

Governmental Non-Formal Education in Thailand

—The Case of Chiang Mai—

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1. Introduction

1-1. Background

Non-formal education programs have been actively promoted by governmental and non-governmental organizations in Thailand as a means of lifelong learning opportunities for the out-of-school population, especially for adults who missed formal education. The Thai government has prioritized non-formal education since the government established the Department of Non-formal Education within the Ministry of Education in 1979. An umbrella term for programs such as these is ‘governmental non-formal education’ (GNFE). According to the Ministry of Education 4,718,811 people participated in governmental non-formal education in 2004. However, there is little research which focuses on learner expectations. This research aims to shed light on expectations of learners toward GNFE and assess the relevance of GNFE programs in Thailand.

1-2. Research Objective

The research is intended firstly to find out what kind of education governmental non-formal education is offered in Thailand, through analyzing its education system, curriculum and opinions from the teachers, and secondly to analyze learner expectations toward governmental non-formal education in Thailand.

1-3 Main Research Question

To what extent does governmental non-formal education meet the expectations of learners in Thailand?

The related research questions are:

- 1) What opportunities does GNFE offer to learners?
- 2) What kind of expectations do learners have toward GNFE?

1-4 Research Methodology

Before our fieldwork in Chiang Mai, we conducted a literature review to obtain basic information about the Thai governmental non-formal education system and its characteristics. Our fieldwork was conducted mainly by direct interview. In order to answer the research questions, we conducted surveys of both providers and recipients of governmental non-formal education. To gain understanding from the point of view of providers, we visited non-formal education centres in provincial, district, and sub-district levels and interviewed the directors and nine teachers. On the side of recipients, we interviewed 23 learners, including graduates.

2. Literature Review

2-1. Non-Formal Education

Based on the concept of “Education for All” brought forward in 1990 at the World Conference for Education in Jomtien, Thailand, the expansion and intensification of non-formal education has been promoted. Consequently, the World Education Forum held in Dakar in 2000 committed to achieve universal access to basic education by 2015. These efforts have made significant progress in educational development, however numerous children do not have access to school and others drop out of school. “It is clear that merely increasing resources and augmenting the capacity of school system is inadequate to deal effectively with the problem” (Hoppers, 2006). The need to promote not only formal education but also non-formal education to achieve “Education for All” has been emphasized (JICA, 2005).

