

The roles of governments in the education reform policy in Thailand from 1999 - 2009

Thipsarin Phaktanakul

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Professional Doctorate in Public Administration
University of Canberra
2015

Abstract

The most recent education reform policy in Thailand officially began in 1999, when the National Education Act came into force. It was considered the most comprehensive reform in Thailand's history. From 1999 to 2009, many governments and ministers of education assumed power. Their roles in implementing the education reform policy as stipulated in the National Education Act were significant. This research examines the roles of each government and each Minister of Education in implementing the education reform policy after the National Education Act came into force in 1999 to the end of the first decade of this policy. This research is qualitative and is undertaken by two main methods: document analysis and semi-structured interviewing. This research analyses the factors which influenced the implementation of the education reform policy based on the top-down approach to policy implementation analysis. The governments of Thailand within the timeframe of this research can be divided into three groups: (1) the Democrat Party from 1999 to the beginning of 2001 and from the end of 2008 to 2009; (2) the Thai Rak Thai Party and other political parties associated with Thaksin Shinawatra from 2001 to 2006 and in 2008; and (3) the government appointed by the military junta after the coup d'état on 19 September 2006. Based on the top-down approach to policy implementation analysis, there are five major factors which obstructed the implementation of the education reform policy from 1999-2009, namely: (1) the size of target groups involved and affected and the extent of change required by the policy; (2) the ambiguity of the National Education Act as the main framework of the education reform policy and other related regulations; (3) the lack of one main agency responsible for implementation of the education reform policy; (4) different levels of commitment and leadership of the governments; and (5) political instability in Thailand, especially from 2006-2009.

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Acknowledgements

A large number of people contributed to this thesis. First and foremost, I wish to thank my supervisors, Dr Robin Tennant-Wood and Dr Christopher Sadleir. Without their continuous academic and moral support from my first year at the University of Canberra (UC), this thesis would not have been completed. I also owe my gratitude to Sue Uzabeaga, Faculty Research Support Officer, Faculty of Business, Government and Law, who has been with much patience assisting me in many different ways throughout my study.

In Thailand, co-operation from a wide range of stakeholders in the education reform policy was of paramount significance. I thank all key informants who were willing to give interviews and to provide their information and opinions on the policy. The key informants are politicians who were responsible for the education reform policy in Thailand from 1999 to 2009, bureaucrats of the Ministry of Education and other related agencies, school executives, teachers, educational supervisors, scholars, and the chairperson of the National Parent Network Association.

My thanks also go to all of my lecturers and supervisors during my undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Thailand. They have always supported me morally and academically. Knowledge I got from them is a strong foundation for my thesis.

On a more personal note, I thank my family in Thailand who has been supporting me throughout my study. My husband, Thosaphon Chieocharnpraphan, has always been on my side for nine years in hardship and in happiness. Without his company, I would not have been able to come this far. Gregory Bruce Bradford, my best Australian friend who has made my life in Australia happy and enjoyable. He is also my best English teacher who has patiently taught me English since 2010 so that I can write this thesis more effectively. I also wish to thank Thomas Knight, who has always patiently fixed my computer. Without his assistance, my work would have been lost.

I am also in the debt of Allan and Jenny Nicholls, my homestay parents. They are like my father and mother in Australia. Without their kind support and generous assistance, I would not have been able to settle down well in Canberra. I thank all my Thai friends in Canberra. They are not only friends, but they are also my family members in Canberra. Last but not least, I thank Phenphan Weissel, my first Thai friend in Australia, who has always cooked delicious Thai food for me. The support from compatriots is always significant overseas.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Rationale and Significance of the Thesis

In 1997, Thailand encountered the most severe economic crisis in its modern history. This crisis had unprecedented traumatic effects on people's daily lives. The country's educational system was blamed on the ground that it had failed to prevent the crisis in the first place. On the other hand, it was also considered a solution to revive the country's economy from the recession, to lay a strong foundation to enhance the country's competitiveness in the era of globalisation, and to promote the wellbeing of Thai people in every perspective.

Before the promulgation of the National Education Act B.E.2542 (1999), hereinafter the National Education Act, there had been some critical problems in Thailand's educational system, which urgently needed to be resolved, exemplified by the inequality of access to high quality education between urban and rural children. There were about 7.1 million children between 13 and 24 years of age who were excluded from the compulsory educational system. Worse still, when compared to 47 other countries, Thailand's competitiveness ranked lowly at 33, which also reflected on the poor quality of the educational system (Office of Education Reform 2001a, p.1). Additionally, there had been other weaknesses that exacerbated the educational system of Thailand. These included: (1) the lack of reliable indicators to measure the standards of schools and other educational institutions nationwide; (2) the teacher-centred teaching method, which has ignored the true potential of learners; (3) the centralised administrative system which has led to the inefficiency, rigidity and inertia of decision-making procedures, as well as the low-level of participation of civil-society organisations and ordinary citizens. Consequently, the

demand for a comprehensive education reform had been continuously increasing in Thai society.

The most significant milestone which turned the education reform vision into reality was the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E.2540 (1997), which was commonly known as the ‘People’s Constitution’. It was the first constitution of Thailand having the most tangible provisions on education in Chapter 3, Rights and Liberties of the Thai People in Article 43 and in Chapter 5, Fundamental Principles of the State in Article 81. The first paragraph of Article 43 stipulated that “Persons have the equal right to receive not less than twelve years of basic, quality of education which must be provided free of charge by the government on generally available basis” (The Royal Thai Government 1997b, p. 10). Furthermore, Article 81 of the constitution stipulated that “The state must provide education and training, support the private sector to provide education and training to give rise to knowledge coupled with ethics, arrange to have a national education law...” (The Royal Thai Government 1997b, p. 16).

Two years later on 19 August, 1999, in order to comply with the provisions of the Constitution, Thailand’s first national education law was published in the Royal Government Gazette and came into force the day after (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p. 1-23). It has become the master plan and framework for the education reform policy of Thailand in later years.

Every step to implement the education reform policy as stipulated in the National Education Act seemed to be smooth when the Democrat Party and the Chart Thai Party were responsible for the education reform policy after the Act came into force. The 27th Prime Minister of Thailand, Abhisit Vejjajiva, was Deputy Leader of the Democrat Party and Minister to the Prime Minister’s Office responsible for formulating the education

reform policy in 1999. Somsak Prissanananthakul of the Chart Thai Party was the Minister of Education. However, the major obstacle to the education reform policy began when the Chuan Leekpai Government dissolved the House of Representatives on 9 November, 2000, and called an election on 6 January 2001 (The Royal Thai Government 2000d, p. 1-2). Police Lieutenant Colonel Thaksin Shinawatra, hereinafter Thaksin, became the 23rd Prime Minister of Thailand after he led his Thai Rak Thai (TRT) Party to defeat the Chuan Leekpai's Democrat Party Government. Thaksin's political party won almost half of the seats in the House of Representatives, 248 out of 500 (Pongsudhirak 2009, p. 32).

The government, led by the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) Party with Thaksin Shinawatra as the Prime Minister, delivered a policy statement before the joint parliamentary session on 26 February 2001. In that policy statement, the education reform agenda was not one of the government's urgent policies. The urgent policies of the Thaksin Government were mainly about reviving the economy of Thailand from recession: (1) Three-year individual small farmers' debt suspension; (2) Establishment of the one-million baht Village and Urban Community Revolving Fund; (3) Establishment of the People's Bank; (4) Establishment of the Small-and Medium sized Enterprise Bank; (5) Establishment of a National Asset Management Corporation in order to comprehensively solve the problem of Non-Performing Loans (NPLs) in the commercial banking system; (6) Development of State Enterprises; (7) Universal Health Care Insurance Scheme in which Thai people needed to pay only 30 baht when they went to hospitals; (8) Illegal drugs clamp down; and (9) Corruption elimination (The Secretariat of the Cabinet 2001a).

However, the government declared the education policy as follows:

the Government is determined to launch education reform in accordance with the provisions and the spirit of the 1997 Constitution and the 1999 Education Act, with the aim of developing Thailand into a knowledge-based society, which is a pre-requisite for becoming a knowledge-based economy. The reforms will provide the Thai public with equal access to life-long education and training, enabling them to acquire knowledge and capital to generate income and to eventually pull the country out of the economic and social crisis. Towards this end, the Government will abide by the principle that “Education Builds the Nation, Empowers the Individual and Generates Employment”... (The Secretariat of the Cabinet 2001a).

This engendered doubts among officials and scholars in the education sector as well as ordinary people about the sincerity of the government to push forward the education reform policy.

Furthermore, during five years of the Thaksin administration from 2001 to 2006, the cabinet was reshuffled several times with the rotation of six Education Ministers including Thaksin himself. In 2002, when Suwit Khunkitti became the Minister of Education, the National Education Act was amended in order to separate the organisations responsible for religious and cultural missions, to establish the Ministry of Culture, which caused delays to the implementation of the education reform policy set by the National Education Act (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p. 19-22; The Royal Thai Government 2002d, p. 16-21). Besides, the Thaksin Government also failed to provide free education for every Thai citizen as stipulated in the 1997 Constitution. Because of insufficient government funds to subsidise every public school, many students were required to pay for expenses previously covered by the government. According to the study of the Office of the National Human

Rights Commission of Thailand, parents had to pay 2,000 Baht more per semester in 2004 for the education of their children, and 3,500 Baht per semester in 2005 (*'Krueakai Kanakummakan'* 2006).

From the end of 2005, the Thaksin Government faced strong resistance from the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), or the yellow shirt protestors, and Thaksin was toppled in the bloodless coup d'état of 19 September 2006. Until the end of 2008, the political situation in Thailand was dominated by the conflicts between the pro- and the anti-Thaksin movements, so the agenda of the education reform almost entirely disappeared from the public interest. Even though the 2007 Constitution of Thailand, which was drafted after the coup d'état, also recognised the rights of Thai people to access high quality education free of charge in Article 49 (The Royal Thai Government 2007, p. 15), the Thai government appointed by the military junta (2006-2007) was largely interested in pushing for the privatisation of public universities in Thailand including Chulalongkorn University, the first university of Thailand established by King Rama VI (The Royal Thai Government 2008a, p. 56-86). At the end of 2008, when the Democrat Party came to power and Jurin Laksanawisit, the deputy leader of the Democrat Party who was responsible for drafting policies of the party for the 2007 general election campaign, was appointed the Minister of Education. The situation seemed to be slightly better when he commenced to undertake some tangible measures to implement the education reform policy, for example, the 15-Year Quality and Free Education for all Children in the Academic Year 2009 and the Tutor Channel Project.

The governments of Thailand within the timeframe of this thesis can be divided into three groups: (1) the Democrat Party from 1999 to the beginning of 2001 and from the end of 2008 to 2009; (2) the Thai Rak Thai Party and other political parties associated with

Thaksin Shinawatra from 2001 to 2006 and in 2008; and (3) the government appointed by the military junta after the coup d'état on 19 September 2006. Moreover, there were six prime ministers and eleven ministers of education from 1999 to 2009. Each of them had their own priorities, approaches and styles when implementing the education reform policy.

Theoretically, the significance of the roles of governments in policy implementation is supported by a top-down theory. Top-down theorists argue that the successful implementation of public policy is achieved through good executive management (Kendal 2010, p. 4). Moreover, people involved in the implementation process are directed by the objectives set in policy decisions (Van Meter & Van Horn 1975, p. 445).

Despite the fact that the roles of governments are significant in policy implementation, it has not been researched in detail. Although there are some reports assessing the progress of the education reform policy in Thailand during this period, they provided only a general overview (Fry 2002) or focused on particular issues such as school reform (Atagi 2002), but did not focus particularly on the roles of governments. Therefore, this study will study in detail the roles of governments in the education reform policy from 1999 to 2009.

Aims and Objectives of the Thesis

The broad aims of this research are to study the roles of governments in the implementation of the education reform policy in Thailand, and to examine how their actions or nonactions were influenced based on the top-down approach to policy implementation analysis. In order to achieve these two aims, this research has six specific objectives as follows: (1) to examine the substance of the Constitution of Thailand B.E. 2540 (1997) and B.E. 2550 (2007) and the National Education Act as the main

frameworks for the education reform policy as well as other related regulations; (2) to identify what the goals of the education reform policy are, and what the governments of Thailand needed to implement to achieve those goals; (3) to understand the goals of each government pertaining to the education reform policy by investigating the policy statements delivered by each government of Thailand from 1999 to 2009 to joint parliamentary meetings before they could formally commence their duties, according to Article 211 of the 1997 Constitution and Article 176 of the 2007 Constitution of Thailand (The Royal Thai Government 1997b, p. 54; The Royal Thai Government 2007, p. 66); (4) to investigate what each government of Thailand from 1999 to 2009 did or did not do to reform the educational system of Thailand and the rationale behind their actions or nonactions; (5) to collect data on how other groups of stakeholders such as members of the opposition parties, the civil society organisations and some scholars who have been continuously scrutinising the governments of Thailand on this policy, viewed and thought about each government's actions or nonactions; (6) to analyse how the governments' actions or nonactions were influenced by factors based on the top-down approach to policy implementation analysis.

Thesis Questions

In order to achieve the aims and objectives mentioned above, this research has two research questions, namely:

(1) From 1999 to 2009, what each government of Thailand during this period did or did not do to implement the education reform policy?

(2) How did the factors based on the top-down approach to policy implementation analysis influence the actions or nonactions of each government of Thailand from 1999 to

2009 with regard to the implementation of the education reform policy according to the provisions of the National Education Act and other related laws and regulations?

Justifications for the Thesis

This thesis will contribute to the academic field of public administration and Thai society in the following ways:

(1) The thesis highlights the validity of the top-down approach of policy implementation analysis as the main framework for analysing the roles of Thai governments in the education reform policy;

(2) The thesis provides details of what each government did or did not do in order to implement the education reform policy since the promulgation of the National Education Act to the 10th anniversary of this policy in 2009;

(3) Apart from focusing on only bureaucrats in the phase of policy implementation and other actors such as teachers or executives of educational institutions in the education reform policy, the thesis urges people to realise the significance of the roles of governments in the education reform policy. This encourages Thai people to scrutinise the actions of governments regarding the education policy more closely;

(4) The thesis draws the lessons for the future of the education reform policy in Thailand. Thai governments can learn lessons from this period, so they know what they should and should not do in order to successfully implement education policy.

Chapter Structure

The next chapter, Chapter 2, explains briefly the history of the education reform policy in Thailand since the reign of King Rama V in the second half of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth centuries. The chapter then reviews the literature on models of public policy, roles of the cabinet in public policy, the top-down approach of policy implementation analysis, which will be adopted as the main framework for this thesis. Chapter 3 elaborates in detail research methodology and methods of this thesis. After that, there are five chapters which devote to each factor influencing the roles of governments in the education reform policy namely: (1) the size of target groups involved and affected and the extent of change required by the policy; (2) the ambiguity of the National Education Act as the main framework for the policy and other related regulations; (3) the lack of one main agency responsible for implementation of the education reform policy; (4) different levels of commitment and leadership of the governments between the three groups of governments; and (5) political instability in Thailand, especially from 2006 to 2009. Chapter 10 is discussion, conclusion and suggestions.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter explains briefly the history of the education reform policy in Thailand since the reign of King Rama V in the second half of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth centuries. The chapter then reviews the literature on models of public policy, roles of the cabinet in public policy, the top-down approach of policy implementation analysis, which will be adopted as the framework and guideline for this thesis.

History of Education Reform in Thailand

Before the major education reform in the reign of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V), who ruled Thailand or Siam at the time from 1868-1910, monasteries were the centres of education, and the monks were the main teachers who could teach every subject deemed necessary for young men (Fry 2002, p. 4).

According to Fry (2002, p. 21), education reform in Thailand can be divided into four phases. The first phase occurred during the reign of King Chulalongkorn or King Rama V from 1868-1910. Kullada *Kesboonchoo-Mead* (2004, p. 68) argued that the main rationale for the education reform in this period was to supply the modern bureaucratic system, the main organisation for a modern centralised state, with a sufficient number of literate officials, as she pointed out:

The creation of the absolutist state with its modern bureaucracy fundamentally changed the way official business was conducted, as literate skills were now indispensable. The king's daily audiences became perfunctory, and the most significant business was carried out in various ministries generating streams of paperwork. Literate officials were needed

from the outset in 1872, when the king established a corps of salaried officials who were to keep office hours and carry out their business in office (Mead 2004, 68).

The King established Suan Anan and Suan Kulap schools in 1879 and 1880 respectively in order to educate the royalty and nobility. In order to expand education to ordinary people King Chulalongkorn encouraged monasteries to be integrated into the new educational system. This scheme began in 1875. Mead (2004, p. 74) argued that “the government involved itself by supporting the production of new textbooks and paying salaries to both monk and lay teachers. Moreover, King Chulalongkorn also established the Training School of the Civil Service, which later was upgraded to be Chulalongkorn University, the Law School, and the Military Officers’ Academy to train future bureaucrats with specialised skills (Mead 2004, p. 77).

The second phase of education reform in Thailand occurred after the uprising of university students and Thai people to topple the authoritarian regime in 1973. The key feature was the unification of the basic education including primary and secondary education under the Ministry of Education. Moreover, it was the period in which there was a demand for a more open curriculum, and many Marxist writings were allowed (Fry 2002, p. 12-13).

The third phase of education reform in Thailand occurred in 1990-1995 in response to globalisation and internationalisation of the Thai economy. Cooperation and integration between numerous actors in society such as the government, teachers and schools, parents, religious leaders, businessmen and industrialists was needed in order to improve the quality of the educational system of Thailand (Commission on Thailand’s Education in the Era of Globalization: Towards National Progress and Security in the Next Century 1996, p. 36).

The fourth phase began in 1997 when Thailand was confronted with the most severe economic crisis in its modern history. This crisis became the fundamental motive of the education reform policy. The constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand 1997 became the first constitution with the most tangible provisions on education. Two years later, the National Education Act came into effect. Atagi (2002 p. 27) argued that the National Education Act was developed based on extensive research on 42 major issues with great public participation from every stakeholder in society. It is the most comprehensive education reform in the history of Thailand including eight main components namely: (1) ensuring basic education for all; (2) reform of the educational system, curriculum and learning process; (3) encouraging participation and partnership in education; (4) restructuring the of educational administrative structure; (5) enhancing standards and quality; (6) Reform of teachers and personnel; (7) Mobilisation of resources and investment for Education; and (8) Utilization of Technologies for Education (Office of the National Education Commission 1999a, p. 116-122).

Elements for Successful Education Reform

Drawing the lessons from many countries, Atagi (2002, p. 17-19) identified some critical elements for successful education reform policy, and categorised them into state, school and classroom levels.

At the state level, authority from central administration must be centralised to the local area and educational institutions in order to give some flexibility to the operational level. Moreover, the government must provide sufficient financial and technical resources for the reform policy. Most importantly, the government needs to play the leadership roles in the education reform policy.

At the school level, clear visions and goals, effective management, reform-oriented cultural environment and teachers with high professional skills are of great significance to successful education reform.

Lastly, at the classroom level, an appropriate curriculum, pedagogy, technology such as computers and internet and class size all significantly contribute to the success of education reform.

Hallinger et al. (2000, p. 219-223) interviewed some executives of schools in the Northern part of Thailand. From the perspectives they received, they identified three major qualifications that the Ministry of Education and the government needed to have in order to successfully implement the education reform policy, namely: *Jingjai* (sincerity), *Jingjung* (seriousness), and *Naenorn* (consistency of policies from the central government). *Jingjai* means the government and the Ministry of Education need to support educational personnel at the local levels substantively (Hallinger et al 2000, p. 219-220). *Jingjung* means effective communication between the policy-decision makers in Bangkok and the staff who need to implement the policies at the local levels (Hallinger et al. 2000, p. 220-222). *Naenorn* is connected to the political stability of Thailand because the education policy always changes whenever the new governments assume power. Political instability in Thailand becomes one of the major obstacles to the education reform policy.

Public Policy

Dye (2010, p. 1) defines public policy as “whatever governments choose to do or not to do.” Easton (1953, p. 129) presents a similar definition, which is “the authoritative allocation of values for the whole society.”

Dye presents many models to conceptualise public policies. For this thesis three models are useful for examining the roles of governments in the education reform policy in Thailand from 1999 to 2009. The three models include: institutional, elite, and group models. In an institutional model, public policy as Dye argues, is authoritatively determined, implemented, and enforced by government institutions. Moreover, government institutions also give public policy three distinctive characteristics. First, government institutions make public policy legitimate because only government policies involve legal obligation, which every citizen needs to obey and follow. Second, government institutions make public policy universal as it will reach the whole society. Third, government institutions can coerce their citizens to follow their policies (Dye 2010, p. 12). Sombat Thamrongthanyawong (2006, p. 226-227) divided governmental institutions into three branches: executive, legislative and judiciary.

In the implementation of the education reform policy in Thailand from 1999 to 2009, many government institutions were involved, for example, the governments, the Office of Education Reform (OER) set up by the National Education Act, Ministry of Education, Ministry of the Prime Minister’s Office, and Parliament. In order to understand the roles of governments in the education reform policy, it is necessary to understand the roles of government institutions.

Another model is an elite model. This model suggests that public policy does not reflect the demands of the people or the mass, but public policy is the preferences of elites. The main reason is that the mass are always ill informed about public policy. Consequently, elites can influence and shape mass opinions on public policy but not vice versa. Changes in public policy occur when there are changes in the values of elites, and the changes are always incremental, not revolutionary (Dye 2010, p. 20-22). Even though non-state actors were involved in the education reform policy in Thailand, the Thai elites still played leading roles in directing and implementing the policy which is the focus of this thesis.

Sombat (2006, p. 206-207) pointed out that the elite model can be applied to the deregulation of Thailand's financial sector implemented by the Chuan Leekpai and the Chavalit Yongchaiyudh Governments as ordinary Thai people did not have much influence in the formulation of this policy.

The other useful model is a group model, which suggests that public policy is equilibrium in the group struggle. Individuals who have common interests form interest groups to put pressure on governments to comply with their demands. Each group in society tries to influence public policy, therefore, public policy is the result of the struggles between groups. Public policy tends to move in the direction of the groups which have increasing influence (Dye 2010, p. 19-20). According to Sombat (2006, p. 210-211), the Sugar Cane and Sugar Act B.E. 2527 (1984) was a result of the compromise of interests and demands between sugar cane growers and sugar producers. In the case of the education reform policy in Thailand from 1999 to 2009, despite the fact that the elites play leading roles, other actors had some influence to either support or oppose the governments' actions or nonactions to implement the education reform policy. Therefore, it is also useful to adopt this model.

Roles of the Cabinet in Public Policy

Bridgman and Davis (1998, p. 9) define the cabinet as “a meeting of ministers, chaired by the prime minister, premier or chief minister, at which political and policy decisions are made.” Weller (1990, p. 33) identified six major roles of the cabinet pertaining to public policy. First, the cabinet acts as a clearing-house by providing an authoritative decision on many issues. Second, the cabinet is a platform for information exchange between ministers. Third, when government agencies disagree with one another, the cabinet performs a function as an arbiter. The cabinet determines the priority of issues and budget allocation. Fourth, the cabinet is a political decision maker. They have to consider the electoral consequences of the policy proposals. Fifth, the cabinet must ensure coordination of policies between many government agencies. The final role is the guardian of the strategy of the government. The cabinet is the forum which sets overall themes and objectives for the government.

Policy Implementation

As the focus of this thesis is the implementation of the education reform policy by various governments of Thailand from 1999 to 2009, it is necessary to review the concept of policy implementation and the approaches to policy implementation analysis.

Policy implementation is considered as a separate stage from a policy formation stage (Hill & Hupe 2009, p. 7). Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983, p. 20-21) presented a definition of implementation as:

Implementation is the carrying out of a basic policy decision, usually incorporated in a statute but which also take the form of executive orders or court decisions. Ideally, that decision identifies the problem(s) to be addressed, stipulates the objective(s) to be

pursued, and in a variety of ways, 'structures' the implementation process. The process normally runs through a number of stages beginning with passage of the basic statute, followed by the policy outputs (decisions) of the implementing agencies, the compliance of target groups with those decisions, the actual impacts – both intended and unintended – of those outputs, the perceived impacts of agency decisions, and finally, important revisions (or attempted revisions) in the basic statute.

Ripley and Franklin (1986, p. 4) presented a similar definition of policy implementation. They separate policy implementation from the stage of policy formulation, and implementation can be both actions and nonactions of actors involved as follows:

what happens after laws are passed authorizing a program, a policy, a benefit, or some kind of tangible output. The term refers to the set of activities that follow statement of intent about program goals and desired results by government officials. Implementation encompasses actions (and nonactions) by a variety of actors, especially bureaucrats, designed to put programs into effect, ostensibly in such a way as to achieve goals.

According to Hill (2009, p. 174-194), there are two main models for the study of policy implementation. The first model is the top-down model. This model separates the stage of policy implementation from policy formulation. People involved in the implementation process are directed by the objectives set in policy decisions (Van Meter & Van Horn 1975, p. 445). The other model is the bottom-up model, which emphasises the roles of what Lipsky calls 'street-level bureaucrats' (Hill & Hupe 2002, p.51). Street-level bureaucrats, in dealing with their daily workloads, have to make choices on their own how to make use of their scarce resources. Controlled and directed from the top will lead to worse service delivery (Hill & Hupe 2002, p. 52-53).

Top-down Approach to Policy Implementation Analysis

Hill and Hupe (2002, p. 45-51) referred to some scholars who contributed to the top-down approach of policy implementation, for example, Van Meter and Van Hon, Sabatier and Mazmanian, Hogwood and Gunn. To begin with, according to Matland (1995, p. 147), there are some general points which top-down theorists share: “(1) make policy goals clear and consistent; (2) minimise the number of actors; (3) limit the extent of change necessary; and (4) place implementation responsibility in an agency sympathetic with the policy’s goals.”

Van Meter and Van Horn (1975, p. 458) firstly identified two features affecting policy implementation: the level of change required and the level of goal consensus among actors involved in implementation. Concerning the level of change required, according to Van Meter and Van Horn (1975, p. 458), “incremental changes are more likely to engender a positive response than will drastic ones.” Moreover, implementation would be more likely to succeed if the agencies involved would not be required to reorganise themselves to a considerable degree (Van Meter & Van Horn 1975, p. 459). When discussing the level of goal consensus, they focused on the level of participation from subordinates or implementors “in the making of the policy decision” (Van Meter and Van Horn 1975, p. 459). Van Meter and Van Horn (1975, p. 461) therefore concluded that in principle “implementation will be most successful where only marginal change is required and goal consensus in high.” However, they also noted that high level of goal consensus would not necessarily remove all problems of policy implementation (Van Meter and Van Horn 1975, p. 459-460). They went on to identify six variables which affect the implementation phase of public policy (Van Meter and Van Horn 1975, p. 462-474): (1) policy standards and objectives, which “move beyond the generalities of the legislative document to

provide concrete and more specific standards for assessing program performance” (Van Meter and Van Horn 1975, p. 464); (2) resources must be available; (3) interorganisational communication and relationships, especially if there is one superior organisation which can direct and influence others; (4) the characteristics of the implementation agencies, for example, the competence and size of the agency, the degree of hierarchical control, the political resources of the agency, the agency’s links with the policy-making body etc.; (5) economic, social and political conditions; and (6) disposition and attitudes of implementers towards the goals and standards of a policy.

Mazmanian and Sabatier (1989, p. 21) divided a large number of factors affecting implementation into three categories: “(1) the tractability of the problem(s) being addressed; (2) the ability of the statute to structure favourably the implementation process; and (3) the net effect of a variety of political variables on the balance of support for statutory objectives.”

In the first category, there are four issues to be considered: (1) technical difficulties; (2) diversity of proscribed behaviour; (3) the size of a target group (the smaller the target group is, the more likely the implementation to be successful; (4) extent of behavioural change required (Mazmanian & Sabatier 1989, p. 21-25). The issues in the second category (the ability of the statute to structure the implementation process) include: (1) clear and consistent objectives; (2) valid causal theory; (3) initial allocation of financial resources; (4) hierarchical integration within and among implementing institutions; (5) decision rules of implementing agencies; (6) officials commitment to objectives; and (7) formal access by outsiders (Mazmanian & Sabatier 1989, p. 25-30). Finally, nonstatutory variables are the followings: (1) socioeconomic conditions and technology; (2) public support; (3) attitudes and resources of constituency groups; (4) support from sovereigns;

and (5) commitment and leadership skill of implementing officials (Mazmanian & Sabatier 1989, p. 30-35).

Hogwood and Gunn (1984, p. 199-206), provided ten recommendations for policy makers to ensure successful policy implementation which could be summarised as follows: (1) external circumstances should not be constraints; (2) adequate time and resources must be provided; (3) required resources must be available for each stage in the implementation process; (4) a policy needs to be based on a valid theory of cause and effect; (5) the cause and effect relationship is direct; (6) there is one implementing agency without the need to be dependent on others; (7) complete understanding of, and agreement on objectives to be achieved; (8) the tasks to be performed by each participant is specified in detail; (9) perfect communication and communication between agencies involved; and (10) the authorities of those in command.

In order to measure the success of policy implementation, Ripley and Franklin (1986, p. 232) presented three dominant ways of thinking. First, success should be measured by the degree of compliance bureaucracies. Second, successful implementation should be characterised by smoothly functioning routines and the absence of problems. And third, successful implementation should lead to desired performance and impacts.

