CHAPTER II

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN THAILAND

This chapter throws light upon the historical background of the Thai traditional system of education and discusses the factors influencing primary educational reforms in Thailand. Thailand is situated in the heart of Southeast Asian mainland covering an area of 513,11 sq. km from north 5° 30" to 21° and from east 97° 30" to 105° 30". It borders the Laos and Myanmar to the north, Cambodia and the Gulf of Thailand to the east, Myanmar and India Ocean to the west and Malaysia to the south. Climate in monsoon with average temperature is between 23.7°C & 32.5°C.

Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia that has never experienced colonialism. In 2000, the population of Thailand was approximately 62,300,000 (Thailand Government of 2001), with an annual growth rate of approximately 1.09 percent. Although the Thais comprise an overwhelming majority, about 60 percent of the population, there are many minority ethnic groups. About 40 percent of the population are the Chinese, Malays, Lao, Vietnamese, Indians, and others, some of which play significant role in the country's social and economic life. Buddhism is the official religion of Thailand, which is professed by about 95 percent of the population. All other religions can be found in practice as the people subscribe to the ideal of religious freedom.

Among the minority ethnic groups, the Chinese form about 30 percent of the population in Thailand. The Thai Malays number about 600,000 or about 6.2 percent of the population in Thailand. They are Moslems and they differ in religion, language, and custom. The Vietnamese are also a significant ethnic group in Thailand. They are mostly refugees from their war-torn homeland.
The official national language is Thai, which is classified by linguists as belonging to the Chinese-Thai branch of the Sino-Tibetan family. Most polysyllabic words in the vocabulary have been borrowed mainly from Khmer, Pali or Sanskrit. Dialects are spoken in rural areas. Other principal languages are Chinese and Malay. English, a mandatory subject in the public schools is widely spoken in Bangkok and other major cities. With a parliamentary form of government, Thailand is governed by a constitutional monarchy. The country is divided into 76 provinces, each administered by an appointed governor, which are sub-divided into districts, sub-districts, groups of villages and villages. The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration is administered by an elected governor and is divided into 50 districts.

Agriculture engages 85 to 90 percent of the country's population. Despite difficulties and handicaps, Thailand is engaged in a steady process of diversifying its economy, advancing with increasing rapidity from a base of subsistence farming to market economy. "Apart from efforts to ensure an appropriately trained supply of manpower for development and to take the slack out of employment in the agricultural sector, great care will be needed to prevent social change from exercising culture to the needs of modern society, How for this can be done in large measure, depends on the evolving pattern and quality of education". (Buripakdi and Manakhan 1980:226)

Education in Thailand is traced back to as early as the 15th century when the Shukhothai king, Ramakamhaeng the Great, created the first Thai alphabet, using as its basis the Mon and Khmer scripts which had in turn, been derived from a south Indian script. For the first time King Ramakamhaeng employed the new alphabet in his stone inscription of 1292 at Sukhothai which is still in use, although they have undergone several changes. The Sukhothai stone inscriptions recorded aspects of education in moral, intellectual and cultural terms.

The Sukhotai System of Learning prevailed in Thailand till the first half of the 19th century. It primarily revolved around two institutions: the Buddhist monasteries and the royal family. Since most of the people in Thai society in the early days were
farmers, there was no or little need for literacy. Thai people were basically interested in the child’s occupation. In those days education meant learning agricultural skills and social skills in the context of the extended family social norms. “These two purposes were often combined in the popular practice of sending one’s child to his uncles or aunts so that he learned a broader spectrum of occupational arts and gained a comprehension of ties among family relatives”. (Buripakdi and Manakhan 1980:230).

Socio-cultural life of Thai society centred around the monastery, which specialized in wisdom and spiritual study. Its main function was to enable the child to grow up with a broader framework of specialization and equip him with intellectual-spiritual quality highly valued by the society. Oral tradition was maintained to pass on village history, lore and local philosophy from generation to generation. Monastic education was confined to the Buddhist monasteries and it was restricted to males. The main purpose of monastic education was to provide moral and religious instruction. The students were taught to read and write in Thai language and were usually taught Pali. Knowledge of the language of the Holy Scriptures was also imparted to the students.

