

## The Problems of Secondary Education Expansion in Thailand

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### I Introduction

One of the major concerns of every government is the development of the country's human resources. Among various approaches to improving the quality of human resources, education has always been regarded as one of the most important measures. According to the human capital theory, resources appropriated for education are considered as an investment. Empirical findings in many countries reveal that the rate of returns on this form of investment are, in general, relatively high. These encouraging findings urge the governments of many countries to set education high among their budget priorities.

After a long history of development of the educational system and a huge amount of resources allocated to the education sector, Thailand is now claiming that it will reach universal enrollment in primary education by the end of the Fifth Economic and Social Development Plan, i.e., by 1986. With a decline in the population growth rate and the need to develop a middle level of manpower, the government is now contemplating the possibility of extending compulsory education to the lower secondary level.

It is therefore of interest to evaluate the

present situation in the development of a middle level of manpower in Thailand and to investigate the problems related to the attempt at making lower secondary education compulsory.

### II The Development of the Educational Attainment of the Thai Labor Force

The speed of the development of the economy depends critically on the rapidity of the improvement of the quality of its human resources. The development of the quality of the Thai population, measured in terms of educational attainment alone, has progressed relatively slowly, as revealed by the three population censuses, taken from 1960–80. The only significant change has been a reduction in the percentage of population with no education, which is a result of an increase in the proportion of population with compulsory primary education. However, the vast majority of the Thai population are still having at most four years of primary education.<sup>1)</sup> The pattern of distribution of population by educational attainment, as revealed by the

1) Since the time when primary education was made compulsory in Thailand in 1921, its curriculum has been revised many times. During 1936–60 it consisted of only four years. In accordance with the recommendations of the Karachi Plan, it was extended to seven years in 1960. From 1978 onwards, it has changed again to six years.

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three censuses, did not show much change, as can be seen from Table 1. The percentage of population with education beyond the primary level increased from 3.4 per cent in 1960 to 11.5 per cent in 1980.

Since the economy of Thailand embarked on the First National Economic Development Plan in 1961, there has been quite a noticeable change in the structure of production. Agricultural products, which used to constitute the major portion of the gross domestic products,

declined sharply from 60.3 per cent in 1947 to 26.2 per cent in 1980 (see Table 2). However, changes in the structure of employment took place at a much slower pace. Since the majority of the Thai population have not been equipped with the ability to adapt to changes in technology, they still have to rely on the traditional agriculture sector as their main source of earnings. As a consequence, the percentage of the labor force working in the agricultural sector declined very slowly, from

**Table 1** Population Age Six and Over by Educational Attainment, 1960-80

	Number ('000)			Percentage		
	1960	1970	1980	1960	1970	1980
Total	21,148	27,596	38,261	100.00	100.00	100.00
No education	7,974	7,145	6,043	37.70	25.90	15.80
Primary	12,234	18,375	27,325	57.80	66.60	71.40
Secondary	635	1,337	3,550	3.00	4.80	9.30
Higher	95	186	842	0.40	0.70	2.20
Others and unknown	210	552	501	1.00	2.00	1.30

Source: Thailand, National Statistical Office, *Population & Housing Census, Whole Kingdom 1960, 1970 and 1980*

**Table 2** Percentage Distribution of Production and Employment by Industry, 1947-80

Industry	1947		1960		1970		1980	
	GDP	Employment	GDP	Employment	GDP	Employment	GDP	Employment
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Agriculture	60.30	84.80	39.80	82.30	28.30	79.30	26.20	72.50
Mining	0.20	0.10	1.10	0.20	2.00	0.50	2.10	0.20
Manufacturing	10.40	2.20	12.50	0.75	16.00	4.10	18.70	5.60
Construction	-	0.10	4.20	0.50	6.10	1.10	5.80	1.60
Public utilities	0.20	0.03	0.40	0.10	1.20	0.20	0.90	0.30
Transportation	1.00	0.70	7.50	1.20	6.30	1.60	7.00	1.80
Commerce and banking	15.40	7.90	17.00	5.70	23.20	5.30	8.00	7.40
Service	12.50	4.30	9.70	0.50	10.20	7.10	9.60	7.90
Ownership of dwelling and public Admin.	-	-	7.50	1.80	6.70	0.90	5.40	2.70

Source: Data on GDP are from the National Economic and Social Development Board, Thailand. Data on employment are from Thailand, National Statistical Office, *The Population Census, 1947, 1960, 1970 and 1980*.

**Table 3** Labor Force by Sex and Educational Attainment, 1985 (thousands)

Sex	All Levels	Less than Primary	Lower Primary	Upper Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary	Vocational	Teacher Training	University	Others & Unknown
Male	14,620 (54.8)	1,484 (44.0)	9,592 (54.8)	1,428 (55.4)	941 (75.4)	186 (65.7)	318 (56.4)	269 (56.5)	325 (56.5)	77 (67.5)
Female	12,050 (45.2)	1,885 (56.0)	7,870 (45.2)	1,151 (44.6)	307 (25.6)	97 (34.3)	246 (43.6)	207 (43.5)	250 (43.5)	37 (32.5)
Total	26,670 (100.0)	3,369 (12.6)	17,462 (65.5)	2,579 (9.7)	1,248 (4.7)	283 (1.1)	564 (2.1)	476 (1.8)	575 (2.2)	114 (0.4)

Source: Thailand, National Statistical Office, *Labor Force Survey 1985*  
 Reproduced from Niyom Purakhum, Policy and Unemployment, paper presented in the Seminar on "Policy and Labor Problems" organized by the Human Resources Institute, Thammasat University, on June 25, 1986.