It should be noted that the top-down approach meets three sets of criticisms and limitations (Matland 1995, p. 147). First, the approach fails to consider the policy-making process as a significant step for policy implementation (Matland 1995, p. 147). Second, the top-down approach tries to ignore the political aspects of the implementation process (Matland 1995, p. 147). Matland (1995, p. 147-148) argued that “the call for clear, explicit, and consistent goals contradicts much of what is known about how legislation is passed. Passage of legislation often requires ambiguous language and contradictory goals

to hold together a passing coalition.” Third, the bottom-up approach proponents criticise the top-down approach that it ignores the roles of officers at the operational level in implementing public policy (Matland 1995, p. 148).

However, these limitations are acceptable to this thesis because the thesis mainly focuses on the roles of governments, not other actors, in the implementation of the education reform policy. Moreover, this thesis aims to study the stage of policy implementation, not the stage of policy formulation. As a result, the thesis concentrated mostly on studying what happened after the National Education Act came into force on 20 August 1999, not on how the Act was drafted and enacted in the first place. Nevertheless, the origin of the National Education Act will be discussed briefly in Chapter 4.

In conclusion, based on the literature on the top-down approach to policy implementation analysis, there are five factors which are the main framework of this thesis influencing the governments’ action or nonactions to implement the education reform policy as follows: (1) the size of target groups involved and affected and the extent of change required by the policy; (2) the ambiguity of the National Education Act as the main framework for the policy; (3) the lack of one main agency responsible for implementation and the lack of agreement on the education reform policy; (4) different levels of commitment and leadership of the governments between the three groups of governments; and (5) political instability in Thailand, especially from 2006 to 2009. The thesis also explores the roles of different groups of institutions, elites and groups influencing the implementation of the education reform policy based on the models proposed by Dye.

The next chapter, Chapter 3, explains in detail research methodology and methods used in this thesis.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology and Methods

In order to answer the thesis questions and achieve the aims and objectives of the research identified in the Chapter 1, this research uses a qualitative research methodology. Bryman (2008, p. 22) explained that qualitative research could be construed as a research methodology which emphasises words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data. Strauss and Corbin (Golafshani 2003, p. 600) defined qualitative research as “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification.” There are three reasons a qualitative research methodology is used, and why a quantitative research methodology is inappropriate for this research. First, a qualitative research methodology allows the researcher to investigate the complex issues more profoundly (Miwa 2000, p. 6). A quantitative research methodology can be used to collect data on the attitudes of the significant stakeholders such as teachers and students on the roles of governments in the education reform policy, or may be able to measure which dimension of the roles of governments influenced the education reform policy the most, but it will not be able to provide in-depth information and details on this particular issue to answer the research questions. As the perspectives and the roles of governments in the education reform policy and the impacts of their actions and nonactions are the complex issues, a qualitative research methodology will lead to a better understanding. Second, the aim of quantitative research is to examine the causality between independent and dependent variables (Bryman 2008, p. 156), but the aim of this research is to explore in detail the roles of governments of Thailand within the timeframe mentioned, therefore, it is not compatible with a quantitative research methodology. Lastly, the results of this research are within the

specific context and the specific timeframe; they do not need to be generalised, consequently, a quantitative research methodology is not appropriate.

Due to the fact that a qualitative research methodology is used in this thesis, the researcher also adopts social constructivism as the ontological stance and interpretivism as the epistemological stance. Creswell (2009, p. 8) argued that social constructivism is seen as an approach to qualitative research. According to this ontological stance, “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences...The goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied” (Creswell 2009, p. 8). Pertaining to the epistemological stance, interpretivism suggests that reality is socially constructed, and in order to understand social phenomena fully, the researcher needs to be involved in those phenomena. It is also necessary to understand the context in which those phenomena take place (Bryman 2008, p. 15; Lee & Lings 2008, p. 59, 374-375). In this thesis, it is necessary for the researcher to understand how each government of Thailand from 1999 to 2009 and each individual Prime Minister, Minister of Education and other related actors understood, viewed and interpreted their duties to implement the education reform policy, which is in accordance with the ontological and epistemological stances described above.

However, in qualitative research, there are many methodologies, for instance, biography, phenomenology, ethnography, and case study (Creswell 2009, p. 8). In this research, a case study approach is chosen because it enables “an in-depth study of a single unit (a relatively bounded phenomenon) where the scholar’s aim is to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena” (Sadleir 2007, p. 74). Besides, a case study methodology also allows a researcher to use many methods to collect data to understand a

specific case (Creswell 2009, p. 13). The scope of the case study for this research is sufficiently interesting and justifiable, which will be explained in the following section.

The Scope of the Thesis

The education reform in Thailand began during the reign of King Rama V in order to create a modern bureaucratic system. After that there have been numerous attempts to reform Thailand's education. However, the education reform policy which began in 1999 was the most comprehensive reform in Thailand's history covering a wide range of issues.

The thesis examines the roles of governments in the education reform policy since the promulgation of the National Education Act to its 10th anniversary in 2009. There are four points which need to be clarified and justified.

First, the level of education on which the thesis focuses is the basic education, which according to the National Education Act encompasses primary and secondary education which begins from Year 1 at the primary level when a student is 7 years old to Year 12 at the senior secondary level when a student is 18 years old (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p.2). This is because the Thai government has more power to control the basic education than the tertiary education. In other words, universities in Thailand are more independent than primary and secondary schools. Each university has its own university council, which has autonomy to administer the university. For example, the Chulalongkorn University Act B.E. 2551 (2008) (The Royal Thai Government 2008a, p. 64-65) authorises the University Council to determine the development policy of the university. The Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) only coordinates between universities and between universities and the government; it does not have any authority over the universities at all (The Royal Thai Government 2003d, p. 24-25). In

simpler words, the government does not have much power to control universities in Thailand.

Second, concerning the timeframe of the thesis, 1999 was the year in which the education policy reform formally began when the first National Education Act of Thailand came into force; and 2009 was the year in which the 15-year quality and free education for all children was fully implemented. Moreover, during this period, the education reform policy became the national agenda, almost every government attached great significance to this policy regardless of whether they could do as they had promised or not. Also, civil society organisations, scholars, parents, teachers, students and other stakeholders closely monitored this policy and actively participated in every process. Many conferences and workshops were held in order to brainstorm how to implement the education reform policy most effectively. Moreover, as education reform policy has entered the second decade in 2010, it will be beneficial to review the roles of each government in the first ten years which contributed to the success or failure of this policy. Many valuable lessons can be drawn from this period and can be applied to improve this policy in the future. Consequently, 1999 to 2009 is the most appropriate period to investigate this policy thoroughly.

The third point is about the level of government on which the thesis concentrates. This thesis only focuses on the central government located in Bangkok. As Thailand is a democratic country with a parliamentary system, the central government of Thailand is normally formed by a political party or a group of political parties which win the most Members of Parliament (MPs), and finds sufficient votes in the House of Representatives after each general election. The main reason is that Thailand is a unitary and highly centralised state with the central government responsible for education policy. According

to the statistics of the Office of the Education Council (2004, p. 6), local governments in 2004 were responsible for only 6% of the educational institutions, most of which were childcare centres. In 2008, according to the Office of the Education Council (2009, p. 85-86), many ministries of the central government including the Ministry of Education as the main organisation, the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and the Royal Thai Police Headquarter were responsible for 37,225 from 52,879 educational institutions or approximately 70.39% all over the country. Moreover, every educational institution administered by the local governments throughout Thailand must be assessed by the central government.

The final point is the meaning of the word 'government' in this research. Unlike the Australian political system in which not every minister is a member of the cabinet; the cabinet in Australia at the federal level comprises only the prime minister and some senior ministers (Bridgman & Davis 1998, p. 9-10). The members of the current Abbott ministry are, apart from Tony Abbott himself as the Prime Minister, the Treasurer, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister for Trade and some other ministers (*'Tony Abbott's cabinet and outer ministry'*, 2013). There are also outer ministers who are not the member of the cabinet exemplified by **Luke Hartsuyker**, the Assistant Minister for Employment (*'Tony Abbott's cabinet and outer ministry'*, 2013).

On the contrary, in the context of Thai politics, every minister and deputy minister is a member of the cabinet. According to the 1997 and 2007 Constitutions, the Cabinet consists of the prime minister and 35 other ministers (The Royal Thai Government 1997b, p. 52; The Royal Thai Government 2007, p. 65). Consequently, the government in this research is equivalent to the cabinet.

During this period, there were six Prime Ministers and eleven Ministers of Education. Six prime ministers included: (1) Chuan Leekpai, leader of the Democrat Party; (2) Thaksin Shinawatra, who won two general elections and was deposed by the coup d'état on 19 September 2006; (3) General (retired) Surayud Chulanont appointed by the military junta after the coup; (4) Samak Sundaravej; (5) Somchai Wongsawat, brother-in-law of Thaksin; and (6) Abhisit Vejjajiva, leader of the Democrat Party.

Eleven Ministers of Education from 1999 to 2009 included: (1) Somsak Prissanananthakul; (2) Kasem Watanachai; (3) Thaksin Shinawatra; (4) Suwit Khunkitti; (5) Pongpol Adireksan; (6) Adisai Bodharamik; (7) Chaturon Chaisang; (8) Witchit Srisa-an; (9) Somchai Wongsawat; (10) Srimuang Charoensiri; and (11) Jurin Laksanawisit.

Adisai Bodharamik was the longest serving Minister of Education from 8 November 2003 to 2 August 2005 (The Royal Thai Government 2003i, p. 2; The Royal Thai Government 2005b, p. 4). Srimuang Charoensiri was the shortest-serving Minister of Education from 24 September 2005 to 2 December 2008, when his People Power Party was dissolved by the Constitutional Court and Srimuang was removed from the position and banned from politics for five years (The Royal Thai Government 2008e, p. 4; The Royal Thai Government 2008b, p. 1, 26-27).

Research Methods

In qualitative research, there are many research methods which can be employed including semi-structured interviewing, document analysis, participant observation and focus group etc. This thesis is undertaken by two main methods, namely: document analysis and semi-structured interviewing with key informants who played important roles in the education reform policy in Thailand from 1999 to 2009. Semi-structured interviewing and document analysis can complement each other. Document analysis can provide sufficient background knowledge and ideas which can effectively guide the questions for semi-structured interviewing while semi-structured interviewing can fulfill the limitations of access to documents and bring the subjects matter alive (Sadleir 2007, p. 86). Moreover, it should also be noted that by combining these two methods, it helps enhance the reliability of the data obtained because the data can be compared, contrasted and cross-examined (Andari 2007, p. 73). However, in this thesis, other methods are not appropriate. For example, participant observation cannot be used because the phenomenon in this research already ended, and there is no ongoing situation to be observed, Focus group as a group interview comprising of at least four interviewees (Bryman 2008, p. 473) is not appropriate either because when there are many interviewees being interviewed simultaneously, their views may be affected by other participants' views, so some participants may not express their views independently (Bryman 2008, p. 489).

The order of the methods begins with document analysis in order to obtain preliminary information on the education reform policy in Thailand from 1999 to 2009 and to find interesting topics to be the questions for semi-structured interviewing. However, as there are many kinds of documents which can be used, for example, personal documents such as letters and autobiographies, official documents, and news articles. Before using them, their

reliability must be assessed. Booth, Colomb and Williams (2008, p. 77-78) identified some criteria which can be used to evaluate the reliability of documents, for instance, whether the documents are published or posted online by a reputable press; whether they are peer-reviewed; or whether the author is a reputable scholars. The thesis begins by examining some official documents, news articles concerning the education reform policy, and written work of reputable scholars in the field of the education policy. After having sufficient information, semi-structured interviewing is conducted.

In semi-structure interviewing, the researcher has a list of questions or specific topics which need to be covered in the interviewing, but simultaneously the researcher can ask different questions, or pick up some interesting points raised by the interviewees to continue their conversations (Bryman 2008, p. 438). The questions for semi-structured interviewing should be in 'what', 'how', and 'why' rather than 'yes-no' formats in order to let the interviewees express their views with minimal limitations (Miwa 2000, p. 50). There are two kinds of non-probability sampling techniques which were used in this research: purposive and snowball sampling, neither of which can be generalised to the population (Bryman 2008, p. 415). In purposive sampling, the samples are drawn strategically, especially people who are highly relevant to the research topic (Babbie 2007, p. 184). Another technique is 'snowball sampling'. The people to whom the key informants refer were also interviewed in order to gain more information (Babbie 2007, p. 184-185).

The data collection phase of this thesis took place in Thailand in the second half of 2012. The key informants for this research are the politicians who were responsible for the education reform policy from 1999 to 2009. One of them were the former Prime Minister, as the head of government, who is still alive, living in Thailand and agreed to be

interviewed, Abhisit Vejjajiva. The five others were not interviewed because of different reasons. Samak Sundaravej already passed away. Thaksin Shinawtra, who served as the Prime Minister of Thailand from 9 November 2001 to 19 September 2006, is currently a fugitive, and his whereabouts is not certain. Chuan Leekpai, Somchai Wongsawat and General (retired) Surayud Chulanont declined to be interviewed.

Seven of the key informants were the former Ministers of Education, directly responsible for directing the education policy of the country. Some of them held more than one position directly responsible for the education policy of Thailand. For example, Chaturon Chaisang was appointed the Deputy Prime Minister responsible for the education policy and plans in March 2005 (The Royal Thai Government 2005a, p. 1); then in August 2005 he was reshuffled to be the Minister of Education (The Royal Thai Government 2005b, p. 4). Therefore, by interviewing these key informants who held more than one position, the researcher can obtain more information. Moreover, some of the former Ministers of the Prime Minister's Office and deputy Prime Ministers were also interviewed as they were responsible for the education policy and plans from 1999 to 2009.

The second group of the key informants is bureaucrats at both the senior and operational levels as they had to follow the policies and orders of the politicians and implement them. At the senior level, the interviewees included former members of the Executive Committee of the Office of Education Reform, former deputy secretary-general of the National Education Council, former permanent-secretaries of the Ministry of Education, current directors of the educational service areas, educational supervisors. At the operational level, the interviewees included directors of schools of all sizes – from very big to small as well as many teachers.

Besides, other stakeholder groups including reputable scholars who have always been following and writing books and articles on the education reform policy, some student and the chairperson of the National Parent Network Association were also asked to provide their opinions on the roles of the governments in the implementation of the education reform policy.

In order to enhance the validity and credibility of the data and information obtained and verify key informants' perspectives, document analysis was used again (Andari 2007, p. 73). The main key documents include, but are not limited to: (1) primary documents from the Ministry of Education of Thailand and Ministry of the Prime Minister's Office and other related agencies; (2) secondary documents, for example, reports from the government agencies and academic work of scholars in the field of education; (3) transcripts and proceedings of parliamentary debates and motions of no confidence on the education reform policy.

By combining the methods mentioned, the data and information can be cross-examined, compared and contrasted. In addition, this thesis used other techniques such as comparison of data from different subjects, and careful assessment of the specific context of the data obtained from both document analysis and semi-structured interviewing. By doing so, the research questions can be answered and the aims of the research can be achieved.

Before analysing the roles of governments in the implementation of the education reform policy based on five factors outlined in Chapter 2, it would be useful to discuss briefly how the National Education Act was formulated and how the Office of Education Reform (OER), the ad hoc public organisation responsible for drafting necessary legislations to implement the education reform policy was established.

Chapter 4

The Origin of the National Education Act

This chapter traces the origin of the National Education Act since the provision on education was stipulated in the 1997 Constitution until the National Education Act came into force on 20 August 1999. This chapter also elaborates how the Office of Education Reform, the ad hoc public organisation responsible for drafting necessary legislations to implement the education reform policy, was established.

As already explained in Chapter 1, the severe economic crisis which Thailand encountered in 1997 and the demand for political reform through drafting a new constitution were the two major factors contributing to the formulation of the National Education Act. Other factors included the current of globalisation, the expansion of the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and the demand to solve some ongoing educational problems which can be classified into five categories, namely: (1) educational administration; (2) quality of education; (3) resources and budget allocation in the educational system; (4) monitoring and evaluation system; and (5) opportunities and equality to access high quality education (Sriprasath et al. 2003, p. 6; Pipatrojanakamol 2004, p. 101-106). Worse, according to the study by Suranee Pipatrojanakamol (2004, p. 108), before the National Education Act came into force, Thailand had had more than 150 laws, regulations and plans about education. However, none of them was an Act which was approved by the National Assembly of Thailand consisting of the House of Representatives and the Senate, therefore, they could be easily amended depending on each government's policies. The result was a lack of the overall framework and direction for education policy in Thailand which is consistent enough so that each political party adheres to when they assume power.

The Constitution Drafting Assembly first convened on 7 January 1997 (The Royal Thai Government 1997a, p. 77-81), and it was not until 11 October 1997 when the new Constitution of Thailand, commonly known as the People's Constitution, was promulgated and came into effect (The Royal Thai Government 1997b, p. 1-99). It was the first constitution of Thailand having most tangible provisions on education in Chapter 3, Rights and Liberties of the Thai People in Article 43; and in Chapter 5, Fundamental Principles of the State in Article 81. According to the first paragraph of Article 43, "Persons have the equal right to receive not less than twelve years of basic, quality of education which must be provided free of charge by the government on generally available basis" (The Royal Thai Government 1997b, p. 10). The Constitution also had the provision requiring the government to enact the first national education law in Thailand's contemporary history (The Royal Thai Government 1997b, p. 16). It should be noted that at this early stage, the Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC), the government agency under the portfolio of the Prime Minister's Office, not politicians, played important roles in convincing the members of the Constitution Drafting Assembly to realise the significant of the issues related to education issues and to incorporate them in the Constitution despite the fact that some members of the Assembly who are legal and political science experts did not agree with the ONEC's proposals (Pipatrojanakamol 2004, p. 89-95).

After the Constitution came into effect in 1997, General Chavalit Yongchaiyuth, the Prime Minister at the time, resigned amidst the economic crisis. Chuan Leekpai, the leader of the Democrat Party, became Prime Minister and formed the coalition government at the end of 1997. The government realised the significance of enacting the national education law in compliance with the Constitution. In a policy statement which the government delivered to a joint parliamentary session on 20 November 1997, the government mentioned the

enactment of the national education law was one of its missions which it needed to accomplish (The Royal Thai Government 1997c, p. 153). Moreover, the government included the national education bill in the list of the bills necessary for administration of state affairs (The Royal Thai Government 1997c, p. 167). This policy statement reflected that the government led by the Democrat Party at the time had a strong will to uphold the provision and the spirit of the Constitution by expressing a strong will to put forward the national education law.

However, ONEC was still the main government agency which collaborated with other stakeholders in order to draft the national education bill. First, ONEC conducted documentary research on 42 significant issues on education and synthesised experiences from both Thailand and foreign countries to set up the main substances of the bill to be proposed to other stakeholders including the cabinet and the National Assembly (Pipatrojanakamol 2004, p. 119; Office of the National Education Commission 1999b, 3). The bill drafted by ONEC was examined, amended and scrutinised by scholars with a variety of expertise including education, law, economic and social development (Office of the National Education Commission 1999b, 3). At this stage, politicians had some roles. Among the members of the National Education Commission (NEC) at the time, there were two politicians who took the positions of the chair and the deputy chair persons of the Commission: Deputy Prime Minister Panja Kesornthong from the Chart Thai Party was the chairperson and Minister to the Prime Minister's Office Abhisit Vejjajiva from the Democrat Party was the vice chairperson respectively. This Commission had reviewed the bill drafted by ONEC before it was proposed to the Cabinet (Pipatrojanakamol 2004, p. 111-112). The Commission held seven meetings to consider the details of the National Education Bill, and Abhisit Vejjajiva assumed the responsibility to present the bill

approved by the Commission to the Cabinet (Office of the National Education Commission 2000, p. 86).

Apart from the bill drafted by ONEC and approved by the NEC, there were also the bills drafted by other government agencies and some politicians. The first organisation was the Standing Committee on Education of the House of Representatives, which was comprised of Members of Parliament from many political parties in the Lower House of Thailand. The Members of Parliament from four major political parties in the House of Representatives, namely: (1) the Democrat Party; (2) the Chart Thai Party; (3) the Chartpattana Party; and (4) the New Aspiration Party, also drafted the national education bills separately and introduced them for the consideration of the House of Representatives. The other two government agencies which drafted their own bills and proposed to the Cabinet for consideration were the Ministry of Education and the Office of the Primary Education Commission, one of the departments under the portfolio of the Ministry of Education (Pipatrojanakamol 2004, p 112-119).

On 23 June 1998, the Cabinet agreed in principle the national education bills proposed by the National Education Commission, the Ministry of Education and the Office of the Primary Education Commission. The Cabinet passed the bills to the Council of State, the legal advisory body of the government, to fuse all bills into one single bill by using the bill approved by the National Education Commission as the main one and to review every single word of the bill. This is a normal procedure of the legislative process in Thailand before the bill is introduced in the House of Representatives.

The Council of State sent the bill back to the Cabinet for approval on 20 October 1998. The day after, 21 October 1998, the last day of the parliamentary sitting period, the Cabinet introduced the bill to the House of Representatives. At the first reading of the bill,

the House of Representatives agreed to allow the other bills drafted by the four major political parties to be introduced at the same time. The debate of members on the principles of the bills at the first reading was short and all five bills were passed easily (The Royal Thai Government 1998, p. 171-172).

Then, the House of Representatives established an extraordinary committee comprising 45 members, nineteen of whom were senior bureaucrats from the Ministry of Education, ONEC and other related agencies, well-known academics in the field of education (The Royal Thai Government 1998, p. 172-174; Pipatrojanakamol 2004, p. 112-119; Office of the National Education Commission 1999b, p. 3). The rest of the committee were Members of Parliament from eight political parties in the House of Representatives at the time based on the number of seats each party held. This extraordinary committee had the authority to consider the bills in detail and amend any parts of the bills at its discretion. This committee was one of the biggest committee ever established to review the ordinary bills (Pipatrojanakamol 2004, p. 161). This was the step which politicians from every political party were heavily involved in considering the first national education law of Thailand.

Minister to the Prime Minister's Office Abhisit Vejjajiva responsible for this law from the drafting stage was elected the chairperson, and Somsak Prissananathakul, the Minister of Education from the Chart Thai Party was elected one of the vice chairpersons of the Committee (Office of the National Education Commission 1999b, p. 3-4). The Committee convened once a week for approximately four months. The meetings of the Committee often lasted all day. During the process, the Committee organised seven seminars in Bangkok, and all other regions of Thailand including the Northeast, the South, the North, and the East, in order to let other stakeholders express their opinions on many significant

issues on the educational system of Thailand and the substances of the bill (Office of the National Education Commission 2000, p. 12). According to the statistics presented by the Office of the National Education Commission (1999b, p. 4), throughout the whole legislative process of this law, 254,318 people attended various meetings, seminars and public hearings all over the country. At the stage of consideration in detail by the extraordinary committees of both the House of Representatives and the Senate, there were approximately 38,942 people who had the opportunity to express their opinions on the bill.

When the Committee of the House of Representatives reviewed the bill, the Committee presented the bill back to the session of the House of Representatives. The first session which the House of Representatives considered the billed amended by the Committee took place on 17 March 1999 (The Royal Thai Government 1999b, p. 204). Dr Rung Kaewdang, the Secretary-General of the National Education Commission at the time, one of the members of the extraordinary committee of the House of Representatives, commended Abhisit Vejjajiva for his academic leadership as the chairperson of the committee because he was able to answer almost every question raised by other ministers in the Cabinet and the Members of Parliament from both the government and the opposition sides and to convince them to approve the bill (Pipatrojanakamol 2004, p. 173). Dr Rung Kaewdang also claimed that leadership and knowledge of the minister on education greatly contributed to the success of the legislative process of the National Education Act (Pipatrojanakamol 2004, p. 173). Abhisit Vejjajiva (The Secretariat of the House of Representatives of Thailand 2004, p. 255-256) claimed that the National Education Act was the output of co-operation between every political party in the House of Representatives, as he put it:

It was true that the initial stages of drafting the National Education Act was the result of the research conducted by scholars in the field of education. However, when it was

introduced in the House of Representatives, every political party, the government, senior bureaucrats and scholars co-operated with one another to review and amend it to the best of our ability... I, as the chairperson the extraordinary committee, was extremely open to consider every proposal for amending the bill proposed by any politicians from any political parties. Due to the high level of participation from every political party, it was approved almost unanimously by the House of Representatives and the legitimacy of the National Education Act was high.... The National Education Act emerged from a consensus in our society.

The bill was finally approved by the House of Representatives at the third reading on 25 March 1999. Next, the bill passed through the same proceedings in the Senate. However, it should be noted that all Senators in 1999 had been nominated by then Prime Minister Banharn Silpa-archa and appointed by His Majesty King Bhumibol in 1996 (The Royal Thai Government 1996, p. 1-14). Abhisit Vejjajiva, the Minister to the Prime Minister's Office, also played important roles in the consideration of the Senate by being elected the first vice chairperson of the extraordinary committee. Finally, after the Senate amended the wording of the bill in order to make it more precise and comprehensive, the Senate sent the bill back to the House of Representative for a final approval. The House of Representatives agreed with the Senate's amendments on 1 July 1999, which means the bill passed the National Legislative Assembly of Thailand (The Royal Thai Government 1999c, p. 195). His Majesty King Bhumibol granted his royal assent to this bill on 14 August 1999. The National Education Act was published in the Royal Thai Government Gazette on 19 August 1999, and it came into effect the day after. The National Education Act has become the framework to guide education reform policy in Thailand since that moment.

Suranee Pipatrojanakamol (2004, p. 254-255) concluded that apart from strong bureaucracy with profound information on education, the government's policy which attached great significance to education, political stability of Thailand in 1998-1999 and leadership and charisma of the ministers responsible for the education policy contribute to the success of the legislative process and the promulgation of the National Education Act in August 1999, almost two years after the 1997 Constitution had been in force.

The Establishment of the Office of Education Reform (OER)

After the National Education Act came into effect, there was an immediate task which needed to be completed, the establishment of the Office of Education Reform as an ad hoc public organisation. This office lasted only three years. This new public organisation, the status of which was the agency affiliated to a state but was neither the government agency nor the state enterprise, needed to be established by the Royal Decree by virtue of the provisions of the Public Organisations Act B.E. 2542 (1999) and Section 75 of the National Education Act (The Royal Thai Government 1999e, p. 45). The duties of the Office of Education Reform were: (1) to restructure the government agencies responsible for delivering education in Thailand to unite them under the Ministry of Education, Religious and Culture; (2) to propose the new personnel system for the educational system of Thailand; and (3) to review and recommend the ways in which how resources for education would be mobilised as stipulated in Chapter 5, 7 and 8 of the National Education Act. The other duty was to draft the bills and other related legislations in regards to Chapter 5, 7 and 8 of the National Education Act. In doing so, the Office of Education Reform had to submit a report with all propositions to the Cabinet to approve and implement (The Royal Thai Government 1999e, p. 46-47).

Abhisit Vejjajiva, Minister to the Prime Minister's Office, who played important roles in pushing for the education reform in Thailand at the time (personal communication, 24 August 2012), explained the ideas behind the establishment of the Office of Education Reform as follows:

When we finished the process of enacting the National Education Act, there were numerous issues and tasks which needed to be accomplished. The main idea at the time was that it would be extremely difficult to appoint any government agencies which had already existed to propose how to reform and change themselves. As a result, it would be better to establish a new organisation to perform this duty. It was a coincidence that we had just enacted the legislation establishing a new kind of government agency called 'public organisation' which is still affiliated to a state but will not adhere to bureaucratic rules and procedures in order to enhance flexibility. We thought it was appropriate for the Office of Education Reform to be a public organisation. Moreover, we considered that the task of reform was temporary, therefore, it was not necessary to establish a new permanent government agency. The Office of Education Reform emerged from these ideas as an ad hoc public organisation which would last for only three years. Its main duty was to provide practical and tangible propositions as well as related regulations to reform the educational system of Thailand.

The National Education Act requires the Office of Education Reform to be a public organisation primarily because the law needs this newly-established organisation to be free from political intervention, and the operation of this organisation would not be affected by political changes in Thailand.

In regards to other aspects of the education reform policy implementation, for example the learning and teaching process and curriculum improvement, were still duties of the Ministry of Education. In other words, the Office of Education Reform mainly dealt with

only the structures of the government agencies, personnel in the educational system and resources for education as Professor Wichit Srisa-an (personal communication, 14 September 2012), the former Chairperson of the Executive Committee of the Office of Education Reform argued:

The Office of Education Reform was established to perform a staff function which assisted the government. Therefore, the legislation was drafted in order to let the existing organisations under the Ministry of Education to perform their regular duties and functions and implement some reform policy stipulated in the National Education Act. The Office of Education Reform had specific duties about the structure of the new ministry and the personnel system which had no connections with the existing Ministry of Education at the time. It had no authority to command anyone. The Prime Minister has the authority to oversee the operation of this organisation. When it completed its duties, it would report directly to the government.

The Royal Decree establishing the Office of Education Reform was drafted and King Bhumibhol gave his royal assent. The Royal Decree was published in the Royal Government Gazette on 25 November 1999, and it came into effect the day after (The Royal Thai Government 1999e, 45-57).

The Selection Committee for the Members of the Executive Committee of the Office of Education Reform

Section 77 of the National Education Act (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p. 21) along with Section 17 of the Royal Decree Establishing the Office of Education Reform B.E. 2542 (1999) (The Royal Thai Government 1999e, p. 50) entitled the Prime Minister to establish a fifteen-member Selection Committee for the members of the Executive Committee of the Office of Education Reform. The duty of the Selection Committee was

to propose twice the number of the members of the Executive Committee from among those qualified to the Cabinet for appointment. The Selection Committee was composed of four groups of people: (1) five ex-officio members including the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of University Affairs, the Secretary-General of the Council of State, the Secretary-General of the National Education Commission and the Director of the Budget Bureau; (2) two members elected among vice-chancellors of state and private higher education institutions which are legal entities according to Thai laws; (3) three members elected among deans of faculties of pedagogy and education from both state and private higher education institutions offering at least bachelor's degree courses; and (4) five members elected among representatives of academic or professional associations in the field of education (The Royal Thai Government 1999e, p. 50-51). However, it should be noted that Section 17 of the Royal Decree requires the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of University Affairs and the Office of the National Education Commission to jointly provide the list of academic or professional associations in the field of education for the Selection Committee (The Royal Thai Government 1999e, p. 51).

