

# A Comparative Study of Educational Policies in South Korea and Thailand During 1945-1980

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**Abstract:** This article examines the educational policies of South Korea and Thailand during the period that both countries desired to adjust to rapid change and catch up to modernization. Thailand began to promote educational developments in the 1870s, earlier than South Korea, whose educational system was restrained during Japanese colonialism, and where education reformation began in 1950. Yet, South Korea overtook Thailand in both educational achievements and developments. The aim of this article is to compare the educational policies between Korea and Thailand from 1945-1980. The research shows that the Korean educational policies that are related to economic development during 1960-1980 were better and more efficient policies than that of Thailand and the establishment of the Economic Planning Board (EPB) in 1961, and brought about a compatible policy of education and economic development. On the other hand, the Thai government paid less effort in achieving its goal. This can be seen from having no mechanisms for coordinating the supply of skilled workforces to meet the demands of industry and the educational indifference of Thai governments. As a result, the goal of education for economic growth has not been achieved in practice.

**Keywords:** Educational policy; Educational development; Economic development

## Introduction

Education has been identified as a cornerstone of economic and social development. Since the 1980s, it has become even more important to the development process because of accelerated technological changes. Information, biological improvement, and new materials are the basis of new sources of prosperity. Consequently, education is a key to knowledge production and personal efficiency to adjust to rapid change and catch up to modernization (Haddad, 1990). As a result, the abundance of educated people has become the prerequisite of social and economic development (Okoh, 1980).

The chosen countries are South Korea and Thailand. The reason behind selecting these countries is that both nations started at the same GNP per capita in the 1960s. However, the economic development of Thailand has recently lagged behind South Korea. Moreover, the government of Thailand began to promote educational developments in the 1870s, earlier than South Korea, whose educational system was restrained during Japanese colonialism, and where education reformation began in 1950. However, South Korea overtook Thailand in both educational achievement and development since 1960. Thailand lags behind South Korea in entering the age of modern economic growth (Kuznets, 1966), which is described by Simon Kuznets as constant increases in real income per capita, and the question that this paper seeks to answer.

Both South Korea and Thailand have experienced formal education for a long period of time. There are two common features among these two countries. The first feature is that the educational systems were modernized by Western styles. The Thai educational system was influenced by the British system since 1898. On the contrary, South Korea's school system was based on the American model during the period that this country was occupied by the United States in 1945. Secondly, the development processes of these two countries have integrated by the combination of state-related and cultural factors (Kunio, 1999).

There are some important features that make Thai characteristics different from its South Korean counterpart: (a) Thailand's sovereignty faced serious menaces from western powers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but it was capable to sustain independence and kept away from colonization; (b) Thailand opened trade with western nations in 1855 (signing the Bowring Treaty with Great Britain). In contrast, Korea closed to trade with western nations, and was colonized by Japan from 1910-1945, and occupied by the United States after the end of the Pacific War in 1945. The aim of this article is to compare the educational policies between Korea and Thailand from 1945-1980, in order to find out why South Korea overtook Thailand in both educational achievements and economic developments.

## **Research methodology**

This paper uses documentary research that involves the systematic investigation and analysis of historical documents to understand past events, trends, and cultural contexts. This research compares educational policies between Korea and Thailand during 1945-1980, particularly from 1960-1980, in which both countries had relatively similar theme policies. This comparison is rooted in empirical evidence, and four types of data: a collection of relevant legislative documents, a policy document synopsis, and a World Bank report, books and country policy analysis, World Bank report (1980, 1989, 1993, 1995, 1998).