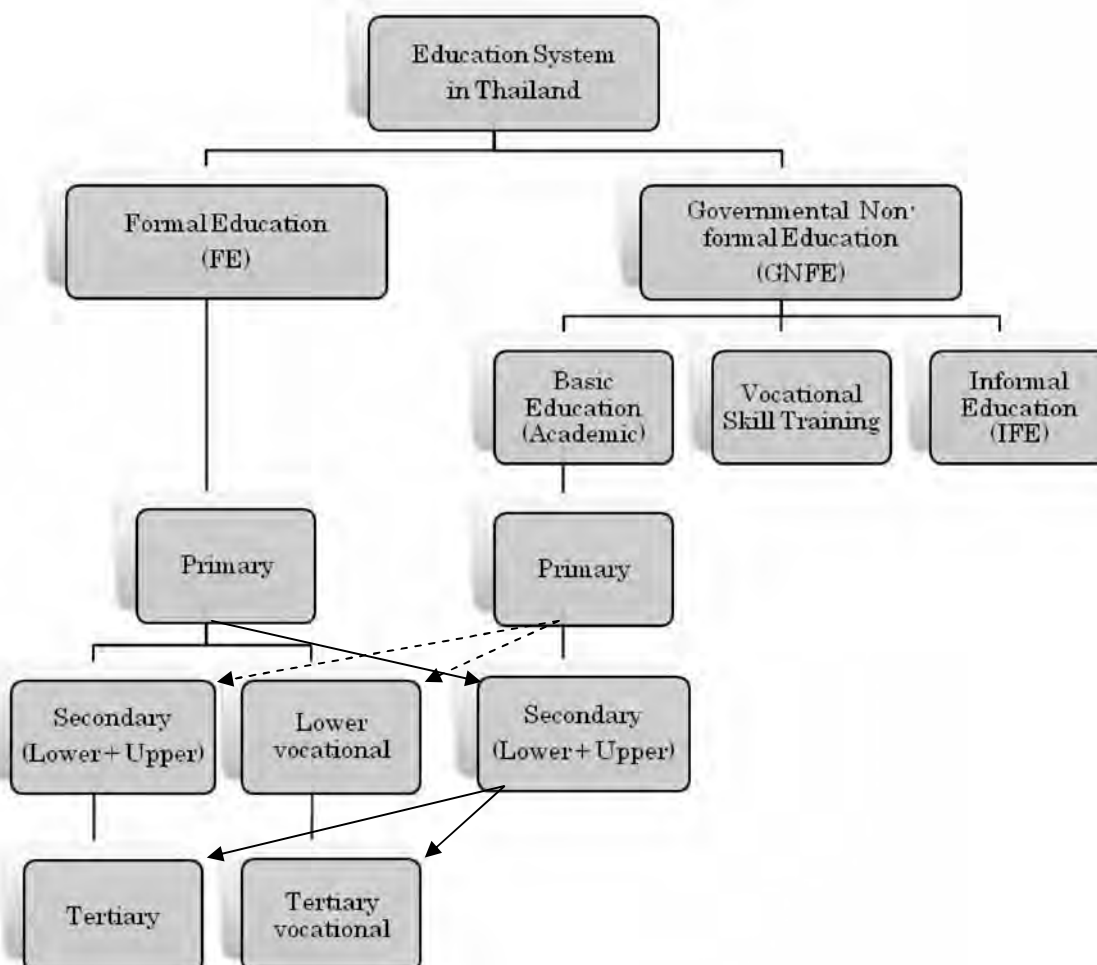
Originally, Non-Formal Education was conceptualized in 1970s with the criticism of formal education (JICA, 2005). Phillip (1976) said that Non-Formal Education is “simply a convenient label covering a bewildering assortment of organized educational activities outside the formal system that are intended to serve identifiable learning needs of particular subgroups in any given population -be they children, youths, or adults; males or females; farmers, merchants or craftsmen; affluent or poor families.” (Phillip, 1976). In recent years, this loose description has changed slightly because formal education and Non-Formal Education have similar characteristics and the border between formal education and non-formal education is getting vague. “The current use of the language NFE owes more to discourse of lifelong learning than it does to Education for All.” (Roger, 2005). Murata (2005, pp.145-47) summarizes the major roles of Non-Formal Education in four points:

- 1) **Basic human rights:** Education is one of the basic human rights and the Nation has to provide education opportunities to all citizens. Non-Formal Education can provide knowledge and skills to those who miss formal education to meet their needs and current life situation.
- 2) **Survival:** Non-Formal Education can provide knowledge about health, nutrition and family planning as well as literacy skills necessary to maintain a basic livelihood.
- 3) **Poverty alleviation:** Through literacy education and vocational training offered by non-formal education, people can aware and think the life surrounding them critically, which make them able to take an action for their own development with their initiative.
- 4) **Peace-building:** Education itself can promote mutual understanding between people of different backgrounds. Non-Formal Education has high mobility and its role cannot be ignored especially in post-conflict situations.

2-2. Governmental Non-formal Education in Thailand

In Thailand, education systems have two courses: Formal Education (FE) and Governmental Non-formal Education (GNFE), the latter will be the focus of this paper. Those two different courses have parallel and complementary relationships; therefore graduates from one level can transfer to the upper level of another one. Most of the GNFE learners of the secondary level are graduates of the FE primary level and they go back to FE again in tertiary level. The bold arrows in Figure 1 explain this common case.

Figure 1



This section primarily outlines the provision of Governmental Non-formal Education in Thailand from four aspects: 1) life-long learning in Thailand, 2) institutional structure of governmental NFE in Thailand, 3) general NFE programs/activities in Thailand, and 4) government budget allocation for NFE.