In pursuance of establishing the Selection Committee, Abhisit Vejjajiva, the Minister to the Prime Minister's Office, was responsible for the election of the deans of faculties of pedagogy and education from state and private higher education institutions. Associate Professor Wanchai Sirichana, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of University Affairs was responsible for the election of the vice-chancellors of state and private higher education institutions, and Panom Pongpaiboon, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education was assigned to supervise the election of the representatives of academic or professional associations in the field of education (Sriprasath et al. 2003, p. 15).

After the Selection Committee had been established, the Committee had the duty to nominate 18 people who have knowledge, capability, experience and expertise in one of the following fields: (1) educational administration; (2) state affairs administration; (3) personnel administration; (4) budgetary, monetary and financial systems; (5) public; and (6) educational laws, to the Cabinet (The Royal Thai Government 1999e, p. 51). The Selection Committee agreed to set the open, transparent and fair selection process, so the application was announced through the mass media in Thailand.

Finally, the Selection Committee nominated 18 applicants to the Cabinet. Then, the Cabinet had to appoint nine of them as the Members of the Executive Committee of the Office of Education Reform (The Royal Thai Government 1999e, p. 48). The other nine of them who were not appointed were held in reserve in case there were some Members of the Executive Committee whose tenure terminated due to various reasons such as death, resignation or being discharged by the Cabinet. In light of this, the Cabinet could appoint anyone from the other nine without having to begin the whole process again (The Royal Thai Government 1999e, p. 49, 51).

The Executive Committee of the Office of Education Reform

On 11 January 2000, the Cabinet appointed nine Members of the Executive Committee of the Office of Education Reform from the 18 nominees nominated by the Selection Committee. Professor Wichit Srisa-an was appointed as the Chairperson of the Executive Committee. The eight other members of the Executive Committee included: (1) Professor Prachya Vessaraj; (2) Professor Somchai Ruchupan; (3) Associate Professor Suraphon Nitikraipot; (4) Dr Suwat Ngercham; (5) Dr Wallop Suwandi; (6) Dr Chuechan Chongsathityoo; (7) Reverend Brother Prateep Martin Komolmas; and (8) Mr Somchao Kespratoom (The Royal Thai Government 2000a, p. 7-8).

Section 12 Paragraph 2 of the Royal Decree Establishing the Office of Education Reform authorises the Executive Committee to appoint one of the members as the Secretary-General who would assume the responsibility for the administration of the Office of Education Reform in accordance with the law, objectives of the Office, rules, regulations, announcements, stipulations, policies and decisions of the Committee, and shall serve as the supervisor of all officials and employees of the Office (The Royal Thai Government 1999e, p. 48, 52). The Secretary-General of the Office should be able to devote his/her full time for working for the Office. The Executive Committee therefore decided to appoint Dr Chuechan Chongsathiyoo, one of the Members from the Office of the National Education Commission, as the Secretary-General on 25 January 2000. However, Dr Chuechan later resigned from the position, the Executive Committee agreed to appoint Dr Suwat to replace her on 23 January 2002 (personal communication with Suwat Ngercham, 21 September 2012).

However, after the Executive Committee have performed their duties for a while, some members resigned, so their vacant positions needed to be replaced. Professor Somchai Ruchupan was the first member who resigned because he had some other duties to perform and could not devote his time to the Executive Committee. On 26 September 2000, the Cabinet appointed Ms Sukuma Kerdpoo as the Member of the Executive Committee (The Royal Thai Government 2000b, p. 58).

At the end of 2000, Professor Wichit Srisa-an, the Chairperson of the Executive Committee resigned because he became a candidate for the proportional Member of Parliament of the Democrat Party after the Executive Committee had finalised all of its propositions about the education reform policy as required by the National Education Act. As a result, on 21 November 2000, the Cabinet appointed Professor Prachya Vessaraj as

the Chairperson of the Executive Committee and Professor Somwang Pittayanuwat was elected to fill the vacancy in the Executive Committee as required by the laws (The Royal Thai Government 2000c, p. 7).

The Chuan Government was successful in enacting the National Education Act with co-operation from MPs from every political party in the House of Representatives and Senators. The government was also successful in the establishment of the Office of Education Reform responsible for restructuring the organisations responsible for education in Thailand and proposing legislations to the government to enact to implement the education reform policy.

Chapter 5 examines the first factor influencing the actions or nonactions of governments in the implementation of the education reform policy, which is the size of target groups involved and affected and the extent of change required by the policy.

Chapter 5

The Size of Target Groups Involved and Affected and the Extent of Change Required by the Policy

This chapter argues that the scope of the most recent education reform policy in Thailand, which formally began in 1999 after the National Education Act came into force was too broad; the size of target groups involved and affected was too big and the extent of change required by the policy was too extreme. As a result, it was opposed by many actors which made the governments more reluctant to implement the policy as stated in the National Education Act.

Based on the propositions of top-down theorists such as Van Meter and Van Horn (1975, p. 458) and Hogwood and Gunn (1984, p. 199-206), the size of the target groups involved and affected as well as the extent of change required determined the level of success of public policy implementation.

To begin with, it should be noted that the education reform policy in 1999 was the most comprehensive reform in Thailand's history which attempted to cover a wide range of issues: from learning and teaching processes to restructuring educational personnel and management. This policy then needed to involve a large number and numerous groups of students, teachers, parents, bureaucrats at every level and many government agencies.

The first example was the effort of the Chuan Government to impose a child-centred approach after the National Education Act was in effect in order to reform the learning and teaching process of Thai students at every level. The ultimate aim of this approach is to enhance the ability of children to learn, think and understand the substance of the subjects by themselves through many interactive activities and facilitation of teachers. If

successful, this approach would revolutionise the teaching and learning process in Thailand. Teachers have to change their roles from lecturers and instructors to facilitators, and students have to participate in many activities in classes.

Woods (2008) identified four central notions to the child-centred approach as follows: “(1) education should meet the needs of those being educated; (2) these needs are best met if identified with the interests of children; (3) the curriculum should be based on experience and discovery; and (4) rather than being subject- or content-based, educational programmes should focus on activity.”

Wood (2007, p. 121) clearly summarised this approach as follows:

Child-centred education incorporated care, rescue and correction of ‘defects’, alongside a commitment to free choice and free play within a richly resourced learning environment. There was no distinction between work and play; teachers and adults were ‘human resources’, as they responded to children’s needs, interests, and patterns of learning that emerged during play and other child-initiated activities. There was no ‘syllabus of work’; the curriculum was ‘activity led’, as teachers planned in response to their observations of children’s learning and development. Teacher-directed activities included stories, readings, sense and habit training, drama, poetry and music. Notions of developmental readiness underpinned their decisions about when to introduce more structured teaching of reading, writing and number. Otherwise content knowledge was embedded in play activities that reflected their everyday lives, and promoted fantasy and imagination.

The explanation of the Office of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education of Thailand issued on the occasion of the 108th anniversary of the Ministry in 2000 was not different from the aforementioned features of the child-centred approach (Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education 2000, p. 12-14). The Office of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education (2000, p. 14) summarised this approach that the

child-centred approach is “a learning and teaching process which place great significance on the roles of students in the process. Students will have more opportunities to participate in learning and teaching activities and to practice until they can learn and understand something by themselves. Teachers in this approach have duties to guide and facilitate students’ learning.” The roles of teachers in this approach, according to the Office of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education (2000, p. 15-16), have three aspects, namely: (1) teachers must be managers of the learning environment which can assist students to study happily and to fulfil their potentialities; (2) teachers must be facilitators of individual development; and (3) teachers must be mediators of human relations as teachers need to have fine relationships with students and foster pleasant relationships between students.

Somsak Prissanananthakul (personal communication, 20 August 2012), explained the way in which the government imposed the child-centred approach, as he elaborated:

The Ministry of Education had a policy and ordered the bureaucrats that from now in the teaching and learning process, students should not be forced to study what teachers need them to do so. Teachers are supposed to utilise their experiences and pedagogic skills they develop while they were be trained to be teachers to find out students’ interests and potential. When students’ interests and potential are discovered, teachers should utilise them for the benefits of students, especially in education. I do not want to see great students who get high marks because they write answers to examinations which are in accordance with teachers’ ideas and preferences, but I want to see great students who know how to survive in society. They should have wisdom rather than knowledge. I emphasised that the new educational system must be student-, not teacher-, oriented. Teachers should function as facilitators encouraging students to study what they want to know.

Not only does the learning and teaching process need to change, but the way in which students are assessed must also be adapted in order to meet the variety of students. The types of examinations may include a multiple-choice examination which has only one correct answer; a subjective examination which requires student to write an extended essay to answer the examination question and an oral examination or an oral test.

The child-centred approach became a new aspect of education in Thailand in 1999. It can also be argued that the Chuan Leekpai Government initiated the transformation of the learning and teaching process from teacher-centred to child-centred in order to comply with Section 22 of the National Education Act which states “Education shall be based on the principle that all learners are capable of learning and self-development, and are regarded as being most important. The teaching-learning process shall aim at enabling the learners to develop themselves at their own pace and to the best of their potential” (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p. 7).

Somkit Ngamprasert (1999), a Thai language teacher in Nonthaburi Province near Bangkok, suggested that “if the child-centred approach is implemented properly, it will help to unlock students’ potential, especially their thinking and presentation skills. Moreover, it helps strengthen the relationship between teachers and students mainly because students in this approach have the opportunities to study what they want, not what the teachers require them to study.” However, the child-centred approach created problems, especially the anxiety among teachers about how they could adapt or transformed their teaching process to comply with the new approach. Kitti Ammaranantana (personal communication, 26 September 2012), the Director of Bansuan Jananusorn School in the eastern part of Thailand, identified two major problems of the child-centred approach when it was first introduced by the Chuan Government: the lack of

understanding among teachers and the curriculum of Thai education. He elaborated the problem of understanding as follows:

At the early stage of the imposition of the child-centred approach in Thailand, teachers did not understand what it is and how they could apply it in their classroom. Some of them misunderstood and misinterpreted this approach. They thought this approach let students work inside their classrooms while teachers only needed to advice or supervise them distantly without giving them fundamental knowledge on each subject in the first place. Then, the phrase 'child-centred' was changed to 'students as most significant' in order to solve this problem. When students are regarded as most significant in the learning and teaching process, they are given more opportunities by their own individual experiments, thinking and conducting numerous activities. However, teachers still have some roles to play, even subsidiary ones. Teachers still have to closely guide their students' learning process, counsel them and correct their misunderstanding on any issues.

His viewpoint is supported by the opinions of some students who were exposed to this child-centred approach. According to Thosaphon Chieocharnpraphan (2000b, p. 5), who reflected his experience as a student exposed to this approach, teachers only gave assignments or work sheets to students to complete without explaining anything even the basic concepts of the subjects they taught. He also pointed out that at the time there were still many teachers, parents and even students who did not understand what the child-centred approach really means and encompasses. It definitely was not the learning process in which teachers did nothing in class (Chieocharnpraphan 2000a). Benjamas Kongwallop (2000), another Year 9 student from Bangkok, expressed a similar opinion on this new approach after the child-centred approach was used in Thailand for about a year:

After one year of the education reform policy, there have been changes in the system.

Teachers assigned students to write more assignments and essays based on individual

study and further research in libraries and from other sources. However, students could not choose the topics of the assignments by themselves. They are still forced by the teachers. Sometimes, teachers do not explain anything. They just let students study and finish the assignments on their own. If students cannot write the assignments in accordance with the teachers' preferences, they will not get high marks.

The other significant obstacle to the implementation of the child-centred approach in Thailand raised by Kitti Ammaranantana is the curriculum. He pointed out:

The curriculum of Thailand required students to study too many subjects, therefore, the child-centred approach is considered inappropriate by many people because the child-centred approach requires a large amount of time for students to experiment, practise and gradually understand the substance of the subjects they undertake. Students will not be able to study all of the substance set by the curriculum (personal communication with Kitti Ammaranantana 26 September 2012).

In addition, the entrance examination also prevented teachers, especially in secondary schools from employing the child-centred approach because the entrance examination which was the main criteria for gaining admission to public universities in Thailand was still in a multiple-choice format. An entrance examination with this format required students to memorise as many details of each subject as they could in order to get higher scores. Therefore it was problematic for teachers to encourage their students to embrace the new approach.

The Chuan Government also formulated a plan to transfer educational institutions at various levels to local government organisations based on its interpretation of related laws and regulations including the provision of the 1997 Constitution, Decentralisation Plan and Process Act B.E. 2542 (1999) (The Royal Thai Government 1999a, p. 48-66) and the

National Education Act. The transfer would have radically changed the administration of education in Thailand.

The summary of that plan is as follows: first, early childhood centres and primary schools except border patrol police schools would have been transferred to municipalities and sub-district administrative organisations; secondary schools would have been transferred to provincial administrative organisations, city and town municipalities; vocational institutions would have been transferred to provincial administrative organisations; and public tertiary institutions would still be administered by the central government (Pinthawanich 2000). The plan was divided into two phases. The first phase would have begun in the Fiscal Year 2002 to 2006; education provision would have been transferred to municipalities, sub-district administrative organisations class 1 and 2, provincial administrative organisations and the City of Pattaya. The second phase would have begun in the Fiscal Year 2004 to 2010; education provision would have been transferred to sub-district administrative organisations class 3-5 and sub-district municipalities. If the transfer had been complete, the Ministry of Education, Religion and Culture would have had the duty to set the national standard and desirable qualifications, promote research and development and supervise all local government organisations in providing education (Pinthawanich 2000).

However, this proposed plan was resisted by teachers who were government officers around the country. The leaders of the national teacher union mobilised teachers around Thailand to protest against this government's policy at the King Rama V Monument Square on 25 October 2000. Minister Somsak Prissananuntagul commented on this policy as follows:

I agreed that if education is transferred to local government organisations which are not ready, consequential problems will occur and the country in general will be undermined. However, I think most teachers are still confused about this policy, therefore, I will coordinate with Minister to the Prime Minister's Office Abhisit Vejjajiva and the Office of Education Reform in order to set the direction and timeframe which will take into account the readiness and the reality. With regards to the teachers' organisation's announcement to support political parties which have policies in accord with teachers' needs, I want to insist that the Chart Thai Party will not please teachers, but will please the whole society by adhering to the Constitution and the National Education Act. I do not fear to lose votes, but I fear that our country will be undermined (*'Khoonkru hue aojing'* 2000).

The tension was relieved and the protest was cancelled when Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva as the Chairperson of the sub-committee responsible for formulating a decentralisation plan explained that the plan announced was only the draft one which had already been abolished (*'Botsaroop pan krajaiumnaj'* 2000). He also insisted that the formulation of the plan needed consultation with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of University Affairs and the Office of Education Reform by adhering to the substance of the National Education Act (*'Botsaroop pan krajaiumnaj'* 2000).

Teachers around Thailand at the time opposed this policy because they perceived that local government organisations were not ready and their quality was still low. Major obstacles would be the financial support, qualifications of local councillors and executives and their understanding of education policy. In addition, teachers also perceived that politicians at the local level were mostly godfathers and members of local gangsters, so they were not appropriate to oversee the education policy. Teachers also believed that within 10 years, the potentialities of local government organisations could not be developed to be able to provide high quality education (Pinthawanich 2000).

Uthai Singtothaong (personal communication, 11 October 2012), Director of Chonradsadornumrung School in Chonburi Province, disagreed with the policy of Minister Somsak to transfer schools to local government organisations, as he commented:

Actually, Thailand's educational system has always been adhered to a strong bureaucratic system. Education should be united under the main government agency like the Ministry of Education for academic unity... If schools had been transferred to local government organisations, local politicians would have thought of their political objectives. However, political objectives and education have different concepts because education focuses more on human resource development. This was the reason schools and teachers did not want to be transferred to local government organisations. Only few of them were willing to be transferred; the rest strongly resisted.

This policy did not proceed because the House of Representatives was dissolved on 9 November 2000 (The Royal Thai Government 2000d, p. 1-2).

After the general election on 6 January 2001, Thaksin Shinawatra became Prime Minister, and he appointed Professor Dr Kasem Watanachai as Minister of Education. Before taking up the position of the Minister of Education, he had been the Vice-Chancellor of Chiang Mai University in Northern Thailand, the Secretary-General of the Ministry of University Affairs, scholar members of the committees of numerous state and private universities (*'Huajailuk yootee kanborihan kanjudkan'* 2001). He was determined to reform the educational system of Thailand based on the provision and spirit of the National Education Act and the proposal of the Office of Education Reform.

One of the most controversial issues during his tenure of Minister of Education was the number of the educational service areas, which according to Section 37, paragraph 1 of the National Education Act, would be bases for the administration and management of basic

education and higher education lower-than-degree level (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p. 11). The educational service areas would substantially change the administration of educational personnel at the operational level which would affect teachers and bureaucrats around the country. Section 39 also required the central government, especially the Ministry of Education, to decentralise powers to the educational service areas, as it stated: “The Ministry shall decentralise powers in educational administration and management regarding academic matters, budget, personnel and general affairs administration to the Committees and Offices for Education, Religion, and Culture of the educational service areas and the educational institutions in the areas (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p. 12). The main aim is to encourage people in each area to participate in providing high quality education for their own children in a way appropriate for each area. Section 75 of the National Education Act authorises the Office of Education Reform to propose the structures of the public agencies responsible for education at every level including the educational service areas (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p. 20).

The Office of Education Reform set the principles to determine the number of the educational service areas as follows: (1) each educational service areas should have similar and appropriate workloads; (2) the educational services areas should comply with administrative areas which are not too big (Office of Education Reform 2001b, p. 49-50). Based on these two principles, the Office of Education Reform set 4 criteria for determining the number of the educational service areas: (1) the population in each area should be approximately 150,000-200,000; (2) each district will be one educational service area; in case the population in one district is small, it will amalgamate with adjacent districts; (3) the number of educational institutions in each area should be approximately 100; (4) geography, transportation and communication will also be taken into account (Office of Education Reform 2001b, p. 49-50).

There were controversies about the numbers of the educational service areas and which agency of the newly-amalgamated Ministry of Education, Religion and Culture would administer the educational service areas. The Office of Education Reform proposed 295 educational service areas under the portfolio of the Office of the Basic Education Commission based on the aforementioned principles and criteria, but the Ministry of Education suggested that there should be 142 educational service areas under the portfolio of the Office of the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Education. Suwit Khunkitti, Deputy Prime Minister responsible for supervising the Ministry of Education at the time, supported the establishment of 700 educational service areas (Pinthawanich 2001, p. 17).

Kasem, as the Minister of Education, insisted that there should be 295 educational service areas as proposed by the Office of Education Reform. He also declined to follow Suwit's suggestion, as he argued:

Regarding Suwit Khunkitti's proposition that the Office of the National Council of Education, Religion and Culture should be the agency giving advice on the determination the educational service areas, if we wait until the establishment of the Council, it would be too late. As the Council and the new Ministry would be established at the same time, we would not have enough time to prepare ourselves. Moreover, everybody involved now agreed that we should cling to 295 educational service areas as suggested by the Office of Education Reform. The Ministry of Education as the operational agency will start organise the new structure immediately. The Ministry's Committee on personnel management for the newly-structured Ministry chaired by Deputy Minister of Education Chamlong Krutkhunthod will start allocating personnel to the educational service areas. However, if the number of 295 educational service areas is not appropriate, we can change it later (*'Kasem' lui patiroopkansuksamai dernnayued 295 ked'* 2001).

However, the disagreement between Kasem and Suwit on this issue led to Kasem's resignation on 11 June 2001 (The Secretariat of the Cabinet 2001b). Professor Prachya Vessaraj, the second chairperson of the executive committee of the Office of Education Reform after Professor Wichit Srisa-an, in an interview with Ratchanee Yampracha (Yampracha 2001, p. 53), presented a similar opinion towards the resignation of Dr Kasem, as he elaborated:

What happened after the change of government was that Dr Kasem Watanachai agreed with the ideas of the Office of Education Reform. However, every bill and drafted legislation must be approved by a committee responsible for culling them chaired by Suwit Khunkitti. Suwit did not agree with the Office of Education Reform, and provided more opportunities for senior bureaucrats of the Ministry of Education to express their opinions and Suwit believed the senior bureaucrats of the Ministry of Education more, for example, they believe that the educational service areas should be under the portfolio of the Office of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education.

Kasem was replaced by Prime Minister Thaksin. He was afraid that when the educational service areas were established around the country, chaos could occur because this policy would substantially change the administration of the Ministry of Education (*'Thaksin' fai kiew numrong boriharn kedpuentee sukxa'* 2001). Thaksin therefore organised the Committee, the duty of which was to launch the pilot project to establish the educational service areas in some provinces. Thaksin himself was the chairperson of the committee. Other members included the Deputy Minister of Education, the Director-Generals of the Departments of the Ministry of Education, many scholars in various fields. Professor Prachya Vessaraj, the Chairperson of the Executive Committee of the Office of Education Reform, and Dr Roong Kaewdaeng, the Secretary-General of the National Education Commission at the time were advisors to the Committee. The Permanent Secretary of the

Ministry of Education was assigned to oversee the implementation of this pilot project (Choolarb 2001).

The project covered every region of Thailand. One province in each region was chosen to launch this pilot project. There was one educational service area in Phuket Province in the South implemented by the Department of Non-Formal Education. In the North, five educational service areas would be established in Phitsanulok Province. The main agency responsible for this province was the Office of the National Primary Education Commission. The province of Amnatcharoen in the northeastern part of Thailand was chosen for two educational service areas supervised by the Department of Vocational Education. For the central region, Phetchaburi was the site of this pilot project with only one educational service area as required by Thaksin in order to compare with Amnatcharoen Province. The Office of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education was responsible for this province. Other government agencies of the Ministry of Education were required to provide support and advice to the pilot educational service areas (*'Sortor triamnumrong kedpuentee karnsuksa'* 2001; *'Thaksin jee sortor numrong kedpuentee poryor nee'* 2001). Later, Chonburi province in the eastern part of Thailand was also included in this pilot project. The Ministry of Education needed to decentralise its power to those educational service areas. Their structures and administration would follow the proposal of the Office of Education Reform (*'Thaksin jee sortor numrong kedpuentee poryor nee'* 2001).

However, this project was opposed by the Office of Education Reform on the ground that the project was against many laws because the formal structures of the educational service areas never existed in the Ministry of Education, and the laws establishing the educational service areas have not been enacted. The project would be possible in principle, but not in

practice. Suraphon Nitikraipot, one of the members of the Executive Committee of the Office of Education Reform argued that the pilot project initiated by Thaksin would be of no use because the pilot educational service areas had to work within the old structures which did not contribute the reform. He went on to argue that in order to accomplish the education reform, the proposal of the Office of Education Reform must be implemented within the new structures which required amendments of many laws (*'Sortor triamnumrong patiroop karnsuksa bangkedpuentee'* 2001). Professor Prachya Vessaraj asserted that the acting committees and directors of the pilot educational service areas would not be able to issue any orders or command anyone because their actions would definitely contravene the state administration laws because the provisions of the National Education Act which establish the educational service areas had not yet come into force (*'Chee numrong kedpuentee sortor kud kodmai'* 2001).

Another controversial issue was the amalgamation of various government agencies responsible for education in Thailand including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of University Affairs, the Office of the National Education Commission under the portfolio of the Prime Minister's Office to set up new agencies under the portfolio of the Ministry of Education, Religious and Culture with only four main agencies, namely: Office of the Basic Education Commission, Office of the Higher Education Commission, Office of the Religion and Culture Commission, and Office of the National Council for Education, Religion and Culture (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p. 10). It was required by the National Education Act to complete within three years since the Act came into force (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p. 20). The deadline for the new structure of the Ministry of Education and other related agencies was the 20 August 2002. In light of this, many agencies needed to be abolished, for example, Department of Academic Affairs, Department

of Vocational Education, the Ministry of University Affairs, Office of the National Primary Education Commission, and Department of General Education.

Suwit Khunkitti was appointed as the third Minister of Education of the first Thaksin Government on 9 October 2001 (The Royal Thai Government 2001d, p. 2-3). It meant that Suwit had only 10 months to put forward 23 bills, and 51 other draft legislations and ministerial regulations (Office of Education Reform 2001c, p. 61-70; *'Sorkao 'Thaksin' yued patiroop'* 2001). By the time Suwit Khunkitti became the Minister of Education, no single bill has been proposed to the House of Representatives for consideration (*'Karnmuang rueng karn patiroop karnsuksa'* 2001).

Suwit's personal attitude towards the education reform policy was that this policy should be implemented gradually with caution based on reasons and principles, as he explained his visions:

I have been following the education reform policy all this time, and I found that there are still many differences among stakeholders. Therefore, it needs to be gradually implemented. I always insist that it cannot be implemented overnight... As I am a scientist, when I need to do something, they need to be based on reasons and principle... If we implement this policy quickly and it fails again, it will be very difficult to resolve. We need to be cautious when we implement this policy (*'Saroop wisaitas 'patiroop karnsuksa' 3 rattamontree Suwit Chamlong Sirikorn'* 2001).

Suwit also said he needed to consider the proposals of the Office of Education Reform regarding the restructuring of those agencies more thoroughly (*'Suwit' wo pen hero plukdun kodmai juakklub 3 Dr. – 9 Araham 'sorporsor'* 2001). Suwit (personal communication, 27 September 2012) also raised the issue of vocational education. He believed that believed that the amalgamation of the government agencies responsible for

primary, secondary and vocational education as required by the National Education Act went too far and would not work. The government decided not to comply with the restructure set by National Education Act. On the contrary, the government and Suwit decided to amend the National Education Act to separate the vocational education mission to set up the new agency, Office of the Vocational Education Commission (The Secretariat of the House of Representatives of Thailand 2002a, p. 3-4). The amendment of the National Education Act came into force 20 December 2002 (The Royal Thai Government 2002d, p. 16-21).

Suwit defended the delay to put forward the education reform bills within the timeframe set by the National Education Act in the House of Representatives that he wanted to consider every issue carefully as he did not want to complete the reform within the timeframe but caused too many problems which needed to be resolved afterwards (The Secretariat of the House of Representatives of Thailand 2002c, p. 36-44, 47-65; '*Sarookam apiprai mai wai wangjai rattamontree*' 2002). The Thaksin Government was successful in restructuring the government agencies responsible for education in 2003 during the tenure of the fourth Minister of Education of the first Thaksin Government, Pongpol Adireksan.

The executives of some schools shared Suwit's concern on the issue of authorising the educational service areas to oversee both primary and secondary educational institutions under their jurisdictions. They believed that primary and secondary education is completely different from every aspect. Uthai Singtothong, Director of Chonratsadornumroong School in Chonburi province (personal communication 11 October 2012), expressed his opinions that "Secondary schools are not comfortable when

they had to be under the same jurisdiction because the psyche of the two levels are different.”

Later, the Education Council chaired by Minister Jurin Laksanawisit agreed in principle to separate primary and secondary educational service areas on 5 February 2009. There were 41 secondary educational service areas and 182 primary educational service areas. Personnel and financial management must also be separated (Ministry of Education 2009b, p. 41).

It could be argued that his fear for too radical change and the affected actors was only one of the factors leading to his actions to amend the National Education Act and the delay to approve the proposals of the Office of Education Reform. Another factor included his lack of confidence in the Office of Education Reform set up by the Chuan Government, which will be explained more meticulously in the latter chapter of this thesis.

After Suwit was removed from the position of the Minister of Education, this factor has less influence on the governments' actions or nonactions because many issues could be settled and compromised. However, the tenure of Pongpol Adireksan onwards was affected by the four remaining factors, which will be discussed in the latter chapters.

From the details elaborated, the most recent education reform was the most comprehensive one in Thailand's history. It tried to cover many issues from teaching and learning process to the structure of government agencies, administration, personnel, technology and financial resource for education. The Chuan Government tried to revolutionise the teaching and learning process, which caused confusion among teachers and students around the country. The government also proposed the transfer of educational institution from the central government to local government organisations, which was resisted by teachers. The first three ministers of the first Thaksin Government including

Thaksin himself faced controversial issues including the number of the educational service areas and how to restructure the government agencies within the timeframe set by the National Education Act. These policies affected a large number of target groups and required significant changes of statuses and behaviours of stakeholders including bureaucrats, teachers, students, parents, which cause the delays to the implementation of the education reform policy.

Chapter 6 examines how the ambiguity of the National Education Act as the main framework of the education reform policy affected the roles of governments.

Chapter 6

The Ambiguity of the National Education Act as the Main Framework of the Education Reform Policy and Other Related Regulations

Based on the top-down approach, one of the necessary conditions of successful implementation is a clear policy with clear objectives. This issue was in accordance with Kla Thongkao's proposition that when considering the implementation of the national education, religious, arts and cultural plan, the ambiguity of the plan needs to be taken into account (Thongkao 2001, p. 55-56).

