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Transformation in Lifelong Education in Thailand

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Abstract

This research aims to evaluate the operational performance of the Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education (ONIE) based on the Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act B.E. 2551 during 2008–2012. The samples were selected from personnel of ONIE and learning networks by means of the multiple-stage sampling method. The research instruments are: (a) a form used for recording operational results of related non-formal and informal education; (b) an interview form to observe factors influencing the performance of ONIE; (c) an evaluation form to observe the factors linked to the operational results; and (d) a form to evaluate the relevancy between the organization structure and authority of ONIE and the performance and focus group discussion. The results showed that the performance of the ONIE cannot provide equal opportunity for people nationwide regarding non-formal and informal education opportunities, insufficient funding, and the number of partnership networks remains way too low. It is found that learners are able to focus more effectively on issues that interest them and that are essential for life quality enhancement. The problematic issues highlighted in the study are partially related to the organizational and authority structure of ONIE.

Keywords: evaluation, non-formal and informal education, policy research, Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act.

A key conceptual framework highlighted in the National Education Act B.E. 2542 is aimed at the full development and potential of the people of Thailand, who constitute the major force of the country, so as to attain balanced development in all respects—physical strength, knowledge morality and desirable way of life so as to be able to live in harmony with other fellows in the society as well as members of the world community. This concept is on par with the key idea reflected by the Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act B.E. 2551, which is aimed at encouraging people to continue learning throughout their lives. The development of these aspects goes in line with ways to develop the country. The Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education (ONIE) is a key agency in charge of promoting learning among the people, based on the lifelong education concept. Its mission is to ensure that all Thai citizens are given lifelong education opportunities as well as professional training so that they are able to find quality jobs anytime and anywhere. This helps create a knowledge-based society and permanent employment (Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education, 2011). However, the ONIE has faced a number of problems, including problems about transfers of study results among the formal, informal, and non-formal systems, a large number of those in the target groups; varieties of learning needs; and the lack of a complete and up-to-date database system for learners, education managers, and supporters. Moreover, some supporter networks are neither motivated nor have clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities (Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education, 2011).

As mentioned above, although the operational performance of the ONIE for the fiscal year 2011 was satisfactory, there remained some problems in regard to non-formal and informal education. It should be noted that the ONIE had been operational under the Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act B.E. 2551 for five years in 2013. It is thus essential that research aimed at observing the performance of the ONIE under the Non-formal and Informal Education Promotion Act B.E. 2551 be continuously conducted as a guideline for development of lifelong learning in Thailand.

Objectives

This research aims to evaluate the operational performance of the ONIE based on the Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act B.E. 2551 during 2008–2012; to study the relation among factors or components related to the organizational structures, their flexibility, management systems, the policy and funding management processes, the funding availability, the capacity, the availability of personnel of the ONIE and the operational performance of ONIE; and analyze the relevancy between organizational structures plus the scope and authority of the ONIE and objectives of the operation to promote non-formal and informal education.

Literature Review

The study reviewed literature both in Thailand and foreign countries focusing on the concepts of lifelong education and learning, non-formal and informal education in Thailand, community participation, networking and partnership, and policy research. An analysis has shown that there have been many problems and obstacles to management of non-formal and informal education in term of concepts, vision and philosophy, and goals.

There have been a number of changing elements in the society, e.g., the formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), new 21st century skills, Education 4.0, the lifelong learning society, etc. Besides, there are not many research studies conducted to enhance the development of lifelong education and learning in Thailand. Therefore, it is essential for the study to identify the operational performance of the ONIE based on the Non-formal and Informal Education Promotion Act B.E. 2551 during 2008–2012 and propose the possibility of transforming the Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act B.E. 2551 to Lifelong Education Promotion Act.

