong learning activities toward building a learning society in the Thai context. Case studies presented reflect efforts have been made to help raise local citizens' awareness to the transformation of communities, cities, and regions into a learning society in Thailand. This article may help provide some developmental guidelines for countries that are in the similar processes of cultivating lifelong learning environment and culture for a sustainable development of a society.

Building a Learning Society: Perspective From Thailand

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Introduction

Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia to have escaped colonial rule. Presently, it is composed of seventy-six provinces. The current population of Thailand is 69,184,615 people, 52.6 % of the population is urban (36,419,724 people in 2018, based on the latest United Nations estimates) (United Nations, 2018). Thailand is the world's 50th largest country by total area. Currently, the country is in transition of transforming 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, infrastructure of information technology system, and exclusive public services). The society is plagued with several obstacles including low quality of education in some areas/regions; an unequal opportunity to access to learning of people who live in some rural areas; lacking of skills and ability to adapt upgraded knowledge into practice, which result in low labor productivity (Charungkaittikul, Pathumcharoenwattana, & Sujiva, 2013; National Economic and Social Development Board, 2017; Pongpaiboon, 2007). Therefore, this is an urgent need

to provide lifelong learning opportunities to all and to balance the national development.

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), which together help lay a significant foundation for national developing toward building a learning society. These related learning society policies represent an important opportunity to help the education system deal with global change. The government has geared toward development as a lifelong learning society, which acts as a major mechanism for the national economic and social development (Charungkaitikul, 2016). At the same time, it helps ensure lifelong learning opportunities and enhance the education access and quality of all people.

Similarly, some private and public agencies, such as Knowledge Management Institute, Thailand Productivity Institute, Office of Non-formal Education and Informal Education Promotion, as well as local communities become active in pursuing study of the concept of lifelong learning and strategies of building a learning society, and developing a lifelong learning society that is applicable to the Thai context. Efforts have been made to clarify the concept of lifelong learning, to review its application to 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.

This chapter aims to indicate several keys aspects and roles of lifelong learning in the local context. It reviews the implantation of appropriate policy initiatives for promoting learning activities toward building the Thailand learning society. It discusses the sustainable developmental guidelines for lifelong learning.

Lifelong Learning Development in Thailand

The public policy relating to adult education can be traced to the 1940s, when the government decided to embark on a nation-wide campaign to eradicate illiteracy by providing classes to out-of-school people. In 1940, the Adult Education Division was created within the Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education to take the responsibility and develop adult education in the country (Sangsri & Mellor, 1984).

The idea of lifelong education was not introduced in Thailand until 1970s. It was identified as a concept relevant for Thailand's society, following the publication of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s Faure Report in 1972 (Faure et al., 1972). At that time, Thailand received assistance and advice for educational arrangements from UNESCO. In 1977, a new education scheme was planned by adjusting the

Education Plan of 1960. The National Education Plan in 1977 referred to “lifelong learning” for the first time, stating that the aim of education is a “lifelong continuous procedure” wherein education in the school system was provided, from the preelementary education level to the higher education level, similar to another previous education plan (Sangnapaboworn, 2007). The only difference was that the scope of adult education was changed into nonformal education, opening opportunities for people of all ages. In the national education plans from 1977 onward, lifelong learning has been mentioned broadly, be it in Education Development Plan, Education Development Policy, through the National Education Act of 1999 and its amendment, the National Education Act Amendment (Issue 2) of 2002 wherein lifelong learning became the frame for education arrangements of the country (Office of the Education Council, 2017). The Office of National Education Commission (2000) stated clearly on section eight that education indicates lifelong learning for the people.