“Throughout its evolution, the Thai education system has more or less paralleled developments in the socio-economic conditions of the country. During the long early period of Thai history, education remained virtually unchanged. Then the infiltration of western ideas brought about new economic, political and social needs which gave impetus to educational change”. (Buasri 1968:138). The 19th century saw a wave of change in Thai system of education. Several factors were responsible for ushering changes into the education system in Thailand.

Along with the merchants and Christian missionaries in the mid 1800’s came modern technology in the form of printing press. In 1858, king Rama IV commanded the government to establish a printing press for its own use and began to print the Royal Gazette or Rajkitchanubeksa which has continued till the present day.

Along with technological advancement in the shape of printing, the spread of colonialism in the east towards the end of the 19th century had great impact on Thai
education. King Mongkut (Rama IV, 1851-1865) foresaw the danger of his country being subjugated by western powers like several of his neighbouring nations and he successfully established diplomatic and friendly relations with the west. So under the threat of colonialism and the impetus of western influence, king Rama IV used education as a significant tool to uphold national stability and independence. King Rama IV was a monk for about 17 years and during his monkhood, he was a very diligent Buddhist scholar and also studied English, Latin, science, geography and astronomy. The king sent scholars to study abroad and he along with his children acquired the knowledge of English language.

The reign of king Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1868-1910) was marked by increased recognition of the need for educated people to staff the growing bureaucracy. King Rama V realized that the kind of education provided by the monastery and the court was not enough for future government officials. For this reason, he commanded that measures be taken to modernise the education of the country. Recognising the importance of good knowledge of English, he ordered that English should form a part of the new educational requirements, as it had become a necessary key to further knowledge as well as medium of communication with foreigners. Here education was to perform the dual role of modernization as well as combat the danger of western imperialism. “The ideal of modernization became materialised upon the threat of western imperialism and the pressure of internal political movements. Education was to assume a functional role as the major means of modernization. It was to help produce new generation of qualified leaders and administrators in order to anticipate and keep pace with the momentum of the reforming process” (Thailand 1998:9).
Under the patronage of the king a school was established (1871) in the Royal palace, which was the first Thai school on the modern lines. It had its own school building, lay teachers and a timetable. The princes and the sons of country were trained and educated for posts in the civil services. The demand for officials increased with the widespread developments in administration and education mainly concentrated in producing the necessary personnel. The subjects taught were bookkeeping and service regulation with English for the more advanced students. Hence, initially Thai system of education was patterned to meet the need of running the administration of the state efficiently.

After the setting up of the first formal school in 1871, the Command Declaration on Schooling was issued. The Command declaration on Schooling signifies the advent of formal education during the reign of king Rama V. However, the fact remains that the educational system at the time was confined to the elite of Thai society. Later on schools were set up (1918) outside the Royal Palace. Private enterprises and missionaries were also encouraged to establish schools. Most of the schools were still located in monasteries with the monks entrusted with the task of teaching the students.

A further step was taken in 1887 by king Rama V by establishing the department of Education to oversee the kingdom’s educational affairs. The department, at the time of its inception, had 34 schools in the metropolitan and provincial areas, 81 teachers and 1,994 students including 4 other advanced schools in the metropolis under its jurisdiction. The significance of the establishment of Department of Education was not in the scope of its responsibilities but in the fact that education in Thailand was on its way to becoming a planned enterprise, more systematic than before, and that education also had its own spokesman to speak of its worthy cause” (Thailand nd.: 15).
On April 1, 1892, the Department of Education became a full-fledged Ministry of Education, which brought about expansion in the educational system.

STAGES OF EDUCATION REFORMS IN THAILAND: THE INITIAL PERIOD (1892-1932)

King Rama V worked vigorously to modernize the system of education on western lines to enable his subjects to meet life's challenges in the modern world. Western innovations were willingly accepted. By the 1892 Declaration, the Department of Education became a full-fledged Ministry of Education, and the control of private schools in its rudimentary form was introduced. The emergence of private sector as co-sharer of educational responsibilities with the government is reflected in this development.

