2. Educational Situations and Trends

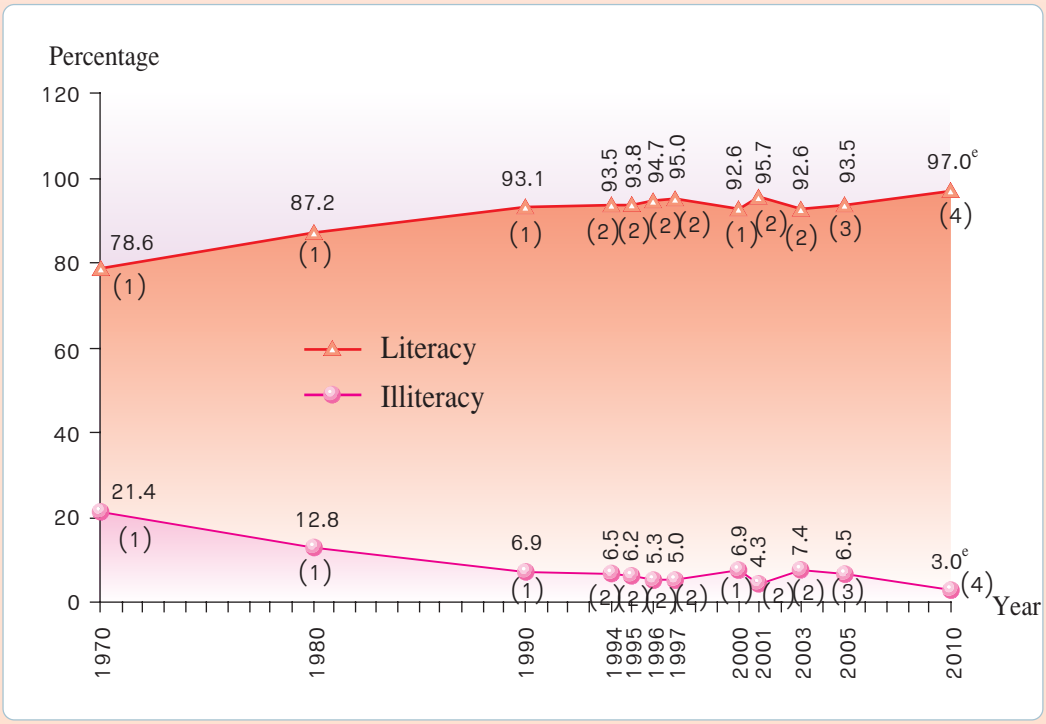
2.1 Knowledge, Capability and Skills of Thai People

2.1.1 Literacy Rate

The literacy rate among Thai population aged 15 and over rose from 78.6% in 1970 to 93.5 in 2005 (Figure 4.7), much higher than the average for developing countries (67.0%). Although Thailand's literacy rate ranks second among the ASEAN member countries,[1] second to Brunei, its illiteracy rate was recorded at 6.5% in 2005; and it is estimated that the literacy rate will be as high as 97% in 2010.

[1] UNDP. Human Development Report,2005.

Figure 4.7 Literacy and illiteracy rates of Thai population aged 15 and over, 1970-2010



Sources: (1) Data for 1970, 1980, 1990 and 2000 were derived from the Population and Housing Censuses. National Statistical Office.

(2) Data for 1994-1997, 2001, and 2003 were derived from UNDP, Human Development Reports, 1997-2003.

(3) Data for 2005 were derived from the report on population characteristics from the population change survey, 2005-2006, National Statistical Office.

(4) UNESCO, Principal Regional Office for Asia and Pacific, Literacy in Asia and the Pacific.

2.1.2 Learning Rate

The learning rate of Thai people is rather low at only 60.0% (2005) and there are wide disparities between those for the regions and between urban and rural residents (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 Learning rate of Thai people, 1992-2005

Unit: Percent

Region and area	1992	1996	1997	1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Urban	57.1	60.0	61.7	65.4	67.5	68.6	70.0	70.8	71.2
Rural	36.5	41.0	42.2	46.9	49.4	50.8	52.9	54.6	54.3
Region									
Central	41.0	48.2	49.4	52.1	52.4	53.2	58.6	59.7	62.3
North	36.2	38.6	40.7	43.5	46.6	48.2	49.9	51.8	50.0
Northeast	39.6	44.1	45.0	51.0	54.8	55.7	56.5	58.3	56.0
South	43.6	47.5	48.5	53.8	56.3	58.7	58.7	60.7	62.5
Bangkok	61.6	64.8	66.8	72.1	73.1	73.7	75.7	75.9	76.4
Whole country	**42.3**	**47.1**	**48.5**	**53.0**	**55.3**	**56.6**	**58.7**	**60.1**	**60.0**

Source: Data from the Workforce Survey (3rd Round) of the National Statistical Office, analyzed by the Bureau of Development Evaluation and Dissemination, NESDB.