However, from the outset, the provisions with regard to education in the 1997 Constitution was rather abstract and ambiguous, so it is open for different interpretations by different groups of elites who became the governments of Thailand. The first paragraph of Section 43 of the 1997 Constitution states that "Persons have the equal right to receive not less than twelve years of basic, quality of education which must be provided free of charge by the government on generally available basis" (The Royal Thai Government 1997b, p. 10). However, the Constitution did not define the range of "twelve years of basic, quality of education" In general, it has always been expected that twelve years of basic education ranges from the primary to the secondary levels of education (Year 1 to Year 12), but it can be interpreted to cover the pre-school levels (3 years) to the junior secondary level (Year 9). The entitlement is reiterated in Section 10 of the National Education Act (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p. 4). It is therefore compulsory for every government of Thailand to provide at least twelve years of free basic education for Thai children. The other ambiguous term is 'basic education'. The National Education Act provides a broad definition of basic education which is education provided before the level of higher education (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p. 2). In Thailand, before the level of

higher education, the education extends from early childhood to senior secondary education. The early childhood or pre-school education programmes vary from 1 to 3 years (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation n.d.). Primary education spans 6 years (Year 1-6), and secondary education is divided into two levels: three years of junior secondary (Year 7-9) and three years of senior secondary levels (Year 10-12). They cover the period of 15 years. Therefore, each government can exercise its discretion to determine which levels of basic education it will deliver to Thai people free of charge.

The Chuan Government had sought to clarify the definition of basic education before the National Education Act came into force by excluding the 3-year early childhood education from the definition of basic education (The Secretariat of the Cabinet 1999). The clarification implied that primary and secondary education would be provided free of charge by the government as required by the 1997 Constitution and later the National Education Act.

When Thaksin became the Minister of Education, he realised the problem of ambiguity of the provisions of the Constitution and the National Education Act. He requested the figures of the budget for providing education from the senior secondary to early childhood levels of both public and private schools (*'Thaksin' chee karnsuksa kanpuentarn rortornor – porrorbor karnsuksa kudkanaeng'* 2001). Later, after discussing the issue of free basic education with the members of the Executive Committee of the Office of Education Reform, the Ministry of Education reinterpreted twelve-year free basic education. Thaksin rejected the interpretation of the Chuan Government which intended to provide free education from the primary (Year 1) to senior secondary levels (Year 12). Instead,

Thaksin's free education scheme would extend from the three-year early childhood education to junior secondary (Year 9) education. Concerning the senior secondary level (Year 10-12), the government decided to provide financial assistance to only underprivileged students (*'Thaksin' plik rienfree 12 pee mor. 4-6 jai aeng' 2001*). Chamlong Krutkhunthod, Deputy Minister of Education, insisted that the decision did not result from the need to reduce the budget for education, but that the government realised the significance of early childhood education as a factor for future success or failure of people (*'Thaksin' tud oodnoon rienfree 12 pee luea 9 pee' 2001*). Chamlong also argued that the new scheme of free basic nine-year education could be implemented without amending the National Education Act; the government only needed to revise the Cabinet resolution of the Chuan Leekpai government in 1999 which had defined basic education covering only primary and secondary education as mentioned (*'Thaksin' plik rienfree 12 pee mor. 4-6 jai aeng' 2001*).

Suraphon Nitikraipot, a member of the Executive Committee of the Office of Education Reform, agreed with Thaksin's idea on the ground that the government can save a large amount of money as the expenditures used to subsidise early childhood education are lower than senior secondary education (*'Prub 'rienfree 12 pee' rerm anubarn tung mor 3' 2001*). It was also argued that the Director and other prominent scholars agree with the change because they all regarded early childhood as a significant foundation for future studies (*'Prub 'rienfree 12 pee' rerm anubarn tung mor 3' 2001*).

However, not every stakeholder group shared the same opinions as Thaksin. Dr Suwat Ngerncham, another member of the Executive Committee of the Office of Education Reform, agreed with the government's commitment to subsidise early childhood

education, but he did not expect the government to cut its financial support for senior secondary education. As he put it:

It was stated no less than twelve years. When Thaksin became the Minister of Education...there were some people explaining to him that early childhood education was also of great significance, and needed to be taken care of. Thaksin consulted my Committee which he had rarely done. He asked my Committee whether we agreed with the change to subsidise early childhood education. We replied that we agreed... But we never suggested that the government needed to cut the subsidies for the senior secondary level” (personal communication, 21 September 2012).

The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education at the time, Dr Panom Pongpaiboon, also opposed the new scheme. He argued that if the government continued to provide senior secondary education free of charge, it would benefit the impoverished people more. If the government started from early childhood education, nobody would benefit or lose to a considerable degree as the Ministry of Education could provide early childhood education to 75% of the population, but senior secondary education only covered 60% of the population (*‘Thaksin’ sungderanna prubrienfree anubarn - mor 3’* 2001). Moreover, Dr Panom also referred to rural impoverished people’s preferences for the inclusion of the senior secondary level in a free-education scheme:

Personally I think rural people desire basic education which extends to the senior secondary level because they do not have problems taking care of their infants because the provision of early childhood education covered a majority of the population. However, they are still concerned about the senior secondary level the expenditures of which are high. At the academic senior secondary level, the expenditure is estimated to reach 20,000

Baht per year (*'Panom' jaitung klakarn Thaksin maihenduai rienfree anubarn - mor 3'* 2001).

The Opposition in the House of Representatives also opposed Thaksin's scheme. Abhisit Vejjajiva, Deputy Leader of the Democrat Party, insisted that it was beneficial to expand the free education scheme to early childhood education, but it was not appropriate to cut the subsidies for the senior secondary level (*'Palat sukka karn idea Thaksin anubarn rien free porchorpor daitee talom'* 2001).

Dr Amornwit Nakornrat from the Faculty of Education criticised the scheme because it would undermine the development of educational standard and human resource of the country in the future (*'Won 'Thaksin' tobtuan rien free 12 pee'* 2001). Some former members of the Constitution Drafting Assembly responsible for drafting the 1997 Constitution, for example, Decho Sawananont asserted that even though the proposed plan to change the free education scheme of Thaksin complied with the provision of the Constitution, it was against its spirit (*'Pey prubrienfree 12 pee pid jedtanarom mor. 43'* 2001).

Finally, Thaksin could not resist the opposition of key players in the education reform policy and reversed his decision again to provide free education from the primary to senior secondary levels (*'Rienfree por. 1 - mor.6 tarmderm'* 2001; *'Thaksin' maitidjai noonrienfree tangtae por. 1'* 2001). Nevertheless, the Thaksin Government could not provide free basic education for all students as required by the 1997 Constitution and the National Education Act. According to the study of the Office of the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, parents had to pay 2,000 Baht more per semester in 2004 for the education of their children, and 3,500 Baht per semester in 2005 (*"Krueakai Kanakummakan"* 2006).

After the coup d'état on 19 September 2006, the government appointed by the military junta led by General (retired) Surayud Chulanont and Minister of Education Wichit Srisa-an still adhered to the framework set by the Thaksin Governments on the free education scheme. However, the government decided on 21 November 2006 to increase subsidies for individual student to 14,564 million baht in three years from Fiscal Year 2007 to 2009 (Ministry of Education 2007a, p. 41). The government also increased 700 schools for students from lower socio-economic background and students with disability which could provide education for 125,000 students. Besides, the government organised a 200-million baht fund for students with autism and learning deficiency (Ministry of Education 2007a, p. 46-50; Ministry of Education 2008a, p. 7-8).

At the general election at the end of 2007, the People Power Party which gathered most MPs from the dissolved Thai Rak Thai Party of ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra won the general election on 23 December 2007. The People Power Party won 233 seats out of 480 while its main opponent the Democrat Party won only 164 seats in the House of Representatives. The House of Representatives voted for Samak Sundaravej, the leader of the People Power Party to be prime minister, and Samak was appointed on 29 January 2008 (The Royal Thai Government 2008g, p. 1). Samak chose Somchai Wongsawat, a brother-in-law of ousted Prime Minister Thaksin, to be the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Education (The Royal Thai Government 2008d, p. 1).

The government led by Prime Minister Samak and Somchai still adhered to providing 12-year free education for all students. Moreover, the government also intended to provide more resources for impoverished students and students with disability through the Income Contingent Loan (ICL) from the first semester of the Academic Year 2008, which had been abolished by Professor Wichit. He also provided scholarships for students to

undertake their studies in Thailand and abroad. Somchai increased financial subsidy per student which the Cabinet approved on 25 March 2008 to enable him to spend 2,917.3234 million baht. It was argued that through the Income Contingent Loan, the government could determine which fields are necessary for the country and should be granted more financial support and loans. Moreover, Somchai also co-operated with the Ministry of Labour to train students who wished to improve their vocational skills and to be employed during the semester break (Ministry of Education 2008b, p. 99-108).

After Abhisit Vejjajiva was voted to be prime minister by 235 to 198 votes (The Royal Thai Government 2008c, p. 339), Abhisit chose Jurin Laksanawisit as the Minister of Education (The Royal Thai Government 2008f, p. 4). During the election campaign in 2007, Jurin was deputy leader of the Democrat Party responsible for formulating the party's strategies and policies (Phaktanakul 2007, p. 120). The Abhisit Government declared that the education reform policy would be one of its urgent policies (The Royal Thai Government 2009, p. 285).

The Abhisit Government and Minister of Education Jurin Laksanawisit interpreted the provisions of 2007 Constitution drafted after the coup d'état against the Thaksin Government and the National Education Act differently from its predecessors. As the 2007 Constitution and the National Education Act required the Thai government to provide "not less than twelve years of free basic and quality education" for Thai citizens (The Royal Thai Government 2007, p. 15), the Abhisit Government and Jurin decided to expand the free education scheme to 15 years covering early childhood education to the senior secondary level. The government formally announced that it was committed to reducing the cost-of-living of the people by ensuring access to 15 years' education cost-free for all by providing textbooks on primary subjects to all schools, providing students' uniforms and learning stationeries free-of-charge in time for the Academic Year 2009 as

well as supporting other cost to subsidised school fees, so parents would not have to pay anything to schools anymore (The Royal Thai Government 2009, p. 285).

Before implementing the 15-year free education scheme, Jurin listened to people's opinions at public hearings in Bangkok and in other regions. In Bangkok, a public hearing was organised at Satriwittaya School on 30 January 2009. In other regions, a public hearing was held at Chonkanyanukoon School in Chonburi on 6 February 2009 (*'Prachapijarn karnsuksa free 15 pee kukkak'* 2009; *'Saosiang jaekkongrienfree coupon ma win'* 2009; *'Jurin aonae jaek chood nakrien'* 2009). From the two public hearings, the government would provide financial support for five categories which were considered essential for education. The first category was the tuition fee for each student determined by the Cabinet. The second category was textbooks for eight core subjects based on the decisions of teachers, parents, student committees and communities. Each school needed to set up the system which students can borrow textbooks, so younger students will be able to use them after that. The third one was learning materials. The government would provide money for schools and each school would distribute it to parents. After that, parents had to present receipts to the schools. The fourth category which would be subsidised by the government was school uniforms. Each student would be granted two uniforms per academic year. The Ministry of Education would grant money directly to schools and parents similar to the learning materials. The last category was extra-curriculum activities, for example, activities promoting morality, scouts (boys and girls), and excursions at least once per academic year as well as information and communication technology no less than 40 hours per student per year (Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education 2009, p. 1-10; Office of the Basic Education Commission 2009, p. 1-33). The Ministry of Education transferred the budget to every school around the country on 18 March 2009. For better understanding of stakeholders, the Ministry of

Education published and distributed the manuals which elaborated in detail this policy (Ministry of Education 2009a, p. 1-33).

Another example is Section 22 which is the first section of Chapter 4, National Education Guidelines. This section set the major principle for education provision, as it stated: “Education shall be based on the principle that all learners are capable of learning and self-development, and are regarded as being most important. The teaching-learning process shall aim at enabling the learners to develop themselves at their own pace and to the best of their potential” (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p. 7). “All learners....as being most important” is confusing and key stakeholders interpreted this phrase differently. When the Chuan Government tried to implement this section in the name of the “Child-Centred” approach, it caused confusion and anxiety among executives of schools, teachers and students because it was not clear what it really means and encompasses.

The next controversial issue which was the result of the ambiguity of the National Education Act and other related regulations. As discussed in Chapter 5 that the Chuan Government proposed the plan to transfer educational institutions to local government organisations which triggered resistance from teachers around the country. Not only did the government try to substantially transform the administration of education in Thailand, the government also proposed this plan based on its interpretation of the 1997 Constitution, the National Education Act and other related regulations.

Paragraph 2 of Section 289 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2540 (1997) stated that “A local government organisation has the right to provide education and professional training in accordance with the suitability to and the need of that locality and participate in the provision of education and training by the State, but needs to be

consistent with Section 43 and 81 as provided by law” (The Royal Thai Government 1997b, p. 75). The right of local government organisations to provide education at any level is reiterated in other legislations including the National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999) and the Decentralisation Plan and Process Act B.E. 2542 (1999). Section 41 of the National Education Act provides that “Local administration organisations shall have the right to provide education at any or all levels of education in accord with readiness, suitability and requirements of the local areas” (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p. 12). Section 42 assigns a duty to empower local government organisations to provide high-quality education and to set a standard for them to the Ministry of Education, Religion and Culture, as it specifies: “The Ministry shall prescribe the criteria and procedures for assessing the readiness of the local administration organisations to provide education. The Ministry shall be responsible for co-ordination and promotion of the local administration organisation’s capability to provide education in line with the policies and standards required. It shall also advise on the budgetary allocations for education provided by local administration organisations” (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p. 13). The Decentralisation Plan and Process Act B.E. 2542 (1999) also entitles all five categories of local government organisations in Thailand, namely: (1) Municipalities covering urban areas with crowded population; (2) Sub-District Administrative Organisations outside municipalities; (3) Provincial Administrative Organisations covering the whole area of each province and the jurisdictions of municipalities and sub-district administrative organisations; (4) Bangkok Metropolitan Administration in Bangkok; and (5) City of Pattaya, to provide education for the residents in their jurisdictions (The Royal Thai Government 1999a, p. 53-55). Moreover, Chapter 4 of this Act ambiguously requires the government to develop a plan to decentralise “public service” which can be interpreted to

include education provision to local government organisations (The Royal Thai Government 1999a, p. 63-65).

The Chuan Government interpreted all of the related law mentioned above that education provision was one of the public services which could be decentralised to local government organisations.

After Kasem was appointed Minister of Education, he insisted all involved actors should come together to set the standards to assess the readiness of local government organisations to receive educational institutions, as he clearly stated:

From now on, we should not waste time quarrelling with one another or arguing about the willingness to be transferred. We should come together to set the standards to assess the readiness. The core goal is to transfer to local government organisations and encourage local people to learn to take care of their own children's education. Some local government organisations can perform this duty tomorrow; some of them may have to wait for further 3 to 5 years. The central government and local government organisations must co-operation with each other. The central government should support local government organisations academically and financially. Designing a system cannot please everyone, but will benefit a majority. If we adhere to this principle, conflict will be gradually settled. We need to entitle teachers and local government organisations to participate in the process (Watanachai 2001).

However, as the tenure of Kasem was relatively short, the issue was not completely resolved. This issue was to some degree settled on 4 August 2005 during the tenure of Chaturon Chaisang, the sixth Minister of Education of the Thaksin Governments appointed in 2005 (The Royal Thai Government 2005b, p. 3; *'Kortonrub rattamontree'* 2005). He said that the transfer of schools to the local government organisations would be based on the readiness of each local government organization. He also insisted that the

Ministry of Education would not transfer many schools at a time. Moreover, he promised to set the clear standards for teachers who wished to be transferred to the local government organisations and how they would get promoted (*'Chaturon Chaisang rormorwor sortor konmai'* 2005).

On 8 November 2005, the Cabinet agreed to transfer educational institutions to the local government organisations based on the willingness of both sides and taking the readiness of the local government organisations, educational quality and the benefits for students into account. The Cabinet assigned the Ministry of Education to monitor and assess how the local government organisations provide education after the transfer. The Cabinet also assigned the Ministry of Education amend related regulations in compliance with the Cabinet resolution (The Secretariat of the Cabinet 2005b). In order to comply with the Cabinet resolution, the Ministry of Education legislated the second Ministerial Regulations on the Criteria and Procedures Assessing the Readiness of the Local Government Organisations' Capacities to Provide Education B.E. 2549 (2006) and the Ministry of Education Announcement on the Procedures and Criteria to express willingness to transfer educational institutions to the local government organisations B.E. 2549 (2006). The main reason is that the first Ministerial Regulation did not have any provisions on the willingness of the executives, teachers and education personnel to be transferred the educational institutions to the local government organisations (The Royal Thai Government 2006a; p. 8-11; The Royal Thai Government 2006d, p. 1-3).

The ambiguity of the National Education Act leading to different understandings between different actors to some degree influenced Pongpol Adireksan, the fourth Minister of Education of the first Thaksin Government, to implement the scheme with the aim of

explaining what were required by the National Education Act in simple words so that different actors understood the education reform policy in the same direction.

Pongpol explained his project:

About the National Education Act, when I was appointed as the Minister of Education, people had different interpretations. This was why I travelled a lot to other provinces to explain to stakeholders about the essence and details of the education reform. I separated the reform into five pillars, which I called '*Punja patiroop*'. After I elaborated for a while, people began to understand more clearly what the education reform was, what the essence of the National Education Act was" (personal communication, 16 August 2012).

Pongpol divided the education reform policy into five pillars. First, it was necessary to reform the educational system in Thailand according to Section 15 of the National Education Act by trying to link formal, informal and non-formal education together and make them compatible with one another. Second, learning processes had to be reformed according to Section 22-30 by focusing on a curriculum, students, content, teaching methods, learning sources and learning processes. Third, reforming the administration and management according to Section 31-39 of the National Education Act needed to be implemented by concentrating on decentralisation and internal quality control. The main agencies involved are Office of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Office of the National Education Council, Office of the Basic Education Commission, Office of the Vocational Education Commission, Office of the Higher Education Commission. Fourth, teachers and education personnel had to be reformed according to Section 52-57 of the National Education Act. The system should be able to recruit high quality teachers and personnel. The status of teachers and education personnel had to be elevated. Their welfare and salary must be adjusted in accordance with the standards of this career. The standard of teachers' performance would be improved. Lastly, it was

inevitable to reform resources and investment in education according to Section 58-62 of the National Education Act by encouraging the whole society and the media to support the reform as well as the use of technology for education (Saroop karnpatipatratchakarn Pongpol Adireksan 2003).

Chaturon also needed to embrace reconciliation principles to administer the Ministry of Education and the education reform policy as he found out that found out that the most serious problem was the different understanding and interpretation of the education reform policy and related laws and regulations (*'Chaturon Chaisang rormorwor sortor konmai'* 2005). He explained the rationale behind his approach that "I have a chance to be a member of the Reconciliation Commission, so I would embrace the reconciliation principles to solve the dispute within the Ministry of Education. I had been Deputy Prime Minister overseeing education policy. This enhanced my understanding of education and my familiarity with senior bureaucrats of the Ministry... My strategies focus on co-operation and opinion exchange with staff. From now on, senior bureaucrats of the Ministry can open the door and talk to me all the time" (Saengsook 2005).

The last issue of ambiguity was about 'area base administration'. The National Education Act did not outline the criteria how to determine the number of the educational service areas. Wichit himself did not want to use the administrative areas like provinces as the basis for the establishment of the educational service areas, but he encouraged the consideration of various criteria, for example, similar and appropriate workloads and the appropriate sizes which should not be too big (Office of Education Reform 2001b, p. 49-50). However, there were some people who wished to base the education service areas on the number of provinces (personal communication with Wichit Srisa-an 14 September 2012). The issue on the criteria to determine the number of the educational service areas

was one of the controversial issues which resulting in the dispute between Minister Kasem Watanachai and Deputy Prime Minister Suwit Khunkitti in 2001, which led to Kasem's resignation in 2001.

As the National Education Act and other related regulations contained some ambiguous terms and phrases which led to different interpretation by different governments and ministers leading to conflict and disagreements between different actors. Some ministers including Pongpol and Chaturon needed to implement the scheme and approach to seek a consensus on how to interpret the provisions of the National Education Act and other related regulations.

Chapter 7 discusses the third factor affecting the actions or nonactions of governments which is the lack of one main agency responsible for the implementation of the education reform policy in Thailand from 1999 to 2009.

Chapter 7

The Lack of One Main Agency Responsible for the Implementation of the Education Reform Policy

This chapter discusses how the lack of one main responsible agency and the lack of agreement on the education reform policy affected the roles of governments in the education reform policy in Thailand from 1999 to 2009.

Top-down theorists such as Hogwood and Gunn (1984, p. 199-206) suggested that there should be one main agency responsible for policy implementation without the need to be dependent on other agencies to be successful. This is not the case for the National Education Act and the education reform policy in Thailand. First of all, Instead of elaborating in detail how to restructure the agencies responsible for education, how to mobilise resources for education and how to restructure the personnel system in education, the Act required the government to set up the ad hoc public organisation called the “Office of Education Reform”, the executive committee of which was initially chaired by Professor Wichit Srisa-an, and later by Professor Prachya Vessaraj (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p. 20-21; The Royal Thai Government 2000a, p. 7-8; The Royal Thai Government 2000b, p. 58; The Royal Thai Government 2000c, p. 7). The main duties of this organisation according to the National Education Act were to finalise details of the three issues mentioned, to draft related legislations and to propose the legislations to the government for consideration. Even though the Office of Education Reform became a significant agency because its proposals and drafted legislations would be a basis for restructuring the government agencies related to education in Thailand in later years, the Office of Education Reform established by the National Education Act did not have the authority to force the government in power to accept its proposals at all. It means the

Thaksin Government which was in power when the Office of Education Reform completed their proposals did not necessarily accept the proposals or could even reject them.

It was the Chuan Government who established the Office of Education Reform after the National Education Act came into force. The government was removed from power at the general election on 6 January 2001 before the Office of Education Reform finalised all of its proposals and draft legislations.

When the first Thaksin Government came to power, the conflict and disagreement between the government and the Office of Education Reform began to emerge. The first issue as elaborated in the Chapter 5 was how to determine the number of the educational service areas. Kasem Watanachai, the first Minister of Education of the Thaksin Government seemed to agree with the proposal of the Office of Education Reform with 295 educational service areas under the portfolio of the Office of the Basic Education Commission based on the following criteria: (1) the population in each area should be approximately 150,000-200,000; (2) each district will be one educational service area; in case the population in one district is small, it will amalgamate with adjacent districts; (3) the number of educational institutions in each area should be approximately 100; (4) geography, transportation and communication will also be taken into account (Office of Education Reform 2001b, p. 49-50). However, Suwit Khunkitti as Deputy Prime Minister, who oversaw the administration of the Ministry of Education disagree with this proposal. Finally, Kasem could not stand the pressure put on him and decided to resign from the position.

In March 2001, the Office of Education Reform attempted to put forward the most comprehensive reform based on the provision and the spirit of the National Education Act

by proposing 23 bills and 51 other draft legislations and ministerial regulations with regard to the restructuring of the government agencies responsible for education to the government for consideration (Office of Education Reform 2001c, p. 61-70 '*Sorkao 'Thaksin' yued patrioop*' 2001). However, the Thaksin Government did not propose any single bill to Parliament for consideration. When Suwit Khunkitti replaced Thaksin as Minister of Education, had only 10 months to enact all bills by the deadline set by the National Education Act. His personal attitude towards the education reform policy was different from that of the Office of Education Reform. Suwit believed that the education reform policy should be implemented gradually with caution based on reasons and principles. He decided not to propose the bills to Parliament for consideration because he needed to consider the details of each bill thoroughly. He explained the rationale behind his actions:

I don't know whom I should blame regarding the education reform in the past. Whether we blame the people who design the learning plans and learning processes which force teachers to teach as directed, or whether we blame the law-makers, are all reasonable (*'Saroop wisaitas 'patrioop karnsuksa' 3 rattamontree Suwit Chamlong Sirikorn*' 2001).

He also created conflicts with the members of the Executive Committee of the Office of Education Reform and some other prominent advocates of the education reform policy including Dr Wichit Srisa-an, Dr Sippanon Ketthat, and Dr Rung Kaewdang. Suwit strongly criticised these three prominent advocates of the education reform policy on the ground that they were all involved in the education reform in Thailand in 1974, after the upheaval of the university students and ordinary people against the military authoritarian regime in Thailand in 1973, and their efforts to reform Thailand's education at the time obviously failed. Their failure in 1974 led us to the need of another reform in 1999 (*'Suwit' wo pen hero plukdun kodmai juakklub 3 Dr. – 9 Arahan 'sorporsor'* 2001;

'Suwit' maiwangjai patiroop sorkorsor wan sumroi' 2001). He summarised his distrust in these scholars that “how could I not worry about this proposed education reform...when it is these same people who drafted the previous plans. They failed the last time and are now back again. I don't want to see past mistakes haunt us” (*'Reformers 'can't be trusted' 2001*).

When criticising the prominent scholars advocating the education reform policy, not only did Suwit refer to their historical records on this policy, he also referred to Thailand's ranking in education as released in 2001 by the International Institute of Management Development (IMD) based in Switzerland, 44th from 49 countries, as an indicator of the failure of the education reform policy in the past 20 years despite the fact that Thailand has invested about one-quarter of its annual budget in education (International Institute of Management Development 2001, p. 331).

Due to the fact that Suwit had no confidence in the Office of Education Reform and some other advocates of the education reform policy as elaborated, he could not accept their proposals immediately, but the proposals needed to be tested and thoroughly analysed first (*'Suwit' sud karnsuksathai woop ponjak rabob pitplad 20 pee kon' 2001*; *'Chee karnsuksathai rungtai hedpitplad jak adeed' 2001*; *'Suwit' yonadeed tee lomlew dueng rabob karnsuksathai toktum' 2001*).

Suwit's comments triggered bitter criticism and explanations from stakeholders of the education reform policy. Dr Rung Kaewdang, the Secretary-General of the National Education Commission, retaliated against Suwit's criticism that Thailand's education was ranked 44th by IMD because more money was spent on materials than teaching and learning development (*'Suwit' suamroi todadeed tumlew 'patiroop' lomlew tonhed thai buay' 2001*).

Dr Rung Kaewdang also explained that in reality the education reform scheme in 1974 did not fail, but it could not be implemented because of the political instability of the country in 1976, and it was alleged that the education reform plan was drafted by communists. At the time Dr Rung himself, Dr Sippanon and Dr Wichit were all undertaking doctoral studies (Srisa-arn 2001; *'3 Dr' tokklab 'Suwit' suksa mailomlew – yoodsardklone'* 2001).

Wichit Srisa-arn demanded Suwit to identify clearly which proposals of the Office of Education Reform he could not accept and the reasons behind:

If Minister Suwit said he cannot accept the reform propositions, he needs to identify clearly which ones are not good enough. The problem is that he did not identify which of the previous reform was not good. He only blamed the previous reform for the current failure of education... it is too quick to attack other people without classification. I have been working continuously as a teacher, educator, I always classify before I say this is somebody's fault, especially when you work together in a system with many committees sifting information. This time we come this far as we have enacted the National Education Act. I need to ask the Minister when the National Education Act was proposed for consideration, are you in government? When the National Assembly approved this Act, are you a Member of Parliament? Why did you approve this Act and now say it is only the cryptic writing? Why did not you say that at the time? (Srisa-arn 2001).

Suwit (personal communication, 27 September 2012) claimed that he has broad experiences about education as a student who had opportunities to study in regional Thailand, in Bangkok and abroad; a member of the National Primary Education Commission; the Secretary to the Minister of University Affairs responsible for drafting the first National Education Development Plan of Thailand; the Chancellor; Deputy Prime Minister overseeing the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Education. Based on his claimed extensive experience in education, he argued that the National Education Act

had created some problems and needed to be amended. One issue which he criticised the proposal of the Office of Education Reform was the abolishment of the agency responsible for vocational education and amalgamated it with basic and higher education. He elaborated his views on the amendment:

We thought the law [*the National Education Act*] had some problems. The nine members of the Education Reform Commission had one kind of experience because most of them were university lecturers. There was only one member who had been involved in basic education, Mr Suwat Ngercham. However, he had not been a teacher in a school or had been for a very little while. He had no experience in administering a school. He works mainly in the Ministry. Therefore, the law had many problems. For example, they integrated all basic education: non-formal education, primary and secondary education, vocational education, into one. By doing so, a problem definitely emerged because they were totally different in terms of the psychological principles, the behaviours of students, how to prepare students for studies. Only the combination of primary and secondary education had created problems let alone adding vocational education. Primary school teachers simply cannot teach secondary students and vice versa. Moreover, vocational education teachers have never been prepared to teach secondary students. It simply did not help solve the issue of a teacher shortage. We foresaw this kind of problems from the beginning... It was not going to work. There were problems within the basic education administration alone. I proposed the amendment, and I was strongly criticised on the ground that how I knew that there would be problems mentioned (personal communication 27 September 2012).

Ratchanee Yampracha (2001, p. 52) observed that one of the reasons the Thaksin Government was sceptical about the National Education Act and the proposals of the Office of Education Reform was that the education reform policy in Thailand was initiated by the government led by the Democrat Party in 1999, the change of government in 2001

inevitably delayed the implementation of this policy. It is usual in Thai politics that the new government would not want to attach great significance to the policy which they had not initiated in the first place. The government led by Prime Minister Thaksin was not an exception. They did not continue the policy which had been initiated by his political opponents. This also could to some degree explain the reason the Thaksin Government reluctantly pushed for laws considered essential for the education reform policy. In 2001 alone, the Thaksin Government never proposed the bills to the Cabinet or the National Assembly for consideration (Yampracha 2001, p. 65).