## **Research results**

### **The Educational Policy for Economic Development**

In order to compare the educational policies during 1945-1980 in Korea and Thailand, which affected on their educational and economic development, the evolution of their educational policies should firstly be discussed. Since 1945, when Korea became independent, and it was the age of reconstruction and development in educational system. Also, Thailand was in the age of modern education development. After gaining some recommendations from the Mission Report of the UNESCO in 1949, the Thai government paid attention to developing the educational system in order to become modernized. Moreover, during 1960-1980, both countries utilized education as a mean to provide the workforce to meet the economic needs of the country. Although, the theme was the same, the outcome of each country was different. Korea achieved successfully in providing workforce to its new industries which brought about economic growth. In contrast, Thailand failed to create an educated workforce which also affected economic development. Firstly, it is important to discuss the successful policy choices of Korean in achieving its objectives. Then, the Thai educational policy will be discussed. The evolution of educational policies of each country is as follows:

#### ***KOREA***

Table 1 shows that educational planning in Korea during the post-colonial stage was begun in 1948, and shifted to education for economic growth since 1961. The policy at the first stage aimed to achieve general primary education for children and literacy for adults. Consequently, the first educational plan focused on educational expansion of compulsory

elementary education. In addition, civic schools were established to deal with adult illiteracy. The educational policies for achieving the objectives focused on countering the problems of enrolment which caused by general poverty. Therefore, free compulsory on primary education which was postponed during the Korean War, was implemented in 1959 (MOE[SK], 1996). For tackling adult illiteracy issue, the Ministry of Education started to invite college students to return to their home town to give literacy classes in 1951.

The efforts resulted in the numbers of elementary school rose from 1.3 million in 1945 to more than 3.6 million by 1960. The enrolment rate was up to 60 percent. This rate of participation in primary schooling was above other low-income countries of the time, such as Pakistan (22%), Indonesia (40%) or Uganda (32%). In addition, it was also greater than in many middle-income countries, such as Turkey (42%) or Portugal (53%) (Ashton, 1999). Moreover, literacy classes in urban and rural areas reduced the number of adult illiteracies for more than 10 million people.

**Table 1. Evolution of South Korean Education from 1948-1980**

Education in South Korea	1948-1960 Reconstruction	1961-1980 Education for Economic Growth
Challenges to Education	Compulsory Education	Secondary Education for All Supply for Technical workforce
Major Concerns	Access to Opportunity	Growth of Quantity, Efficiency and Control
Policy choice	-Universal compulsory education -Reconstruction of educational infrastructure	-Technical Vocational education and training -Expansion and equalization of secondary education

Source: Adapted from Lee, Chong Jae. The Development of Education in Korea: Past Achievement and Current Challenges, Background paper for the East Asia Study Tour for Senior African Education Policy Makers Organized by World Bank on June 19-23, 2006.

Immediately after reconstructing school facilities and expanding compulsory education, the objectives of education shifted to education for economic growth. In 1962, educational plans were outlined by the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the Economic Planning Board (EPB). It was introduced and facilitated the linkages between economic policy and education and training policy. The Education Reconstruction Plan (1962-1966) was the first five-year plan which has been developed alongside the five-year Economic Development Plan. Consequently, the quantitative expansion of education was encouraged by the state during the 1960s, resulting in the enrolment rate of middle-school which increased substantially (Table 6). In 1962, teacher training institutions and schools were upgraded. As a result, the quality of teachers and educational facilities expanded alongside a rising number of students (Lee, 1974).

Technical and vocational education was the next step to proceed as soon after universal primary education was attained (Gill & Ihm, 1996). In order to increase an amount of workforce, higher education was limited by reducing in the number of four-year institutions and student quotas (Adams & Gottlieb, 1993). On the other hand, two-year junior colleges and vocational high schools were increasingly established in 1960s to provide craftsmen for labour-intensive light industries. These educated workforces were called 'the backbone of the early export-oriented push' (Ashton, 1999). Following the first educational plan, the second five-year plan (1967-1971), the expansion of science and technical

education was a priority (Adams & Gottlieb 1993). Although, vocational high schools were promoted and widely expanded, vocational education was less popular than academic education (see Table 2), resulting in the onset of skill shortages.