Note: Learning rate is the level of literacy and basic computation required for daily livelihood; to attain such a level, a person should have had 5-6 years of formal schooling or equivalent.

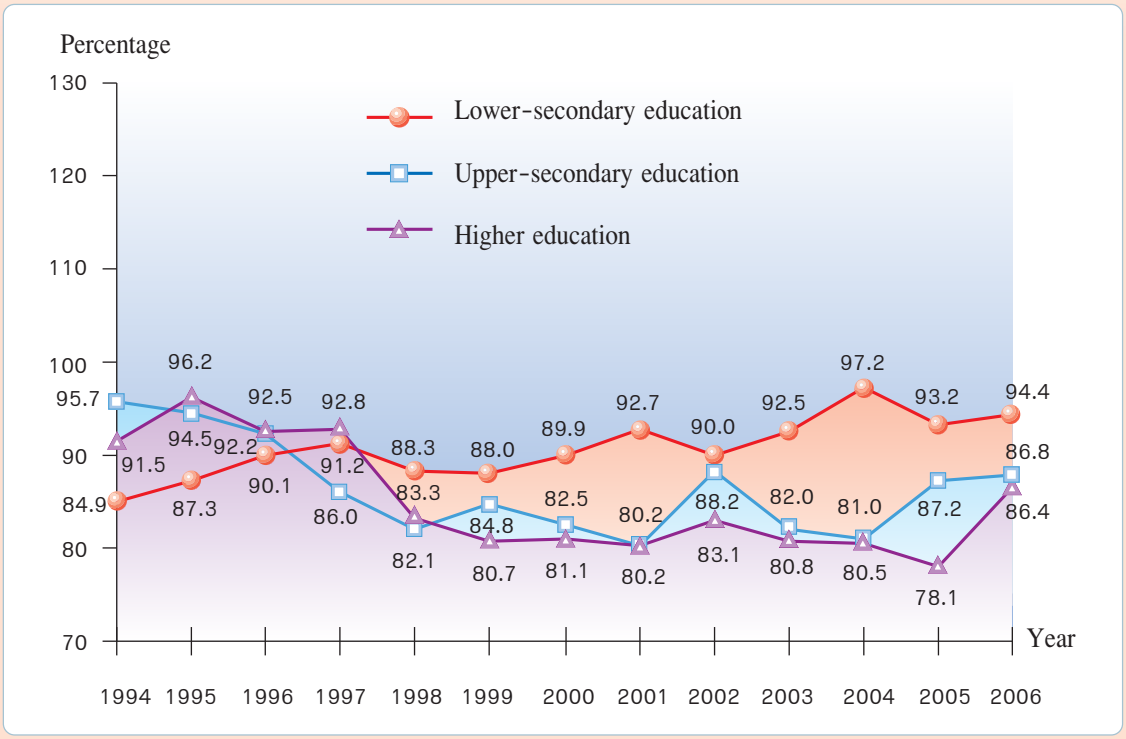
Nevertheless, when considering the reading rate among the Thai people, it was found that only 35.4 million people (61.2%) read regularly in 2003 and the trend rose slightly to 40.9 million (69.1%) in 2005 (Report on Reading of Population Survey, 2005, National Statistical Office).

2.2 Education Opportunities

2.2.1 Educational Continuation

The rates of students continuing their education from primary to lower-secondary, from lower to upper-secondary, and from upper-secondary to higher education tended to be rising during the pre-economic crisis period. But the rates dropped during the crisis and rose again after the crisis was over (Figure 4.8).