This observation is in accordance with the comment of Abhisit Vejjajiva, the Deputy Leader of the Democrat Party at the time. He believed that the Thaksin Government tried to delay the education reform policy mainly because Thaksin regarded the National Education Act as the Democrat Party's law, as he commented:

I think it was really the case even though what happened in reality was different. If he had followed the law-making process, he would have discovered that it was the law which every political party worked together to formulate. I was the chairperson of the extraordinary committee of the House of Representatives responsible for considering this law in detail; the process was open for every stakeholder's participation. I never clung to the draft approved by the Cabinet or the Council of State. Unfortunately, Thaksin was not involved in the process at the time (personal communication, 24 August 2012).

However, there were some stakeholders which explicitly supported Suwit. For example, the Network of Teachers and Officials of the Ministry of Education Organisation provided their strong support for Suwit. The organisation argued that during the six-month tenure of Suwit Khunkitti as the Minister of Education, the education reform policy substantially progressed because Suwit was determined to do so (Ruecharit 2002). The organisation

went on to argue that Suwit was open to listen to the opinions of every group of stakeholders. Even though he had contradictory views to the Office of Education Reform, the policy was not halted, for instance, the pilot project of the Educational Service Areas had been implemented. Regarding the proposals of the Office of Education Reform, Suwit himself attended the Fourth Cabinet Sub-Committee and continuously discussed many issues with the representatives of the Office of Education Reform and other related agencies, which helped decrease controversial issues (Ruecharit 2002). The attempt of the opposition parties to impeach Suwit based on the allegations that he intentionally violated the laws was false and unfair for him (Ruecharit 2002).

Due to his contradictory views with the Office of Education Reform, Suwit faced a censure debate in 2002 and the impeachment process initiated by the Democrat Party-led Opposition Sanan's other allegation against Suwit was that Suwit failed to implement the education reform policy effectively within three years, the timeframe set by the National Education Act (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p. 20). Sanan criticised Suwit that he was not determined to put forward five bills regarding education which the government considered necessary for governing the country and 23 bills which the Office Education Reform proposed to the government. That Suwit did not attend the meetings of the committees responsible for considering the details of each bill reflected his failure and his lack of determination to implement the education reform policy (The Secretariat of the House of Representatives of Thailand 2002c, p. 21-24).

Suwit responded to all charges against him by the Opposition that during his seven-month tenure, he was determined to implement the education reform policy and the reform progressed well. He argued that he had many achievements, for example, the reform of the curriculum and the reform of pedagogy. He also argued that the reason he did something

contrary to the policy statement of the government was that he wanted to be open for different opinions from a large number of stakeholders. Moreover, he defended his failure to put forward the education reform bills within the timeframe set by the National Education Act that he wanted to consider every issue carefully as he did not want to complete the reform within the timeframe but caused too many problems which needed to be resolved afterwards. Lastly, he insisted that he did not amend the essence of the National Education Act; he only amended its details (The Secretariat of the House of Representatives of Thailand 2002c, p. 36-44, 47-65; '*Sarop kam apiprai mai wai wangjai rattamontree*' 2002). After the censure debate ended, Suwit Khunkitti won a vote of confidence in the House of Representatives by 357 to 131 votes (The Royal Thai Government 2002a, p. 130).

The restructuring of the government agencies was successful during the tenure of Pongpol Adireksan; the Administration of the Ministry of Education Act was in force in 2003. The Act amalgamated three main agencies, namely: Ministry of Education, Ministry of University Affairs and the Office of the National Education Commission into the Ministry of Education. Moreover, the Act also amalgamated the previous 14 departments into 6 main agencies (The Royal Thai Government 2003h, p. 1-30).

The first agency is the Office of the Permanent Secretary responsible for formulating plans and strategies for the Ministry and coordinating with other agencies of the Ministry. The Office of the Permanent Secretary comprises the following bureaus: (1) Bureau of General Administration, (2) Bureau of Policy and Strategy, (3) Bureau of International Co-operation, (4) Bureau of Legal Affairs, (5) Bureau of Inspection and Evaluation, (6) Office of the Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Commission, (7) Office of the Private Education Commission, (8) Office of the Non-Formal Education Commission, (9)

Bureau of Information and Communication Technology, (10) Bureau of Scout Movement, Red Cross Youth and Student Affairs, and (10) Institute for Development of Educational Administrators (The Royal Thai Government 2003f, p. 4-11).

The second agency is the Office of the Education Council responsible for generating education policies and plans. The agency comprises the following bureaus: (1) Bureau of General Administration, (2) Bureau of Education Policy and Planning, (3) Bureau of Education Standards and Learning Development, (4) Bureau of Education Administration Evaluation, (5) Bureau of Education Law Development, and (6) Bureau of Educational Research and Development (The Royal Thai Government 2003c, p. 12-16).

The third agency is the Office of the Basic Education Commission responsible for basic education from Year 1 to Year 12. The agency comprises the following bureaus: (1) Bureau of General Administration, (2) Bureau of Policy and Basic Education Planning, (3) Bureau of Academic Affairs and Education Standards, (4) Bureau of Basic Education Monitoring and Evaluation, (5) Bureau of Special Education, (6) Bureau of Personnel Administration Development and Legal Affairs, (7) Bureau of Finance, (8) Bureau for Innovative Development in Education, (9) Bureau of Educational Testing, and (10) Bureau of Technology for Teaching and Learning (The Royal Thai Government 2003b, p. 17-23).

The fourth agency is the Office of the Higher Education Commission responsible for higher education. The agency comprises the following bureaus: (1) Bureau of General Administration, (2) Bureau of Higher Education Policy and Planning, (3) Bureau of International Co-operation Strategy, (4) Bureau of Higher Education Standards and Evaluation, (5) Bureau of Higher Co-operation and Promotion, (6) Bureau of Student Development, (7) Bureau of Personnel Administration and Development, (8) Bureau of

Community College Administration, and (9) Bureau of Central Education testing (The Royal Thai Government 2003d, p. 24-29).

The fifth agency is the Office of Vocational Education Commission: the office comprises the following bureaus: (1) Bureau of General Administration, (2) Bureau of Vocational Education Policy and Planning, (3) Bureau of Co-operation, (4) Bureau of Vocational Education Standards and Qualifications, (5) Bureau of Personnel Competency Development, (6) Bureau of Research and Development, and (7) Bureau of Monitoring and Evaluation (The Royal Thai Government 2003g, p. 30-34).

The sixth agency is the Office of the Minister responsible for providing support for the minister on political missions and coordinating with other government agencies. The agency comprises the following bureaus: (1) Unit of General Administration, (2) Unit of Political Relations, and (3) Unit of Academic Support (The Royal Thai Government 2003e, p. 1-3).

Pongpol was replaced by Adisai Bodharamik at the end of 2003 (The Royal Thai Government 2003i, p. 2). Adisai inherited some problems pertaining to human resource management as the results of the structuring of the Ministry of Education completed during the tenure of Pongpol. The Department of General Education, Department of Academic affairs and Office of the National Primary Education Commission were amalgamated into the Office of the Basic Education Commission. At the provincial level, approximately 2,000 offices of the Provincial Primary Education Commission, offices of the District Primary Education Commission and offices of the Provincial General Education were to be dissolved in order to set up 175 educational service areas (The Royal Thai Government 2003h, p. 1-30). The Teacher Civil Service and Education Personnel Bill was still debated in the Parliament when Adisai was appointed Minister of Education

Adisai needed to solve this problem by consulting many related agencies. They all agreed that the Teacher Civil Service Commission at the time should legislate the 25th Regulation on the Salary of the directors, deputy directors and staff of the educational service areas (The Royal Thai Government 2004e, p. 1-2). He believed that legislating the regulation enabled all stakeholders to perform their duties smoothly (Ministry of Education 2005, p. 70-72). On 8 March 2004, the Teacher Civil Service Commission issued an announcement on recruiting the directors of educational service areas, and the Ministry of Education later appointed the directors of educational service areas. However, a legal case was lodged at the Supreme Administrative Court. The Court ruled that the 25th regulation and the announcement of the Teacher Civil Service Commission on the directors of educational service areas were nullified (*'Jabkrasae sarnpokkrongsoongsoot'* 2005).

Adisai Bodharamik was also successful in putting forward three bills through Parliament as required by the National Education Act pertaining to teachers and educational personnel, namely: (1) the Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Act (The Royal Thai Government 2004d, p. 22-74); (2) the Salary, Accrediting Allowance and Positioning Allowance of Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Act (The Royal Thai Government 2004b, p. 75-77); and (3) the Salary and Positioning Allowance Act (Revision 4) (The Royal Thai Government 2004c, p. 78-80).

Despite his many achievements in enacting a number of legislations necessary for the implementation of the education reform policy, his sceptical attitude towards the Office of Education Reform, the National Education Act and the education reform policy in general was not different from Suwit. When he faced a motion of no confidence proposed by the Opposition led by the Democrat Party on 21 May 2004, he responded during the debate that many ministers in the Thaksin Government including himself did not agree with many

issues proposed by the Office Education Reform, for example, they did not agree with the amalgamation of 14 government agencies of the Ministry of Education and other agencies under the portfolios of other ministries into three or four main agencies with their own committees which was believed as an effort to exclude politicians from the education policy (The Secretariat of the House of Representatives of Thailand 2004, p. 220-223). He went further to argue that it was necessary for him and the Thaksin Government to consider amending the National Education Act and other related laws and regulations in the future to reduce confusion in the system, especially among bureaucrats at the operational level (The Secretariat of the House of Representatives of Thailand 2004, p. 224-225).

Another issue was that the Thaksin Government set up the system in which the Cabinet considered proposals from different ministries. Sub-committees chaired by deputy prime ministers were established in order to consider the first drafts of each ministry in detail and provide suggestions and recommendations back to the ministries. Often, the Cabinet also ordered each ministry or the Council of State when reviewing the details of bills to take into account the recommendations or observations of the sub-committees. This complicated the implementation of the education reform policy as it added an additional step. Kasem Watanachai, the first education minister of the Thaksin Government, faced this obstacle when he advocated 295 educational service areas. He needed the approval from Suwit as deputy prime minister supervising the Minister of Education.

The second example of how this system worked is the consideration of the Compulsory Education Bill by the Cabinet during the tenure of Prime Minister Thaksin holding another position as Minister of Education. The Cabinet approved the Compulsory Education Bill. The essence of the bill was to provide nine years of compulsory education. The bill would

require Thai children who are 7 years of age to attend schools and receive formal education until they turn 16. Parents who prevented their children from attending schools would be punished. Officers of each educational service area would be authorised to provide education to every child in their areas who fall into the age group of 7-16. After the Cabinet's approval, the Bill was passed on to the Council on State, the legal advisory body of the Thai government, for detailed consideration. The Cabinet also required the Council of State to take into account the suggestions of the Cabinet Second Sub-Committee that the Minister of Education should oversee the application of the Bill while the Ministry of Education, Religion and Culture was not yet established. After that the Bill must be submitted to the Government Whip before being proposed to the House of Representatives. Moreover, the Cabinet also required the Minister of Education to consider the suggestions of the Cabinet Second Sub-Committee on the solutions to resolve the insufficiency of teachers such as recruiting more teachers and dissolving some schools when appropriate (*'Parn por ror bor karnsuksa parkbangkub'* 2001; *'Kor ror mor parn rang karnsuksa parkbangkub'* 2001; The Secretariat of the Cabinet 2001c).

When Suwit as Minister of Education proposed the amendment of the National Education Act in 2002, the Cabinet ordered the Ministry of Education and the Office of the National Education Commission to take into account the suggestions from the Fourth Cabinet Sub-Committee chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Pongpol Adireksarn at the time supervising the Ministry of Education (The Secretariat of the Cabinet 2002a).

As elaborated, the Chuan Government established one ad hoc public organisation, the Office of Education Reform with the responsibility to draft essential legislations in order to restructure the government agencies responsible for education as required by the National Education Act. However, this organisation did not have any authority to

command or force the government to adopt its proposals and draft legislations. This loophole provided opportunities for the governments to criticise the organisation, delayed or even reject its proposals as Suwit did when he was Minister of Education. Suwit had no confidence in some members of the executive committee of the Office of Education Reform and the organisation's proposals. This was why he delayed proposing the bills drafted by the Office of Education Reform to Parliament for consideration. The restructuring of the Ministry of Education was delayed for approximately one year, and the reform of personnel management was delayed for approximately two years. Moreover, the Thaksin Government also created the system of Cabinet sub-committees which further compounded the implementation of the education reform policy.

Chapter 8 examines the fourth factor; how different levels of commitments and leadership of the governments affected the implementation of the education reform policy.

Chapter 8

Different Levels of Commitment and Leadership of the Governments

This chapter elaborates how different levels of commitment and leadership of the governments in the implementation of the education reform policy influenced the governments' actions or nonactions.

As Mazmanian and Sabatier (1989, p. 34) pointed out, commitment and leadership of implementing officials is a requirement for effective implementation. In this case, the commitment and leadership of the Thai governments to push for the education reform policy after the National Education Act came into force is necessary. However, the levels of commitment and leadership of each government and each minister responsible for the implementation of this policy differed.

In general, there were three major groups of elites who assumed power after the National Education Act came into force to implement the education reform policy. The first group was the elites led by the Democrat Party and some prominent scholars working closely with the party, who also formulated the education reform policy and legislated the National Education Act. The second group was the elites led by former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra who assumed power after the election victories in 2001, 2005 and 2007. The last group was the elites who assumed power after the bloodless coup d'état on 19 September 2006, which toppled the Thaksin Government. The leader of this group of elites is former Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont. Each group of the Thai elites who have been in power since 1999 had their own styles of and different levels of commitment to implementing the education reform policy based on the provisions and spirits of the National Education Act which caused confusion to policy implementation.

The Democrat Party

When the Democrat Party led coalition governments, it tended to focus on rules and regulations in order to reform the education of Thailand. The first step was complete as the Democrat Party-led coalition Government led by Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai was successful in enacting the National Education Act as elaborated in Chapter 4. After that the Chuan Government immediately established the Office of Education Reform as a public organisation with the responsibilities to present comprehensive proposals on how to restructure the Ministry of Education and other related government agencies in terms of organisations, personnel management and financial system as required by the National Education Act. The Royal Decree establishing the Office of Education Reform came into effect within around three months after the promulgation of the National Education Act, on 26 November 1999 (The Royal Thai Government 1999e, p. 45-57). At the beginning of 2000, on 11 January, the Chuan Government could officially appoint nine Members of the Executive Committee of the Office of Education Reform (The Royal Thai Government 2000a, p. 7-8). This showed the determination of the Democrat Party to implement the education reform policy based on the provisions of the National Education Act.

Moreover, the Chuan Government also tried to reform the teaching and learning methods according to Section 22 of the National Education Act which requires learners to be regarded as most important by introducing a child-centred approach as explained in detail in Chapter 5. Even though this approach was interpreted differently by different stakeholders and caused confusion and anxiety among parents, teachers and students, it expressed that the Chuan Government was determined to reform the learning and teaching methods of Thailand's education according to the provision and the spirit of the National Education Act.

The Chuan Government also initiated the drafting process of the new national curriculum which tried to incorporate local wisdom to comply with many sections of the National Education Act. Section 27 of the National Education Act authorises the Basic Education Commission, the new organisation under the new Ministry of Education, Religion and Culture set to be established within three years after the promulgation of the National Education Act, to prescribe core curriculum for basic education. The same section also grants some degree of autonomy to basic education institutions around the country to prescribe curriculum substance relating to needs of their local communities and include local wisdom (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p. 8-9). Section 28 identifies some desirable features of the curriculum mentioned in Section 27 must be “diversified...with the aim of improving the quality of life suitable for each individual’s age and potential” (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p. 9). Moreover, the new curriculum must also “aim at human development with desirable balance regarding knowledge, critical thinking, capability, virtue and social responsibility” (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p. 9).

However, after the promulgation of the National Education Act, the Basic Education Commission has not yet been established. The Ministry of Education led by Minister Somsak Prissanananthakul was initially responsible for drafting the new basic education curriculum. The Ministry of Education planned and started to conduct many activities in order to formulating the new basic education curriculum. There were many activities which would last three fiscal years from 2000 to 2002. Some examples of the activities included: the basic education curriculum framework setting; the core basic education curriculum drafting, publicising the curriculum, teaching media development and the implementation of the new curriculum.

Minister of Education, Somsak Prissanananthakul was one of the strong advocates of incorporating local issues and wisdom into the new curriculum. He tried to push for the local curriculum. Somsak (personal communication, 20 August 2012) explained his ideas:

One of the policy initiatives which I thought was successful was the local curriculum. The main idea was to encourage local communities to take part in administration of the curriculum. I wanted to see the roots and the way of life of the people in the countryside to be inculcated into students' minds. I tried to encourage local philosophers and local experts to help teachers to teach students in schools, for example, how to make desserts, how to play traditional Thai music, how to fish etc. I think this was one of the policies which worked. The whole society admired and welcomed it.

However, the new core basic education curriculum was not complete during the Chuan Leekpai Government because the tenure of the government terminated when Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai dissolved the House of Representative on 9 November 2000 and called an early election on 6 January 2001 (The Royal Thai Government 2000d, p. 2). The new core basic education curriculum was issued under the Thaksin Government in 2001.

In addition, the Chuan Government also wished to see the implementation of the education reform policy with the National Education Act as the main framework as smooth as possible, so the government organised conferences, seminars and workshops to encourage all stakeholders to exchange their opinions and to share their experiences on many significant issues to be implemented such as the new core basic education curriculum, new teaching approaches and the new structure of the Ministry of Education, Religion and Culture. Somsak at the time was also keen to create more opportunities for stakeholders in the educational system to participate in the education reform and to reach a consensus on the strategies to implement the education reform policy which were appropriate for Thai society.

Minister Somsak (personal communication, 20 August 2012) explained that “conferences and seminars were organised to bring together staff at the operational level and executives to discuss the rationale of the education reform and the strategies to implement them. They could reach an understanding between one another.” Besides, international conferences were also organised in order to exchange experiences with foreign scholars and practitioners on the education reform policy. The Thai government, especially Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai and Somsak, always made use of these opportunities to outline his visions for reforming Thailand’s educational system and to seek co-operation from stakeholders to put forward the education reform in Thailand.

The government also sought co-operation from journalists in Thailand to support the implementation of the education reform policy. In September 1999, the Ministry of Education invited approximately 30 leading journalists and heads of educational news of many television channels and radio stations to offer their opinions on the education reform policy. Somsak (*‘Sortor radom tuataensue’* 1999) stated that:

Journalists and mass media have important roles in the current education reform because we are in the age of information and communication. Besides, the Ministry of Education has already outlined the core missions. However, I would like to encourage all of you to bear in mind that the education reform scheme is not a burden to only one person, but it is everybody’s duty to support this reform... public relations lies at the heart of the success of the education reform.

From 13-16 December 1999, Bangkok hosted the international conference under the theme “Reforming Learning, Curriculum and Pedagogy: Innovative Visions for the New Century”. This international conference was organised and supported by various organisations including: the Asia-Pacific Centre of Educational Innovation for Development (ACEID); Office of the National Education Commission of Thailand

(ONEC); Centre for Citizenship Education, the Hong Kong Institute of Education; Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria, Australia; Department of Curriculum and Instruction; and College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota, U.S.A. The substance of the conference covered a wide range of issues: from visions for the twenty-first century, teaching and learning processes, assessment methods to curriculum (*Joodprakai patiroop kanrienroo* 2000; Asia-Pacific Centre of Educational Innovation for Development (ACEID) and UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific 2000). One outstanding activity of this international conference was the Youth Forum at which approximately 17 primary and secondary students from some schools in Bangkok, for example, St. Gabriel's College, Triam Udom Suksa School, Khamasiri Memorial School, Vajiravudh College etc., selected by the Office of the National Education (ONEC), had an opportunity to express their own views on education. The forum identified seven major problems with which Thailand was confronted at the time, namely: (1) the national curriculum; (2) teaching and learning processes; (3) the quality of teachers; (4) the quality of students themselves; (5) inequality between Thai children to access high quality education; (6) administration; and (7) academic freedom of teachers and students (Karakade 2000). The significance of the Youth Forum at this international conference was that it was a significant milestone which students as one of the most important groups of stakeholder of the education reform policy were allowed to express their opinions, and their opinions were heard by politicians and bureaucrats responsible for the education reform policy.

Another important objective of organising exhibitions and conferences was to elaborate the details of the education reform policy to teachers and staff at the operational level. On 28 December 1999, the Department of General Education responsible for secondary education in Thailand at the time, organised a learning process reform exhibition at

Surasakmontree School in Bangkok in order to showcase how a learning process had been reformed (*'Krom saman suksa road show'* 2000). At the beginning of 2000, there were exhibitions and conferences on the education reform policy. On 25 February 2000, at Watsaiyai in Nonthaburi Province, adjacent to Bangkok, there was an exhibition showcasing the new teaching methods of teachers who were then members of the teaching reform network created by the Office of the National Education Commission (*'Nitassakan lakpleinriano'* 2000). A further example was the national exhibition called *'Education Fair 2000'* from 9-26 March 2000. The *'Education Fair'* displayed innovations, technologies and best practices in education reform. It was also the forum where policy-makers, practitioners and stakeholders including students could exchange information, opinions and experiences. When delivering a speech at the Education Fair in 2000, Minister Somsak Prissanananthakul called for more open institutions for public participation and scrutiny, as he said:

Educational institutions belong to the communities, therefore, schools must be open wide for public participation in school administration as the National Education Act required that school administration committees need to have representatives from the communities. At the same time, I also want to see more women's participation in school affairs in order to reduce the number of female students suffering sexual harassment and make a more balanced decision (*'Saroop sara ngan makagum kansuksa 2000'* 2000).

Another example was the workshops and public hearings for brainstorming the substance of the subordinate laws required to be enacted by the National Education Act organised by the Office of the National Primary Education Commission in every province of Thailand (*'Sorporchor radom kwamkid'* 1999).

Not only did the Ministry of Education and other related government agencies organise these conferences, seminars and workshops for publicising the education reform scheme, other stakeholders also convened conferences and seminars; and then proposed conclusions to the government. An example was the conference of local philosophers and local community leaders in Northeastern Thailand on 11-12 December 1999 in Buriram Province. One of the main objectives of this conference was to find a strategy to integrate local wisdom into formal education (*'Poompanyatongtin'* 2000).

These conferences, seminars and workshops around the country contributed significantly to raising and maintaining awareness of the significance of the education reform policy among every segment of the Thai society after the promulgation of the National Education Act.

The last scheme which the Chuan Government implemented to comply with the National Education Act was the establishment of the specialised school for science and mathematics, Mahidol Wittayanusorn School. One of the purposes of the education reform and the National Education Act is to encourage and support each individual student to fulfill their potentialities for any subjects in which they are skillful. Gifted students will be offered high-quality and appropriate forms of education which may be different from education provided for ordinary students as stated in Paragraph 4 of Section 10 of the National Education Act (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p. 4).

The Chuan Government attached great significance to science, mathematics and technology as the government regarded these subjects necessary for developing the country and uplifting the quality of life of people. In 2000, the government decided to establish the specialised senior secondary school - Mahidol Wittayanusorn School - for science and mathematics as the public organisation and granted a considerable degree of

autonomy in terms of administration to the school. Only the major in science and mathematics is available at this school. The government noted the rationale behind the establishment of Mahidol Wittayanusorn School at the end of the Royal Decree establishing this school as follows:

Thailand is currently short of researchers and inventors in the field of science... at the moment the government a policy to encourage students who have great interests and competence in science and mathematics to have a chance to fulfil their potentialities which requires a special curriculum and teaching process which are different from ordinary schools. Therefore, it is necessary to establish this specialised school which concentrates on teaching science to gifted students in science and mathematics in order to prepare them for higher education and to be excellent scholars of the country... (The Royal Thai Government 2000e, p. 16).

The vision of Mahidol Wittayanusorn School is to “become a model of public specialised school in science which pilots the recruitment of highly gifted students in science and mathematics and providing high quality of education for them at the secondary level. The quality must be as high as leading science schools in the world. Students must have the spirit of researchers and inventors; maintain excellent health; have moral principles and virtues; have passion for learning; have pride in Thai identity; be determined to develop the country, and have positive attitudes towards fellowmen and nature” (Mahidol Wittayanusorn School n.d.).

Students of this school are granted scholarships, so they do not have to pay for tuition fees and other expenses. In the Fiscal Year 2004, which began on 1 October 2003 to 30 September 2004, Mahidol Wittayanusorn School received 192,444,700 baht of funding from the government (The Royal Thai Government 2003a, p. 30). In that Fiscal Year 2004, the school had 689 students from Year 10 to Year 12 (Mahidol Wittayanusorn

School 2004, p. 38). It means that on average the government provided approximately 279,310 baht for each student of this school. The amount was higher than that of ordinary students. According to Kriengsak Chareonwongsak (2004, p. 5), in the same Fiscal Year, the government subsidised each Year 10 to Year 12 student for only 3,164.44 baht.

Despite the fact that it was not explicitly stated in the Royal Decree establishing Mahidol Wittayanusorn School, it is the spirit and intention of this school to encourage the students to continue their higher education in basic sciences such as chemistry, biology and physics. The problem is that even though the government has been investing a large amount of money in this school each year, there is no single rule in the related laws requiring the students of this school to continue their studies at the universities in basic science. This loophole lets some students study social sciences and humanities in the tertiary education institutes, which does not comply with the aim of this school. Abhisit Vejjajiva (personal communication, 24 August 2012) conceded that this problem still exists, as he commented, “this is still a problem today. I tried to meet the students every year and convince them to pursue their higher education in the fields of sciences.”

The statistics presented in the school’s annual report suggest that each year no more than 30 per cent of the students continue their studies in the faculty of science; many of them choose to study applied sciences, for example, Medicine, Engineering, Pharmaceutical Science, Veterinary Medicine, Nursing etc. According to the 2006 annual report (Mahidol Wittayanusorn School 2006, p. 94), only 25.62 of the students who completed Year 12 in the Academic Year 2003 got into the faculty of sciences at universities; the proportion dropped to 20.17 per cent in the Academic Year 2004 and to only 16.96 per cent in the Academic Year 2005. On the contrary, the proportion of the students who decided to study Medicine at universities increased from 27.09 per cent in the Academic Year 2003 to

34.76 per cent in the Academic Year 2004 and 44.63 per cent in the Academic Year 2005 (Mahidol Wittayanusorn School 2006, p. 94). Worse, every year there have been some students undertaking the field of social sciences and humanities at the tertiary level. The proportion was 10.84 per cent in the Academic Year 2003, 12.02 per cent in the Academic Year 2004, and dropped to 6.70 per cent in the Academic Year 2005 (Mahidol Wittayanusorn School 2006, p. 94).

However, neither government nor politician responsible for education policy in Thailand has seriously considered closing this loophole in the laws to resolve this problem.

As a result, it could be argued that every step to implement the education reform policy after the National Education Act came into force seemed to be smooth and the government led by the Democrat Party tended to adhere to and follow the provisions and the spirit of the National Education Act as the main framework for the education reform policy in Thailand. The government tried to do anything to make the reform as smooth as possible.

Somsak Prissanananthakul, the Minister of Education under the Chuan Leekpai Government (personal communication, 20 August 2012), characterised the period of that government as the period of reform, as he explained:

It was the period in which the Honourable Chuan Leekpai returned to the prime ministership for the second time. The government realised the significance of the educational system of Thailand. We therefore delivered a policy statement pledging that we would reform the whole educational system of the country: from reforming the learning process which focused on students, reforming the teaching process focusing on teachers, reforming the structure of the government agencies and the administration emphasising the decentralisation from the central to regional and provincial agencies. As the government policy was sufficiently clear, we began by organising seminars and

workshops to train teachers, explain the policy to executives of educational institutions about decentralisation of educational administration to the educational areas.

When the Democrat Party returned to government at the end of 2008, Jurin Laksanawisit was appointed the Minister of Education. The government prioritised the provision 15-year free education for all Thai students from early childhood to senior secondary levels and declared it as one of its urgent policies as elucidated in detail in Chapter 6. Moreover, Jurin also initiated other schemes to improve the quality of education for Thai students.

The first scheme was the Tutor Channel. It was the extended project of the 15 year free education with its ultimate aim to uplift the quality of education of students around the country, especially at the secondary level, teachers, parents, people and students in non-formal education. This project has three objectives. First, it aimed to uplift the quality of education through an intensive tutoring. Second, the project would create more opportunities for students around the country to study with famous tutors. Third, the project would create more opportunities for every group of stakeholders to participate in providing education. This project gathered teachers from top schools in Thailand, for instance, Triamudom Suksa, Samsen Wittayalai, Howang etc. and popular famous private tutors to teach various subjects. Their teachings were broadcasted on NBT from 10.00-12.00 every Saturday. The videos could also be watched at www.etvthai.tv and other websites of the Ministry of Education. Apart from the Tutor Channel on Air, Jurin also initiated the Tutor Channel on Tour which the team responsible for the project travelled to the remote areas of Thailand and broadcasted the teachings there (Laksanawisit 2009).

The second scheme was the “Give Teachers back to Students” scheme. This scheme aimed to employ people with bachelor degrees to do administrative work in schools in order to relieve the burden of teachers. The Office of Education Council surveyed the

needs of schools and found that 13,000 positions were needed. Then, the Cabinet agreed to give 14,542 temporary positions on 6 May 2009. Applicants were trained for 1 month and were sent to work in educational institutions for 1 year. The recruitment would give priority to people in each local community (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Commission 2009; Commission on Human Resources of the Public Service 2009; *'Lengpundit tokngan tam turakarn'* 2009; Panngam 2009).

Yuppayong Woonwong, Director of Kochanpittayakarn School in Chonburi Province, agreed with this project because it “helped relieve the burden of teachers as they did not have to do administrative work by themselves” (personal communication 9 October 2012).

