

Education in Thailand



- **Education in Thailand** is provided mainly by the **Thai government** through the Ministry of Education from pre-school to senior high school. A free basic education of **twelve years** is guaranteed by the constitution, and a minimum of nine years' school attendance is mandatory.
- Formal education consists of at least twelve years of basic education, and higher education. Basic education is divided into six years of primary education and six years of secondary education, the latter being further divided into three years of lower- and upper-secondary levels. Kindergarten levels of pre-primary education, also part of the basic education level, spans 2-3 years depending on the locale, and is variably provided. Non-formal education is also supported by the state. Independent schools contribute significantly to the general education infrastructure.
- Administration and control of public and private universities is carried out by the Ministry of University Affairs.

School system

- Primary school students in Thailand
- The school structure is divided into **four key stages**: the first three years in elementary school, Prathom 1 - 3, are for age groups 6 to 8, the second level, Prathom 4 through 6 are for age groups 9 to 11, the third level, Matthayom 1 - 3, is for age groups 12 to 14. The upper secondary level of schooling consists of Matthayom 4 - 6, for age groups 15 to 17 and is divided into academic and vocational streams. There are also academic upper secondary schools, vocational upper secondary schools and comprehensive schools offering both academic and vocational tracks. Students who choose the academic stream usually intend to enter a university. Vocational schools offer programs that prepare students for employment or further studies.

- Admission to an upper secondary school is through an entrance exam. On the completion of each level, students need to pass the NET (National Educational Test) to graduate. Children are required only to attend six years of elementary school and at least the first three years of high school. Those who graduate from the sixth year of high school are candidates for two decisive tests: O-NET (Ordinary National Educational Test) and A-NET (Advanced National Educational Test).

- Public schools are administered by the government, and the private sector comprises schools run for profit and fee-paying non-profit schools which are often run by charitable organisations - especially by Catholic diocesan and religious orders that operate over 300 large primary/secondary schools throughout the country. Village and sub-district schools usually provide pre-school kindergarten (*anuban*) and elementary classes, while in the district towns, schools will serve their areas with comprehensive schools with all the classes from kindergarten to age 14, and separate secondary schools for ages 11 through 17.

- Due to budgetary limitations, rural schools are generally less well equipped than the schools in the cities and the standard of instruction, particularly for the [English language](#), is much lower, and many high school students will commute 60 - 80 kilometres to schools in the nearest city.

Academic year

- The school year in Thailand is divided into **two semesters**, and for primary and secondary schools generally begins on or around **15 May**, to end in **March**, and from **June** to **March** for higher education. It has a two or three week break between the two terms in September. The long summer break coincides with the hottest part of the year and [Songkran](#), the traditional Thai new year celebrations. Schools enjoy all public and Buddhist religious holidays and Christian and international schools usually close for the Christmas-New Year break.

Uniforms

- Uniforms are compulsory for all students with very few variations from the standard model throughout the public and private school systems, including colleges and universities.
- The dress code in primary and secondary grades for **boys** comprises knee-length dark blue, khaki, or black shorts with a pale white open collar short-sleeved shirt, long socks and brown or black trainers. **Female** students, wear a knee-length dark blue or black skirt, and a pale white blouse with a loosely hanging bow tie. The bow tie is dropped in favor of an open-necked pale blue shirt from Matthayom 4.

Matthayom 4-6

a girl

a boy



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Private school



- The girls' uniform is complemented by white ankle socks and dark blue or black sandals. The student's name, number, and name of the school are often embroidered on the blouse or shirt. Some independent or international schools have uniforms more closely resembling British school uniform standards, and boys in senior high school grades may be allowed to wear long trousers. The standard dress for children in kindergarten is a red skirt and white blouse for girls, and red short trousers and a white shirt for boys. In all Thai schools, one day per week, usually Thursday, is dedicated to scouting, when beige scout uniforms for boys and dark green guide uniforms are the rule, both wearing yellow neckerchiefs.

- **University uniforms** are standard throughout the country, and comprise a white blouse and plain or pleated skirt for the females, and long black trousers, a white long sleeved shirt with a dark blue or black tie for the males.
- **Staff:** As in all branches of the civil service at lower grades, teachers and staff in government schools wear a military style uniform. The female teachers and administrators of independent schools may be required to wear discrete, attractive uniforms, while staff in universities generally wear standard business attire.