84.8 per cent in 1947 to 72.5 per cent in 1980.

The most recent figures on labor force statistics, as reported by the Labor Force Survey of 1985, revealed that 87.8 per cent of Thai labor force had at most a primary education. Within this group, 76.6 per cent completed only four years of primary education. As for the secondary level, 4.7 and 1.1 per cent of the Thai labor force possessed an education at the lower and the upper secondary level respectively (see Table 3). Although the data in Table 3 are not classified by location of residence, one can easily guess, based on the previous survey, that almost all of the workers residing in the rural areas have at most four years of compulsory primary education. The low educational attainment of the rural manpower has undoubtedly been one of the major factors accounting for the slow growth rate in the rural economy of Thailand.

### III The Formal Education System and the Development of Secondary Education in Thailand

The present structure of the Thai formal

education system is based on a 6-6-4 system (six years at the compulsory primary level, six years at the secondary level, divided into a three-year lower cycle and a three-year upper cycle, and a four-year nonprofessional first degree). The present structure is the result of repeated changes and revisions in the structure and curriculum.

The primary level aims at providing basic knowledge and promoting the development of children towards effective learning and desirable behavior. The secondary level aims at providing students with further general knowledge and skills that will enable them to earn a living, become an apprentice or continue their studies at a higher level [Thailand, Ministry of Education 1976: 61, 73].

Originally, students beginning the lower cycle of the secondary level were separated into either a vocational stream or a general stream. On the average, students with lower academic achievement or from relatively poor families chose the vocational stream. Later, when it became apparent that many vocational skills could not be taught effectively to 14-16 year-old children in lower secondary schools, a new

system of comprehensive secondary education was introduced to replace it. Under this system both the general and the vocational streams at the lower level are combined in one school. In 1966 the curriculum of all the secondary general schools, which used to be concentrated heavily on academic subjects was also revised to be more diversified. In the upper secondary level, students could choose the arts or the science stream or a new general stream which placed considerable emphasis on acquiring practical and vocational skills. However, the curriculum was still very rigid in terms of the available elective courses and the method of evaluating the students' performance. In 1975 a credit hour system, which allowed students to have more freedom in their choice of courses, was introduced to replace the old rigid percentage system. Although the lower secondary level is no longer separated into two streams, the separation is still distinct at the upper level. The concern over the problem of the employment of secondary school drop-outs leads to another revision of the general stream curriculum. In the present system, students in this stream are required to take at least some basic vocational courses. They may also take a certain group of vocational courses as an elective study plan. This vocational study plan in the general stream provides nearly the same level of theoretical and practical knowledge to students as the one received by their counterparts in the vocational stream. This new curriculum is quite expensive since it requires general secondary schools to have workshops. At the provincial level, the Ministry of Education is now experimenting with a so-called Area Vocational Centered Project to solve this problem. Twelve

area vocational centers were constructed in each educational region to serve as workshops for students from all the general secondary schools in its catchment areas of around 25 kilometres from the center. Although this project is still at a very early stage, further construction of this type of vocational center will require large amounts of investment.

#### **IV Access to Secondary Education**

In 1961, the year that Thailand launched her First National Economic Development Plan, the enrollment ratio at the secondary level in the appropriate age group was 11.2 per cent; classifying into 13.7 per cent for the lower secondary and 7.0 per cent for the upper secondary level. At present, it is estimated that the enrollment ratios are 41.0 and 28.5 per cent for the lower and the upper secondary level respectively (see Table 4). This implies that more than half of the Thai children in the age group of 12-17 are still out of school. In this section we will look into the problems Thai children have in gaining access to secondary education.

Many factors may account for the low participation rate of children in this age group. First, there is no school at the secondary level in the villages. Before the period of the Third Plan (1972-76), there were secondary schools only in large districts. In accordance with the recommendation of the Educational Reform Committee, the Third Plan gave importance to the problem of equality of educational opportunity. At the secondary level, the aims were to improve the quality of rural schools and to increase the enrollment ratio in the rural areas. Another objective

**Table 4** Participation Rate by Age Group, 1961-86 (Percentage)

	Age Group	1961	1970	Age Group	1980	1986
Pre-primary	5-6	2.7	5.9	4-5	13.7	25.0
Primary	7-13	77.4	85.2	6-11	95.0	99.8
Secondary	14-18	11.2	16.1	12-17		
Lower	14-16	13.7	18.2	12-14	37.7	41.0
Upper	17-18	7.0	12.7	15-17	17.2	28.5
Higher*	19-24	2.0	2.4	18-21	5.6	7.9