However, the approach of the elites led by the Democrat Party to the education reform policy faces some criticism from scholars. For example, Dr Vuthiphong Priebjivat (personal communication, 3 September 2012) criticised the Chuan Leekpai government that reforming the education in Thailand by enacting the National Education Act was a mistake because teachers could not be forced by law to embrace a child-centred approach, and they could not be punished in case they failed to do so. He analysed that many politicians of the Democrat Party have qualifications in law, and legislating laws is only their expertise (personal communication with Vuthiphong Priebjivat, 3 September 2012).

The Governments led by Thaksin Shinawatra and His Supporters

The situation began to change when the second group of elites led assumed power in Thailand after Thaksin Shinawatra led his Thai Rak Thai Party to win the election on 6 January 2001. This group of elites did not share the same approach with their predecessor.

The slogan of Thaksin's party during the election campaign was "think anew, act anew". Thaksin and his Thai Rak Thai Party pledged to lead Thailand out of the economic crisis which began in 1997. Thaksin captured a golden opportunity from the economic crisis to overcome, in Anek Laothamatas' words, "a tale of two democracies", which represented the conflicting perceptions of politics between the urban and educated middle class and the rural impoverished voters (Laothamatas 1996, p. 201). In the past, the urban and educated middle class and the rural impoverished voters always elected the candidates with different qualifications. As Anek Laothamatas (1996, p. 221-222) explained different voting patterns, "When the rural electorate chooses its candidates, it chooses patrons to look after its welfare and represent its communities. When the middle class evaluates the performance of the elected politics, it looks for political executives or professional lawmakers who could operate effectively at the national level." As the majority of Thai people still live in the rural areas, they have always been the people who put the government into being. On the other hand, the urban middle class who had less influences in determining who would be the government ironically had more power to topple the democratically-elected government by aligning themselves with the military to stage a coup d'état.

Nevertheless, the 2001 general election was a different story. Thaksin and his political party could win the votes from both rural, impoverished and urban middle class in Bangkok and other major cities. When speaking to the rural voters, Thaksin promised to delivered unprecedented social welfares and economic opportunities such as universal health care scheme in which Thai people needed to pay only 30 baht every time they went to see doctors. When speaking to the urban middle class in major cities, Thaksin positioned himself as a successful businessman who would lead the country out of the economic crisis and to compete with other countries in the international arena. He promised to strengthen every perspective of Thai economy and reformed the educational system of the country to serve that purpose. The main indicator of his success was the electoral result in Bangkok; out of 37 constituencies in Bangkok, Thaksin's political party won 29 seats (The Royal Thai Government 2001a, p. 3-4; The Royal Thai Government 2001b, p. 12).

After the election, unlike the Abhisit Government, the education reform policy was not one of the Thaksin Government's urgent policies of the first Thaksin Government. The urgent policies of the Thaksin Government were mainly about reviving the economy of Thailand from recession: (1) Three-year individual small farmers' debt suspension; (2) Establishment of the one-million baht Village and Urban Community Revolving Fund; (3) Establishment of the People's Bank; (4) Establishment of the Small-and Medium- Sized Enterprise Bank; (5) Establishment of a National Asset Management Corporation in order to comprehensively solve the problem of Non-Performing Loans (NPLs) in the commercial banking system; (6) Development of State Enterprises; (7) Universal Health Care Insurance Scheme in which Thai people needed to pay only 30 baht when they went to hospitals; (8) Illegal drugs clamp down; and (9) Corruption elimination (The Secretariat of the Cabinet 2001a).

Thaksin's economic policies were labelled by many scholars, both Thais and foreigners, as "Thaksinomics". Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker (2004, p. 100) explained that the main idea of Thaksinomics was the shift from neoliberalism, which IMF had imposed on Thailand before 2001, towards developmentalism, which the government has had to "play a positive role in protecting and promoting firms and sectors to overcome the disadvantages of competing against more advanced economies. The government implemented a 'dual track' policy. The first track was the stimulation of domestic consumption and providing more economic opportunities and welfare for the impoverished people. The second track was enhancing the Thai economy to be able to compete with other countries in the international arena (Phongpaichit & Baker 2004, p. 121-122).

However, the first Thaksin Government promised to implement the education reform policy "in accordance with the provisions and the spirit of the 1997 Constitution and the 1999 Education Act with the aim of developing Thailand into a knowledge-based society, which is a pre-requisite for becoming a knowledge-based economy" "... (The Secretariat of the House of Representatives of Thailand 2001a, p. 28-29).

Professor Wichit Srisa-an, a proportional MP of the Democrat Party which was in opposition at the time raised the question why the education reform policy was not one of the Thaksin Government's urgent policies, as he said:

The first issue I want to consider to what extent the government attaches significance to the education reform policy. During the election campaign, the education policy was one of the eleven issues of the national agenda, but in the policy statement the education policy is not one of the urgent policies. I am wondering whether it means the education policy is currently less significant in the government's perception... Regrettably, an issue on the

national agenda becomes an ordinary one (The Secretariat of the House of Representatives of Thailand 2001b, p. 2-3).

Professor Kasem Watanachai, Minister of Education responded to Professor Wichit's comment by stating:

I have listened to your [Opposition MPs] comments and criticisms on the urgent policies and policies in specific areas. You seemed to understand that the government attached less significance to the policies in specific areas than the urgent policies, which is not true. It is only that the government set the urgent policies because we consider that they deal with fundamental and severe problems. Policies in specific areas are significant, so they are all in this policy statement. We collectively have to solve those problems (The Secretariat of the House of Representatives of Thailand 2001b, p. 60-61).

Initially, Thaksin appointed Professor Kasem Watanachai, a strong advocate for the education reform policy based on the National Education Act, as the first Minister of Education of his government. He was determined to implement the education reform policy in compliance with the provisions of the National Education Act, and he tended to agree with the propositions of the Office of Education Reform set up by the Chuan Government, for example, on the issue of the number of the educational service areas to be established as elaborated in previous chapters. However, three months later, he decided to resign from the position because his policies and efforts were resisted by other politicians such as the then Deputy Prime Minister Suwit Khunkitti, who was responsible for supervising the Ministry of Education.

After that, the education ministers after Kasem including Thaksin himself tended to initiate their own policies rather than to complete what have been required by the National Education Act. Instead of finding a conclusion on the number of educational service areas,

Thaksin as the Minister of Education initiated the pilot project of the educational service areas in some provinces to figure out how the administration of the educational service areas worked best. However, this project was opposed to as it would contravene many laws, especially the State Administration Law. Moreover, Thaksin also interpreted the laws differently from the spirit of the Constitution and the National Education with regard to free basic twelve-year education. It was commonly understood that basic education is from Year 1 to Year 12 excluding early childhood education. Thaksin reinterpreted free twelve-year basic education to include three-year early childhood education to junior secondary education (Year 9). Even though Thaksin's interpretation was supported by some members of the Executive Committee of the Office of Education Reform, the interpretation was criticised by other key stakeholders, for example, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, other members of the Executive Committee of the Office Education Reform, MPs of the Democrat opposition party, some scholars in the field of education and former members of the Constitution Drafting Assembly which drafted the 1997 Constitution.

After Thaksin's resignation as the Minister of Education, Suwit Khunkitti, Deputy Prime Minister who had conflict with Kasem, was appointed the Minister of Education. Suwit went further than Thaksin. Not only did Suwit decline to adhere to the timeframe set by the National Education Act to restructure the government agencies responsible for education, he also doubted the validity of the National Education Act in general and the credibility of the Office of Education Reform set up by the Chuan Government. Suwit and the Thaksin Government finally decided to amend the National Education Act.

Apart from other reasons for the amendments explained in the previous chapters, the Thaksin Government also wished to amend the National Education Act because the Act

was contradictory to its attempt to reform the Thai public service. The Thaksin Government declared in 2001 that the government aimed to “reform the public service in order to improve efficiency and streamline the governmental structure in line with the current situation and to enable the public service to better serve national economic and social development. At the same time, accelerate the enactment of legislation to facilitate bureaucratic restructuring in order to keep up with the global trends as well as changes in the social and economic situation” (The Secretariat of the Cabinet 2001a). The Thaksin Government planned to separate the religious and cultural missions to establish the new ministry called the “Ministry of Culture and Tourism”, which was contradictory to Section 4 of the National Education Act, the intention of which was to unite and integrate all government agencies responsible for education, religious and cultural affairs of Thailand under one ministry, Ministry of Education, Religion and Culture (The Royal Thai Government 1999d, p. 3).

Bidhya Bowornwathana (2004, p. 135) called the approach of the Thaksin Government, ‘A country is my company’ approach. One of the nine assumptions of this approach is that government growth is a sign of the company’s prosperity (Bowornwathana 2004, p. 140). The growth of government would help Thaksin to consolidate power, as CEO Prime Minister, but it was contradictory to the spirit of the National Education Act which attempted to create unity of the educational management by reducing the number of government agencies responsible for education.

Accordingly, the Cabinet on 5 March 2002 passed the resolution to command the Ministry of Education to propose the National Education Amendment Bill, the essence of which was to alter the structure of the government agencies responsible for education from the

“Ministry of Education, Religion and Culture” to the “Ministry of Education” (The Secretariat of the Cabinet 2002b, p. 6).

The Ministry of Education then drafted the National Education Amendment Bill, and the Bill was sent to the Council of State for consideration in detail. The Cabinet approved the Bill on 2 April 2002. However, the Cabinet also ordered the Ministry of Education and the Office of the National Education Commission to take into account the suggestions from the Fourth Cabinet Sub-Committee chaired by Deputy Prime Minister Pongpol Adireksarn (The Secretariat of the Cabinet 2002a).

In essence, the amendment separated the religious and cultural missions from the Ministry of Education and established the new department within the Ministry of Education, the Vocational Education Commission responsible for proposing policies, development plans, standards and core curriculum for all levels of vocational education in compliance with the National Economic and Social Development Plan as well as the National Scheme of Education. Moreover, the Commission also has duties to promote co-ordination of provision of vocational education, mobilise resources, inspect and evaluate the provision of vocational education (The Secretariat of the House of Representatives of Thailand 2002a, p. 3-4).

Many groups of stakeholders strongly opposed the amendment put forward by Suwit Khunkitti and the Thaksin Government. The Office of Education Reform organised the roundtable seminar entitled “Analysis of the amendment of the National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999) proposed by the Ministry of Education”, at which many scholars, politicians, teachers and parents participated. Professor Prachya Vessaraj, the Chairperson of the Executive Committee of the Office of Education Reform at the time, presented the conclusion of the seminar that the amendment of the National Education Act proposed by

the Ministry of Education was an attempt to distort the spirit and principles of the Act regarding the unity, the decentralisation, the integration between education, religious and cultural affairs, knowledge with morality, which would lead to the same failure in the past. Moreover, the seminar agreed to move in order to express their opposition to the amendment proposal (*'Tuang patiroop karnsuksa – sorwor koo lar chuee tod 'Suwit'* 2002).

Then, the Council of University Presidents of Thailand (CUPT), in its ad hoc meeting 1/2002 at Chulalongkorn University on 6 April 2002. The meeting was attended by vice-chancellors of public universities, scholars in the field of education, former Ministers of Education and Senators. The meeting demanded the Thaksin Government not to amend the National Education Act mainly because they did not want the politicians to intervene in the education reform policy for their own benefits. They also sent a letter to Prime Minister Thaksin insisting that the government should implement the education reform policy in accordance within the framework of the existing law (*'Tor por or' perd weatee chapokit tueng nayok fantong 'kong por ror bor karnsuksa 2542'* 2002; *'Tor por or yuen nangsue tueng nayok yabiengben patiroop korsor'* 2002).

Against the opposition and criticism from many groups of stakeholders, the Cabinet proposed the National Education Amendment Bill to the House of Representatives on 1 May 2002. There were two other bills with similar provisions proposed by Mr Amnuay Klangpa, an MP of the ruling Thai Rak Thai Party from Lopburi Province and Mr Worawat Ueapinyakul, an MP of the Thai Rak Thai Party from Prae Province. Abhisit Vejjajiva, the Deputy Leader of the Democrat Party at the time opposed these three bills in the House of Representatives on the ground that the government waited for one year and a half to propose this bill; and that the amendment would only hold back the education

reform policy (The Secretariat of the House of Representatives of Thailand 2002b, p. 25-43). After the debate, the House of Representatives approved this bill by 307 to 95 votes, and the House of Representatives established an extraordinary committee comprising of 35 members to review the bills in detail. Other MPs who were not chosen members of this committee had seven days to submit any changes to the bill to the committee (The Secretariat of the House of Representatives of Thailand 2002b, p. 175). The House of Representatives considered the review of the extraordinary committee and passed the bill on 1 July 2002 (The Royal Thai Government 2002b, p. 156). The Amendment Bill then proceeded to the Senate, which made minor amendments to the Bill and approved it (*‘Wuttisapa parn rang kaekai por ror bor karnsuksa haengchart laew’* 2002). The House of Representatives approved the amendments made by the Senate on 6 November 2002 (The Royal Thai Government 2002c, p. 181). The National Education Amendment Bill was published in the Royal Thai Government Gazette on 19 December 2002 (The Royal Thai Government 2002d, p. 16-21).

When Suwit was replaced by Pongpol at the end of 2002, the situation was not different. Even though Pongpol tended to support and put forward the proposals of the Office of Education Reform and was successful in restructuring the Ministry of Education as explained in the previous chapters, the Ministry of Education needed to implement Thaksin’s initiative, the Lab School Project or One District One Dream School.

This project was initiated by an idea of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra with the aims of improving the quality of schools in terms of teaching quality and management and to reduce the gaps between schools in Thailand. Prime Minister Thaksin thought that most of the all high quality schools are located in only Bangkok and some other metropolitan areas

of Thailand while schools in remote and rural areas did not have sufficient resources to provide high quality education (Ministry of Education 2003b, p. 18, 21).

The Ministry of Education set up a commission on One District One Dream School, the main mission of which was to select one school from each district to be a dream school or a lab school. The commission also needed to outline the strategies to develop the curriculum which would be more flexible, develop the information technology for more flexible and more efficient school management. Each lab school would also be a learning source for its community in which it is located. Moreover, each lab school in every district would be supported by universities or private enterprises. The progress of this project had to be reported back to the Cabinet on 8 July 2003. In summary, there were five aspects of each lab school which needed to be developed to be a model for other schools in their communities, namely: (1) management structure; (2) teachers and personnel; (3) curriculum, media and learning sources; (4) information and communication technology and software; and (5) evaluation. When a lab school developed all five aspects, it needed to act as a mentor and help other schools in the same district to improve their quality and management (Ministry of Education 2003c, p. 2-4). In order to achieve these goals, the Ministry of Education issued a manual for stakeholders supporting this project. The substance of the manual included the strategies of the project, the roles of the supporters and mentors, ideas and principles on how to develop teachers and executives of lab schools (Ministry of Education 2003a).

According to Siriwan Tiamsiriwat, the director of Pantong School in Chonburi Province (personal communication 2012), the project was good for raising awareness and participation of everybody in her school. She recalled her experience when she heard about this project for the first time:

At the time, I did not know that my school had been chosen to be a lab school. The evaluators from the Office of the Basic Education Commission came to my school without notice and asked me if I knew anything about this project. I knew nothing at all. They told me this project was about smart students who can use ICT well and can analyse anything through the use of ICT. However, I was told that money would not be provided for my school, and I needed to find financial support by myself from banks and factories in the area ... I began with renovating my school together with changing the teaching methods. Students needed to be taught how to present the activities of the school ... The project raised awareness of the teachers and the executives of my school as all of us needed to find enough money apart from government budget for school development. The surrounding community also supported us. To assess this project, it was good if it was maintained. I must admit that the potential of students who took part in this project completely changed and became substantially greater than ever before.”

However, there was criticism against this project. It could be considered contradictory to the spirit of the Constitution which aimed provide high quality education for all Thai people, not only some students (Tuaypa 2003).

After Pongpol was removed from the position, Adisai Bodharamik replaced him as Minister of Education. He was successful in enacting three significant bills as required by the National Education Act pertaining to teachers and educational personnel, namely: (1) the Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Act (The Royal Thai Government 2004d, p. 22-74); (2) the Salary, Accrediting Allowance and Positioning Allowance of Teacher Civil Service and Educational Personnel Act (The Royal Thai Government 2004b, p. 75-77); and (3) the Salary and Positioning Allowance Act (Revision 4) (The Royal Thai Government 2004c, p. 78-80).

However, during his tenure, the Thaksin Government also initiated another scheme - One District One Scholarship (ODOS) - with the aim of providing scholarships for impoverished students around the country to undertake their undergraduate studies in Thailand or overseas (Kittisuksathit, Rakumnuaikit & Ponpiroon 2006, p. 1). The budget for this initiative came from the income from launching the 2- and 3- digit lottery. The main idea behind this project was “to enhance potentials and to develop knowledge and learning of Thai people at every level which is investment in human resource development. This investment would lead to sustainable and long-term economic growth and social development of Thailand” (Kittisuksathit, Rakumnuaikit & Ponpiroon 2006, p. 1). This scholarship was different from other government scholarships because this scholarship did not require scholarship recipients to study specific subjects, but they were entitled to study whatever they wished to. After they complete their studies, they would not be forced to work for any government agencies. The project began in January 2004. The government assigned the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office of the Civil Service Commission and the Government Lottery Office to implement this policy (Kittisuksathit, Rakumnuaikit & Ponpiroon 2006, p. 4-5). Adisai himself went to visit the first group of students who won the scholarships in France in order to inspect the implementation of the project and ask the students about their lives. He found that the students were satisfied with the scholarships and the opportunities bestowed upon them to study abroad (Ministry of Education 2005, p. 107-108).

Nevertheless, this project had a serious weakness with regard to how to prepare the students who won the scholarships before they travelled overseas for their studies both academically and psychologically. One student studying computer engineering in Germany committed suicide. The student’s elder sister revealed that she had received a

call from her younger sister and heard her younger sister cry “I cannot stay anymore. It’s too difficult to study the language”. Then, the student took 40 pills of paracetamol but the hospital was able to rescue her. However, the student later jumped off a building and died (*‘Klua pormae pidwang plardmaidai’* 2004). Sompong Jitradab from the Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University, criticised this project that he had already warned the government not to send students who won the scholarships overseas too quickly because he believed that those groups of students were not ready for both learning and living in foreign countries. Moreover, Sompong also argued that the government agencies responsible for taking care of those students were not ready either (*‘Kwam tai kong 2 nakrian botrian tee tatai rattabarn’* 2004). Adisai realised that the student’s suicide became a lesson for the Ministry of Education but he would not abolish the project. The solution to this problem was to allow teachers to go overseas and stay with the students for four or five months until the students could settle down well (*‘I amphoe I toon cheewit tee maikoom toon’* 2004). Thaksin, in order to prevent the same problem to recur, ordered the Office of the Civil Service Commission (OCSC) to counsel the students. If the students could not study foreign languages, they had an option to go back to Thailand to continue their studies. Besides, Thaksin also ordered the Thai embassies to take care of the students. The Ministry of Education needed to improve the criteria for recruiting the students. To prepare the students who received the scholarships better by inviting psychologists to assess the readiness of students before travelling overseas was also the Thaksin Government policy to prevent further suicide (The Secretariat of the Cabinet 2004; *‘Saner tang tootsuksa koom nakrian toon’* 2004).

The last minister of education of the Thaksin Governments was Chaturon Chaisang. He tried to seek a consensus among different actors on the implementation of the education reform policy, especially on contentious issues, for example, the transfer of educational

institutions to local government organisations as elaborated in Chapter 6. However, Chaturon and the second Thaksin Government from the end of 2005 to coup d'état in September 2006 faced protests by the Yellow-Shirt protesters, and he was removed from the position after the coup.

After the 2007 general election, the People Power Party (PPP), most members of which were from Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai Party, formed the coalition government. Somchai Wongsawat, a brother-in-law of ousted Prime Minister Thaksin, to be the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Education (The Royal Thai Government 2008d, p. 1). Somchai tried to implement many schemes to reform Thailand's education, for example, the promotion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education and providing of additional funding for the free-basic education scheme (Ministry of Education 2008b, p. 87-91, 99-108). His tenure terminated because Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej was removed from office by the Constitutional Court verdict because he had hosted two cookery TV programmes and received payment from a private company. This was considered a violation of Section 267 of the 2007 Constitution which prohibited all ministers including the prime minister from working for a private company. His cabinet ministers including Somchai had to step down automatically (*'Court says Thai PM 'must resign' 2008*).

After that, Somchai became Prime Minister and Srimuang Charoensiri was appointed Minister of Education. The tenure of the Somchai Government was the shortest one in the first ten years of the education reform policy, from 18 September 2008 to 2 December 2008, which lasted only about 75 days (The Royal Thai Government 2008f, p. 1; The Royal Thai Government 2008b, p. 1, 26-27). Thai politics was not stable mainly because of the protests by the anti-Thaksin movements, also known as the Yellow-Shirt protesters,

which lasted 193 days. The protesters seized the Government House in Bangkok, where the Prime Minister works and the Cabinet meeting takes place. It was extremely difficult for the Somchai Government to run the country because he could not enter the Government House to work. The Minister of Education was also affected by the protests because the Ministry of Education was located opposite to the Government House. Srimuang could not implement any of his visions for the education reform policy. The details of the political instability in Thailand in 2008, which significantly affected the stability of the governments and the implementation of the education reform policy, will be explained in the next chapter.

The Government Appointed by the Military Junta after the 19 September Coup d'État

After the coup d'état, Professor Wichit Srisa-an, former chairperson of the Executive Committee of the Office of Education Reform and Proportional MP of the Democrat Party, was appointed Minister of Education (The Royal Thai Government 2006b, p. 3).

Wichit had extensive experience in education and politics. He was the former permanent secretary of the Ministry of University Affairs and the chairperson of the Office of Education Reform who had played important roles in putting forward the education reform policy since at least 1999. Wichit was also a former MP of the Democrat Party who had always followed and monitored the education reform policy of many education ministers of the Thaksin Governments. He was warmly welcomed by the senior bureaucrats of the Ministry of Education, for example, Kasama Voravarn na Ayutthaya,

the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education at the time, praised Dr Wichit for his deep understanding of the education reform policy, as she noted:

It was lucky that Professor Wichit, the chairperson of the Office of Education Reform, was appointed the minister. When he was appointed, he understood that there were some problems and he was ready to solve them while many others would strictly adhere to the same policies and blueprints. He tried to change the direction of some policies. If somebody else had tried to change the reform, the change would have not been accepted by stakeholders because the stakeholders would have considered the change as an effort to undermine the spirit of the education reform. It was lucky that Professor Wichit understood the principles, but he was ready to amend the details as appropriate. Someone tried to amend both the principles and the details which was not possible (personal communication, 25 August 2012).

However, as the government was not democratically elected by Thai people and stayed in power for only one year, the government did not want to touch controversial issues. Instead, the government concentrated on non-controversial issues such as promoting the principle of “morality before knowledge” and self-sufficiency economy in the curriculum (Ministry of Education 2007a, p. 19), decentralisation of power to the educational service areas (Ministry of Education 2007b, p. 7-8), expanding opportunities of students to access high quality and free education by increasing financial subsidies for students (Ministry of Education 2007a, p. 41) and constructing more schools for students of low Socioeconomic Status (Ministry of Education 2007a, p. 46-50; Ministry of Education 2008a, p. 7-8) and uplifting educational standards and quality (Ministry of Education 2008a, p. 9-10; Ministry of Education 2007a, p. 62-94).

Apart from three different groups of elites with different approaches to implementing the education reform policy as already elaborated, in ten years from 1999 to 2009, there were

11 ministers altogether. In average, a minister was changed every year during the period. Each minister had different levels of commitment and leadership skills in implementing the education reform policy according to the provisions and the spirits of the National Education Act.

Kasama Voravarn na Ayutthaya (personal communication, 25 August 2012), former Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education and former Secretary-General of the Basic Education Commission, agreed that the frequent changes of the Ministers of Education undermined the Ministry of Education the most as when the new Minister assumed power, the entire Ministry needed to responded to the Minister's new policies and directions. She also believed that every policy and direction of every minister was good for Thailand's education; the problem is that no one had sufficient time in the position to implement their policies and visions (personal communication with Kasama Voravarn na Ayutthaya, 25 August 2012).

To sum up, from 1999 to 2009, there were three groups of elites who assumed power in Thailand and were responsible for the education reform policy. They had different levels of commitments and leadership to implement the education reform policy which caused confusion among stakeholders and delayed the reform. The Democrat Party tended to adhere to the provisions and spirit of the National Education Act. Thaksin Shinawatra and his associates tended to initiate their own schemes rather than only followed the laws and regulations. The government appointed after the 19 September coup d'état only focused on non-controversial issues.

Chapter 9 discusses the last factor, political stability in Thailand and the impacts on the implementation of the education reform policy.

Chapter 9

Political Instability in Thailand

Based on top-down theorist's propositions, political instability could be considered as a major obstacle to the implementation of the education reform policy, especially from 2006 onwards. This chapter examines in detail how political instability in Thailand affected the implementation of the education reform policy.

In 2001, Thaksin's political party, Thai Rak Thai, won almost half of the seats in the House of Representatives, 248 out of 500 MPs (Pongsudhirak 2009, p. 32). As explained in the Chapter 8, Thaksin and his political party could win the votes from both rural, impoverished and urban middle class in Bangkok and other major cities. The Thaksin Government's 'dual track' economic policy was popular with the electorate, especially its populist policy such as a universal health care scheme, in which Thai people needed to pay only 30 baht every time they visit doctors and the establishment of the one-million baht Village and Urban Community Revolving Fund (Funston 2009, p. XV). It should be noted that the first Thaksin Government was the first government in Thai political history after the democratic revolution in 1932, which could serve the full four-year term, from 6 January 2001 to 5 January 2005.

However, Thaksin reshuffled his Cabinet eight times and there were five Education Ministers in the first term of the Thaksin Government including (1) Kasem Watanachai; (2) Thaksin Shinawatra; (3) Suwit Khunkitti; (4) Pongpol Adireksan; and (5) Adisai Bodharamik. In average, each of the nine Cabinets of the first Thaksin Government lasted only about five months (Thanaponpan 2005, p. 90). The first Thaksin Cabinet was appointed by King Bhumibhol on 17 February 2001 (The Royal Thai Government 2001c, p. 1-4); and the ninth Cabinet was appointed on 6 October 2004 (The Royal Thai

Government 2004a, p. 1-3). It was Thaksin's decisions to change his ministers. It was not the result of the pressure from the public, the opposition parties or political instability at all (Thanaponpan 2005, p. 115-116).

Rangsan Thanaponpan (2005, p. 87-92), one of the most prominent scholars and critics of the Thaksin Governments, analysed that as Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai Party grew from a "Merger and Acquisition" strategy by acquiring other political parties in the political system, it was inevitable for the party to face conflicts and disputes between different factions within the party. One of the reasons Thaksin reshuffled his cabinets many times was to resolve the disputes between different factions within his Thai Rak Thai Party (Thanaponpan 2005, p. 115-116). Moreover, the 1997 Constitution intended to enhance the status and power of a prime minister to be a "strong prime minister". According to Rangsan Thanaponpan (2005, p. 113), a strong prime minister did not want to see any outstanding achievements of any ministers as the popularity of those ministers could grow and exceed the popularity of a prime minister. This was another reason behind the frequent reshuffle of the Thaksin's cabinets. As a result, Rangsan (2005, p. 117) concluded that even though the first Thaksin Government could serve its full four-year term, it did not mean that the first Thaksin Government was not more stable than Thailand's coalition governments before 2001. As elaborated in Chapter 8, too frequent changes of the ministers of education significantly affected the implementation of the education reform policy as each of them had different levels of commitment and leadership to implement the policy, which caused confusion among different actors.

When the term of the first Thaksin Government ended on 5 January 2005, the general election was held on 6 February 2005. Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai Party won a landslide victory and could secure an absolute majority in the House of Representatives, 377 out of

500 MPs (Pongsudhirak 2006, p. 286). It means that Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai party could form a majority government in its own right for the first time in Thailand's political history since its democratic revolution in 1932. The three opposition parties: the Democrat Party, the Chart Thai Party and the Mahachon Party, had only 123 seats combined. The number of seats Thai Rak Thai won clearly indicated that the Opposition led by the Democrat Party could not launch a censure debate against Prime Minister Thaksin and could not do so against ministers on corruption allegations based on the provisions of the 1997 Constitution (The Royal Thai Government 1997b p. 46-47, 299). The second Thaksin Government therefore could not be scrutinised in Parliament effectively.

The second Thaksin Government was criticised over its abuse of power, manipulation and political interference in independent organisations set up by the 1997 Constitution. Mutebi (2006, p. 303) labelled the second Thaksin Government as "semi-authoritarian", "soft-authoritarian" or "diminished democracy". Rangsan Thanaponpan (2005, p. 7) argued that Thaksin was leading Thailand towards "Democratic Authoritarianism". Mutebi (2006, p. 303-304) also argued that "there is little doubt that Thaksin's administration has shown greater authoritarian tendencies in comparison to his immediate predecessors". The Thaksin Government after the 2005 election, was accused of interfering in the selection processes of positions of many independent organisations including the positions of Auditor-General, the commissioners of the National Counter Corruption Commission, the commissioners of the National Broadcasting Commission as well as the National Telecommunication Commission as people selected was believed to have some connections with Thaksin or his government (Mutebi 2006, p. 306-314).