Methods

This is policy research, based on the concept introduced by Majchrzak (1984), and combined with survey research. The research is divided into four steps as in Figure 1 (*see page 59*). Those steps are as follows:

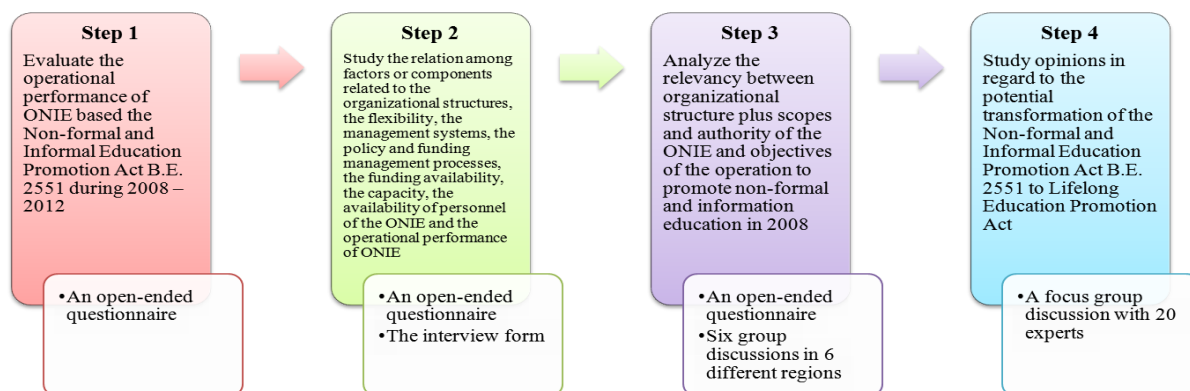
Step one: Evaluate the operational performance of ONIE based on the Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act B.E. 2551 during 2008–2012. The research team observed selective education institutes under ONIE nationwide by using a multi-stage sampling approach. The selective non-formal and informal (NIE) centers were divided into six zones nationwide, namely the north, the northeast, the east, the center, the south and Bangkok. Five provincial NIE centers from each region were selected. Each province selected NIE centers from two districts. Each district selected NIE centers from five sub-districts. For Bangkok, a total of 500 NIE centers were selected from 10 districts, as shown in Figure 1. Moreover, the research team also observed 27 education institutes directly under the central organization, using a form for recording the operational performance of ONIE. The obtained information was analyzed by means of descriptive statistics including count numbers, percentage, mean, standard deviation, content analysis, and the modified priority needs Index (PNIModified).

Step two: Study the relation among factors or components related to the organizational structures, their flexibility, the management systems, the policy and funding management processes, the funding availability, the capacity, and the availability of personnel of the ONIE and the operational performance of ONIE. The research team studied NIE institutes nationwide by means of multi-stage sampling. The selective NIE centers were divided into six zones nationwide, namely the north, the northeast, the east, the center, the south and Bangkok. Five provincial NIE centers from each region were selected. Each province selected ONIE centers from two districts. Each district selected ONIE centers from five sub-districts. For Bangkok, the ONIE centers were selected from 10 districts. Therefore the total of the selected centers was 500 ONIE centers. Moreover, the research team also observed 27 central education institutes using the interview form to study the factors linked to the operational performance of the ONIE, which consisted of three questions in the open-ended questionnaire and the evaluation form to study the factors linked to the operational performance of the non-formal and informal education system, with seven rating scales covering eight aspects; each aspect had three sub-items. The questions were in the form of an open-ended questionnaire. The information was analyzed by means of descriptive statistics, standard deviation, and the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient.

Step three: Analyze the relevancy between the organizational structure plus the scope and authority of the ONIE and objectives of the operation to promote non-formal and informal education in 2008. In this step, the research team organized focus group discussions with individuals under the ONIE, including the Permanent Secretary to Ministry of Education; Secretary General to the ONIE; Deputy Secretary General to the ONIE; plan and policy analysts; education experts; education officers; academicians; teachers and volunteer teachers under the ONIE; directors for educational institutes; directors for distance learning institutes; directors for provincial/district NIE centers; representatives of the private sector; representatives of NGOs; representatives of local administration organizations; representatives of the knowledge management institute (KMI); representatives of networks of private operators; and lecturers from five universities where non-formal and informal education degrees are available, namely Chulalongkorn University, Srinakarinwirot University, Kasetsart University, Mahidol University, and Silpakorn University. The relevancy was evaluated by an evaluation form designed to study the relevancy between the organizational structure plus scope and authority of the ONIE and its operational performance. The information was analyzed using descriptive statistics, i.e., means, standard deviations, rating scales and content analysis and grouping for opinions in addition to group discussions.