Table 2. Distribution of Academic Senior High School Students and Vocational Senior High School Students, South Korea: 1965-1994

	1965 (%)	1970 (%)	1975 (%)	1980 (%)	1990 (%)
Academic	60	53	58	55	65
Vocational	40	47	42	45	35

Source: Ashton, David. *Education and Training for Development in Asia: The Political Economy of Skill Formation in East Asian Newly Industrialized Economies*. Florence, KY, USA: Routledge, 1999.

To counter the problem of skill shortages, the government established a public training system to provide skilled craftsmen and workers. During the second five-year plan, the central vocational training institute was established, and well-equipped public vocational training institutes were founded with the financial support from the World Bank and International Labour Organization.

Moreover, to increase the number of skilled workforces, the government enacted the Special Measures Law for Vocational Training which companies of over 500 employees were required to train 15% of the workforce in 1974. Since 1976, the coverage was expanded to cover the companies of over 300 employees. A fine was placed as the penalty of non-compliance (Ashton, 1999).

## THAILAND

In Thailand, the period of modern educational improvement begun in 1951 and shift to education of economic growth in 1960 (see Table 3). In 1949, Thailand presented as one of the members of United Nation and received assistance from the UNESCO to improve the quality of Thai education. The Mission Report from UNESCO brought about government policy on compulsory education, focusing on the improvement of the methods, the principles, and the theories of Thai education. Although, the policy on compulsory education was promulgated since 1921 resulting in the establishment of a number of local government schools, the policy still not achieved in terms of quality. Tupprasert stated that “despite the large number of schools, student achievement was poor. An obvious reason for this was that the government aimed too much at fulfilling political aims” (Tupprasert, 1985). It was about 33% of primary students who are illiteracy, only 66% of them can read and write (Tupprasert, 1985). Thus, improving quality and universalizing compulsory education were the first priority of the time. Consequently, during 1951-1960 was the age of modern education development.

Table 3. The Evolution of Thai Educational Policy during 1951-1980

Education in Thailand	1951-1960 Development of Modern Education	1960-1976 Education for Economic Growth	1977-1980 Quality Education
Challenges to Education	Compulsory Education	Educational Opportunity and Developing Qualified Labor Force	Management of the educational system, curriculum and schools' structure
Major Concerns	Access to opportunity	Expanded Opportunity	Equality of educational opportunity
Policy choice	Universal compulsory education	Expansion of primary, secondary, and vocational education in rural areas	Improvement of administrative system, curricula and learning processes

Source: Adapted from the World Bank, Thailand Education Achievements, Issues, and Policies, September 21 1998, p. 22-24.

The recommendations from the Mission's Report brought about the first National Education Plan in 1951, following the National Scheme of Education in 1960, resulting in expanding compulsory education from four to seven years of elementary education. One of the major reasons of this policy was that the rate of drop-out students after finishing four years of primary schooling was high. Although, the rate of primary enrolment was high, the dropout rate was as high as 60%, and secondary enrolment was only 2%. The reasons for this were that there were insufficient schools, staff and sufficient funds to cope with the existing school age population (Watson, 1980). However, the realization of this situation came so late. By the late 1980s, the government set up a policy to provide free compulsory primary education to all.

Moreover, the progressive schools modeled under the UNESCO auspices were introduced in Chachongsao (Watson, 1980). However, the report on the achievement of expanding compulsory education prepared by Ministry of Education only showed seven provinces in the total of 21 provinces operated successfully, while other 14 provinces failed due to the lack of building, educational facilities and budgets. In addition, another problem was the lack of qualified teachers. In 1961, 25.5% of elementary teachers attained professional teacher certificate while 74.5% attained elementary education or unrelated field of study (Tuprasert, 1985). As a whole, the qualitative improvement occurred only in the experimental schools in Chachongsao.