The political crisis began when Thaksin decided to take Sondhi Limthongkul's weekly current affairs programme called *Muang Thai Raisapda* or *Thailand Weekly*, which tended to criticise the Thaksin Government more frequently and more severely in 2005 over corruption charges and disloyalty to King Bhumibhol of Thailand, off a state-owned Channel 9 television station on 16 September 2005 (Montesano 2006, p. 2). However, Sondhi moved to host his programme at Lumpini Park in Bangkok Central Business District, which the audience continuously increased. Later, Sondhi's movement expanded to form the anti-Thaksin movement called the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), and it was commonly known as the Yellow-Shirt protesters at the beginning of 2006. According to Thitinan Pongsudhirak (2006, p. 297), Sondhi's movement was composed of "Bangkok-based social activists, NGOs, the intelligentsia, the disaffected middle class, and disgruntled businessmen". They mobilised mass rallies against the Thaksin Government frequently in 2006.

The movement gained momentum when Thaksin decided to sell his family-owned telecommunication company, Shin Corporation, to the Singaporean government's Temasek Holdings. The deal was worth 73 billion baht and Thaksin did not have to pay any taxes for this sale. The deal triggered mass rallies against the government. Thaksin later dissolved the House of Representatives and called an early election on 2 April 2006, which three opposition parties: the Democrat Party, the Chart Thai Party, and the Mahachon Party boycotted. It should also be noted that as mentioned in previous chapters, while Chaturon was trying to seek consensus among different actors on the implementation of the education reform policy and resolve some controversial issues, Thaksin dissolved the House of Representatives, so Chaturon could not continue his policies and approaches.

This boycott to a considerable degree led to political brinkmanship in 2006. The election was later nullified by the ruling of the Constitutional Court of Thailand. The judges argued that “the 37-day period between dissolution of the House and the Election Day, though technically not violating the constitution, had led to political problems severe enough for the election to be disqualified” (Dressel 2010, p. 679). Another rationale was that the positioning of ballot boxes violated the secrecy of the vote. Ultimately the court found that “The election yielded results which are unfair and undemocratic, and are therefore unconstitutional....from the beginning of the election process, i.e. from the scheduling of the elections, the application of candidates, the ballots, and the announcement of the election results” (Dressel, 2010, p. 679).

Finally, on 19 September 2006, while Thaksin was in the United States, Thailand’s military led by General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, the Army Commander, launched a bloodless coup d’état which toppled the Thaksin Government and chose General Surayud Chulanont to be Prime Minister (The Royal Thai Government 2006c, p. 1). Thaksin and his government’s last minister of education, Chaturon Chaisang were removed from the positions.

After the coup, the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) or the Red-Shirt protesters, the pro-Thaksin movement was established. Thailand has been deeply divided since then. At the 2007 general election, the People’s Power Party, the nominee of Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai Party, won 233 out of 480 seats contested and formed the coalition government in 2008 led by Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej (Ockey 2009, p. 318). The People’s Power Party government attempted to amend the 2007 Constitution, drafted after the coup and passed the referendum in August 2007, in order to pave the way for Thaksin’s return to Thailand as innocent and to whitewash other allegations against

him (Askew 2010, p. 32-33). This triggered a new round of the protests led by the PAD, which lasted 193 days (Nelson 2014). The PAD illegally seized the Government House in Bangkok, where the Prime Minister works and the Cabinet meeting is held (Askew 2010, p. 36). When the Government House was taken over by the Yellow-Shirt Protesters, the Prime Minister and other Ministers including the Minister of Education and could not work effectively.

In September 2008, the Constitutional Court ruled that Samak violated the Constitution by working for a private company and must be removed from the position (*'Court says Thai PM 'must resign' 2008*). Despite the tenure of the Samak Government was relatively and it faced protests, at least it tried to implement the education reform policy as mentioned in Chapter 8, for example, it increased funding for the free basic education scheme and promote the usage of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

After Samak was removed from the prime ministership by the ruling of the Constitutional Court, Somchai Wongsawat, the Minister of Education of the Samak Government and Thaksin's brother-in-law was appointed Prime Minister (The Royal Thai Government 2008h, p.1). However, the PAD continued to protest against the new Somchai Government. Somchai could not enter the Government House to work, and his government was paralysed.

When Somchai planned to return from the APEC Summit in Peru, the PAD protesters move to shut down the Suvarnabhumi Airport to prevent his return. The blockade did tremendous damage to Thailand's economy (Ockey 2009, p. 327). On 2 December 2008, the Constitutional Court stepped in to end the political impasse by dissolving the People's Power Party on the ground of electoral frauds and alleged vote-buying and banning the party's executives including Somchai from politics for five years (The Royal Thai

Government 2008b, p. 1-27). The PAD protesters stopped protesting. A faction of the People's Power Party MPs led by Newin Chidchop and other political parties turned to support Abhisit Vejjajiva, the leader of the Democrat Party to be the third Prime Minister in 2008 alone. The Somchai Government was therefore the shortest serving government during the period of this thesis, about 75 days.

Srimuang Charoensiri was appointed Minister of Education of the Somchai Government. He was also affected by the protests because the Ministry of Education was located opposite to the Government House. Even though Srimuang had some visions to reform the educational system of Thailand, for example, setting up community radio stations, teaching on TV and the 1 tambon (sub-district) 1 van for students' pick-up project, he did not have time to implement anything. As he elaborated his plans:

At the time, I was planning for televisions and radios for education and I have finished the proposal, but I was the minister for only 2 months and 7 days. ... I have finished the proposal for the 1 tambon 1 van for students pick-up project, but it was not considered by the Cabinet yet. It was a project for junior kids which could accommodate about 20 kids. We would ask for a tax exemption and give one van to each tambon. The vans would be rotated. Students and teachers could go together (personal communication, 31 August 2012).

Moreover, Srimuang followed Her Majesty Queen Sirikit's recommendations by incorporating Thai history lessons into the curriculum. Each school needed to have one separate Thai history class instead of merging it into social science classes (*'Tok orkbaeb sorn prawatisart'* 2008). Srimuang explained this project that "Her Majesty Queen Sirikit was strongly interested in the history lessons. Therefore, I proposed it. In the future, Thailand will be a part of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). If we do not know

about history and nature of people in this area, we cannot predict the future. If we know, it would be advantageous” (personal communication 31 August 2012).

Nevertheless, as already mentioned, he was Minister of Education for only two months and seven days and he could not implement any of his visions. It was impossible to assess his performance as Minister of Education. It clearly showed that because of political instability in 2008, which prevented him from implementing his visions. When the People Power Party was dissolved by the Constitutional Court, Srimuang as one of the members of the party’s executive committee was also banned from politics for five years.

Leelavadee Vajropala (personal communication, 1 oct 2012), former parliamentary-secretary to Minister of Education Somchai Wongsawat, clearly summarised what happened when she and her colleagues faced the anti-government protesters in 2008 (the Yellow-Shirt protesters) that when Thai politics was not stable, everybody including herself were always scared of what would happen, which gate the protesters would block and they always listened to the radio and surfed the internet to follow the news on the situation. Therefore, they did not concentrate on putting forward the education reform policy, and the policy did not proceed as expected.

When the Democrat Party was able to form the government, Thaksin’s supporters known as the Red Shirt protesters did not accept its legitimacy simply because the Democrat Party did not win the 2007 general election and it was believed that the army convinced or even induced Newin and other political parties to desert Thaksin and support Abhisit (Stent 2012, p. 33). The Red Shirt protesters began protesting against the government in early 2009. In April that year, they stormed the venue of the ASEAN Summit and other related meetings in Pattaya, a major tourist attraction in the eastern part of Thailand. As a result, Abhisit needed to cancel all meetings, declared the state of emergency in Pattaya

and evacuated the leaders attending the meetings (*'Thai protests cancel Asian summit'* 2009). Kevin Rudd's jet plane had to make a sudden about-turn to Canberra (Allard & Gordon 2009). When Abhisit returned to Bangkok and went to the Ministry of Interior and announced the state of emergency in Bangkok, the Red-Shirt protesters surrounded his car and pelted it with rocks, flags, chairs and sticks (*'Two dead as violent clashes rock Thai capital'* 2009). The army then encircled the protesters and the leaders decided to end their protest. Even though the legitimacy and stability of his government was challenged from the beginning, the Abhisit Government survived the protests by the red-shirts.

Jurin Laksanawisit as Minister of Education of the Abhisit Government was not one of the main targets the Red-Shirt protesters wished to attack, so he could continue performing his duties and implementing the education reform policy including the fifteen-year free education for all students, the tutor channel project and the "give teachers back to students" scheme, and the separation of primary and secondary educational service areas.

Thai politics since 2006 was dominated by the conflict between the pro- and anti- Thaksin movements. This inevitably affected the implementation of the education reform policy. The Samak and the Somchai Governments faced protests by the Yellow-Shirt protesters for 193 days. The Government House was seized by the protesters, and the Suvarnabhumi Airport was blockaded. It became increasingly difficult for the Samak and the Somchai Governments to work effectively. Worse, the tenure of both governments was short. Samak and Somchai were deposed by the rulings of the Constitutional Court. The Somchai Government did not have sufficient time to implement anything to reform Thailand's education.

However, the situation of the Abhisit Government was different. Even though the Red-Shirt protesters were successful in forcing the government to cancel the ASEAMN

Summit and other related conferences, the Abhisit Government was still able to command the military to encircle the protesters and put pressure on them to end the protests quickly. The Minister of Education of the Abhisit Government, Jurin Laksanawisit, was not a target of the Red-Shirt protesters, so Jurin and the government could continue working to implement the education reform policy.

Chapter 10

Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

This thesis examines the roles of governments in the education reform policy in Thailand from 1999 to 2009. The two aims of the thesis are to study the roles of governments in the education reform policy in Thailand, and to examine how their actions or nonactions were influenced based on the top-down approach to policy implementation analysis. The thesis attempted to answer two main questions: (1) from 1999 to 2009, what each government of Thailand during this period did or did not do to implement the education reform policy?; and (2) How did the factors based on the top-down approach to policy implementation analysis influence the actions or nonactions of each government of Thailand from 1999 to 2009 with regard to the implementation of the education reform policy according to the provisions of the National Education Act and other related laws and regulations?

This thesis adopts the top-down approach to policy implementation analysis as the framework for analysing the roles of governments in the implementation of the education reform policy. Despite the fact that this approach has some limitations as mentioned in Chapter 2, the limitations are acceptable for this thesis as the scope of the thesis only focuses on the roles of governments as the supreme organisation of the country, not other actors at the operational level. Besides, the thesis also illustrates that even though the top-down approach is not out of date as it can still be used to analyse recent policy implementation. Based on the literature, the factors based on the top-down approach to policy implementation analysis which are used as the main framework of this thesis are as follows: (1) the size of target groups involved and affected and the extent of change required by the policy; (2) the ambiguity of the National Education Act as the main framework for the policy and other related regulations; (3) the lack of one main agency

responsible for implementation of the education reform policy; (4) different levels of commitment and leadership of the governments between the three groups of governments; and (5) political instability in Thailand, especially from 2006 to 2009.

Firstly, the formulation of the National Education Act, which has been the main framework for the education reform policy in Thailand since its promulgation in August 1999, was triggered by the severe economic crisis Thailand faced in 1997 and the provisions of the 1997 Constitution. The Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC), the government agency under the portfolio of the Prime Minister's Office, played important roles in drafting the National Education Bill and proposed to the Cabinet of the Chuan Government, and later to Parliament for consideration. As Abhisit Vejjajiva (The Secretariat of the House of Representatives of Thailand 2004, p. 255-256) claimed, the National Education Act was an output of co-operation between every political party in the House of Representatives at the time. After the National Education Act passed the Parliament, the Chuan Government as required by the Act set up an ad hoc organisation called the Office of Education Reform (OER) with nine members of the executive committee. Wichit Srisa-an was elected the first chairperson of the executive committee. He was later replaced by Prachya Vessaraj. This ad hoc organisation was responsible for drafting necessary legislations to implement the education reform policy. The Chuan Government was successful in enacting the National Education Act in the first place and in the establishment of the Office of Education Reform.

However, the roles of governments in the implementation of the education reform policy were influenced by the five factors mentioned. They to some degree obstructed the implementation of this policy. Each of the policy, project, or initiative of each minister and each government was more or less influenced by these five factors. As elaborated in

Chapter 5 to 9, many of the projects and initiatives were commenced by one minister or one government, but were changed or even abolished by other ministers or other governments, which obstructed the implementation of the education reform policy in general.

The obstacles were initially rooted in the idea attempting to formulate the comprehensive education reform policy which would cover a wide range of issues and involve various groups and a large number of target groups or stakeholders: from learning and teaching processes to restructuring educational personnel and management. This policy then needed to involve a large number and numerous groups of students, teachers, parents, bureaucrats at every level and many government agencies. The education reform policy also required substantial changes of the target groups' behaviours. Many governments tried to implement numerous measures to implement the education reform policy. For example, the child-centred approach, which the Chuan Government believed would revolutionise the learning and teaching processes of Thailand, caused confusion among stakeholders. The plan to transfer educational institutions to local government institutions was also resisted by teachers around the country. When the first Thaksin Government assumed power after the 2001 general election, there were many issues which were still controversial as they were resisted by many actors. The number of educational service areas, the amalgamation of primary, secondary and vocational education as well as many government agencies as stipulated by the National Education Act involved and affected a large number of actors. This explained why Thaksin as Minister of Education initiated the pilot project of the administration of educational service areas because he was afraid that the establishment of educational service areas would have caused chaos and confusion. Suwit Khunkitti also decided to delay the proposition of bills drafted by the Office of Education Reform to Parliament for debate. When the Democrat Party returned to

government, it agreed that the amalgamation of primary and secondary education to form an educational service area was inappropriate and decided to separate primary and secondary education.

The second factor is that the provisions of the National Education Act were ambiguous and they could be interpreted in different ways by different governments and different ministers. Thaksin interpreted the scope of the twelve-year free basic education stipulated in the 1997 Constitution and the National Education Act differently from the Chuan Government. Jurin Laksanawisit from the Democrat Party decided to expand the free basic education scheme from twelve to fifteen years in 2009. Due to the ambiguity of the National Education Act and other related regulations, Pongpol Adireksan and Chaturon Chaisang, two education ministers of the Thaksin Governments needed to initiate the projects with the aim of explaining the provisions of the National Education Act so that different actors understood the education reform policy in the same direction. There were also other ambiguous provisions and issues, for example, the child-centred approach or learners as the most significant actors, the roles of local government organisations in providing education, and area base administration. The ambiguity led to different interpretations by different governments and ministers which delayed the implementation of the education reform policy.

Chapter 7 illustrates how the lack of one main agency affected the implementation of the education reform policy. The problem began to emerge when the Chuan Government chose not to outline the details of what needed to be done in the National Education Act, but chose to assign this task to an ad hoc organisation, the Office of Education Reform, with no actual authority to force the governments to accept its proposals. As a result, it completely depended on the discretion of each minister and each government to decide

which proposals to adopt and to reject. While Kasem Watanachai and Pongpol Adireksan tended to agree with the proposals of the Office of Education Reform, Suwit Khunkitti had sceptical attitudes towards this organisation and its members of the executive committee. He delayed the introduction of the bills drafted and proposed by the Office of Education Reform and he needed to review the details of each proposal meticulously before introducing them to Parliament. This delayed the restructuring government agencies responsible for education for about one year, as it came into effect in 2003. The laws concerning teachers' salaries and their academic statuses were delayed for about two years as they were enacted in 2004. The Thaksin Governments also set up the Cabinet sub-committees to filter every proposal of every ministry including the Ministry of Education and the proposals on the education reform policy. This added an additional step to the implementation of the education reform policy. As the Thaksin Government tended to disagree with the Office of Education Reform, the issues of *Jingjai* (sincerity) and *Jingjung* (seriousness) of the Thaksin Government (Hallinger et al 2000, p. 219-220) to implement the education reform policy were also doubtful. This factor significantly affected the education reform policy in general.

However, the most significant factor that is discussed in this thesis was the different levels of commitment and leadership of the Thai governments from 1999 to 2009 to implement the education reform policy according to the provisions and the spirit of the National Education Act. In general, there were three groups of elites who assumed power in Thailand from 1999 to 2009. Each of them had different levels of commitment, leadership and styles when they tried to implement the education reform policy. The first group was the Democrat Party – the Chuan Government from the end of 1997 to the beginning of 2001 and the Abhisit Government from the end of 2008 to the middle of 2011. This group of elite was successful in enacting the National Education Act in 1999. The Chuan and the

Abhisit Governments tended to adhere to the provisions and the spirit of the National Education Act. The Chuan Government initiated the child-centred approach, the plan to transfer educational institutions to local government organisations. The Chuan Government also organised workshops and conferences around the country to enhance people's and stakeholders' participation in the implementation of the education reform policy and set up Mahidol Wittayanusorn School for gifted science students.

At the end of 2008 when the Democrat Party returned to government, Jurin Laksanawisit attached great significance to resolve a fundamental problem of the education reform policy, which was the free education scheme. Jurin sought to expand the scheme to cover early childhood education and clarify which educational expense his government planned to subsidise. This problem has never been clarified by any of the previous governments. Jurin also initiated other schemes to improve Thailand's education based on the National Education Act, for example, the Tutor Channel project and the Give Teachers back to Students project.

The second group of elite was led by former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra had sceptical attitudes towards the National Education Act and the Office Education Reform. Moreover, they tended to initiate their own policies and measures rather than strictly follow the provisions of the National Education Act and other related regulations. They also provided more opportunities for senior bureaucrats to oppose the proposals of the Office of Education Reform. When the Thaksin Governments' initiatives were contradictory to the National Education Act, the Thaksin Government's initiatives prevailed. An obvious example was the amendment of the National Education Act in 2002. The National Education Act required the establishment of the Ministry of Education, Religion and Culture through the amalgamation of various government

agencies within the Ministry of Education, Ministry of University Affairs and the National Education Council under the portfolio of the Prime Minister's Office for the unity of educational provision in Thailand. However, the first Thaksin Government announced its policy to reform Thailand's bureaucracy by increasing the number of ministries to 20 in order to, as Bidhya Bowornwathana (2004, p. 140) argued, consolidate Thaksin's power as the CEO Prime Minister of Thailand. The government planned to separate the government agencies responsible for cultural and religious affairs to set up the Ministry of Culture. Against criticism from many actors including the Democrat Party in opposition, the Office of Education Reform, the Council of University Presidents of Thailand, the Thaksin Government finally was successful in amending the National Education Act to comply with its public service reform policy in 2002.

In addition, the Thaksin Government also initiated two more projects: the Lab School or One District One Dream School Project and the One District One Scholarship (ODOS) Project. Both projects were overseen by Minister of Education Pongpol Adireksan and Adisai Bodharamik respectively.

Ratchanee Yampracha (2001, p. 52) observed that one of the reasons the Thaksin Government was sceptical about the National Education Act and the proposals of the Office of Education Reform was that the education reform policy in Thailand was initiated by the government led by the Democrat Party in 1999, the change of government in 2001 inevitably delayed the implementation of this policy. It is usual in Thai politics that the new government would not want to attach great significance to the policy which they had not initiated in the first place.

The third group was the government appointed by the military junta after the coup d'état on 19 September 2006. As they stayed in power for only about one year, they only

touched non-controversial issues for example promotion of the principle of morality before knowledge in education and self-sufficiency economy in the curriculum.

The problem of different levels of commitment and leadership was aggravated by too frequent changes of governments and ministers of education. In ten years from 1999 to 2009, there were six prime minister and eleven ministers of education. Each minister had less than a year to implement his visions for education reform, and bureaucrats could not keep adapting to each minister. Kasama Voravarn na Ayutthaya (personal communication, 25 August 2012), former Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education and former Secretary-General of the Basic Education Commission, believed that every policy and direction of every minister was good for Thailand's education; the problem is that no one had sufficient time in the position to implement their policies and visions.

The final factor is political instability, especially from 2006 to 2009. It severely affected the Samak and the Somchai Governments in 2008. Both governments faced ongoing protests by the Yellow-Shirt protesters, which lasted 193 days. The Government House where the Prime Minister works and the Cabinet meeting takes place was seized by the protesters. Somchai Wongsawat as Minister of Education could still implement some measures to reform Thailand's education. Srimuang Charoensiri, who replaced Somchai as Minister of Education, did not have sufficient time to implement anything while he was in power.

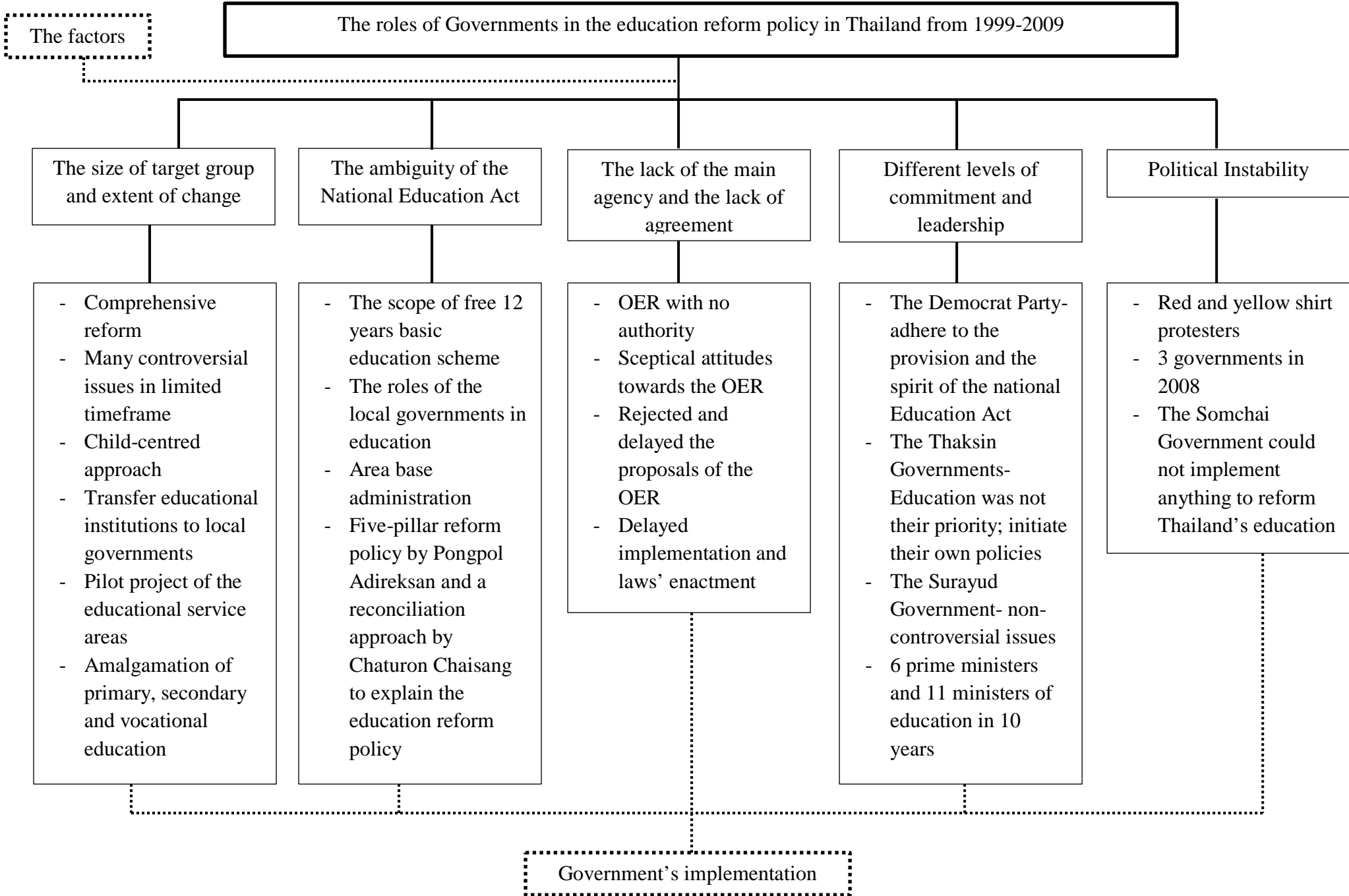
The situation was different under the Abhisit Government. Despite the fact that the Abhisit Government was confronted with the protests by the Red-Shirt protesters, the government was successful in putting pressure on the protesters to end the protests quickly, and Minister of Education Jurin Laksanawisit was not a target of the protests.

This was the reason the Abhisit Government was not affected by the political instability as much as the Samak and the Somchai Governments.

The fourth and the fifth factors raised the issue of *Nae Norn* or consistency of the policy as Hallinger et al. (2000, p. 219-223) considered as one of the significant qualifications for successful implementation of the education reform policy.

From the details elaborated, this thesis highlights the significance of the roles of governments which are comprised of politicians in the phase of policy implementation. Moreover, this thesis also identifies five factors based on the top-down approach to policy implementation analysis which influenced the roles of governments. The findings lead to the suggestions and recommendations on how the Thai governments can improve their roles in implementing the education reform policy in the future.

Nevertheless, this thesis has some limitations because it focuses only on the roles of the central government of Thailand located in Bangkok, not other actors. This thesis could be a basis for further research to investigate each initiative or each action of each government more thoroughly as well as the roles of other actors, for example, bureaucrats, teachers, parents and students in implementing the education reform policy.



Suggestions

Based on the five factors identified in the previous section of this chapter which influenced the actions or nonactions of the Thai governments in the implementation of the education reform policy from 1999 to 2009, this thesis provided some suggestions and recommendations for the future of the education reform policy. First, as the thesis pointed out at the beginning, the latest education reform policy in Thailand which formally commenced in 1999 when the National Education Act came into force was the most ambitious and comprehensive education reform policy in Thailand's history as it tried to cover a wide range of issues, therefore, a substantial degree of change was required in terms of the structure of the government agencies responsible for education and the teaching and learning processes. It became difficult to reach an agreement let alone consensus among stakeholders on how to implement the reform on each particular issue. The suggestion is that the government should not formulate a policy or a plan which required too many issues to be implemented at the same time, but should try to prioritise non-controversial issues over highly controversial ones and seek agreement or consensus on those prioritised issues. By following this approach, it could help resolve the problem of ambiguity of the policy as well. If the government can seek a consensus on how to interpret and implement the policy no matter how ambiguous it is, the policy can still proceed effectively.

In order to do seek an agreement or a consensus on the education reform policy, Professor Kriengsak Charoenwongsak (personal communication, 13 September 2012), suggested that the government should have sincerity and a strong commitment to resolve the country's long-term problems. The Minister of Education should be appointed based on expertise, not on quotas of political parties. Politicians should not play politics too much

with the education policy but should focus on the educational achievements of the whole nation.

Second, laws and regulations which are the frameworks for the education reform policy should not be ambiguous. Third, there should be one main agency which is responsible for the implementation of the education reform policy. The government or the laws should not create more organisations and additional steps to implement the policy. Fourth, with regard to political instability, Thailand should be moving beyond the Thaksin factor and politics dominated by the division between the pro- and anti- Thaksin and between the yellow and red shirts movements. From 1999 to 2009, both sides have mobilised street rallies in Thailand and often led to violence and loss of lives. Worse, the protests undermined the stability of the governments, especially in 2008, when there were three prime ministers and three ministers of education.

Lastly and most importantly, even though there were many factors which shaped the roles of governments in the education reform policy in Thailand from 1999 to 2009, the most significant factor as mentioned above was different levels of commitment and leadership of the elites responsible for this policy which caused confusion among stakeholders including bureaucrats, teachers, students, and parents. Even politicians from the same political party had different policies, measures and directions to reform Thailand's education despite the fact that the National Education Act existed as the main framework for this policy. In the first ten years of the education reform policy in Thailand, there was eleven Ministers of Education. In average, each Minister had no more than one year to implement the education reform effectively. According to Kasama Vorawan na Ayuthaya (personal communication, 25 August 2012), the educational system of Thailand is too big

to respond to the new directions of the new Minister of Education quickly. The entire system needs some time to adjust to the new directions.

Consequently, the continuity of policies, directions and the position of the Minister of Education becomes significant. Each Minister of Education should have sufficient time to implement the education reform policy. Uthai Singtothong (personal communication, 11 October 2012), Director of Chonradsadornumrung School in Chonburi Province, suggested that in the future when the government appoints the Minister of Education, he/she needs to have full support from the government. The government should reassure him/her that he/she will be in the position for the entire term of the government and would not be removed no matter what happens. If he or she faces the motion of no-confidence in the House of Representatives, he/she will definitely survive. Uthai believed that if the Minister of Education in the future should be assured of his/her position and support from the government, Thailand will definitely have the Minister of Education who has a strong commitment to reform Thailand's education (personal communication, 11 October 2012).

However, Suwat Ngercham (personal communication, 21 September 2012), former member of the executive committee of the Office of Education Reform, had slightly different opinions about the meaning of continuity. He suggested that continuity means if there is the new Minister of Education, he/she should consider what has been done by his/her predecessor whether it is good or not. If it is good, it should be continued by the new Minister while what is still problematic should be rectified.

Overall, the most significant suggestion which this thesis makes is that each Minister of Education should have sufficient time and support from the government to implement the education reform policy for the benefits of Thai students and the entire nation in the long run.

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Appendix

Somsak Prissanananthakul, the Minister of Education under the Chuan Leekpai government (personal communication, 20 August 2012), characterised the period of that government as the period of reform, as he explained:

It was the period in which the Honourable Chuan Leekpai returned to the prime ministership for the second time. The government realised the significance of the educational system of Thailand. We therefore delivered a policy statement pledging that we would reform the whole educational system of the country: from reforming the learning process which focused on students, reforming the teaching process focusing on teachers, reforming the structure of the government agencies and the administration emphasising the decentralisation from the central to regional and provincial agencies. As the government policy was sufficiently clear, we began by organising seminars and workshops to train teachers, explain the policy to executives of educational institutions about decentralisation of educational administration to the educational areas.