Following on the heels of the 1892 Declaration, the First Education Plan was launched in 1898. This was strongly influenced by the British system in which two educational paths i.e. the academic and vocational were stipulated. This plan consisted of two parts. The first was concerned with education in Bangkok area while the second with education in the provinces. The most significant feature of this education plan was that it covered all levels, namely, pre-primary, primary, secondary and technical education up to higher education.

The influence of American and Japanese systems could be discerned in the Education Proclamation of 1902. In this year the National System of education in Thailand retained all education levels of the 1898 Plan and divided them into two categories: general education and professional or technical education. Another feature of this plan was that age limit for admission was imposed to motivate graduation within a stipulated duration.
King Rama V who was equally interested in the educational advancement of the country carried on the task of education. An impetus was given to higher education with the founding of Chulalongkorn University in 1916, with four faculties: medicine, law and political science, engineering and literature and science. This was followed by the declaration of the Private School Act which brought privately sponsored schools under state registration and supervision.

Efforts by King Rama V to promote education at the grassroots level led to the declaration of the Compulsory Primary Education Act in 1921. By this Act, four years of primary education was made compulsory for all Thai children, both girls and boys. This was a significant development in the sense that it made education accessible to girls who earlier had no direct participation in the education system. This royal decree was followed by the establishment of free government schools.

THE SECOND STAGE: 1932-1960

Change in the political set up of the country led to change in the educational system in Thailand. The change of governmental system from absolute monarchy to Constitutional monarchy in 1932 led to the re-orientation of education system in Thailand. In order to sustain the new type of government, education was to be more oriented towards political socialization. Moreover, the system of education was influenced by the English system mainly because Great Britain was making deep penetration in Southeast Asia and many high ranking Thai officials who had undergone training in England brought home the idealistic idea that education should serve the purpose of furthering development of education is clearly summed up by
Thamrong Buasri: “Under the advent of democracy in early thirties came still further changes in the educational system. There has followed an investment and a clear awareness of the need to plan carefully so that education is related closely to the changing social and economic needs of the modernizing industrializing country”. (1968: 138)

Thus, the year 1932 heralded a new epoch in Thailand as the traditional system of monarchy was replaced by the constitutional system. With the proclamation of the National Education Scheme in 1932, individual educational ability regardless of sex, social background or physical conditions came to be formally recognized. This was the first formal comprehensive education plan which was introduced in Thailand and this plan highlighted four years of elementary education and eight years of secondary schooling. In 1936 the National Education Scheme of 1932 was refined further with the introduction of five levels of education: 1. Pre-primary or Kindergarten; 2. Primary; 3. Secondary; 4. Pre-university, and 5. Higher education. Special and adult education was facilitated by the Education Plan of 1951.

THE THIRD STAGE: 1960-76

After the World War II, the Thai government faced the task of reconstruction and to fulfill this purpose new hopes and ideals were placed on education as a means of social and economic development. Therefore, as a part of the emphasis on nation development the year 1960 saw further changes in the National Education Scheme to comply with Thai economic and political development. The government faced the double challenge of curbing down widespread illiteracy as well as the massive task of training young men and women for the dynamic development process in the shortest time possible. Thus, primary education was extended to seven years and secondary education was made more flexible to cater to the pupils’ talents and society’s growing scientific and commercial needs. This package was a part of the first six years plan for overall development.

The National Scheme of Education of 1960, served as the basis for the current general objectives of Thai education, according to which the objectives of Thai education were: -to educate the people according to their individual capacities so that they become morally and culturally responsible citizens with discipline and responsibility, with
good mental and physical health, with a democratic outlook and physical wealth, knowledge and ability to carry out an occupation useful to their country; to provide schooling for boys and girls upto at least the age of fifteen; to encourage boys and girls to gain the knowledge and experience that will serve useful purposes in their lives; and to conduct education so as to serve the needs of individuals as well as of societies, in harmony with the country's economic and political system (Buasri 1968:141). This educational scheme was comprised of four major components—moral, physical, intellectual and practical. Moral education is concerned with ethics and refinement, moral responsibility and with the spirit of service. Physical education deals with promotion of good mental and physical health and sporting good spirit. Intellectual education is concerned with the improvement of thinking and the acquisition of knowledge and principles and practices to a useful happy life. Practical education deals with the promotion of industrious habits, perseverance and with training in mental skills that are basic to good living and occupational success.