\* Not including open-admission universities

Source: Thailand, Office of the National Education Commission

was to prevent children from migrating into Bangkok for further education. Approximately 60-70 per cent of the youths in the age group of 10-19 years old had migrated to Bangkok to continue their education. This was because there was no school at the higher level near their localities, or because they believed that schools in Bangkok were of a higher standard. The target of this Plan was to construct at least one secondary school in every district. However, due to political pressure, the Ministry of Education was forced to establish secondary schools at the tambon<sup>2)</sup> level also. It was reported that in 1977 there was approximately one public secondary school per five tambons. If private schools were included, the ratio would be raised to one school per three tambons.<sup>3)</sup>

The fact that there is no secondary school in the villages implies that the cost of sending a child to school at this level is much higher for families living in the villages which is the

majority of the Thai population. According to the Children and Youth Survey of 1983, the average cost of sending a child to a public lower secondary school was Bht 2,882 per year, an increase of almost four times the cost of his/her primary education. If a child could not get a seat in the public school, which normally selects students by means of a competitive entrance examination, sending him/her to a private school would cost the parents approximately Bht 4,400 per year (see Table 5). To spend this amount of money for a child at the lower secondary level, not to mention the higher levels, is impossible for an average farm family.

Another factor that may explain the low enrollment ratio and a high drop-out rate at the secondary level, as well as at other levels, could be the emphasis on severe examinations at every stage. Students proceed from a lower grade to a higher grade by means of examinations. Admission to most public schools and universities depends upon the student's ability to pass the competitive entrance examinations. A large number of students are eliminated at the end of each year through failure in the examinations. In 1981, the problem of failing the year-end examination was lessened when schools were allowed to

2) A tambon is an administrative unit below the district level consisting of many villages.

3) In addition, there was also a wide variation in the participation rates at the secondary level among educational regions, ranging from 3.5 per cent in region 3 to 1.5 per cent in region 11 [Thailand, Office of the National Education Commission 1983: 197-198].

**Table 5** Average Annual Expenditure on Education per Person, 1983 (Baht)

Type of Expenditure	Level of Education			
	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary (General)	Upper Secondary (Vocational)
Public school (Total)	748	2,882	3,895	6,547
School fees	12	518	713	1,914
Books, material & equipment	159	437	556	936
Uniforms	213	506	579	715
Transportation	12	276	438	636
Food taken outside	324	1,002	1,410	1,980
Others	28	143	199	366
Private school (total)	3,889	4,397	5,997	10,111
School fees	1,530	1,461	2,151	5,000
Books, material & equipment	338	494	654	887
Uniforms	412	537	674	731
Transportation	330	330	534	786
Food taken outside	1,158	1,374	1,728	2,436
Others	121	201	256	271

Source: Thailand, National Statistical Office, *The Children and Youth Survey, 1983*

administer their own final exams. Students are allowed to take a re-exam in the summer if they fail the first time. However, admission to any university is still based on a competitive entrance examination administered by the Office of State Universities.<sup>4)</sup> This examination heavily emphasizes the students' academic achievement. Consequently, students in secondary general schools who intend to continue to the university level continue to concentrate on an academic plan rather than a vocational plan, despite the government's heavy investment in vocational equipment.

Many empirical studies have found that a student's academic achievement is significantly affected by his/her parents' socioeconomic status. For examples see Prasert [1973],

4) Except for two open-admission universities, Ramkamhaeng and Sukhothai.

Nitungkorn and Vutisart [1980], and Koosirichien [1983]. These studies show that students from families with a comparatively high status, measured in terms of the parents' educational attainment or occupation, were more likely to perform better in scholastic work.

Regarding the problem of access to lower secondary education, the findings of Chantavanich *et al.* [1979] revealed that the variation in the rate of accessing to this level of education among provinces could be explained significantly by both the variations in the quality of primary schools and the variations in the poverty level of the provinces. A high rate of continuation to the secondary level was attributed to such variables as a high rate of teachers holding higher teaching certificates or above, a large educational budget (staff salaries), and low land rents in the province.

The study of Nitungkorn [1981] which used different sources of data, also confirmed that the correlation coefficients between the provincial educational budgets and the provincial rate of continuation to the lower secondary level was positive and statistically significant. These findings imply that the pattern of government allocations of budget could significantly affect the rate of continuation to secondary education.

Empirical studies at the microlevel also found that the parents' socioeconomic status could affect the possibility of continuation to a higher level of education. Using the data from the Children and Youth Surveys of 1975 and 1976, Tan and Naiyavitit [1980] found that family background was an important determinant of the child's probability of school attendance. They found a wide difference in the probabilities of school attendance by age groups between the so-called "worst-off" and "best-off" children. The former were children whose fathers had both the lowest income, and the lowest education, who had many brothers and sisters, and who lived in the rural North-eastern region; while the latter were children whose fathers had both incomes of Bht 100,000 or more and a post-secondary education, who had one brother/sister, and who lived in Bangkok. The values of probability of school attendance at lower primary, upper primary, secondary and post-secondary levels were 0.71, 0.53, 0.14, and 0.20 for the "worst-off group; and the corresponding probabilities for the "best-off" group were 0.98, 0.99, 0.97, and 0.57 respectively. Chantavanich *et al.* [1979] also found that the opportunities for continuation to the secondary level for the children of farmers and laborers were much lower than

for the children of businessmen and government officials.