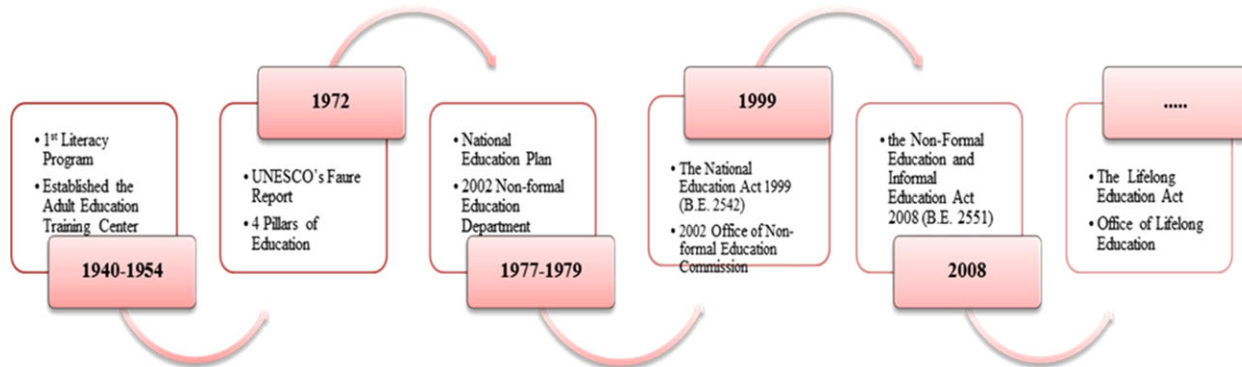
According to the National Education Act of 1999 and its amendment, the National Education Act Amendment (Issue 2) of 2002, lifelong education refers to education consisting of formal, nonformal, and informal education so as to create the ability of continuing lifelong development for the quality of life (Office of National Education Commission, 2000). The practice of lifelong learning has played a strong role in national economic and social development. In 2008, the Office of Non-formal and Informal Education, Ministry of Education launched the first Non-formal and Informal Education Act to promote a lifelong learning society. The major focus of the Promotion of Non-formal and Informal Education Act of 2008 is to promote the development of human resources so as to be relevant to future alterations of the population structure, as well as economic and social structures.

Charungkattikul and Henschke (2014) identified the developmental period of lifelong learning in Thailand, using the historical timeline as illustrated in Figure 2.1. At present, aiming to build a learning society, the Thai government potentially intends to transform the Non-formal and Informal Education Promotion Act to an envisaged “Lifelong Education Promotion Act.” The aim is to develop legitimate, standard qualification systems in a long-term process which offer the prospect of portable qualifications which are recognized around the world. Higher education institutions such as universities are also committed to working closely with the communities to collaboratively develop new knowledge and innovations, and to enhance the development of the learning society in different community contexts.

Practices of Lifelong Learning in Thailand

Lifelong learning practiced in Thailand has become a holistic view of education and embraces all forms of learning including formal and informal, throughout a life-span (from cradle to grave) of people of all ages. It is delivered and undertaken through a variety of providers/facilities to meet a wide range of learning needs and demands. It aims to focus on the triangle of knowledge,

Figure 2.1. Historical timeline of lifelong education and learning in Thailand.



skills, and mindset that enhances employability, personal development, active citizenship, and social inclusion. Following are several examples of the lifelong learning activities promoting equal opportunity and access to lifelong learning. These practices become instrumental to the transformation of the Thai society into a lifelong learning society.

Case 1: Creating Lifelong Learning Centers and Use of Resources.

The national strategy for the improvement and expansion of public spaces for informal learning has stimulated the development and enhancement of museums and libraries under public, private, and nonprofit initiatives. Key activities include promoting learning beyond the classroom through activities such as courses and classes for adult learners and the attraction of sponsors to be partners to share resources for knowledge and learning. For instance, promoting public understanding of science through the science museums, private sectors funded public libraries through the Stock of Exchange of Thailand's public library or "Mareuy Library," or the Bangkok Children's discovery museum by the Bangkok metropolitan Administration. These private organizations have also provided professional development initiatives online to promote lifelong learning for all. Looking forward, the society needs more learning resources to serve high demand, providing a variety of knowledge skill sets, accessibility of all local people and groups, and data and information technology processing development for all purposes.

Various agencies have also played key roles in providing lifelong learning activities. Such agencies include the Sub-district Administrative Organization, temples, local educational administrations or community committees in cooperation with other organizations. One of the latest activities promoting lifelong learning opportunity for people is "Smart Book Home" project by Thai government, Office of Non-formal Education and Informal Education (ONIE), Ministry of Education. Other learning network agents have encouraged communities to develop their own learning and enhance community lifelong learning within community-based development through the nonformal and informal education promotion centers (Charungkaittikul & Henschke, 2014).