Since 1960, the main objectives of the policy were closely linked to economic development and focused on providing a medium and high-level workforce required for rapid economic growth (World Bank, 1998). Vocational education and training have also been promoted. A variety and types of courses and training programs are offered. Vocational education was set on a same level as the academic level. In order to create a large number of people being taught new vocational and technical skills, vocational schools have been extended further. Although, there were over 200 vocational secondary schools in the country, only 50% percent of these skilled people prepared for industry. That is because a large number of the boys' schools offer courses such as agriculture, carpenter, and simple building construction, while dressmaking, craft and home economics were offered in girls' schools. In addition, the majority of schools specialized in only one field. In 1962, in

Bangkok and Thonburi, there were four engineering schools, three building schools, three commercial schools, one foreign language, one tailoring school, and one arts and crafts school (Watson, 1980).

However, these vocational schools were far from popular. Parent considered vocational school as second best because many of them were poorly equipped. Additionally, only a few courses were offered because of unqualified staff or a shortage of materials, textbooks and equipment. Educational policy in the Second Plan (1967-1971) placed a great emphasis on producing more and better qualified workforce to fulfil national workforce needs, especially in the fields of science and technology. As a result, by 1971, nine agricultural and 16 trade and industrial schools were established, and over 40,000 had passed through them (Watson, 1980).

The expansion of seven years compulsory education had not been achieved, especially the quality of schools and teachers at all levels. Only the demonstrated schools which were supported from the UNESCO were successfully developed. Most of schools in the country had still not changed. Also, it remained the same for 21 years from 1951 to 1972. The reasons behind this inefficient education were the lack of budgets, educational facilities, and qualified teachers (Tupprasert, 1985).

Therefore, during the age of educational improvement, the government tried to find ways to make education more effective. The Forth Plan (1977-1981), focusing on improving the administrative system, curricula and learning processes, and encouraged equality of educational opportunities. Interestingly, the emphasis of the Forth Plan shifted away from those previous plans, the expansion of vocational workforce. Education policy during this period was influenced by three related features of equality of opportunity, the curriculum and structure of schools, and the management of the educational system (World Bank, 1989). However, the objectives of the Forth Plan were not successfully achieved. The reason is that the government has changed a great deal since 1973. In fact, the reformation of educational structure and processes requires the continuous time in proceeding. Over four to five years, there have been six groups of governments administrated the country (see table 4).

Table 4. The Governments of Thailand during 1973-1977

No.	The Government of Prime Minister	duration	No.	The Government of Prime Minister	duration
1 <sup>st</sup>	Sunya Thammasak	7 months	4 <sup>th</sup>	Kuklith Pramote	13 months
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Sunya Thammasak	9 months	5 <sup>th</sup>	Senee Pramote	11 days
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Senee Pramote	1 month	6th	Thanin Kraivichian	13 days

Source: Adapt Tupprasert, Historical Analysis of Practices in Thai Compulsory Education, 1985, 222-226.

Since its objectives had not been achieved, the emphasis of the Forth Plan was continued to the Fifth Plan, (1981-1986). The policies adopted for the Fifth Plan were very much an extension of developments set in train during the reforms of the Forth Plan (World Bank, 1989).

## Discussion

According to the educational theme during the 1960s, there was a huge difference between the educational policies of Korea and Thailand in achieving 'Education for Economic Growth' and the linkages between educational and economic development. These linkages were seriously in place to prepare for future workforce requirements by the Korean government. There is a specific formal institution responsible for making the linkages possible. The establishment of the Economic Planning Board (EPB) in 1961 brought about a compatible policy of education and economic development. The EPB has had three major functions, the planning and formulating of economic policy programs, the coordination of economic and other policies by ministries, and evolution of policy programs implemented by ministries. The EPB, called a board as a part from the ministries, played a major role in setting the agenda for South Korea, including the skill formation agenda (Ashton, 1999). The EPB formulated five-year economic plans and the workforce plan, consulting with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Science and Technology, was a principal part of economic planning process. The EPB played an important role in formulating skill formation plans in the light of and alongside economic development plans.