## V Pattern of Government Budget Allocation to the Education Sector

Since the budget allocation for education each year is enormous, its distribution has a great impact on the quantity and quality of education received by different groups in the society. In this section, we will look into the pattern of distribution of this allocation among different levels of education from the First National Economic Development Plan until the present time.

Over the past 26 years, the government has allocated around Bht 390 billion to the education sector. On the average, the education budget has accounted for 3.2 per cent of the gross domestic products, or about 18.6 per cent of the total government budget each year (averaged over 26 years). Within the education sector, the primary education level received the largest share, approximately half of the total education budget. In the past, the secondary general education level and the university level took turns as the second and third ranking. However, since the Fourth Plan the amount of the budget allocated to secondary general education has outgrown that of the university level. As discussed previously, this has been the result of an increasing importance of the equality of educational opportunity at the lower secondary level.

From Table 6, it can be easily seen that the government has put a great deal of emphasis on the university level since the First Plan. This was due to a concern over a shortage of high level manpower which would cause a

**Table 6** Educational Budget by Level, 1961-86 (Million Baht)

	First Plan 1961-66	Second Plan 1967-71	Third Plan 1972-76	Fourth Plan 1977-81	Fifth Plan 1982-86
Primary and preprimary	6,034 (54.5)	10,771 (54.1)	22,848 (54.9)	56,026 (56.0)	106,203 (48.8)
Secondary (general)	1,751 (15.8)	2,380 (12.0)	5,228 (12.6)	16,046 (16.0)	50,592 (23.2)
Vocational	741 (6.7)	1,679 (8.4)	2,228 (5.4)	6,379 (6.4)	20,142 (9.3)
Teacher training	450 (4.1)	978 (4.9)	2,214 (5.3)	2,839 (2.8)	5,049 (2.3)
University	1,121 (10.1)	2,684 (13.5)	5,708 (13.7)	12,786 (12.8)	22,912 (10.5)
Nonformal education	49 (0.4)	137 (0.7)	499 (1.2)	1,643 (1.6)	4,522 (2.1)
Other educational promotion	920 (8.3)	1,277 (6.4)	2,860 (6.9)	4,297 (4.3)	8,325 (3.8)
	11,066 (100.0)	19,906 (100.0)	41,585 (100.0)	100,016 (100.0)	217,745 (100.0)

Source: Thailand, Office of the National Education Commission (Values in parenthesis are percentage distribution)

bottleneck to economic development. As was shown earlier, this level of education has been accessible to only a small percentage of the population living mainly in the big urban areas where most universities are located. On the contrary, the majority of students in the formal school system, around 90 per cent, are at the primary and secondary levels.

There have been many studies that have evaluated the rate of returns on investment in education. The findings are generally in accord with those of other developing countries. All these studies have found that the marginal social rates of returns on investment at the lower level of education were relatively high. For examples see Blaug [1971] and Chintakananda [1980]. Blaug found that the marginal social rate of returns to education were 20, 17, 11, 10, and 7 per cent for the first four years, the first seven years, from seven to ten years, from ten to twelve years, and from twelve to sixteen years of education respectively. The study of Chintakananda, using different sources of data, found that the marginal social rates of returns were 8, 11, 7,

and 4 per cent for the first nine years, nine to eleven years, eleven to fourteen years, and from twelve to fourteen years of education respectively.

In the following section, we will briefly review the pattern of resources allocated to the secondary level in order to see the development of public policy regarding this level of education.

The First Plan (1961-66): the policy during this plan was aimed at establishing lower secondary schools in large districts and upper secondary schools in every province of the kingdom. During this plan, the Ministry of Education concentrated on improving the quality of existing schools and establishing more comprehensive lower secondary schools. Regarding the budget for the secondary level, over 86 per cent of the total budget went to recurrent expenditures. Since education in Thailand is very labor-intensive, almost all the recurrent expenditures were spent on wages and salaries.<sup>5)</sup> From Table 7, it can be seen

5) For example, during the academic year 1977-78



**Table 7** Average Percentage Increase in Budget for Secondary Education per Year, 1961-86  
(Percentage)

	First Plan 1961-66	Second Plan 1967-71	Third Plan 1972-76	Fourth Plan 1977-81	Fifth Plan 1982-86
Average percentage Increase per year					
Total ed. budget	16.24	15.76	25.92	16.18	9.72
Secondary ed. budget	6.82	14.20	27.98	21.35	8.13
Recurrent expenditure	7.88	10.39	24.56	27.69	14.74
Capital expenditure	0.60	22.64	28.53	11.33	5.31
Recurrent expenditure/ Total expenditure	85.80	67.70	57.40	67.00	72.10

Source: Reproduced from Thailand, Office of the National Education Commission [1984: Table 8].

that secondary education was practically neglected. Despite an average increase in the total education budget of around 16 per cent per year, the average annual increase in the budget for secondary expenditures was less than 7 per cent. Moreover, almost all the increase went to recurrent expenditures.