Office of the National Digital Economic and Society Commission with the nonformal and informal education center nationwide by adjusting the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) learning center in the communities and using nonformal and informal education center at the district level (Tambon) to serve as "a digital community's center" (Office of the National Digital Economic and Society Commission, 2018). Office of Non-formal Education and Informal Education (ONIE) support for facilities, tools and personnel. It is the new center for digital services, economic and social information to the community, and community enterprise, as well as being a communication channel between the government or state and the community. In addition, there are many useful lifelong learning activities for different people at the community level, for example, digital literacy program, online store management, product and service improvement, Village E-Commerce,

and public relations through digital media, and so on, along with the learning environment throughout life. Learning is facilitated via a variety of mediums, particularly on e-devices, which promotes real-time learning and enhanced digital literacy. Utilizing digital technology for career and livelihood is the foundation of sustainable development (Office of the National Digital Economic and Society Commission, 2018).

There are many lifelong learning providers including groups of individuals, communities, and various organizations such as libraries, community learning centers based on local wisdom, local museums, agricultural demonstration centers, community radios, TV programs, and newspapers. Finally, informal education can also be developed by electronic media, such as the Internet, websites, or community stages, study field visits, group discussions, local stages, seminars, and field trips in various areas.

Case 2: Using Information and Communication Technology (ThaiMOOCs) to Foster Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All. The network linkage to sources of learning for mutual applications and taking the existing learning resources development should be available in the society as potential learning source services which provide complete facilities and effectiveness of lifelong learning. The roles of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) networks, web technologies in e-learning, mobile learning tools, and virtual worlds as facilitators of knowledge sharing in all types of learning settings have brought new opportunities for lifelong learning for people in many countries. With the Thailand 4.0 initiatives, the nation has been making considerable efforts to transform Thailand that maximizes the use of digital technologies in all socio-economic activities in order to develop infrastructure, innovation, data, human capital, and other digital resources that will ultimately drive the country toward wealth, stability, and sustainability. One of the mega projects is to develop ICTs for education in the new century through an open access learning system “Thailand Massive Open Online Courses (ThaiMOOCs)” with the full support from Thai government. Thai MOOC, a national strategy for Lifelong learning space for all was officially launched in 2016, targeting higher education and lifelong learners. Courses are often cheap or offered for free, and you follow them whenever and wherever you want (Thailand Cyber University, 2017). The future of lifelong learning may also resides in the new and innovative way to extend opportunities to resolve these lifelong learning constraints and connect education and employment in new ways.

Information and communication technologies are having a profound influence on the reach and influence of learning in Thai society, as learning is now accessible to a wider range of learners. This has enormous potential for building a more cohesive and robust learning society.

Case 3: The Equivalency Programs for Promoting Lifelong Learning. It is equally important to recognize learning outcomes and establish equivalencies between what is learned through formal and nonformal education. Some countries have developed equivalency programs (EPs) that can

promote the flexibility of learner's entry to and exit from formal and nonformal channels of education at different levels of school education.

Thailand gives high priority to education and recognizes its importance for human and social development. As a result, Non-formal Education (NFE) program of various kinds have been offered over the years. A large number of organizations have supported NFE and their numbers have steadily risen. This support culminated in the National Education Act of 1999, which states in Article 10 that people will have equal rights and opportunities to receive at least 12 years of basic education. Because of this Act, the government has the mandate to cover all areas and target groups and to provide quality basic education (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)/ UNESCO, 2016). Today, Thailand's equivalency programs include primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education. Learners are from various backgrounds and include industrial workers, people in the business and service sectors, members of hill tribes, homeless children and teenagers, conscripts, prisoners, people with physical disabilities, and Thai people living overseas, among others. Equivalency programs currently in operation are based on the nonformal basic education curriculum that is the core curriculum and similar to that of the formal school system. The system of EP includes accrediting and/or certifying levels of learning of individuals as comparable to the formal education system; based on clearly defined procedures and methods of assessment, measurement and evaluation of learning; in reference to national education standards. In Thailand, there is no separate organizational structure for EPs. The government uses Community Learning Centers (CLCs) created for literacy and continuing education, as well as formal schools, non-government organizations (NGOs) venues, and vocational centers.