The National Education Plan of 1980 differed from previous plans in regard to its emphasis on the provisions of classes. Compulsory primary education was fixed at a period of seven years, while secondary education was to be for five years. The government's support to the far-sighted vision of Thai education is reflected in its efforts to develop a system appropriate to the needs of the time. For instance, the transfer of municipal primary schools in provinces outside Bangkok from the Ministry to the Provincial Administrative Council in 1966.

A students' uprising took place in mid October 1973 in the interim of the Third Plan. They demanded changes of bureaucratic administrative systems, particularly in the area of education. Hence, the educational reforms in 1974 came about after the students' uprising in 1973. The government appointed the Committee for Establishing Framework for Educational Reform and the Educational Reform Committee in 1974 and 1975 respectively to revise the educational system and submit
recommendations for educational improvement. The National Education Scheme of 1977 replaced the National Education scheme of 1960 with the Committee’s recommendations. This proclamation led to the relaxation of period of primary education from seven to six years, but the content of learning was not reduced so as to accelerate the universal primary education. “The policy agenda began to widen its scope to address poverty and inequality issues. Educational policies were introduced to increase rural access to schooling, improve the administrative system, and strengthen curricula and the learning process. Priority was also given to issues of quality in education. In addition, science, technology, and non-formal education were strongly emphasized and the role of private education was encouraged”. (Thailand nd.: 11)

PERIOD OF DEVELOPMENT 1977-1992:

The period between 1977-1992 in the history of education in Thailand is seen as a period of development. During these years, society and improvement of people’s quality of life became the main focus of education which proved to be both dynamic and progressive. During the period between 1982-86 policy directed towards educational development were launched. The Fifth National Social and Economic Development Plan was launched in 1982 and it included the National Education Development Plan as an integral part of its Plan. This plan was launched with the aim to foster and speed up the quantitative and qualitative development of education in line with economic and social needs of the country. The plan also laid down specific objectives for each level of education.

At the pre-primary and primary levels, the government extended the primary education to all pupils of the age group, and would improve the quality of education with the view to reducing regional disparities.

At the secondary level, the government promoted equal opportunities for all to gain access to education. The emphasis was also placed on the moral, civic and physical education, in accordance with the principles of democratic government with monarchial head. The teaching learning process aimed at the inculcation of work-habit and problem-solving ability.
At the vocational level, the aim is to give training for entering the labour market, as well as for self-employment. Non-formal education would be extended to serve the needs of population according to the principle of life-long education. (Thailand 1988:11).

In achieving its objectives the Ministry of Education was supported by many other organisations, which have responded to the need of educational management at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. However, these developments in education did not meet the demands of the people nor of the economy which had taken off in the 1980s. In order to meet the need of the people and the demands of the economy, a major reform of the educational system was undertaken in 1992.

In Thailand, the system of modern education took place at a slow pace as compared to that in the advanced western countries. Though considerable progress has been made in the twentieth century both in respect of the quality of education and the numbers of people educated, many factors impede the process of achieving the required quality of education as per the demands of the present age, and of bringing education within the reach of very citizen in the country. One adverse factor in this regard has been the growing economic disparity between the rich and the poor, and between the urban and the rural areas, that leads the poor people from the countryside to leave their rural homes and to migrate to the towns and cities in search of livelihood. The demand for labour in urban areas draws huge numbers of children to the workplace in the form of child labourers. For these children, education is a luxury that they cannot afford, and they adopt the easy way of earning small amounts of money by working rather than going to school. Their parents do not have much idea of the value of education and encourage them to work as they contribute to the family income. This is one of the main economic factors hindering the achievement of total primary education for all.

The problems involved in improvement of the educational system were traced to the failure of the educational management process, which focussed on theoretical knowledge rather than on practical aspect. Moreover, the old system trained children to memorize rather than to think or analyze facts. This process provided less scope for original and innovative ideas to develop in children which retards their problem-solving abilities.
All these factors led to the necessity of introducing changes in the educational process so as to make it more practice-oriented and to augment the learning of theory by development of skills that would help learners in applying their knowledge in the workplace and in creating innovative ideas. The responsibilities have also been felt and such education can act as a catalyst for bringing about national development.