History

- Formal education has its early origins in the **temple** schools, when it was available to **boys only**. From the mid sixteenth century Thailand opened up to significant French Catholic influence until the mid seventieth century when it was heavily curtailed, and the country returned to a strengthening of its own cultural ideology. Unlike other parts of south and southeast Asia particularly the Indian subcontinent, [Myanmar](#) (Burma), [Laos](#), [Vietnam](#), [Cambodia](#), the [Malay Peninsula](#), [Indonesia](#) and the [Philippines](#) which had all benefited from the influence of countries with centuries of educational tradition, Thailand has **never been colonized** by a western power and structured education on the lines of education in developed countries was therefore slow to evolve until it gained new impetus with the reemergence of diplomacy in the late nineteenth century.

Early education

- It is possible that one the earliest forms of education began when King [Ramkhamhaeng](#) invented the Thai alphabet in 1283 basing it on Mon, Khmer, and Southern Indian scripts. Stone inscriptions from 1292 in the new script depict moral, intellectual and cultural aspects. During the [Sukhothai](#) period (1238-1378), education was dispensed by the Royal Institution of Instruction (*Rajabundit*) to members of the royal family and the nobility, while commoners were taught by Buddhist monks.

- In the period of the [Ayutthaya kingdom](#) from 1350 to 1767 during the reign of King Narai the Great (1656-1688), the *Chindamani*, generally accepted as the **first textbook** of the Thai language, collating the grammar, and the prosody of Thai language and official forms of correspondence, was written by a monk, Pra Horatibodi, in order to stem the foreign educational influence of the French Jesuit schools, and remained in use up to King Chulalongkorn's reign (1868-1910). Narai himself was a poet, and his court became the center where poets congregated to compose verses and poems. Although through his influence interest in Thai literature was significantly increased, Catholic missions had been present with education in Ayutthaya as early as 1567 under Portuguese [Dominicans](#) and French [Jesuits](#) were given permission to settle in Ayutthaya in 1662.

- His reign therefore saw major developments in diplomatic missions to and from Western powers.
- On Narai's death, fearing further foreign interference in Thai education and culture, and conversion to [Catholicism](#), xenophobic sentiments at court increased and diplomatic activities were severely reduced and ties with the West and any forms of western education were practically severed. They did not recover their former levels until the reign of [King Mongkut](#) in the mid-nineteenth century.

Development

- Through his reforms of the Buddhist [[[Sangha]], [King Rama I](#) (1782-1809), accelerated the development of public education and during the reign of [King Rama IV](#) (1851-1865) the printing press arrived Thailand making books available in the Thai language for the first time; English had become the *lingua franca* of the Far East, and the education provided by the monks was proving inadequate for government officials. Rama IV decreed that measures be taken to modernize education and insisted that English would be included in the curriculum.

- [King Rama V](#) (1868-1910) continued to influence the development of education and in 1871 the first relatively modern concept of a school with purpose constructed building, lay teachers and a time-table was opened in the palace to teach male members of the royal family and the sons of the nobility. The Command Declaration on Schooling was proclaimed, English was being taught in the palace for royalty and nobles, and schools were set up outside the palace for the education of commoners' children. With the aid of foreign - mainly English - advisers a Department of Education was established by the king in 1887 by which time 34 schools, with over 80 teachers and almost 2,000 students, were in operation and as part of the king's programme to establish ministries, in 1892 the department became the Ministry of Education.

- Recognizing that the private sector had come to share the tasks of providing education, the government introduced controls for private schools.
- In 1897 on the initiative of **Queen Sribajarindra**, girls were admitted into the educational system. In 1898, a two-part Education Plan, for Bangkok, and for the provinces was launched with programmes for pre-school, primary, secondary, technical, and higher education. In 1901, the first government school for girls, the **Bamrung Wijasatri**, was set up in Bangkok, and in 1913, the first teacher training school for women was set up at the Benchama Rajalai School for girls. Further developments took place when in 1902 the plan was remodeled by National System of Education in Siam into the two categories of general education, and professional/ technical education, imposing at the same time age limits for admission to encourage graduation within predetermined time scales.

- The first university is named after [King Chulalongkorn](#) (Rama V), and was established by his son and successor [King Vajiravudh](#) (Rama VI) in 1917 by combining the Royal Pages School and the College of Medicine. In 1921, the Compulsory Primary Education Act was proclaimed.

Modernisation

- The bloodless revolution in 1932 that transferred absolute power from the king to democratic government encouraged further development and expansion of schools and tertiary institutions. The first National Education Scheme was introduced formally granting access to education regardless of ability, gender, and social background.
- In 1960, compulsory education was extended to seven years, and for the first time special provisions were made for disabled children, who were originally exempted from compulsory education. In 1961, the government began a series of five-year plans, and many of the extant purpose-built school buildings, particularly the wooden village primary schools, and the early concrete secondary schools date from around this time.

- In 1977, the key stages of primary and secondary education were changed from a 4-3-3-2 year structure to the 6-3-3 year system that is in use today.