In contrast, there was no such formal institution responsible for providing linkages in increasing workforce requirements in Thailand. However, in the late 1960s, there were three government agencies closely concerned with educational and workforce planning; it was conceded that "none of the plans had been as systematic or complete as they might have been." (Education Planning Office, 1965). That is because these agencies which are the National Educational Council (NEC), the Educational Planning Office (EPO), and the Manpower Planning Office (MPO), faced with some problems which resulted in unsuccessful human resource development. The NEC was responsible in making an overall educational scheme and educational planning policy, and confronted with the shortage of trained and experienced personnel. The EPO's responsibility is providing information on the operational aspects of educational planning; however, there were some obstacles, such as the limited size of staff, the lack of needed data and information, inadequate office facilities and limited budget, had caused substantial delay in planning. Finally, the MPO has the purpose of providing machinery for formulation of policies, projects and implementation procedures to secure the fullest utilization of Thailand's workforce resources, and could not be effectively performed due to lack of personnel and other resources. Lastly, in Korea there were the sequential expansion of access to education corresponded well to the workforce requirements for economic development. This can be illustrated by the following Table.

Table 5. Educational Policy Choices in South Korea

	Policy Choices	Type of Economy
1960s	Expansion of Elementary and secondary Education	Labor Intensive Light Manufacturing
1970s-1980s	Expansion of Vocational- Technology High schools	Capital Intensive Heavy- Chemical Industry
1980s-2000s	Expansion of Higher Education	Electronics, High-Tech Knowledge Industry

Source: Chong Jea Lee, 'The Development of Education in Korea: past achievement and current challenges'. Background paper for the East Asia Study Tour for Senior African Education Policy Makers. World Bank on June 19-23, 2006

Table 5 shows that the Korean educational policy has changed according to the type of economic promotion since the 1960s. It reveals the successful coordination between

educational planning and economic planning, although the access to vocational school was not as popular as it was expected to be, the substantial numbers of vocationally educated graduates were ensured by the Korean government. In addition, in-service training for the industrial workforce was proceeded to support the number of skilled workforces in the industry. In contrast, despite the educational policy choice of the Thai government since 1960 it relatively collaborated with its demand for labour force needs, the numbers of skilled workforce were not meet the human power requirements for economic development. In the 1960s, although over 200 vocational secondary schools provided skilled training, only 50% of these graduates were prepared for industry. That is because a large number of courses offer in these schools, such as agriculture, carpenter, and simple building construction, were isolated from the surrounding economic environment they were supposed to be serving.

In short, Korean educational policies that related to economic development during 1960-1980 were better and more efficient than that of Thailand. The Korean government spent a lot of effort on expanding labour force needs for economic development. Their huge effort on human resource development might come from the fact that South Korea has limited natural resources; therefore, the population is regarded as a valuable human capital.

On the other hand, the Thai government paid less effort in achieving its goal. This can be seen from having no mechanisms for coordinating the supply of skilled workforces in order to meet the demands of industry. As a result, the goals of education for economic growth were not achieved in practice. The educational indifference of Thai governments reveals from the fact that despite the failure of many educational policies since 1951, it took them about 48 years without legal critical action for educational reform (National Education Act was promulgated in 1999). It indicates that education for human resource development has not been a key resource of national development. Douangngeune, Hayami and Godo pointed out the reason behind this action that is because Thailand in 1960s and 1970s had abundant natural resources; therefore, the need for education for economic growth was not so high. “Thailand was able to continue exploiting hitherto unused land for increasing output. As a result, educational development in Thailand in the early post-war period was less impressive” (Douangngeune & Godo, 2004).

## Conclusion

The Korean educational policies that are related to economic development during 1960-1980 were better and more efficient policies than that of Thailand and the establishment of the Economic Planning Board (EPB) in 1961, and brought about a compatible policy of education and economic development. On the other hand, the Thai government paid less effort in achieving its goal. This can be seen from having no mechanisms for coordinating the supply of skilled workforces to meet the demands of industry and the educational indifference of Thai governments. As a result, the goal of education for economic growth has not been achieved in practice.

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