THE SEVENTH NATIONAL EDUCATION PLAN (1992-1996): A NEW DIRECTION

The first to six National Economic and Social Development Plans focused on the production of manpower to meet the demands for the development of the country. The Seventh National Education Development Plan has been adjusted to concentrate on the ‘human’ aspect as the centre of development. Some of the problems and obstacles connected with the management of education and implementation of the Seventh National Economic and Social Development Plan at the initial stage were as follows (Thailand 1994:4):

Equality of Education:

The coverage of compulsory education is not complete due to inaccessibility of some areas and poverty of the parents causing the students to be without educational equipment and uniform. Some parents move away frequently from their homes, while some want to keep their children at home to help lessen their workload. Despite the government’s efforts in extending and improving educational opportunities the goal has not been yet fully achieved. Since the programme has not been included in the national plan, the budget for the implementation was not allocated. Responsible agencies had to eke out money from ordinary budget meant for regular duties causing the programme to be less flexible. Further, a line of division of responsibilities among government departments was not clearly established. Education for the disabled was not fully and widely provided because of the insufficiency of data on different types of disabilities to plan and allocate the budget ahead. In addition, teachers were not appropriately trained to have teaching skills for each specific type of students with special needs. Teaching equipment was also not sufficient for providing special education.
Quality of Education:

Students’ achievement in some classes has not yet reached high standards, such as in mathematics and life experiences at primary education level or science at the secondary education level. Problems in the management of higher education include lack of quality instructors in some vocational and university level subjects, such as engineering and computer management. The number of graduates in such as engineering and computer management. The number of graduates in such subjects is still limited. Graduates in such subjects prefer to join the private rather than the government sector after their graduation. Moreover, training of technicians is not effective due to the obsolete equipment.

Education for Ethics Promotion:

Ethics education does not have a clear structure, but relies on the teachers. Some teachers are not knowledgeable enough and cannot measure the extent of preparedness and willingness of the students. Moreover, a lack of continuity exists in the coordination of ethics instillation in the family, classroom and society. A wide gap exists between each level of education. Ethics education at the primary level is different from that of the secondary level and at home. There is no specific model for students to follow.

Life Long Education:

Although many agencies are responsible for non-formal education, the coverage has not met the demand. There are youth and adults ready for the service throughout the country, particularly in rural areas. However, the provision of skills and vocational training and development does not yet meet the demand due to the insufficiency of information and data. It also presents relevant agencies from planning and realizing appropriate courses for individuals and community. Problems also exist in terms of disparities in quality of the courses offered by different agencies, coordination and joint planning among different agencies.
Education for Economic Development:

Education at primary and secondary levels is not enough to produce graduates capable of earning their own livelihood in the community. There is, however, a lack of instructors with appropriate qualifications as well as written and easy to follow instructional texts books and manuals for teaching. In some vocational schools, there are not enough qualified teachers to handle courses desirable to the labour market.

The promotion of students’ skills for earning is also limited. Despite the promotion of cooperatives, the focus is on the theories rather than on actual practice. Activities organised to help solve problems and develop the community offer little or no participation from the students. Most of them are organised on periodic basis such as a campaign for good deeds on certain commemorative days. The curriculum of each level stresses the content as prescribed in the course but it cannot fathom its effectiveness in the mind and behaviour of the students.

Health Education:

A certain number of primary school students are under-weight compared to the standards of the public health which reflect the problem of health education. The family’s economy level and culture of the family may not correspond to the rules of nutrition and health. Lessons in health education tend to focus on sport calibre, aiming at producing champions more than to create an awareness of personal health. Thus, the students do not realise the value of physical exercise for the sake of improving their health.

The policy and framework for action of Education for All in the 1992 National Education Scheme by the Thai Government is in compliance with the World Declaration on Education for All in March 1990 at Jomtien, Chonburi, Thailand.