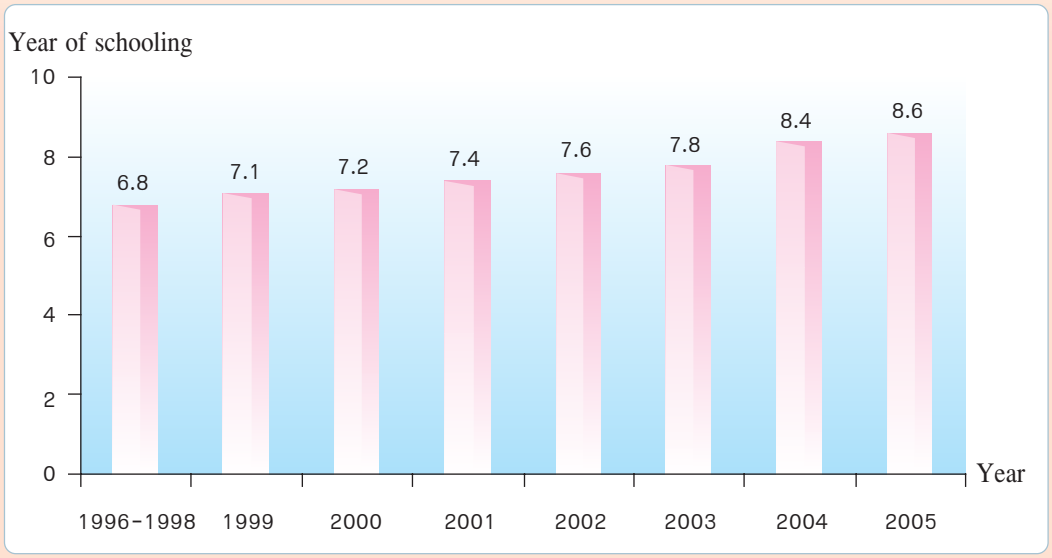
Figure 4.8 Rates of educational continuation by educational level, academic years 1994-2006



Sources: Office of the Education Council, Ministry of Education.

With the higher rate of educational continuation, coupled with an increase in the average duration of education among Thai population aged 15 and over from 6.8 years in 1996 to 8.6 years in 2005 (Figure 4.9), the proportion of labour force (2006) with primary schooling has dropped to 59.9%. It has been projected that the proportion of workers with primary education will drop further to only 39.9% in 2020, while those with higher education will rise from 14.0% in 2006 to 22.5% in 2020 (Table 4.4).

Figure 4.9 Average years of schooling of Thai people, 1996-2005



Source: Office of the Education Council.

Note: Data for 1996-2003 covered the population aged 15 years and over and 2004-2005 for population aged 15-59 years.

Table 4.4 Structure (percentage) of labour force by educational level, 1995-2020

Educational level	1995(1)	1997(1)	1999(1)	2001(1)	2003(1)	2005(1)	2006(1)	2010(2)	2020(2)
Primary and lower	78.0	75.2	69.8	66.3	63.8	61.4	59.9	55.9	39.9
Lower-secondary	8.9	10.1	12.0	12.7	13.7	13.8	14.1	14.7	14.6
Upper-secondary	3.3	3.6	5.0	6.2	7.2	8.1	8.8	8.7	14.3
Vocational	4.7*	4.8*	5.0*	3.4*	3.3*	3.3*	3.2*	6.6	8.7
Higher	5.1	6.2	8.2	11.3	11.9	13.4	14.0	14.1	22.5
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Source: (1) Data for 1995-2006 were derived from the Reports of the Workforce Survey, 3rd Round, National Statistical Office.

(2) Data for 2010-2020 were derived from the Report on Thailand's Social and Economic Trends, Thailand Development Research Institute.

Note: *Including graduates from vocational and teacher-training colleges for 1995-2006.

2.2.2 Education Equalities among Male and Female Children

At present, boys and girls have an equal educational opportunity. In 2004, the proportion of boys attending primary school was slightly higher than that for girls; on the contrary, at the higher educational level there were more female students than male students. However, the educational equalities among boys and girls in Thailand are inferior to those in other ASEAN countries, all countries in Europe and the USA (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5 Educational inequalities at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, 2000-2004