ช่วงนั้นเป็นช่วงของ ฯพณฯ ชวน หลีกภัย กลับไปเป็นนายกรัฐมนตรีครั้งที่ 2 เราก็ได้มองเห็นความสำคัญ
ของเรื่องระบบการศึกษาไทย ก็ได้แถลงนโยบายว่า จะมีการปฏิรูปการศึกษาใหม่ ตั้งแต่ปฏิรูป
การเรียนรู้ นั่นคือตัวเด็ก ปฏิรูประบบการสอนก็คือตัวของครูผู้สอน ปฏิรูประบบบริหารราชการ
ก็คือ ปฏิรูประบบโครงสร้างในการบริหารโดยมุ่งเน้นในการที่จะกระจายอำนาจไปสู่
ภูมิภาคตามจังหวัดต่างๆ นโยบายมีความชัดเจน แล้วก็เริ่มด้วยการจัดประชุมสัมมนาอบรม
ครูผู้สอน ทำความรู้ความเข้าใจกับผู้บริหารเกี่ยวกับเรื่องระบบโครงสร้างในการที่จะกระจาย
อำนาจไปให้ภูมิภาค ไปให้ตามจังหวัด โดยแบ่งเป็นเขตพื้นที่การศึกษา แล้วในตัวเด็กก็มีการ
ปฏิรูปสื่อ ปฏิรูประบบการสอนใหม่

Somsak Prissanananthakul (personal communication, 20 August 2012) explained the way in which the government imposed the child-centred approach, as he elaborated:

The Ministry of Education had a policy and ordered the bureaucrats that from now in the teaching and learning process, students should not be forced to study what teachers need them to do so. Teachers are supposed to utilise their experiences and pedagogic skills they develop while they were be trained to be teachers to find out students' interests and potentiality. When students' interests and potentiality are discovered, teachers should utilise them for the benefits of students, especially in education. I do not want to see great students who get high marks because they write answers to examinations which are in accordance with teachers' ideas and preferences, but I want to see great students who know how to survive in society. They should have wisdom rather than knowledge. I emphasised that the new educational system must be student-, not teacher-, oriented. Teachers should function as facilitators encouraging students to study what they want to know.

กระทรวงศึกษามีนโยบายและสั่งการไปว่า ต่อไปนี้ การเรียนการสอนเน้นคุณจะไปยึดยึดเด็ก
อย่างเดียวไม่ได้ คุณต้องแสวงหาตัวเด็กให้พบว่า เด็กนี่เขาถนัดอะไร เขาสนใจอะไร คุณก็ต้อง
พยายามใช้ความเป็นครูซึ่งคุณมีประสบการณ์มากกว่าเขา คุณผ่านกระบวนการหล่อหลอมของ
การเป็นครู คุณรู้จักจิตวิทยา คุณก็ต้องพยายามให้หาสิ่งที่เป็จุดเด่นของเด็ก แล้วก็เอาสิ่งนั้นเนี่ย
สนับสนุนส่งเสริมให้เด็กใช้จุดเด่นของเขาเนี่ยให้เกิดผลดีกับเขาทางการศึกษา ผมไม่อยากจะเห็น
เด็กเก่งเพราะเขียนคำตอบได้ตรงกับใจของครู ผมอยากจะเห็นเด็กเก่งตรงที่เด็กสามารถมี
สติปัญญารอบรู้สังคมที่จะทำให้เขาอยู่รอดได้ เรียกว่าปัญญามากกว่าความรู้ ก็พยายามปลูกฝัง
อย่างนี้ว่า การศึกษาใหม่เนี่ย คุณต้องให้เด็กเป็นตัวตั้ง ไม่ใช่ครูเป็นตัวตั้ง ครูมีหน้าที่เหมือนกับ
อำนวยการสอน สนับสนุนในสิ่งที่เด็กๆ อยากเรียนรู้ นั่นก็คือสิ่งที่

Mr Kitti Ammaranantana (personal communication, 26 September 2012), the Director of Bansuan Jananusorn School

At the early stage of the imposition of the child-centred approach in Thailand, teachers did not understand what it is and how they could apply it in their classroom. Some of them misunderstood and misinterpreted this approach. They thought this approach let students work inside their classrooms while teachers only needed to advice or supervise them distantly without giving them fundamental knowledge on each subject in the first place. Then, the phrase ‘child-centred’ was changed to ‘students as most significant’ in order to solve this problem. When students are regarded as most significant in the learning and teaching process, they are given more opportunities by their own individual experiments, thinking and conducting numerous activities. However, teachers still have some roles to play, even subsidiary ones. Teachers still have to closely guide their students’ learning process, counsel them and correct their misunderstanding on any issues.

ในช่วงเริ่มแรกของชายเซ็นเตอร์มีปัญหาในเรื่องของความไม่เข้าใจในวิธีการสอนของครู ครูเข้าใจว่าการให้เด็กนักเรียนเป็นศูนย์กลาง คือให้เด็กทำงานอยู่ภายในห้องเรียน โดยครูเป็นผู้ดูแลอยู่ห่างๆ ไม่ต้องช่วยเหลืออะไร ต่อมาได้เปลี่ยนคำจากนักเรียนเป็นศูนย์กลาง เป็นนักเรียนเป็นสำคัญ เพื่อให้ครูเข้าใจถึงบทบาทหน้าที่ของตนเองมากขึ้น คือ การเรียนที่เน้นผู้เรียนเป็นสำคัญ โดยให้ผู้เรียนทำเองทดลองเอง คิดเป็นทำเป็น ผู้สอนหรือครูมีหน้ารองลงมาคือให้คำปรึกษาเสนอแนะ และแก้ไขในสิ่งที่ผู้เรียนเข้าใจผิด

Mr Kitti Ammaranantana (personal communication, 26 September 2012), the Director of Bansuan Jananusorn School

the curriculum of Thailand required students to study too many subjects, therefore, the child-centred approach is considered inappropriate by many people because the child-centred approach requires a large amount of time for students to experiment, practise and gradually understand the substance of the subjects they undertake. Students will not be able to study all of the substance set by the curriculum.

หลักสูตรของประเทศไทยมีเนื้อหามากเกินกว่าที่จะใช้วิธีการสอนแบบ ชายเซ็นเตอร์ เพราะหากใช้วิธีการสอนแบบเน้นผู้เรียนเป็นสำคัญ ผู้เรียนจะต้องใช้เวลามากในการเรียนรู้ ทดลอง และทำความเข้าใจ ซึ่งจะทำให้ผู้เรียนไม่สามารถเรียนรู้เนื้อหาได้อย่างครบถ้วนตามที่หลักสูตรกำหนด

Minister of Education, Somsak Prissanananthakul was one of the strong advocates of incorporating local issues and wisdom into the new curriculum. He tried to push for the local curriculum. Somsak (personal communication, 20 August 2012) explained his ideas:

One of the policy initiatives which I thought was successful was the local curriculum. The main idea was to encourage local communities to take part in administration of the curriculum. I wanted to see the roots and the way of life of the people in the countryside to be inculcated into students' minds. I tried to encourage local philosophers and local experts to help teachers to teach students in schools, for example, how to make desserts, how to play traditional Thai music, how to fish etc. I think this was one of the policies which worked. The whole society admired and welcomed it.

รัฐมนตรีสมศักดิ์ ปริศนานันท์ทุก สนใจการผลักดันเรื่องหลักสูตรท้องถิ่น

อีกอันหนึ่งคิดว่าเป็นความสำเร็จ ก็คือ หลักสูตรการศึกษาของท้องถิ่น ซึ่งผมพยายามในการที่จะให้ท้องถิ่นเข้ามามีส่วนร่วมในการบริหารจัดการ และผมอยากให้เห็นแก่น รากเหง้า วิถีชีวิตของคนในชนบทนี้ ถูกปลูกฝังให้กับเด็กได้ซึมซับ ได้เรียนรู้ ก็พยายามหาปราชญ์ชาวบ้าน หากคนที่มีความถนัดเชี่ยวชาญในเรื่องภูมิปัญญาท้องถิ่นเอามาเป็นครูให้ช่วยสอนสิ่งเหล่านั้น เช่น ครูสอนทำขนม ครูสอนดนตรีไทย ครูสอนวิธีการออกไปหาปลา ออกไปทำมาหากินเหล่านี้ ผมเลยคิดว่ามันเป็นนโยบายที่โดนนะ ผมก็คิดว่ามันออกมาแล้วสังคมมันชื่นชมแล้วก็งานรับ

Minister Somsak (personal communication, 20 August 2012) explained that “conferences and seminars were organised to bring together staff at the operational level and executives to discuss the rationale of the education reform and the strategies to implement them. They could reach an understanding between one another.”

จัดประชุมสัมมนา ผู้ที่จะต้องเป็นผู้ปฏิบัติ ผู้ที่จะต้องเป็นผู้บริหาร ก็มาทำความเข้าใจให้ตรงกันว่า เอ๊ะ.. คำว่าปฏิรูปการศึกษา เจตนารมณ์ของมันคือเป้าหมายอย่างนี้ วิธีทำอย่างนี้ แนวทางการปฏิบัติอย่างนี้ ก็ทำความเข้าใจ

Uthai Singtothaong (personal communication, 11 October 2012), Director of Chonradsadornumrung School in Chonburi Province, disagreed with the policy of Minister Somsak to transfer schools to local government organisations, as he commented:

Actually, Thailand's educational system has always been adhered to a strong bureaucratic system. Education should be united under the main government agency like the Ministry of Education for academic unity... If schools had been transferred to local government organisations, local politicians would have thought of their political objectives. However, political objectives and education have different concepts because education focuses more on human resource development. This was the reason schools and teachers did not want to be transferred to local government organisations. Only few of them were willing to be transferred; the rest strongly resisted.

จริงๆ แล้วรูปแบบของการจัดการศึกษาของไทย มันเป็นระบบราชการ มันอิงอยู่กับระบบราชการอย่างเข้มแข็ง แล้วก็การศึกษามันควรจะเป็นเอกภาพอยู่ภายใต้หน่วยงานที่เป็นหน่วยงานหลักอย่างเช่นกระทรวงศึกษา เพื่อให้เกิดความเป็นเอกภาพทางวิชาการ เพราะมันเป็นการสอนคนมีความรู้ การที่จะโอนโรงเรียนไปสู่ท้องถิ่น มองว่ามันเป็นการมองไปที่งบประมาณ เพราะกระทรวงศึกษาเป็นกระทรวงใหญ่ ลูกเยอะ งบประมาณที่เอามาดูแลโรงเรียนมันไม่เพียงพอ โรงเรียนมันก็อาจจะโตได้ช้า แต่ถ้าผลักไปสู่ท้องถิ่น ท้องถิ่นก็มองในรูปของการเมือง การเมืองกับการศึกษามันคนละเรื่องกัน การเมืองเขามองคนอีกแบบหนึ่ง เป็นเรื่องของผลประโยชน์ทางการเมือง แต่การศึกษามันเป็นการมองที่ผลของการพัฒนาคนในเรื่องของการพัฒนาทรัพยากรมนุษย์ เขาเรียกว่า concept มันคนละอย่างกัน การที่กระทรวงศึกษาเองก็รู้ ก็มียุทธศาสตร์ที่จะโอนโรงเรียนให้กับท้องถิ่น โรงเรียนก็ไม่อยากไป โรงเรียนก็อยากอยู่กับกระทรวงศึกษา มันก็เลยมีโรงเรียนที่ไปอยู่กับท้องถิ่นเพียงนิดเดียว นอกนั้นเขาก็แข็งตัว เกร็งขึ้นตัวไว้ไม่ไป

However, not every group of stakeholder shared the same opinions as Thaksin. Dr Suwat Ngercham, another member of the Executive Committee of the Office of Education Reform, agreed with the government's commitment to subsidise early childhood education, but he did not expect the government to cut its financial support for senior secondary education. As he put it:

It was stated no less than twelve years. When Thaksin became the Minister of Education...there were some people explaining to him that early childhood education was also of great significance, and needed to be taken care of. Thaksin consulted my Committee which he had rarely done. He asked my Committee whether we agreed with the change to subsidise early childhood education. We replied that we agreed... But we never suggested that the government needed to cut the subsidies for the senior secondary level" (personal communication, 21 September 2012).

เขาบอกไม่น้อยกว่า 12 ปี ตอนที่ท่านทักษิณมาเป็นรัฐมนตรีกระทรวงศึกษาธิการ...ก็มีคนไปชี้แจงท่าน บอกอนุบาลสำคัญนะ ควรจะไปดูแลอนุบาลด้วย ท่านก็มาถามคณะผม นานๆ จะมาถามสักที ว่าเห็นด้วยไหมอนุบาล ผมก็บอกผมเห็นด้วย... แต่ผมไม่ได้บอกว่าถ้ามาอนุบาลแล้วต้องลดข้างบน เพียงแต่บอกเห็นด้วย

This observation is in accordance with the comment of Abhisit Vejjajiva, the Deputy Leader of the Democrat Party at the time. He believed that the Thaksin Government tried to delay the education reform policy mainly because Thaksin regarded the National Education Act as the Democrat Party's law, as he commented:

I think it was really the case even though what happened in reality was different. If he had followed the law-making process, he would have discovered that it was the law which every political party worked together to formulate. I was the chairperson of the extraordinary committee of the House of Representatives responsible for considering this law in detail; the process was open for every stakeholder's participation. I never clung to the draft approved by the Cabinet or the Council of State. Unfortunately, Thaksin was not involved in the process at the time (personal communication, 24 August 2012).

จากข้อสังเกตดังกล่าวได้สอดคล้องกับคำให้สัมภาษณ์ของนายอภิสิทธิ์ เวชชาชีวะ รองหัวหน้าพรรคประชาธิปัตย์ในขณะนั้น และรัฐมนตรีประจำสำนักนายกรัฐมนตรี คุณเลขาธิการศึกษาในสมัย นายชวน หลีกภัย ที่กล่าวว่า การดำเนินการที่ล่าช้าของการปฏิรูปการศึกษาเกิดจากการที่รัฐบาลทักษิณคิดว่ากฎหมายดังกล่าวเป็นของพรรคประชาธิปัตย์

ก็คิดว่าคงจะเป็นอย่างนั้นครับ ทั้งๆ ที่ความเป็นจริงถ้าท่านติดตามการทำกฎหมาย ท่านจะพบว่ามันเป็นกฎหมายซึ่งทุกพรรคร่วมแล้วก็มีส่วนร่วมจริงๆ ผมเป็นประธานคณะกรรมการในสภาผู้แทนราษฎร เป็นกฎหมายที่เราเปิดกว้างมาก ให้ทุกฝ่ายได้ช่วยกันคิดช่วยกันทำอย่างเต็มที่ ไม่ได้ยึดว่าจะต้องเอาร่างตามที่ ครม. หรือกฤษฎีกาส่งมาเฉยๆ แต่คุณทักษิณบังเอิญไม่ได้สัมผัสกับสิ่งเหล่านี้

In an interview with Suwit Khunkitti (personal communication 27 September 2012), he claimed that he has broad experiences about education as a student who had opportunities to study in regional Thailand, in Bangkok and abroad; a member of the National Primary Education Commission; the Secretary to the Minister of University Affairs responsible for drafting the first National Education Development Plan of Thailand; the Chancellor; Deputy Prime Minister overseeing the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Education. Based on his claimed extensive experience in education, he argued that the National Education Act had created some problems and needed to be amended. He elaborated his views on the amendment:

We thought the law [the National Education Act] had some problems. The nine members of the education reform commission had one kind of experience because most of them were university lecturers. There was only one member who had been involved in basic education, Mr Suwat Ngercham. However, he had not been a teacher in a school or had been for a very little while. He had no experience in administering a school. He works mainly in the Ministry. Therefore, the law had many problems. For example, they integrated all basic education: non-formal education, primary and secondary education, vocational education, into one. By doing so, a problem definitely emerged because they were totally different in terms of the psychological principles, the behaviours of students, how to prepare students for studies. Only the combination of primary and secondary education had created problems let alone adding vocational education. Primary school teachers simply cannot teach secondary students and vice versa. Moreover, vocational education teachers have never been prepared to teach secondary students. It simply did not help solve the issue of teacher shortage. We foresaw this kind of problems from the beginning... It was not going to work. There were problems within the basic education administration alone. I proposed the amendment, and I was strongly criticised on the ground that how I knew that there would be problems mentioned (personal communication 27 September 2012).

ทางด้านรัฐมนตรีสุวิทย์ คุณกิตติได้ให้สัมภาษณ์ถึงสาเหตุการแก้ไข พระราชบัญญัติการศึกษาแห่งชาติ 2542 ว่า จากประสบการณ์ ที่ศึกษาทั้งในกรุงเทพ และต่างจังหวัด, ในโรงเรียนรัฐบาล และโรงเรียนเอกชน, ในประเทศและต่างประเทศ ซึ่งทำให้มีความสนใจในเรื่องของ School district เรื่องการบริหารการศึกษา การกระจายอำนาจและเรื่องคุณภาพการศึกษาของเด็กในอเมริกาว่าเป็นอย่างไร รวมถึงประสบการณ์การทำงานที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการศึกษา เช่น กรรมการการประถมศึกษา ตามพระราชบัญญัติการศึกษาปี 2525, เลขานุการรัฐมนตรีว่าการทบวงมหาวิทยาลัย มีหน้าที่จัดทำแผนพัฒนาการศึกษาแห่งชาติ 15 ปีฉบับแรก ซึ่งเป็นความคิดริเริ่มของรัฐมนตรีและเลขานายกรัฐมนตรีในสมัยนั้น, เลขารัฐมนตรีทบวงมหาวิทยาลัย, นายกสภามหาวิทยาลัย, รองนายกรัฐมนตรีกำกับกระทรวงศึกษา และมาเป็นรัฐมนตรีว่าการกระทรวงศึกษา ทำให้เห็นการศึกษาในทุกระดับ

จนเห็นว่ากฎหมายนี้มันมีปัญหา คณะกรรมการปฏิรูปการศึกษา 9 ท่าน ท่านก็มีประสบการณ์แบบนี้ เพราะว่าส่วนใหญ่ท่านเป็นอาจารย์มหาวิทยาลัย มีคนเดียวที่เกี่ยวข้องกับสามัญศึกษาคือ

ท่านสุวัฒน์ เงินกล้า แต่ว่าท่านก็ไม่ได้เป็นอาจารย์นะ หรือเป็นที่ช่วงสั้น ท่านก็ไม่ได้บริหาร การศึกษาในระดับโรงเรียน ก็อยู่ในกระทรวง เพราะนั่นกฎหมายที่ออกมามันก็มีปัญหา อย่างเช่น กฎหมายที่ออกมาเขาไปรวมการศึกษาขั้นพื้นฐาน มีเรื่องของการศึกษานอกระบบ มีการประถมศึกษามีมัธยมศึกษา มีอาชีวศึกษา ประมาณนี้ 3 อันนี้มันเอามารวมเป็นหนึ่งเดียว ปัญหามันก็เกิดอยู่แล้ว เพราะว่าจริง ๆ ระบบการศึกษาในแต่ละช่วงชั้น...หลักจิตวิทยาการศึกษา เขาก็ต้องแบ่งส่วนกันใช่ไหม ... พฤติกรรมเด็กก็ต่างกัน การเตรียมความพร้อมของเด็กก็ต่างกัน เพราะนั่นอาชีวศึกษามารวมกับประถมมัธยม ประถมมัธยมรวมกันก็มีปัญหาอยู่แล้ว เพราะเอา ครูประถมไปสอนมัธยมก็ไม่ได้ เอาครูมัธยมมาสอนประถมก็ไม่ถูก แล้วพฤติกรรมครูก็ต่างกัน อยู่แล้ว ยิ่งเอาครูอาชีวจะมาสอน เขาไม่ได้เตรียมมา เขาไม่ได้เทรนมาเพื่อจะมาสอนเด็กมัธยม บอกว่าขาดแคลนครูจะเอามาทดแทนชดเชยกัน มันชดเชยไม่ได้อยู่แล้ว เพราะฉะนั้นตรงนี้เราก็ มองเห็นปัญหาแล้ว มองเห็นปัญหาแต่แรกแล้ว ...มันไม่เวิร์คหรอก เฉพาะแห่งสามัญการศึกษา ขั้นพื้นฐานอย่างเดียวมันก็มีปัญหาแล้ว ก็ขอแก้กฎหมาย เป็นคนขอแก้กฎหมายเอง ก็โดนด่า เหมือนกันว่ารู้ได้ยังไงว่ามันจะมีปัญหา

Pongpol explained his project:

About the National Education Act, when I was appointed as the Minister of Education, people had different interpretations. This was why I travelled a lot to other provinces to explain to stakeholders about the essence and details of the education reform. I separated the reform into five pillars, which I called ‘Punja patrioop’. After I elaborated for a while, people began to understand more clearly what the education reform was, what the essence of the National Education Act was (personal communication 16 August 2012).

พรบ. ฉบับนั้นแหละ เมื่อผมเข้าไปก็ปรากฏว่า ฟังจะเริ่มใช้และก็ไม่มีการอธิบายรายละเอียดของมาตราทั้งหมดของพรบ.นี้ ทำให้ผู้ที่เกี่ยวข้องตีความกันไปคนละทาง เพราะอย่างนั้นหลังจากนั้น 6 เดือนผมก็ต้องออกตระเวนไปตามต่างจังหวัดเรียกประชุมเพื่อชี้แจงว่า การปฏิรูปการศึกษามันประกอบด้วยอะไร ผมก็เลยแบ่งออกไปเป็น 5 เรื่องซึ่งผมใช้คำว่า ปัญจปฏิรูป...ก็ผมก็อธิบายไปทุกคนเริ่มเข้าใจว่าการปฏิรูปการศึกษามัน คืออะไร กฎหมายฉบับนี้มีอะไรบ้าง มีมาตราที่สำคัญอะไร

According to Siriwan Tiamsiriwat, the director of Pantong School in Chonburi Province (personal communication 2012), the project was good for raising awareness and participation of everybody in her school. She recalled her experience when she heard about this project for the first time:

At the time, I did not know that my school had been chosen to be a lab school. The evaluators from the Office of the Basic Education Commission came to my school without notice and asked me if I knew anything about this project. I knew nothing at all. They told me this project was about smart students who can use ICT well and can analyse anything through the use of ICT. However, I was told that money would not be provided for my school, and I needed to find financial support by myself from banks and factories in the area ... I began with renovating my school together with changing the teaching methods. Students needed to be taught how to present the activities of the school ... The project raised awareness of the teachers and the executives of my school as all of us needed to find enough money apart from government budget for school development. The surrounding community also supported us... To assess this project, it was good if it was maintained. I must admit that the potential of students who took part in this project completely changed and became substantially greater than ever before.

ตอนนั้นพี่ยังไม่รู้ว่าจะต้องเป็นโรงเรียนในฝัน...คนที่ประเมินทีมงานของเขามาจากสพฐ. แวะมาที่โรงเรียนโดยไม่ได้บอกใคร...เขาก็บอกว่ารู้อะไรมั่งเกี่ยวกับโรงเรียนในฝัน บอกไม่รู้อะไรเลย...เขาก็บอกว่าโรงเรียนในฝันมันจะเป็นโรงเรียนแบบคือเด็กฉลาดแบบใช้ ICT เข้าสู่อารคิดวิเคราะห์อะไรต่าง ๆ ได้โดยกระบวนการของ ICT...เสร็จแล้วก็บอกว่าเงินเขายังไม่มีให้ แล้วเราจะหาเงินได้ยังไง เขาก็จะบอกว่ามีธนาคารนั้น มีโรงงานนี้ ... ทำรั้วโรงเรียน ทำพื้นที่ ทำอะไรควบคู่กับการที่สอนเด็ก สอนยังไงให้เขาลงไปจนกระทั่งเด็กมันสามารถพูดอธิบายได้ในกิจกรรมต่าง ๆ... มันก็คือส่วนดีตรงที่ทำให้ทั้งครูทั้งผู้บริหารตื่นตัว หาเงินมาปรับปรุงโรงเรียน โดยที่ไม่ใช้เงินรัฐบาล คือนักเรียนทั้งโรงเรียนได้มีส่วนร่วมหมด แล้วชุมชนเขาก็ได้เข้ามามีส่วนร่วมช่วยโน่นช่วยนี่ ...พูดถึงว่าดีไหม ดีในระดับที่ถ้าเรารักขามันอยู่ ยอมรับว่าเด็กรุ่นนั้นเก่งเลย จากหน้ามือเป็นหลังมือ คือเปลี่ยนขึ้นมาเลย เรียกว่าเขาเก่งเลย

Kasama Voravarn na Ayutthaya, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education at the time praised Dr Wichit for his deep understanding of the education reform policy, as she noted:

It was lucky that Professor Wichit, the chairperson of the Office of Education Reform, was appointed the minister. When he was appointed, he understood that there were some problems and he was ready to solve them while many others would strictly adhere to the same policies and blueprints. He tried to change the direction of some policies. If somebody else had tried to change the reform, the change would have not been accepted by stakeholders because the stakeholders would have considered the change as an effort to undermine the spirit of the education reform. It was lucky that Professor Wichit understood the principles, but he was ready to amend the details as appropriate. Someone tried to amend both the principles and the details which was not possible (personal communication 25 August 2012).

นับว่าโชคดีที่ศาสตราจารย์ ดร. วิจิตร สีสะอาด ซึ่งท่านเป็นประธานของคณะปฏิรูปได้กลับมาเป็นรัฐมนตรีศึกษา เมื่อท่านเข้ามาท่านเห็นปัญหาและท่านสามารถแก้ไข รวมทั้งท่านพร้อมที่จะแก้ไข ในขณะที่คนปฏิรูปหลายคนจะยึดกับรูปแบบเก่า คิดว่าทำปฏิรูปออกมาแบบนี้แล้ว ไม่ว่าจะเกิดอะไรขึ้นก็ต้องผลักดันให้มันเกิดขึ้น แต่เดี๋ยวกิดว่าโชคดีที่ท่านวิจิตรมา เพราะบางเรื่องท่านก็พยายามปรับปรุง...ซึ่งถ้าเป็นคนอื่นมาแก้จะไม่ได้รับยอมรับจากคณะปฏิรูป เพราะจะมองว่าทำลายเจตนารมณ์ของปฏิรูป แต่โชคดีมากที่เป็นท่านวิจิตร เพราะท่านเข้าใจหลักการใหญ่และท่านก็พร้อมจะแก้ไขรายละเอียดซึ่งเป็นส่วนย่อยเพื่อดำรงรักษาหลักการใหญ่ แต่ปฏิรูปบางคนก็จะเอาทั้งรายละเอียดและหลักการใหญ่ ซึ่งเมื่อในโลกแห่งความเป็นจริง บางครั้งมันทำไม่ได้

Even though Srimuang Charoensiri had some visions to reform the educational system of Thailand, for example, community radio stations, teaching on tv and the 1 tambon (sub-district) 1 van for students' pick-up project, he did not have time to implement anything. As he elaborated his plans:

At the time, I was planning for televisions and radios for education and I have finished the proposal, but I was the minister for only 2 months and 7 days. ... I have finished the proposal for the 1 tambon 1 van for students pick-up project, but it was not considered by the Cabinet yet. It was a project for junior kids which could accommodate about 20 kids. We would ask for tax exemption and give one van to each tambon. The vans would be rotated. Students and teachers could go together (personal communication 31 August 2012).

ตอนนั้นกำลังจะทำเรื่องทีวีเพื่อการศึกษา กับวิทยุเพื่อการศึกษา ออกทีวีได้พร้อมกันทั่วประเทศ เขียนโครงการไปแล้ว แต่ไปอยู่ได้ 2 เดือน 7 วัน...เรื่องรถยนต์อยู่ในโครงการ เขียนเรียบร้อยหมด แต่ว่ายังไม่ได้รับการพิจารณา เพราะว่ายังไม่เข้า ครม. โครงการ 1 ตำบล 1 รถรับส่งนักเรียน ก็คือรถตู้ เด็กเล็ก ไม่ใช่เด็กโต นั่งได้ 20 กว่าคน จะซื้อรถขอยกเว้นภาษี ให้ไปใช้ ตำบลละ 1 คัน แล้ว rotate นักเรียนครูไปเรียนรวมกัน

Srimuang explained this project “Her Majesty Queen Sirikit was strongly interested in the history lessons. Therefore, I proposed it. In the future, Thailand will be a part of AEC. If we do not know about history and nature of people in this area, we cannot predict the future. If we know, it would be advantageous (personal communication 31 August 2012).

“วิชาประวัติศาสตร์เป็นวิชาที่สมเด็จพระราชินีสนพระทัยมาก ผมก็เลยเสนอให้เป็นนโยบายต่อไป AIC จะเข้ามา ถ้าเราไม่รู้ประวัติศาสตร์นะ ไม่รู้ nature ของคนที่นี่ เราก็จะอ่านอนาคตไม่ออก แต่ถ้าเรารู้ มันจะทำให้เราได้เปรียบ”

Uthai Singtothong, Director of Chonratsadornumroong School in Chonburi province (personal communication 11 October 2012), expressed his opinions that “Secondary schools are not comfortable when they had to be under the same jurisdiction because the psyche of the two levels are different.”

“ถ้าเป็นโรงเรียนมัธยมจะมีความรู้สึกอีกัดตอนที่รวมกับประถมเป็นสำนักงานเขตพื้นที่การศึกษา
ธรรมชาติของโรงเรียนมัธยมกับโรงเรียนประถมมันใช้จิตวิทยาทำงานคนละตัวกัน”

Yupong Woonwong agreed with this project because it “helped relieve the burden of teachers as they did not have to do administrative work by themselves” (personal communication 9 October 2012).

“มันช่วยลดภาระเราได้เยอะ เพราะครูเราไม่จำเป็นจะต้องมานั่งทำงานธุรการ”