The rationale of a new direction in the development of education i.e. the Seventh National Education Development Plan of 1992-96 can be seen in terms of the government’s efforts to accelerate the process of industrialization. This meant the transfer of a section of agricultural workforce to the industrial and service sectors. Such socio-economic circumstances called for an urgent need for the ministry to adjust its goals and tasks accordingly. "Education system was then expected to
provide equilibrium between development in the economic, social and cultural aspects. It should also facilitate linkages between these aspects as well as creating harmony and mutual benefit between urban and rural sectors". (Thailand 1998:11). The main goal of the Seventh National Education Development Plan is to develop and generate human resources so that they contribute favourably towards the country's development in order to equip and train the people with adequate skills to appropriate the workforce.

The first priority of the Seventh National Education Development Plan is the extension of educational opportunities and services including physically, socially and economically disadvantaged groups. The cabinet adopted a National policy of Education following the Jomtien conference in 1990 endeavours in the coming decade. "This policy recognised that Education for All is a fundamental right of all people and should be universally provided by the government regardless of age, gender, socio-economic and cultural status as well as other conditions affecting individuals as groups which impede access to education". (Thailand nd: 45).

The 1992 National Scheme of Education is based on four fundamental principles; The enrichment of individual wisdom, thinking mind and morality; realisation of the importance of judicious utilisation and conservation of natural resources; an understanding of Thai language and culture; and the proper balance between dependency and self-reliance is an essential basis for cooperation in individual, community and national levels.

The structure of educational system according to the 1992 National Education Development Plan covers education both in school related system and from way-to-life learning process. Education in a school system is provided by educational institutions, which is characterised by class/grading system, and the use of curriculum specialised for the level and type of education so as to develop learners in accordance with curriculum objectives.

The inclusion of vocational education as a part of National Education Development Plan 1992 is to help the learner develop vocational knowledge and skills useful for working both as entrepreneurs and as paid workers. Vocational education in the formal school system aims at the development of educational
knowledge and skills relevant to each level of education from primary to higher levels. Vocational education in the non-formal system is to provide training for specific occupations for those needing to upgrade their knowledge and skills.

Thoranin (1999) says that the main factors acting as barriers to the full implementation of the educational reforms in Thailand are: the inadequacy of financial support for the mandated twelve years of basic education, the change in the management of teaching practices and strategies, and the decentralization of educational management to the level of the local educational authorities.

THE NATIONAL EDUCATION ACT OF 1999 AND EDUCATIONAL REFORM:

Currently the First National Education Act Promulgated in August 1999 is the fundamental law for the administration and provision of education and training incorporating guidelines for comprehensible reform in Thailand. In accordance with the National Education Act 1999 the public educational administration and management will be decentralized to local organizations and educational institutions by 2002.

In order to reform the Thai education system, the National Education Act of 1999 laid down that an Educational Reform Office was to be set up to set guidelines for restructuring the educational administration system as per Chapter 5 of the Act, for reform of personnel management as per Chapter 7 of the Act and for reform of educational finance and investment as per Chapter 8 of the Act. An Educational Review Office has also been established to serve as the agency for external evaluation of all educational institutions and to provide a system of quality assurance.

After a year of implementation of the National Education Act of 1999, an assessment of its progress was conducted, which revealed that considerable advance has been achieved especially in the learning and legislative aspects. Subsequently, macro plans for educational reform were devised and put into operation. The Ninth National Education Development Plan for the five-year period 2002-2006 and the 15-year National Development Plan (2002-16) have been proposed. Till now, educational reform has been carried out in 20 sectors.
Reforms of the 12-year Basic Education programme in Thailand was influenced by the UNESCO's Education For All principle that has been operational since 1990. The ultimate goals were to ensure access to basic education for all, accompanied by an improvement in educational achievement. The strategy of planning was to decentralize educational management, especially for early childhood education, by the local administration. A management system, focusing on coordination and cooperation has been suggested in order to streamline the activities of the Sports Authority of Thailand, the National Olympic Committee of Thailand, the Department of Physical Education of the Ministry of Education and various ports clubs and organisations. A core curriculum for basic education has been prescribed. Institutions for Basic Education would be responsible for determining substantive curricula in accordance with the needs of the community. The 12-year basic education cycle has been clustered into 4 periods of 3 years each. The subject matter of curricula has been divided into 8 categories, in addition to which extra-curricular activities shall be encouraged to foster personal development.