(1) Life-long learning in Thailand

Thailand has emphasized providing lifelong learning opportunities to the out of school population since 1938 (Edirisingha, 1999). At the beginning, non-formal education was aimed at basic literacy and primary level

mathematics, but it has since expanded into secondary and vocational areas. Its strategies include: developing a range of life skills through distance learning, establishing workplace and community learning centers (CLC) and promoting the joint use of resources with the formal school sector. According to the Ministry of Education, 4,718,811 people participated in non-formal education in 2004. 33.56% of learners participated in continuing education courses and 66.44% in vocational education and training courses (MoE, 2007).

(2) Institutional structure of governmental NFE in Thailand

NFE programs and activities in Thailand are mainly provided by the Office of the Non-Formal Education Commission (ONFEC). The organization and structure of ONFEC has been classified in levels, from central office in Bangkok to regional, provincial, and district level all over the country to take charge of local NF educational affairs, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Institutional Structure and Number of Governmental NFE Institutes in Thailand

Office of the Non-Formal Education Commission (ONFEC)		1
Institutes under ONFEC	Regional NFE Centers	5
	NFE Provincial Centers	175
	NFE District (Amphor) Centers	895
	Provincial NFE Science Centers	12
	Vocational Training Center along the Border Areas	7

Source: Siltragool (2007), compiled by authors

(3) General NFE programs/activities in Thailand

NFE in Thailand focuses mainly on three areas: Basic Education, Vocational Education & Skills Training, and Information Services. Programs and activities carried out by ONFEC can be generally categorized into Literacy and Numeracy Programs, Equivalency Programs, Life-skill training programs and NFE vocational training programs (Siltragool, 2007), from which we can see that the NFE system in Thailand in its entirety is trying to provide educational opportunities by targeting to various groups of people.

Literacy and numeracy program is targeting to illiterate people, mainly adults, who do not have access to education. This program has curriculum equivalent to grade 4 of the formal schooling system, providing basic knowledge and skills for reading, writing and calculating. And there are also specific curricula for various targeting groups of people like the southern Thai Muslims and northern hill-tribes. In 2006, the national enrollment of literacy program is 150,592 (male 73,109 / female 77,483), and the number of graduates is 83,944 (male 42,547 / female 41,397) (ONFEC Planning Group, 2006).

The equivalency program is the most important program run by ONFEC and is widespread throughout the country through NFE institutes at different levels. It has three levels of education equivalent to formal schooling: primary, lower secondary and upper secondary, which also provides certificates to graduates. Target groups of this program are people who have not completed compulsory formal education and want to receive basic education at primary and secondary levels. It also targets school-age children and youth who, for whatever reason, are not able to attend formal schools, such as children living in remote areas where formal schools are not provided, or children who have been expelled from school. In 2006, the number of students in NFE equivalency programs was 1,970,376 (male 1,097,722 & female 872,654) (ONFEC Planning Group, 2006).

The target group of life-skills training programs are youth and early adults, aged from 16 to 25 years old. Most are homeless children and juveniles. Curriculum is primarily related to skills needed for daily life, like the prevention of drug addiction, HIV/AIDS, sex education and so on. Non-formal vocational training program aims to provide people with vocational skills to increase income or reduce certain expenses, spending leisure time in appropriate ways. Interest group activities, short-term courses and long-term courses with certificates are provided to the learners.

(4) Government Budget Allocation for NFE

ONFEC receives a budget from the central government annually. In 2006, the total budget to ONFEC was 4,136,984,300 Thai Baht¹, which in 2007 was increased by 20% to 4,964,574,800 Thai Baht (ONFEC, 2007). However, comparing the NFE Equivalency Program with the Formal Education (FE) system, the average budget allocation from the Thai government to FE is more than double of NFE's (per student per year), as shown in Table 2. Lack of budget still remains a major constraint for many NFE institutions in Thailand.