The Second Plan (1967-71): the government continued emphasis on expanding comprehensive secondary schools. As a consequence, the capital expenditures increased noticeably. Nevertheless, the share of the recurrent expenditures at this educational level was still higher than that of the capital expenditures throughout this plan.

The Third Plan (1972-76): the policy for this plan was to improve the quality of existing schools and to extend secondary education to the regional level. The plan aimed at the construction of around 36-50 new secondary schools per year in various districts. As

mentioned previously, the Ministry of Education was forced to open lower secondary schools at the tambon level during this plan. The total number of new secondary schools opened during this plan was 473, of which 194 were secondary schools at the tambon level. The average increase in the number of new schools during this plan was 96 schools per year. Due to the rapid increase in capital expenditures, the share of recurrent expenditures was reduced to 57 per cent of the total budget for secondary general education.

The Fourth Plan (1977-81): during this plan, the structure of the educational system was changed to 6-3-3. According to this new structure the number of years in secondary education increased from five to six years. In addition, the new curriculum of the secondary general education required that students must learn at least some pre-vocational courses. Furthermore, the curriculum of the upper general education was revised to include a group of vocational courses as an optional study plan. The real purpose of this plan was to combine the general and the vocational streams of secondary education into only one

81 the average share of expenditures on wages and salaries was 93.6 per cent of the total recurrent expenditures for secondary general education [Thailand, Office of the National Education Commission 1983: 54].

stream. However, at present this objective has not yet been achieved. The average increase in the number of new secondary schools during this plan was 88 schools per year. The share of recurrent expenditures in the total expenditure for the secondary level increased to 67 per cent during this plan.

The Fifth Plan (1982–86): the emphasis of this plan was on equalizing the quality of schools at the secondary level as well as on equalizing educational opportunities at this level. Schools located in the same area were encouraged to share their facilities in order to make full utilization of resources. The share of the budget for the secondary level was raised to 23.2 per cent of the total educational budget ranking it second, next to primary education. The average share of the recurrent expenditures during this plan rose to 72 per cent of the total budget for this level.

In conclusion, the pattern of budget allocation over time indicates that public investment in education has been in a direction opposite to the rates of returns on education. A large proportion of resources has been allocated to finance higher levels of education yielding low rates of return which reach only a small percentage of the population.

As for the lower level, the prime objective of almost every plan was to increase the number of schools and hence the participation rate of the population in the appropriate age group. The ability to attend school has been left entirely to the parents. Due to an overemphasis on quantitative expansion, the quality of schools, particularly those at the tambon level, has largely been ignored and schools have not been able to make improvements because of their limited budgets.

It turned out that the tambon lower secondary schools are, in general, not popular among children of the economically-better-off families. These children choose to go to schools in large urban areas or in Bangkok instead. As for the children of the villagers, whom these schools intend to serve, the majority of them also choose not to continue their education because of the poverty of their parents. As a consequence, it is not surprising that the actual enrollment in the tambon lower secondary schools was found to be lower than the target.<sup>6)</sup> At the same time, the expansion of the public schools has severely affected the private schools in the same or nearby vicinities.

## VI The Role of Private Sector

The private sector used to be quite active in providing educational services at the secondary level. It can be seen from Table 8 that up to the beginning of the Second Plan, the share of students enrolled in private secondary schools in both the lower and upper levels was over 50 per cent of total enrollment. However, by the end of the Third Plan, this share was reduced sharply to around 27 per cent and has continued to decline gradually since then. It is estimated that the share of the private sector will be reduced to 15 per cent for the lower level and 11 per cent for the

6) In 1986 the actual number of enrollments was below the target by 187,240 and 75,682 students for the lower and the upper secondary levels respectively. In terms of percentage, the enrollments in the lower secondary level were 14.3 per cent, and in the upper secondary level 13.4 per cent below the target level [Thailand, Office of the National Education Commission 1986: 6].

**Table 8** Ratio of Students in Public and Private Schools, 1961-86 (Percentage)

	First Plan		Second Plan		Third Plan		Fourth Plan		Fifth Plan	
	1961	1966	1967	1971	1972	1976	1977	1981	1982	1986
Lower primary	48:52	49:51	48:52	54:46	56:44	72:28	76:24	83:17	85:15	85:15
Upper primary	44:56	44:56	45:55	58:42	62:38	80:20	80:20	87:13	88:12	89:11
Total	48:52	48:52	48:52	55:45	57:43	73:27	76:24	84:16	84:16	87:13

Source: Reproduced from Thailand, Office of the National Education Commission [1984: Table 5].

**Table 9** Number of Closing Private Schools (General Education), Academic Year 1976-82

Academic Year	Number of Closing Private Schools		
	Bangkok	Regional	Total
1976	34	34	68
1977	41	30	71
1978	36	84	120
1979	18	42	60
1980	23	56	79
1981	27	39	66
1982	20	26	46
Total	199	311	510

Source: Office of the Private Education Commission, Ministry of Education, Thailand

upper level by the end of the Fifth Plan, in 1986 (see Table 8).