A new Education Quality Assurance System has been developed for all schools and universities. Arrangements have been made for all institutions to provide for an annual self-study, and also an external evaluation every five years. The scheme for external quality evaluation for basic education shall involve the use of 14 educational standards and 53 performance indicators. A special study has been made concerning the reform of the system of credit transfer in higher education. Credits accumulated by learners will be transferable within the same type of institution or between different types of institutions. These credits can include experiences gained from non-formal or informal education, vocational training or from work experience. From the beginning of the academic year 2001, Ramkamhung University becomes the first Thai University to allow the new credit transfer system for students enrolling in the university’s Bachelor degree programmes. Plans have been put forward for the creation of a professional organisation for teachers, institutional administrators and educational administrators. In addition, a recommendation has been made for the establishment of a fund for the development of teachers and educational personnel. Reforms involving the professional status of teachers include the issuing of licenses for teachers and professional administrators, and improvement of salaries, remuneration and welfare facilities for teachers and educational personnel. Reforms
proposed in the area of curriculum development and delivery include the formulation of a conceptual framework for learning in the new century and the development and promotion of National or Master Teachers to be called the ‘Spearhead Teachers’. Under the guidance of the Ministry, the teaching-learning process shall aim at enabling learners to develop at their own pace and to the best of their abilities. A merger of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of University Affairs and the Office of the National Education Commission would result in the creation of a new Ministry of Education, Religion and Culture.

THE PRESENT SYSTEM OF EDUCATION IN THAILAND

At present, the responsibility for administration of education in Thailand is divided among four main governmental authorities. Besides, there are other government agencies taking care of educational needs of specific

Chart 2.2 Ministerial Administration on Education

The first governmental authority is the office of the Prime Minister. It is entrusted with the task of planning education which is undertaken by the following agencies: i.) The National Economic and Social Development Board entrusted with the task of the overall policy in the areas of national development. ii.) The National Education Commission: This commission is concerned with the overall policy for all types of education administered and separate government agencies. iii.) The Budget Bureau and the Civil Service Commission are responsible for financial and personnel support respectively;
1) The Ministry of Interior: the Ministry shoulders the responsibility for the management of primary education in the municipality of Bangkok. It is responsible for the supervision and financial assistance of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration for the Management of education in Bangkok metropolitan Area. The Ministry of Interior was transferred to the Ministry of Education of October 1, 1980; 2) The Ministry of University Affairs: Higher education in government and private universities in Thailand is placed under the administration and supervision of the Ministry of University Affairs. This Ministry also supervises the management of higher education in private colleges; 3) The Ministry of Education: This ministry carries out the major bulk of educational administration in the country: from pre-primary education to secondary and some post secondary, for instance, teacher education, technical and vocational education. Added to this, the ministry also supervises private schools at all the levels except the degree level.

Chart 2.3  Organization of the Ministry of Education
The other government agencies are also involved in the management of education in specialized fields, both in the formal and non-formal system. For instance, the Ministry of Defense is responsible for the management of military education, and police education, and the Ministry of Health is entrusted with the task of management of health education. Management of education in professional skills is under the local Administration department. The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration is responsible for organizing training in entrepreneurial skills, etc.

The country is divided into 12 regions for the purpose of local education administration. In each region, there is a Regional Education Office, headed by a Regional Education Officer. In addition, each of the 76 provinces has a provincial Education Office, headed by a Provincial Education Officer. Each district also has district Education Office, headed by District Education Officer. (Government of Thailand nd: 26). Both at the regional, provincial or district levels, all education officers are appointed by the office of the Permanent Secretary of Education and supervised by its Inspector-General. More detail will be discussed in the next chapter.

For formal and non-formal education the same system has been followed since 1977. At the pre-primary level (class I and class II) the age group between 3-5 years of age; primary level (class I-class VI) between 6-12 years of age group; lower secondary levelage; primary level (class I-class VI) between 6-12 years of age group;
lower secondary level (class VII-class IX) between 13-15 years of age group; upper secondary level (class IX-class XII) between 16-18 years of age group; and for the higher education level between 19-24 years of age group.