Case 4: A Professional Learning Community for Improving Teaching Quality. The Thai government's new initiative introduces the professional learning community (PLC) model to Thai teachers for a paradigm shift in Thailand's educational reform (Amornvuthivorn, 2018). A professional learning community depends on a strong professional culture characterized by shared norms and values, a focus on student learning, collaborative approaches to work, and reflective inquiry into teaching practices, as well as leadership that fosters and supports that professional culture. It is believed that the learning culture in school plays a pivotal role in determining teachers' success, while at the same time, ensuring better student outcomes. A professional learning community creates a community of like-minded professionals who can help each other by commenting on and critiquing each other's practices and by collaborating to improve their practices in order to solve common problems.

The development of educational quality by the system entails developing the professional learning community for teachers as practitioners and to share and learn how to practice together. The practice of sharing and learning aims to aid teacher's teaching; it also helps prepare students for social life in the twenty-first century. The focus is on human growth by learning through practicing from real world. Teachers change their role of a teacher into a role of a

coach. This approach of development in the professional learning community, enables teachers to learn through teamwork, focusing on the teachers' learning from work practice and not teachers' training (Panich, 2012). In Thailand, the Teachers Professional Development Institute (TPDI) introduced this training approach to Thai teachers with an incentive, which links promotion to participation in the professional learning community. Teachers who attend 50 or more hours of PLC meetings for 5 consecutive years can submit a portfolio to the Ministry of Education reflecting what they have learned and how the changes have impacted student learning to obtain an upgrade of their teaching credentials (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Case 5: The “Little CEO” for Lifelong Learning Skills Enhancement. Recently, increasing involvement of the private sector in the development of knowledge and learning has served two roles: first, stimulated more educational spaces available to the public, and second, enabled learners from primary to higher education access to practical learning experiences and projects which will enable them to develop skills for the world of work. Such programs have grown drastically in recent years and have helped ensure that learners develop practical skills to complement knowledge from formal education. Business management for children is the example. The “Little CEO” (or little Chief Executive Officer) program sponsored by Unilever Thailand encourages children to learn new skills about entrepreneurship and experience a business environment that extend their classroom learning into real life situations. Children are trained how to own and to manage a business for a day. All profits made by the students are donated to charity (Office of the Permanent Secretary, 2009).

To ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning, it is necessary to provide education not only through schools, but also through nonformal education programs for children, youth, and adults who have not completed their basic education. The nonformal education system accentuates development of knowledge and empowers people to develop themselves, families, communities, and the nation. The objectives, patterns, education management, education period, assessment, and evaluation, which are key conditions for education completion, are flexible. Content and curricula are relevant to problems and needs of individuals in different groups. The contents of knowledge are categorized into disparate areas related to work and lives of people.

Discussion and Conclusion

As can be seen from aforementioned cases, all lifelong learning activities aim toward the direction of developing a lifelong learning society. The concept of lifelong learning often alludes to the learning that should be acquired by individuals throughout their lives, and to the different ways and realms in which individuals acquire such learning. In contrast, the concept of learning society, indicates a collective entity (society) that develops (or should develop)

institutional and organizational structures to promote relevant learning opportunities for all members of that society. Thus, reflecting on the needs from different stakeholders among policy makers—government, providers, and learners shall help to develop appropriate policies, planning strategies, and funding allocations. A learning society may be expected to generate new knowledge and construct appropriate knowledge management systems, as well as facilitating the prosperity and the well-being of its people (Charungkattikul, 2011). According to Stiglitz and Greenwald (2014), building a learning society at the macro-condition, economic stability and continuity are important to the learning process. It is obvious that to develop comprehensive policies that address learning in a wide range of spheres using interdisciplinary and intersectoral knowledge and expertise, encompassing education and training policies and related policy areas is necessary (UNESCO, 2016).

Thai lifelong learning has been historically associated with adult education, yet the conceptualization of lifelong learning has developed and gone beyond in terms of expanding education system and integrating various types of approaches. The Office of Non-formal Education and Informal Education (ONIE), Ministry of Education, public and private agencies, other educational institutions, and local communities are in the process of becoming more open, flexible, and extending opportunities for cooperation among each other. Policies and laws help ensure that nonformal education and Informal education supports lifelong learning for all and all people have opportunities to learn and develop their potentials.