Step four: Study opinions in regards to the potential transformation of the Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act B.E. 2551 to Lifelong Education Promotion Act. The research team conducted a focus group discussion with 20 experts and related individuals on the topic of “the potential transformation of the Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act B.E. 2551 to Lifelong Education Promotion Act” on three issues: (a) review the results of the research; (b) the potential transformation to Lifelong Education Promotion Act; and (c) other opinions and recommendations (if any): content analysis and categorization of opinions obtained from group discussions.

Figure 1: The research procedures



Results

The results cover the following areas: (a) the evaluation of ONIE’s operational performance in accordance with the Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act

B.E. 2551; (b) suggestions obtained from the results of the evaluation of ONIE's operational performance; and (c) opinions regarding a potential transformation of the Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act B.E. 2551 to Lifelong Education Promotion Act.

1. The evaluation of ONIE's operational performance based on the Non-formal and Informal Education Promotion Act B.E. 2551.

Key messages from the study results of "The evaluation of operational performance of ONIE based on the Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act B.E. 2551" (ONIE. 2008) can be summarized below:

1.1 The operational performance of ONIE based on the Non-Formal and Informal Education Act B.E. 2551 during 2008–2012 is as follows:

1.1.1 The results of the study on relevant basic information reveal that education institutes have six missions, based on their typical roles and responsibilities: (a) to promote non-formal and information education and thus enable people to engage in lifelong learning with high quality; (b) to support and encourage partnership networks to manage non-formal and information education aimed at promoting lifelong learning and ensuring suitable occupations to all citizens; (c) to promote and support education related to career development to ensure permanent careers for all people; (d) to develop and promote the utilization of information technologies helping to enhance education and communication; (e) to develop personnel and management systems so that all involved parties are able to proceed with projects to promote lifelong learning and occupational education for enhancement of occupational opportunities and; (f) to encourage communities to develop lifelong learning processes for sustainable development.

As for the basic information about targeted population, most populations include working adults (aged 15-59 years old: 57.95%) followed by senior citizens (aged over 60 years old: 28.29%) and groups of students at compulsory level (junior high school; aged 6-14 years old: 13.76%). Illiterate working adults (aged 15-59 years old) in the service areas (people who are unable to read and write Thai) account for 0.61% of the total population in the group. There are 884,924 targeted tribal participants in the particular service areas: 762,374 are Muslim, 52 are from the Morgan tribe, 76,547 are from hill tribes and 45,951 are from other tribes. The study also surveys 247,206 disabled persons: 47,472 are those with eye problems, 36,523 are people with hearing disorders, 38,124 are people with intellectual problems, 42,579 people with physical problems, 23,511 are people with learning problems, 8,542 are people with problems involving speech and language ability, 10,913 are people with behavior and emotional problems, 31,459 are people with autism, and 8,083 are people with multiple disabilities. (*See Figure 2 on page 66.*)

1.1.2 The study results regarding equality, fairness, and quality are examined next. Overall, education services cover a wide range of people in general; however, groups with fewer opportunities do not receive sufficient education services. Both the general group and the group with fewer disabilities receive education services designed for occupational development the most, followed by for basic education. For the disabled group, education services are linked mainly to activities encouraging them to become

literate and improve their thinking ability while the education for professional development is the second priority.

Results from the field trips suggest that opportunities for people to access non-formal and informal education services remain unequal nationwide. Different target groups receive a different amount and quality of education services. In terms of non-formal education, libraries receive unfair shares of budget allocation. As for the budgeting, budget allocation comes mainly from the center, Office of Permanent Secretary, rather than respective departments that are directly in charge of operation. Finally, in terms of quality, the teaching at basic education level still remains below standard; moreover, the content of the act about the non-formal education concept remains ambiguous.