**Chart 2.4 Educational system (Formal & Non-Formal)**

The degree or diploma from non-formal educational institutions is considered or recognized as much as the degree or diploma from formal educational institutions. Thus a student can shift from non-formal to formal system of education.

SCHOOLS AND ENROLMENT:

Documents for the academic year 1999 show that the number of schools in Thailand has increased to the point of sufficiency and they are geographically well-distributed, so as to be able to accommodate all children of school-going age in the country. The total number of registered schools was 50,402, with 1.4 million students from pre-primary up to graduate school, 3.8 million out-of-system students and 2.4 million monk-students. For the education of particular groups of students, there are other schools in the secondary vocational and higher education level. These schools are 106 in number and can accommodate 43,000 students. The total number of students receiving formal education in Thailand stands at 18,683,000 out of the country’s population of 61 million, which is approximately 29.5 percent of the population.

Private schools in Thailand: The total number of registered school was 2,827 private schools out of 50,402 schools in Thailand (i.e. 1,127 primary schools out of 2,827 schools with 612,644 students and 95,352 teachers). There are 18 private schools in Phitchit province with 5,970 students and 443 teachers, and 28 private schools in Suphanburi province with 7,986 students and 637 teachers out of 2,827 private schools in Thailand. (Thailand 2001)

As regards opportunities for availing of the educational services by children, it has been found that the proportion of students who have availed of them to the total number of children within the particular age-groups are as follows: 97.0 percent for pre-primary school, 53.6 percent for junior secondary school, 33.2 percent for senior secondary school (general), 25.1 percent for senior secondary school (vocational), and 25.7 percent for higher education level.

Thus, the proportions of students who do not complete the formal education programme of 12 years duration are 41.7 percent at the senior secondary level and 74.3 percent at the higher education level. This illustrates the need to extend the
coverage of the basic education programmes to cover all the target children and to extend such coverage at the higher education level also.

For better educational management, the ratio of students per class for pre-primary school up to senior secondary school (both in the general and vocational course) can be increased. The ratio of teachers to students is satisfactory except at the vocational level, which needs more teachers. As regards the teachers' qualifications, it is found that most teachers in both the public and the private schools are undergraduates\(^1\), though a few in the public schools are found to be diploma holders. The proportion of teachers with diploma holders teachers is 11.3 percent, i.e., numbering 67,731 out of 589,286 teachers in public schools. The corresponding figure for teachers in private schools is 32.7 percent, i.e., numbering 31,152 out of 95,352 teachers in private schools. For educational development, the number of teachers as well as the proportion of teachers with higher qualifications should increase.

According to documents for the academic year of 1999, the Thai people had, on an average, gained formal education for 7.1 years, the figure being 9.1 years for the urban population and 6.1 years for the rural population. The majority of Thai people are farmers having an average of about 5 years of formal education.

About 59.2 percent of Thai labourers had completed their primary education and about 14.4% had completed higher education. Educational reforms are required to improve these figures so that quality of life improves and the country as a whole achieves progresses. The average of monthly income of the Thai population was Baht 3,358 per person in the country, i.e. Baht 2,421 per person in Phitchit province and Baht 3,811 per person in Suphanburi province (Thailand 2000)

These successes have not led to a feeling of complacency; rather, there is a process of constant retrospection and re-evaluation of policies and achievements that enables the policy-makers to devise better means for the dissemination of socially useful knowledge and skills among the people. The process of educational reforms has, therefore, come to be regarded as a key component of the overall developmental

\(^1\) Undergraduates = B.A.- Bachelor's degree, Postgraduate = M.A. – Master's degree
activities. The next chapter will discuss aspects of primary education at the Provincial level of Phitchit and Suphanburi provinces. It also contains detailed information on Anuban Phitchit Urban School (APUS), Thalor Phitchit Rural School (TPRS), Suphannaphum Suphanburi Urban School (SSUS) and Danchang Suphanburi Rural School.