Recent

- From early 2001, under Prime Minister [Thaksin Shinawatra](#), the Ministry of Education began developing new National Curricula in an endeavour to model the system of education on child, or [student-centred learning](#) methods.
- The years from 2001 to 2006 showed some of the greatest improvements in education, such as computers in the schools and an increase in the number of qualified native speaker teachers for foreign languages. Experiments had also been tried with restructuring the administrative regions for education or partly decentralising the responsibility of education to the provinces. By 2008, however, little real change had been felt, and many attempts to establish a clear form of university entrance qualification had also failed due to combinations of political interference, attempts to confer independence (or to remove it) on the universities, huge administrative errors, and inappropriate or mismatched syllabuses in the schools.

- On return to democracy in early 2008, after the December election, the newly formed coalition led by the [People's Power Party \(Thailand\)](#) - a party formed by the remnants of deposed Thaksin Shinawatra's [Thai Rak Thai](#) party) - announced new allocations of funds for education, an increase in the number of teachers, and more changes to the national curriculum and university entrance system.

Organization

- **Infrastructure**
- Almost all villages have a primary school, most sub-districts [tambon](#) have a school providing education from age 6 through 14, and all districts [amphoe](#) have secondary schools of age 12 through 17, and many have vocational colleges for students from age 15.
- The government is not able to cope with the entire number of students, thus the private sector, which is supervised by the government, provides a significant contribution. The level of education in the private sector is generally, but not always, higher than that of the government schools. Expensive, exclusive private and international schools provide for an exceptionally high level of achievement and a large number of their students continue their education at renowned International universities.

- Charitable organisations (missionary societies or diocesan), and other religions provide the backbone of non-government, low-fee, general education and some established universities, and the standard is relatively high. Cheaper, newer and individual private schools, are occasionally run more for profit and government subsidies, than for results, and are often indistinguishable from government schools in terms of quality of buildings, resources, teaching competency, and overcrowded classrooms; the only real benefit is the prestige afforded to the parents for schooling their children in the private sector - academic superiority is sometimes barely measurable.

- Almost all villages have a primary school, many larger sub-districts [tambon](#) have a school providing education from age 6 through 14, and all districts [amphoe](#) have secondary schools of age 12 through 17, and many have vocational colleges for students from age group 15. In rural schools absenteeism of both students and teachers is high due to family and farming commitments -in fact some schools close down during the periods of rice planting and harvesting.
- Over 400 government vocational colleges accept students who have completed Matthayom 3 and the campuses are usually located within daily commuting distances, although some may offer limited dormitory accommodation on the campus. Many specialised vocational schools offer training in agriculture, animal husbandry, nursing, administration, hospitality and tourism.

Finance

- In comparison with the public expenditure of other countries , (especially developing countries): China 13%, Indonesia 8.1%, Malaysia 20%, Mexico, 24.3%, Philippines 17%, United Kingdom and France 11%, the Thai [GDP](#) and national budget allocate considerable funds to education and by 2006 it represented 27 percent of the national budget. Although education is mainly financed by the national budget, important local funds, particularly in urban areas, are being released to support education. In the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority, up to 28.1 percent of the education budget has been provided by local financing. Loans and technical assistance for education are also received from [Asian Development Bank](#), the [World Bank](#), and the [OECD](#). In December 2008 Education Minister **Jurin Laksanawisit** announced the intention to provide Thai children with **free textbooks and learning materials throughout the 15 years of government-sponsored free education and plans to implement this policy in May at the start of the 2009 academic year.**

Research

- Systematic educational research began in 1955 when the International Institute for Child Study was established in Bangkok. The Institute has now become the Behavioral Science Research Institute and has conducted both basic and applied research. In the 1960s, the Ministry of Education and the National Education Commission, a division of the Office of the Prime Minister, began programmes of Educational research. In-depth research, particularly that of the ONEC, contributed to the education reform initiative of 1999-2002, and extensive research is provided by the country's universities, especially in faculties of education. The Department of Curriculum and Instructional Development of the Ministry of Education also conducts research into testing, curriculum, and content. The National Library, university and other libraries around the country are electronically networked in order to facilitate research.

Primary and secondary levels

- At primary levels, students follow 8 core subjects each semester: Thai language, Mathematics, Science, Social Science, Health and Physical Education, Arts and Music, Technology, and Foreign languages. At age 13 (Matthayom 2), students are allowed to choose one or two elective courses. The Science program (Wit-Kanit) and the Mathematics program (Sil-Kamnuan) are among the most popular. Foreign language programs (Sil-Phasa) and the Social Science program (sometimes called the General Program) are also offered.