The decline in the share of students in the private schools undoubtedly caused the closing of many schools as well as a reduction in the number of classrooms for those schools continuing in existence. According to the Office of the Private Education Commission, Ministry of Education, 510 schools closed during 1976-82. Of these schools, 60 per cent were schools outside Bangkok. The remaining 199 schools, were located in Bangkok (see Table 9).

The Office of the Private Education Commission reported that more than 80 per cent of the schools which closed during 1976-82 were of a small size with an average enrollment of less than 400 students. It is highly unfortunate that approximately 12 per cent of the

schools which closed down in this period were reported to be schools of good quality, and that over 50 per cent were classified as schools of medium quality, according to the standards classified by the Office of the Private Education Commission.

Many factors could be said to account for the closing of the private schools. Among them, two important factors deserve more extensive discussion. They are the gap in tuition fees between the public and the private schools, and the decline in the quality of the private schools.

## VII The Gap in Tuition Fees between Public and Private Schools

The levels of tuition fees in the private and

the public institutions are controlled by the authorities concerned. For the secondary level downwards, the fees are determined by the Ministry of Education. The problem of setting an appropriate tuition fee has always been one of the difficult issues facing the Ministry each year.

In practice the Ministry of Education will set the range of tuition fees for both the private and the public schools. Every private school must have permission from the Ministry of Education for the rates of tuition that it can charge. The approval of the Ministry will be based on the quality of each school. These rates will normally revised from time to time. The private schools that choose to charge tuition fees within the preferred range set by the Ministry are entitled to apply for a subsidy from the Ministry. The details of this subsidy scheme will be discussed later. Normally a school of good quality will choose to charge a higher rate rather than apply for a subsidy. However, these schools too cannot charge beyond a maximum rate imposed by the Ministry.

One problem is that there are wide differences in the rates of tuition charged by various

public and private institutions at the same level. The tuition fees of the public schools at all levels are much lower than those of the private schools. For example, range of the tuition fees at the lower secondary level in the public schools in 1981 was Bht 115-465, and that at the upper secondary level was Bht 145-475. In the same year the maximum fees that the private schools could charge were Bht 2,415 for the lower secondary, and Bht 2,800 for the upper secondary level. The highest fees charged by the public schools were less than 20 per cent of the maximum fees at corresponding levels in the private schools (see Table 10). As a result, most parents try to get their children into a public school. It is therefore not surprising that there are complaints from parents every year about the insufficiency of available seats in the public schools.

The control over the maximum tuition fees chargeable by private schools has created an adverse effect on their growth. It can be seen that at both the preprimary level and the secondary (vocational) level, where the maximum fees are set at relatively high amounts,

**Table 10** Tuition Fee at Different Educational Levels, 1981 (Baht)

Level	Public School	Private School
Preprimary	110-300	max. 1,800
Primary	-	max. 1,800
Secondary*		
Lower	115-465	max. 2,415
Upper (general)	145-475	max. 2,800
(vocational)	275-435	max. 3,500-6,000
Bachelor's degree program		
Ministry of Edu. (Technical)	2,425-3,175	5,900-11,040
Office of State University (closed admission)	1,130-2,600	

\* Exclude Demonstration School

Source: Office of the National Education Commission, and Ministry of Education, Thailand

the number of private schools offering these two levels has increased over time. Another factor that deserves a mention is that the public schools offering these two levels have not been increasing as rapidly as those which offer the primary and the secondary (general) levels. Actually, the schools that are affected most by a ceiling on the tuition fee are schools of good reputation. Because of this reputation, they are able to charge a much higher rate with the consent of the parents. It is a well-known fact that these schools have avoided the official regulation by demanding the parents to make donations or by collecting some so-called "tea money." With this type of school, the problem facing the Ministry of Education has been how to reduce such practices. As long as there is a great demand by the parents to get their children into these schools, this practice is not likely to easily remove.<sup>7)</sup> On the other hand, those schools of a middle and small size which do not possess such good reputations and which have to charge the tuition fee allowed by the Ministry frequently face the problem of many students being too poor to pay the fees. These schools, therefore, have to rely heavily on the subsidies provided by the Ministry of Education for their survival.

### VIII Trend in the Quality of Private Schools

The quality of any school depends crucially on the quality of its teachers and students, not

7) From an economic point of view, this "tea-money" is essentially an economic rent on the good-will provided by the owners of these schools. For more discussion on this problem see Theeratayakeenun [1972], and Thanapornphun [1975].

to mention the teaching facilities. On the average, teachers in private schools are younger and possess lower educational qualifications than teachers in the public schools. Students in the private schools are, in general, found to have lower academic achievement and more behavioral problems than students in the public schools.