1.1.3 The study results in regard to decentralization and empowerment for education institutes to engage in management of non-formal and informal education can be summarized below: **Academic basis:** Education institutes are fully empowered to engage in academic projects. Individuals responsible for particular projects are clearly identified. Personnel engaged in activities for non-formal and informal education demonstrate good performance that very well responds to the communities' needs. **Budgeting:** Budgeting personnel complete budget plans for activities under non-formal and informal education. The budgets for each activity are disbursed in accordance with the plans. However, the allocated budgets are insufficient for the need to organize activities linked to non-formal and informal education for the target groups. Meanwhile, only provincial NIE centers are authorized to disburse the budget. As a consequence, budget allocations for district and sub-district NIE centers are sometimes delayed. **Human Resources Management:** Tasks are assigned in accordance with official appointments based on the qualifications of particular individuals. Qualified personnel are equally and fairly appointed. Personnel have genuine expertise in assigned projects relevant to their roles and responsibilities. They are also encouraged and supported to continue acquiring knowledge and skills so that they can apply what they learn to activities linked to non-formal and formal education with maximum benefits to learners. **General Administration:** Personnel are capable of managing various resources, e.g., buildings, places, media, and educational materials used for non-formal and informal education activities, in collaboration with partnership networks. Resources suffice for conducting non-formal and informal education activities. Education activities are made possible by effective management, with a focus on partnership collaboration. It can be concluded from the results from the field trips that education institutes are empowered to manage education in accordance with characteristics of particular areas, especially in terms of non-formal vocational education, education for skill enhancement, and education for community and society development. Local wisdom is also applied to learning management. Nonetheless, the basic education level still relies largely on a nationalized curriculum.

1.1.4 The study results in regard to collaboration with partnership networks: Various partnership networks participate in promotion of non-formal and informal education, while participation from the communities remains minor as community members are sometimes engaged with their occupations so they do not have time to participate with learning activities. Moreover, with some transportation difficulties, people in remote areas are unable to access to the venues where learning activities are

organized. It is suggested that partnership networks be encouraged to collaborate in organizing learning activities. One suggestion is that some memorandum of understanding (MOU) be signed with partnership networks. Furthermore, partnership networks and state sectors responsible for learning activities should seek opportunities to exchange ideas. The partnership system should be developed and the extent of the collaboration of the partnership networks should be clearly addressed. Partnership networks of non-formal and informal education in national and provincial levels do not organize many regular meetings to plan partnership efforts. Plans or activities aimed at motivating and supporting partnership networks to access the management resources for non-formal and informal education remain unclear. The collaboration is seen in a form that relevant parties help to work on projects in the areas where effort on education projects is minor.

1.2 The study results consider the relation among factors or components about organizational structure; the flexibility in organizational management, management systems, authorities, policy management, budding management, financing availability, capacity and readiness of personnel, and the readiness of ONIE and ONIE's performance.

1.2.1 The results addressed the relationship among relevant factors, such as: various factors are relevant to one another. In particular, policy management is clearly relevant to budding management as well as financing availability.

1.2.2 The results of the study on factors relevant to ONIE's performance include factors relevant to the ONIE's performance and are summarized as follows. For example, (a) Organizational Structure: The overall management of ONIE does not prove effective as the full authorities are given to provincial NIE centers; meanwhile, at district NIE centers only directors are authorized to lead internal management. Moreover, the number of government officers in district NIE centers is too small, resulting in delays in the management process. (b) Management flexibility: The management flexibility is moderate. Sub-district NIE centers' management is under the direction of policies from district offices. While district NIE centers assign many projects to sub-district centers, the number of personnel in sub-district centers is too small to fulfill the assignments. Sub-district NIE centers need to form their own working teams and engage in the management run by committees. Partnership networks in the communities may participate in organizing activities. (c) Management system and management appropriateness: The management system and management appropriateness is moderate. General administration and documentation works are often delayed. Due to too few personnel, some works or projects lack of good coordination. (d) Authorization: As most authorities are at provincial NIE centers, the authority in some issues confronting district and sub-district NIE centers remain unclear. As a result, workflow at district and sub-district NIE centers is not very flexible and some working processes are often delayed. (e) Policy management: The policy management in terms of budgeting sometimes does not go in line with the set activities. Meanwhile, the personnel capacity is too small to fulfill assignments or projects. The job positions do not provide job security. As a consequence, the turnover rate is rather high. The management policies regarding other aspects are appropriate. (f) Budgeting management and financing availability: Allocated budgets are insufficient. Most budgets are allocated for continuing education, while basic education receives a much smaller portion of budget allocation. Moreover, there are a number of