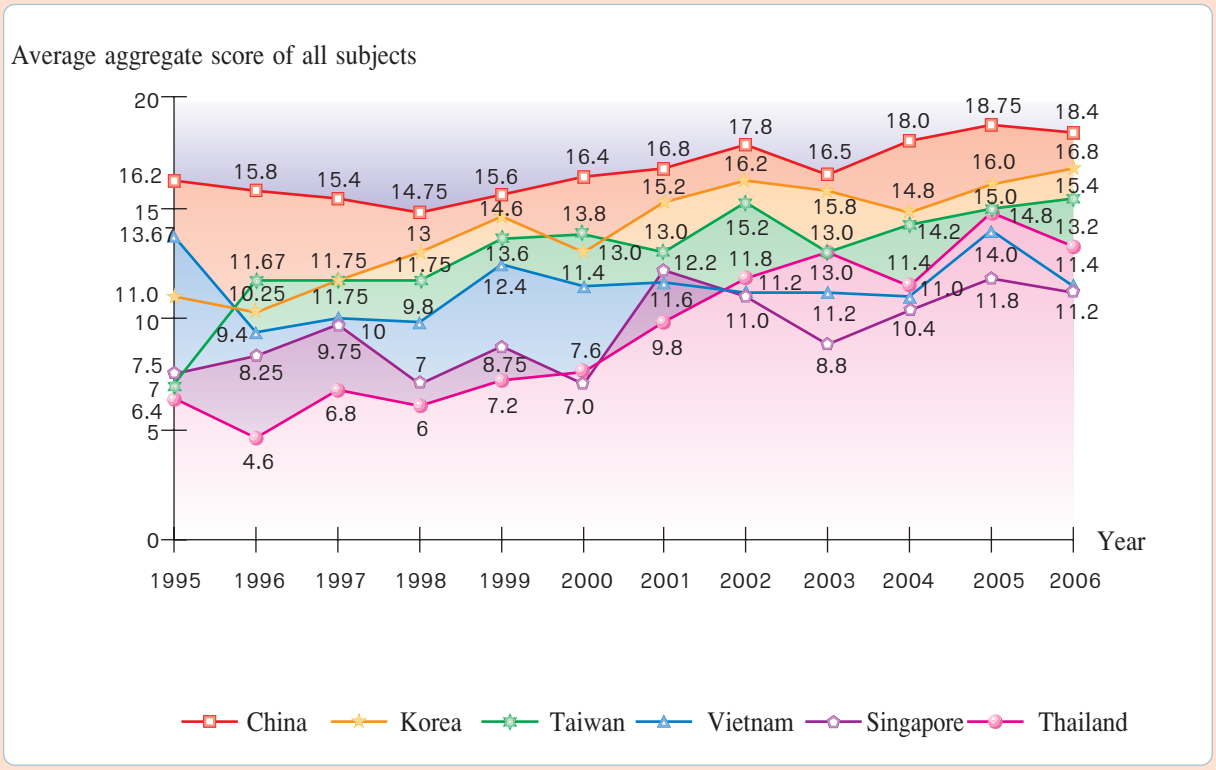
Group/country	2000/2001			2004		
	Ratio of female-to-male students			Ratio of female-to-male students		
	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
WHO/SEAR						
Sri Lanka	1.00	NA	NA	1.00	NA	NA
Maldives	1.01	1.13	NA	1.00	1.15	NA
Indonesia	0.99	0.96	0.77	0.98	0.99	0.79
Bangladesh	1.02	1.05	0.55	1.03	1.11	0.50
Thailand	0.93	1.01	1.12	0.97	1.01	1.17
India	NA	NA	0.66	0.94	NA	0.66
Myanmar	0.99	0.95	1.75	1.01	0.95	1.77
Nepal	0.87	NA	0.27	0.87	NA	0.41
Bhutan	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
North Korea	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
ASEAN						
Malaysia	1.00	1.11	1.08	1.00	1.14	1.41
Vietnam	0.94	NA	0.74	0.94	NA	0.77
Philippines	1.01	1.18	1.10	1.02	1.20	1.28
Indonesia	0.99	0.96	0.77	0.98	0.99	0.79
Singapore	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Brunei	NA	NA	1.96	NA	NA	1.74
Thailand	0.93	1.01	1.12	0.97	1.01	1.17
Cambodia	0.90	0.59	0.38	0.96	0.73	0.45
Laos	0.92	0.81	0.59	0.73	NA	0.80
Myanmar	0.99	0.95	1.75	1.01	0.95	1.77
Worldwide: Top Ten						
Norway	1.00	1.01	1.52	1.00	1.01	1.54
Iceland	1.00	1.05	1.74	0.98	1.04	1.78
Australia	1.01	1.03	1.24	1.01	1.01	1.23
Ireland	1.00	NA	1.27	1.00	1.06	1.28
Sweden	0.99	1.04	1.52	1.00	1.03	1.55
Canada	1.00	1.01	1.35	1.00	0.99	1.36
Japan	1.00	1.01	0.85	1.00	1.01	0.89
U.S.A.	1.01	1.02	1.32	0.96	1.02	1.39
Switzerland	0.99	0.95	0.78	1.00	0.93	0.20
Netherlands	0.99	1.00	1.07	0.99	1.01	1.08