Tertiary and higher education

- The established public and private universities and colleges of higher education are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of University Affairs in both the government and private sectors offer excellent programmes especially in the fields of Medicine, the Arts, Humanities, and Information Technology, although many students prefer to pursue studies of law and business in Western faculties abroad or in those which have created local facilities in Thailand. During the first years of the 21st century, the number of universities increased dramatically on a controversial move by the Thaksin government to rename many public institutes as universities.

- In the [Times Higher Education Supplement World University Rankings 2004](#), [Chulalongkorn University](#) was ranked 46th in the world for social sciences and 60th for biomedicine. In September 2006, three universities in Thailand were ranked "Excellent" in both academic and research areas by [Commission on Higher Education](#). Those universities are [Chiang Mai University](#), Chulalongkorn University, and [Mahidol University](#). Over half of the provinces have a government [Rajabhat University](#), formerly [Rajabhat Institute](#), traditionally a Teacher Training College.

Programmes

- Most Bachelor degree courses are programmes of four years full-time attendance. Exceptions are pharmacy and architecture that require five years, and the Doctor of Dental Surgery, Medicine, and Veterinary Medicine that comprise six years of study. Master degree study last for either one or two years and the degree is conferred on course credits with either a thesis or a final exam. On completion of a Master degree, students may apply for an admission exam to a two to five year doctoral programme. The Doctorate is conferred on coursework, research and the successful submission of a dissertation.

International schools

- By government definition: “An international school is an educational institution providing an international curriculum or international curriculum which its subject’s detail has been adjusted or a self-organized curriculum, which is not the Ministry of Education’s. A foreign language is used as the medium of teaching and learning and students are enrolled without restriction or limitation on nationality or religion or government regime, and are not against the morality or stability of Thailand.” The curriculum is required to be approved by the Ministry of Education and may be an international one, an international curriculum with modifications, or a curriculum established by the school itself. Thai language and culture constitutes a core subject and is mandatory at every level for all students; Thai students are required to study at least five 50-minutes periods a week, while non-Thai students must receive a minimum of instruction of one period per week.

- International schools must operate within a framework of requirements and conditions established by the Ministry of Education, that stipulates the ownership, location and size of the plot, design and structure of buildings, ratio of students to classroom surface, sanitary installations, administration and educational support facilities such as libraries and resources centres. Within one year from their commencement, primary and secondary schools must apply accreditation from an international organization recognized and accepted by the Office of the Private Education Commission and accreditation must be granted within six years. Managers and Head teachers must be of Thai nationality;
- Currently 90 international schools operate in the Kingdom, of which 65 are located in the Bangkok area. (provinces 2003)

Teacher training

- Teacher training is offered either in universities by the Ministry of University Affairs or in teacher training colleges administered by the Ministry of Education's Department of Teacher Education. The university programmes are now commonly influenced by child centred learning methods and several universities operate a *Satit* demonstration primary and secondary school staffed by lecturers and trainee teachers.

Primary and Lower Secondary School Teachers

- The mainstay of the teacher output is provided by the government Rajaphat Universities (formerly Rajaphat Institutes), the traditional teacher training colleges in most provinces. Programmes include courses in teaching methodology, school administration, special education, optional specialisation, supervised practical teaching experience, and the general education subjects of language and communication, humanities, social science, mathematics, and technology. Completion of upper secondary education (Mathayom 6) is required for access to basic teacher training programmes and primary and lower secondary school teachers are required to complete a two-year program leading to the Higher Certificate of Education, also known as the Diploma in Education or an Associate's Degree.

Upper Secondary School Teachers

- To teach at the upper secondary school level, the minimum requirement is a four-year Bachelor of Education degree through government programmes provided either at a teacher's training college or in a university faculty of education. Students who have acquired the Higher Certificate of Education are eligible to continue their studies at a university or teachers training college for two additional years of full-time study for a Bachelor degree. Prospective teachers with a Bachelor degree in other disciplines must undergo an additional one year of full-time study to complete a Bachelor of Education degree.

English language education in Thailand

- The use of English in Thailand while far from being as developed as in the Netherlands, Germany, the Scandinavian countries or the Philippines, is nevertheless rapidly increasing through the influence of the media and the Internet and is far greater, for example, than in France, the United Kingdom's nearest neighbour.
- The government has long realised the importance of the [English language](#) as a major core subject in schools, and it has been a compulsory subject at varying levels for several decades. Since 2005 schools are being encouraged to establish bilingual departments where the core subjects are taught in English, and to offer intensive English language programmes.

- Notwithstanding the extensive use of, and exposure to English in everyday life in Thailand, the standard of correct English in the schools is now the lowest in Southeast Asia. In 1997 Thailand was still in the forefront, but by 2001 Laos and Vietnam had caught up, and by mid 2006 were clearly in the lead.

**Thank you for your
attention.><**