rules for disbursement, causing some difficulties on budget management for target groups. (g) Capacity: The personnel capacity is too low and thus insufficient to provide services. The head of a sub-district NIE center must oversee works of the entire sub-district. Some sub-districts comprise many villages; hence, NIE services are unable to completely cover all members and the quality of NIE services may be negatively affected. (h) Readiness of ONIE personnel: The readiness of personnel has lessened, which can be seen from the high turnover of temporary personnel due to job insecurity. As a result, personnel cannot develop themselves for work that requires higher skills. In addition, the number of personnel who are specialized in particular areas is small. There is only one position of government official in sub-district NIE centers. In other words, there is only one NIE teacher in a sub-district NIE center and he or she has to take huge responsibility. He or she thus does not have time to development himself/herself and thus his or her performance is not very satisfactory.

1.2.3 The study results on ONIE's performance: In summary, structural factors have an impact on the performance of the ONIE, the equality in regard to accessing non-formal and informal education services, as well as the fairness and the quality of non-formal and informal education. Furthermore, structural factors also impact promotion and support of the participation from related parties. In-depth studies show that the organizational structure, in which one district NIE center offers only the position of director as a government officer with full authority and one teacher position as a government official while most of the staff are state employees, results in management delays or lengthy administration processes. As a result, the management is inflexible and administration processes, e.g., general administration issues, parcel dispatches and budget disbursement, are delayed. As the authorities for most matters are from provincial NIE centers, personnel at district and sub-district NIE centers are unable to make decisions on some matters. Hence, management and works are inflexible and thus delayed. Meanwhile, the budget is insufficiently allocated to operational fronts. In regard to the capacity, two major issues are detached. First, teachers, those holding either the government official or state employee positions, often request transfer back to their hometowns; and second, the workforce is insufficient for operation and service tasks. To elaborate, one district NIE center has one office head who oversees the entire district; some districts comprise many villages. Hence, the services may not cover all areas and the quality of non-formal and informal education services may not reach satisfactory levels.

1.3 Relevancies between the organizational structure as well as authorization of the ONIE and the objectives of the promotion and support of the non-formal and informal education in 2008.

1.3.1 The study results on relevancies between the organizational structure as well as authorization of the ONIE and the objectives of the promotion and support of the non-formal and informal education. It is found that learners can learn issues that interest them and are essential for life quality enhancement in terms of politics, society and culture. The learned issues relate to the organizational structure of ONIE.

1.3.2 The study results on relevancies between the organizational structure as well as authorization of the ONIE and the objectives of the promotion and support of the non-formal and informal education are as follows: Learners gain knowledge and basic skills

that can facilitate lifelong learning. The learned issues are relevant to the authority of ONIE.

2. Suggestions obtained from the results of the evaluation of operational performance of the Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education are based on the Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act B.E. 2551.

The ONIE, in collaboration with related agencies, should present the results of research studies to the government so that the government can establish a national agenda and a major policy to drive the development of the country's non-formal and informal education as well as people's lifelong learning. In addition, some rules and regulations related to the management structure should be amended in order to enhance the quality of national education and thus people's living quality.

3. Opinions in regard to the potential transformation of the Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act B.E. 2551 to Lifelong Education Promotion Act.