Sources: - Human Development Report, 2003.
- Human Development Report, 2006.
- Report on the Achievements of the MDGs, Thailand, 2004.

2.3 Quality of Education

The Thai educational system tends to focus on memorization rather than strengthening of analytical skills for problem solving and self-study, resulting in low educational achievements, below 50% for both primary and secondary levels. Thai children's capability is weaker in terms of rational and systematic analysis and synthesis (Table 4.6). Besides, the Thai educational quality cannot compete with that in other countries as evidenced in the results of the academic Olympics competition. In the contest, Thai students' mathematics and science capabilities were lowest among the six Asian countries participating in the event, except for 2002-2006 when Thailand was ranked fourth, better than Singapore and Vietnam (Figure 4.10). Most Thai students have a problem with answering a question that requires the application of knowledge for further analysis, and problem solving and the measuring of process skills. As a result, a lot of Thai people lack the skills for analysis which is a basis for creating life skills, leading to failure or inability to resolve a problem or situation related to health risks.

Figure 4.10 Results of Olympic scientific knowledge contest of students from Thailand and other Asian countries, 1995-2006



Source: Office of the Education Council, Ministry of Education.

Note: Average aggregate score of all subjects means an average score of 5 subjects (mathematics, chemistry, physics, biology and computer science) for each year.

Table 4.6 Learning achievements and scholastic aptitudes of primary and secondary school students, 2000-2006

Educational level / Learning achievement		Average score (percent)			
		Mathematics	Science	Thai language	English
1. Primary	2001	46.9	NA	54.3	49.6
	2002	49.9	NA	50.6	47.4
	2003	41.7	42.4	45.2	41.1
	2004	43.8	41.6	44.2	37.3
	2006	38.9	43.2	42.7	34.5
2. Lower-secondary	2000	31.2	40.4	53.0	38.9
	2001	32.4	NA	46.3	38.9
	2002	39.1	NA	46.7	45.3
	2003	35.0	38.1	54.0	37.9
	2004	34.8	37.2	38.3	32.3
	2006	31.1	39.3	43.9	30.8
3. Upper-secondary	2003	34.0	48.8*	44.5	39.1
	2005	28.5	34.0	48.6	29.8
	2006	29.6	34.9	50.3	32.4

Educational level / Learning aptitude		Computational	Analytical	Language capability
- Upper-secondary	2000	38.3	43.1	37.2
	2001	41.7	39.6	38.7
	2003	38.9	38.3	40.7
	2004	41.6	46.1	39.9

Sources: - Office of the Basic Education Commission, Ministry of Education.
- National Institute for Educational Testing Services, Ministry of Education.

Notes:
1. Assessments of students' learning achievements for primary and lower-secondary levels, 2001-2002 were undertaken in three subjects: Thai language, English and mathematics.
2. For 2000-2004, the assessments of upper-secondary school students' scholastic aptitudes were undertaken in three aspects: computational, analytical and language capabilities.
3. For 2003, there was also an assessment of learning achievements for upper-secondary school students.
4. *For physical/biological sciences.

The changes in the educational system have affected the Thai health system in the following aspects:

1. Some Thai people lack the ability to screen health information in a well-informed manner resulting in the practice of risky health behaviours. At present, many Thai people consume food or something that is unhealthy such as alcohol, junk food, and tobacco (see Chapter 4, health behaviours).

2. Educational attainment of Thai labour force; in 2006 as many as 59.9% of Thai workers had completed only primary schooling which affects the development of labour and health. A lot of workers are unable to take care of their own health and protect themselves resulting in a rise in occupational injuries. In additional, the underprivileged such as the rural and urban poor have no access to the educational system; a number of them have no access to even primary schooling and they will be the group that has no access to health services; so they have to face a lot of health problems.