The low quality of teachers in private schools has been the result of many factors. Teachers in private schools are generally underpaid, having lower welfare benefits and career prospects than their counterparts in the public schools. According to the survey of the Office of National Education Commission in 1983, the ratio of teachers in private schools who had permission to continue their education was 0.5 per cent, who had been supplied with housing was 13.2 per cent, who could receive reimbursement for rent was 2.05 per cent, and who had to pay for their own rent was 26.4 per cent. The corresponding ratios for teachers in public schools were 3.6, 39.7, 18.5, and 12.0 respectively. Teaching in private schools is therefore considered a temporary job by most new graduates. Hence the turnover rate of teachers in the private schools is relatively high.<sup>8)</sup> Quite a number of teachers quit their teaching job in the middle of the academic semester in order to report to a new job. Their new jobs frequently turn out to be teaching jobs in the public schools. This has a severe effect on the quality of teaching and learning in the private schools.

The problems regarding the quality of students in the private schools are due to the practice of recruiting new students by the

8) For an elaboration of this point, see Poapongsakorn [1981].

public schools. As mentioned earlier, public schools normally use an entrance examination to select students. As a consequence, students who have a higher academic achievement are recruited into the public school, leaving the poorer ones to the private schools. As was previously reviewed, many empirical studies point out that a student's academic achievement is positively associated with his family background. Students who can pass the entrance examination of the public schools are, on the average, from families with a high socioeconomic status.<sup>9)</sup> Since the peer group has been found to be another factor contributing to the learning atmosphere, the practice of public schools in recruiting better students has indirectly caused a gradual deterioration in the quality of teaching and learning in the private schools.

#### **IX Government's Assistance to Private Schools**

The Thai Government has a long history of providing assistance to private educational institutions. The forms of assistance have changed over time to meet the needs of the private institutions and the financial ability of the Government.<sup>10)</sup> According to the 1983

regulation on subsidies to private schools, the Ministry of Education offers subsidies to private schools that were established before June 1974. Private schools that are eligible for this subsidy must meet certain standards of quality set by the Ministry of Education, and must have a required minimum number of students. At present the subsidy is provided in the form of raising the salary of teachers in the private schools so that they get paid according to their educational qualifications, granting welfare money for compensating teachers whose salaries are below a certain minimum level, and contributing to the welfare fund for teachers in the private schools. The first two items are provided only to schools that do not charge tuition fee beyond a certain level determined by the Ministry of Education. The amount of subsidy granted to each school varies inversely with the tuition fee collected by that school. The calculation of the amount of the subsidy is based on many factors such as teacher/student ratio, number of students per class, teachers' salaries, etc.<sup>11)</sup>

In 1981 the total amount of subsidies granted to private institution amounted to Bht 639 million, or the equivalent of 2.3 per cent of the total educational budget for that year. Of this amount, 62.6 per cent went to raising teachers' salary, 27.5 per cent was for compensation of the high cost of living for low salary-teachers, and 9.5 per cent was for contributing to the welfare fund of teachers in the private schools (see Nitungkorn [1985: Table 8(2)]). There were totally 2,400 private

9) For an example see the report of Aswaraksa [1978]. According to his findings for the southern region, the children whose fathers' occupations were high-level executives, professionals, businessmen, and merchants were more likely to be admitted to public schools in big urban areas. On the contrary, a large number of children in the private schools were from the rural area.

10) For a more detailed review of the historical development of the government subsidy to private schools, see Thailand, Office of the

National Education Commission [n.d.: 34-43].

11) See Kawakul [1984: 130-139], for an example of the method used in calculating the amount of subsidy to each school.

schools, or approximately 80 per cent of total private schools were under this scheme in 1981. This number included schools from preprimary to upper secondary levels.<sup>12)</sup>

The main purpose of subsidizing the private schools was to keep them from increasing tuition fees which would cause an increase in the cost of education. This, in effect, helps the parents indirectly. The Office of the National Education Commission and the Office of the Private Education Commission carried out a follow-up study in 1977 in order to find out the impact of this subsidizing scheme. Regarding the schools' financial position, they found that during 1973-77, on the average, private schools made a surplus over their recurrent costs. However, if other capital costs, except for land costs, were included in the total costs, most private schools would be making a loss, particularly the small-size schools.<sup>13)</sup> The government subsidy had therefore contributed substantially to the survival of most of the private schools.

The budget for this subsidy, however, has been increasing rapidly over time. The study suggested that the government should gradually reduce its burden by allowing private schools to increase their tuition fees so that they could become self-sufficient. The study also pointed out that the cost incurred by the government in subsidizing a student in a private school was much lower than the average cost for a student in a public school. This implied that if more private schools were

to close, the burden of the government would be heavier. The study revealed further that what the private-school owners wanted most was a definite government policy regarding the expansion of public schools, or an explicit sharing of enrollments between public and private schools.

### **X Future Expansion of Secondary Education**

The possibility of making lower secondary education universal to the population in the appropriate age group depends critically on two factors. The first one is the ability of the government to allocate more of its budget to the education sector, or at least to be able to reallocate the budget within the education sector. The second factor is the ability and willingness of parents to send their children to school beyond the primary level. The second factor applies in particular to poor families in remote rural areas. The importance of this factor has been overlooked in every plan. With the decline in the real income of the agricultural sector due to the depressed price of rice and other main crops, the farmers' financial ability to support their children has deteriorated. Furthermore, with an increasing trend in the unemployment rate for graduates of higher level, parents are more reluctant to send their children to a higher level of education.