According to the group discussion, the scope of lifelong education should be made clear and the overall picture of lifelong education should be made broader than national education. It is appropriate to identify clear responsibilities regarding lifelong education for certain organizations. Nonetheless, there must be a rationale behind the termination of the current act. In regard to a definition, the group discussion also mentioned that the Lifelong Education Promotion Act should focus on the linkage with a focus on learning about life, Thai culture and ways of life, and the philosophy of the Sufficiency Economy. In terms of a philosophical dimension, principles for sufficiency philosophy principle the improvement of quality of life are particularly focused while the concept about "ability to think" is still maintained. (The Chaipattana Foundation, 2016). Learners at all ages should be given equal attention. NIE centers may act as facilitators as well as a mechanism encouraging organizations and partnership networks to take part in learning activities and education management. In terms of personnel, there are insufficient personnel and some personnel do not possess sufficient knowledge. As for budgeting, the Ministry of Education is allocated a large budget, but NIE centers receive insufficient funding. In regard to the decentralization, it is suggested that offices at operational levels be assigned more projects and given larger scopes of authorities. In terms of evaluation, an agency in charge of controlling and prevention of corruption as well as developing KPI should be established in order to reflect the expected results. For a dimension about education management, the Thai uniqueness and identity must always be maintained. NIE centers may manage education themselves or let communities do it, but the main highlight is that education should always be accessible. Learning materials are always available. Learning evaluation should be unique, appropriate and relevant. It should be noted that education management by the ONIE in district levels involves a number of burdens, e.g., budgeting and human resources. Hence, one preliminary solution is that partnership networks are encouraged to help manage education rather than leaving the responsibilities to ONIE alone. Meanwhile, the use of authority of the organization and the lack of unity in driving the mission are also problems in implementation of the current Act.

Conclusion and Recommendations

There are several concepts for education management under the National Education Act B.E. 2542, the second amendment B.E. 2545 and the Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act B.E. 2551. First, education management is designed to make people healthy physically, mentally, intellectually, and morally. In addition, partnership networks should be encouraged to participate in education management. The ONIE is a major organization that joins hands with partnership networks in providing quality lifelong education services as well as professional training. It also works to develop the appropriate planning and implementation of the lifelong learning strategy. To transform the Non-Formal and Informal Education Promotion Act B.E. 2551 to Lifelong Education Promotion Act, it is essential to define the national scope of lifelong education and the overall picture of lifelong education in term of philosophies, concepts and strategies. Basic information about the transformation should be promoted to the society to see a clear direction of the proposed act through legal channels. The proposed transformation would not be successful without cooperation of all related parties and effective law enforcement as well as various partnership networks who will help to manage education. It is appropriate to identify clear responsibilities in regard to lifelong education for certain organizations.

The organizational dimension and education management aspects are also important to manage and promote lifelong education which is relevant to Thai society. In addition, there should be systematic measures and indicators, as well as guidelines for making lifelong education possible. Furthermore, studies on roles of partnership networks for lifelong education should be conducted. Finally, research on budget management for the non-formal and informal education as well as lifelong education should also be conducted. Hence, the roles of ONIE have to be adjusted in accordance with the real demands of the people. The results of this research will be used as a key guideline for promotion of lifelong education as well as for creation of a lifelong learning society in order to maximize the efficiency of education management aimed at lifting people's quality of life.

Figure 2: Information regarding the overall targeted population

| Basic Information | | n | Percentage |
|---|--|----------------|-------------------|
| Age | 6-14 years | - | 13.76 |
| | 15-59 years | - | 57.95 |
| | over 60 years | - | 28.29 |
| | Total | - | 100.00 |
| Participants in the Particular Service Areas | Muslim | 762,374 | 86.15 |
| | Morgan tribe | 52 | 0.01 |
| | hill tribes | 76,547 | 8.65 |
| | other tribes | 45,951 | 5.19 |
| | Total | 884,924 | 100.0 |
| Disabled Population | eye problems | 47,472 | 19.20 |
| | hearing disorders | 36,523 | 14.77 |
| | intellectual problems | 38,124 | 15.42 |
| | physical problems | 42,579 | 17.22 |
| | learning problems | 23,511 | 9.51 |
| | problems involving speech and language ability | 8,542 | 3.46 |
| | behavior and emotional problems | 10,913 | 4.41 |
| | multiple disabilities | 31,459 | 12.73 |
| | Total | 247,206 | 100.00 |

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