Reflecting on these cases, much is to be considered for future development with regards to building a learning society especially toward a more humanistic, rights-based and holistic education and lifelong learning: promoting the transformation of existing education systems into the structure based on lifelong learning; advocating for nonformal and informal learning, especially for youth and adult learning and education; developing synergies between various learning systems; facilitating the development of national policies and strategies for lifelong learning for all; developing capacities for effective lifelong learning policies and practices; facilitating partnerships among government agencies, civil society organizations and the private sector; promoting the development of learning cities, learning regions, learning communities, learning villages, and learning families; enhancing the use of modern learning technologies; and supporting research in lifelong learning policies and practices.

Although the national and governmental policy support is critical for developing lifelong education and learning activities, challenges of assessment and transferability present limitations and obstacles for locals' learning activities, which still need to be resolved. Future policy making on lifelong education and learning society should consider other countries' experiences on similar issues (Han, 2001; Peterson, 1979; Roth, 2001; Tuckett, 1997; UNESCO, 2014), and to meet the growing diversity of economic and societal imperatives and to ensure positive learning outcomes (Leader, 2003). The national policies

for lifelong learning to ensure planning practices are not centralized, top-down and directive which means to increase flexibility and responsiveness, motivate young people to learn, link education and work, facilitate open access to qualifications, diversify assessment processes, make qualifications progressive, make the qualifications system transparent, review funding and increase efficiency, and better manage the qualifications system. Policy planning must be inclusive, participatory, and capacity enhancing, as accountabilities are built into the system as a whole, and not merely at the pinnacle of public sector, in the capital city's ministries. In addition, there should be systematic measures and indicators, as well as guidelines for making lifelong education and learning opportunities for all possible.

In conclusion, Thailand's nonformal education and informal education are geared toward several goals: (1) transforming the Thai society into a learning society, which will drive the country's economy and society; (2) Providing its people with lifelong learning opportunities; (3) inviting all parts of the society to have the rights and responsibilities to participate in lifelong learning activities; and (4) promoting lifelong learning as the educational tool for life and society to meet the needs of target groups and integrating such learning into life for all members in the society.

Implications for Adult and Lifelong Education

The idea of lifelong education and learning is now well acknowledged and increasingly embraced within Thai society. The significance is that it has become a shared value and explicitly supported by the government at all levels. Current practices imply that it requires a continuing and more coherent and consistent coordination among all stakeholders for integrated and multifaceted life-cycle approach toward lifelong learning. As Aspin and Chapman (2007) points out that the principles and ideals of social inclusiveness, justice and equity; a strong, adaptable and competitive economy; as well as the provision of a range of lifelong learning opportunities are necessary.

The degrees to which globalization does not influence all countries the same, and the focus for the development through lifelong learning differs according to the challenges faced by each nation and local communities, therefore examining their own contexts and developing appropriate plans become central. In Thailand, there are both old and new challenges to be addressed, particularly with regard to changing demographics, social infrastructures, economic development, environment and technologies, and maintaining a sense of community while building a learning society.

Building a learning society is a complicated and multifaceted undertaking, which involves various border-cross challenges of integrating various educational domains within a whole learning ecosystem, and therefore requires integrated and systematic approaches. It therefore demands vision, political courage, commitment and multi-stakeholder coordination (Han, 2001; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning [UIL], 2015). Equally important is to

consider educational tradition, demographic structure, educational content, economic parameters, and not the least, individual choices, and preferences and needs in the process of implementation. Further, the development of lifelong learning society is also based on the proactive partnership approaches of various networks that are willing to organize lifelong learning activities. Those networks hold the right and responsibilities in organizing lifelong learning. Charungkattikul (2016) argues that it is important to identify clear responsibilities regarding lifelong learning for certain organizations so that they clearly understand their roles and may be more motivated to serve the society. Finally, a holistic and integrated approach should be applied in order to create an overall development that helps balance lifelong learning activities and address different needs of different target groups, as well as people with the social conditions.

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