Regarding the future enrollments of the secondary level, there are at least three estimates prepared by the Office of the National Education Commission for the Sixth Plan (1987-91).

The first estimate, based on the trend of enrollment during 1978-83, projected that

12) See Thailand, Office of the National Education Commission [1984: Ko(1)-Ko(9)].

13) The data does not allow for a distinction of schools by the level of education, because most private schools offer various levels of education in the same school.

by the end of the Sixth Plan, the participation rate of the population in the age group of 12–14 year olds, or the lower secondary level, will be 52.5 per cent; and the age group of 15–17, or the upper secondary level, will be 20.9 per cent. According to this estimate, the portion of the government budget required for allocation to the secondary level would be 18.1 per cent of the total educational budget.

The second estimate was based on the 1983 share of the total educational budget allocated to the Department of General Education, which is responsible for the management of education at this level. The share of the budget in that year was 16.2 per cent. Assuming that there will be no change in this share or in the cost of providing education at this level, by the end of the Sixth Plan the participation rates were estimated to be 45.5 and 17.6 per cent for the lower and the upper secondary levels respectively. The second

estimate undoubtedly produced a smaller number of enrollments than the first one. Part of the second estimate is reproduced in Table 11. It should be noted that the figures in this table include the estimated enrollment in public schools.

In the same table, we have also reproduced the most recent estimate of enrollment in the secondary level that appeared in the draft of the Sixth Educational Development Plan as of September, 1986. There is no explanation of the method used in this estimation. It can be seen that the 1986 estimate clearly shows smaller figures of enrollment each year than the 1983 estimate. However, the difference in the two estimated enrollments is projected to be reduced over time. This indicates that a future increase in the enrollment ratio cannot be easily achieved. It was also mentioned in the draft of this plan that the enrollment at the lower secondary level has recently been lower

**Table 11** Estimation of Enrollment in Secondary Schools in The Sixth Plan, 1987–91

	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
The 1983 estimation <sup>1)</sup>					
.....					
Total enrollment	2,109.5	2,167.0	2,226.1	2,286.9	2,349.7
Participation rate (%)					
Lower level (12–14)	42.0	42.8	43.6	44.4	45.5
Upper level (15–17)	15.83	16.4	16.90	17.3	17.6
Percentage of enrollment in public schools	89.4	89.7	89.9	90.0	90.2
The 1986 estimation <sup>2)</sup>					
.....					
Total enrollment	1,873.7	1,933.5	2,027.3	2,118.4	2,240.1
Percentage of enrollment in public schools	89.7	89.9	90.1	90.3	90.6

Source: 1) Thailand, Office of the National Education Commission [1984: Table Ko]

2) Thailand, Office of the National Education Commission [1986]



than the target. The rate of continuation to the lower secondary level of students completing the primary level was only 40 per cent. This gives rise to the problem of not having enough enrollments in the newly constructed schools.

### XI Concluding Remarks

This analysis has pointed out that various problems have been encountered in the attempt by the government to expand secondary education. This does not mean, however, that it is not possible to make secondary education compulsory. It should rather be interpreted that a greater effort is needed to achieve this goal. The fact that the majority of the Thai labor force still has low educational attainment by itself justifies the need to improve their educational opportunities. However, it has been seen that the construction of additional schools increases the participation rate up to a certain level, and this rate is not likely to be increased further unless the poverty of the population is reduced. This means that for poor families not only should tuition fees be exempted, but also that transportation, books, learning materials, school uniforms, and lunches should be provided in order to induce their participation.

Recognizing the limitations of the government's resources, the following measures are recommended to ease the burden of the government in providing educational services.

1. The role of the private schools should be strengthened. Further expansion of public schools should be directed only to remote rural areas where there is no private school nearby. The policy regarding private schools should

be firm and made explicit in order to guarantee private-schools owners the security of their investment. Assistance to small and medium-size private schools should be continued, both in terms of financial support and technical assistance, in order to raise their standards. The method of recruiting teachers and students by public schools should be modified in order to minimize those harmful effects on the private schools.

2. The tuition fees in the public schools should be revised to reflect the true cost of supplying education, particularly education beyond the lower secondary level.<sup>14)</sup> The tuition fees in outstanding public schools should not be much different from those of comparable private schools, since most students in these public schools are children of the economically-better-off families who can afford to pay higher tuition fees. This will not only reduce the financial burden of the government, but it will, in effect stimulate efficiency in public schools through competition with the private schools.

3. In order to reduce the cost of providing vocational courses to students in secondary general schools and in order to make fuller utilization of educational equipment, cooperation among departments responsible for different types of education should be encouraged. Arrangements should be made so that students in secondary general schools can be sent to take vocational courses or vocational training skills in any vocational school, technical college, or non-formal education center in their area.

4. Financial institutions, such as commercial banks and finance companies, should

14) For a more extensive discussion on this point, see Nitungkorn [1983].

be encouraged to provide more loans at a lower rate of interest to private schools. Similarly, long term educational loans should also be extended to students in the higher educational institutions with special interest rates and more lenient terms. Interest payments on these loans should be treated like investment in housing, i.e., it should be deductible from the personal income tax.

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