Table 2: Government Budget Allocation for NFE (Equivalency Program) & FE

Level of Education	Each Learner (per year [Baht])	
	NFE Learner	Formal School Student
Primary Education	452	1,100
Lower Secondary Education	1,162	1,800
Upper Secondary Education	1,162	2,700

Source: ONFEC (2004)

2-3. CLC in Thailand

The community learning centre (CLC) is defined as “a local educational institution outside the formal education system, for villages or urban slum areas, CLC program is built on the past experience of implementing various adult, non-formal and continuing education. CLCs are usually set up and managed by community people” (APPEAL 2008: 2006).

The purpose of the CLC is to promote human development through the provision of opportunities for lifelong learning to all people in the local community. CLCs support empowerment, social transformation and improvement of the quality of life of the people. The CLC doesn't necessarily require new infrastructure. It can be set up in different kinds of places, so far as the facility is easily accessible to all people in the community, for example, a health centre, temple, mosque, or primary school. The activities should be flexible and participatory. The activities organized by CLCs cover a wide range of community-based development programs in health, agriculture, education and entrepreneurial skills for out-of-school children, youth, women, the under-privileged and the rural poor. The main function of CLCs is being the venue to provide: 1) education and training, 2) community information and resource services, 3) community development activities, and 4) co-ordination and networking (APPEAL 2008: 2006).

CLCs in Thailand have been divided into two categories; one is centers organized and operated by local people, and the other is centers organized and run by local people, but with some government support. CLCs have

¹ 1 US\$ equivalent to 38 Thai Baht

grown strongly and rapidly with different backgrounds, forms and activities. According to the Office of Non-formal Education Commission (ONFEC), the number of CLCs is currently about 8,057 supported by ONFEC in all 76 of the country's provinces (APPEAL 2008).

CLCs' main activities depend on the readiness and context of each locality. Functions, too, differ according to local problems and needs. Primary activities are related to basic literacy and other development activities. Some activities focus on developing occupational skills and increasing knowledge of agricultural practices. Others are part of quality of life programs, such as health promotion, HIV/AIDS prevention or preserving the local wisdom of elders and developing the relationship between the new generation and the elderly.



Source: Authors

3. Findings

3-1. Characteristics of Governmental Non-Formal Education (GNFE)

Despite its high achievement in terms of education in Thailand, as in many other developing countries, there are persons with fewer opportunities to pursue formal education due to socio-economic constraints and reasons, especially in remote areas in northern Thailand. In addition, there are some middle-aged people who desire to study. There has been a growing promotion of governmental non-formal education (GNFE) that targets not only children and youth, but also adults both in the San Pa Tong district and the Mae Wang district in Chiang Mai province. During our interviews of directors of Chiang Mai provincial NFE centers, directors of San Pa Tong and Mae Wang NFE centers, NFE learners and graduates, we uncovered several characteristics of GNFE. GNFE in Thailand is very unique in terms of the following aspects.

Age limit: According to regulation, there is a specified age limit for joining GNFE. GNFE accepts people who are above the age of 16 up to 60. There are many exceptions, however, that learners even below the age of 16 can be accepted, such as out-of-school children, or street children. Sometimes, formal education institutions can also recommended to students for the GNFE track. The majority of learners with whom we conducted interviews were the in their 40s, 50s and 60s in the San Pa Tong district, while mostly teens, 20s and 30s in the Mae Wang district.

Tuition fee: GNFE provides educational opportunities free of charge. All textbooks are loaned for free. Sometimes those who have enough money donate funds for the school management voluntarily. However, most NFE learners are comparatively poor. Free tuition is a big incentive for these poverty-stricken people to join non-formal education.

Facilities: GNFE centers do not construct new buildings to establish learning centers. Rather, they utilize existing buildings as learning centers. This includes discarded schools and local government office buildings. The GNFE centers can refurbish these buildings in collaboration with the local community in order to make them suitable for conducting classes. Also, GNFE provides libraries as a place of self-learning. Learners can have meetings and use the internet free of charge at the libraries.

Curriculum and System: GNFE integrates multi-purpose objectives; there are academic courses² for primary, lower and upper secondary levels, vocational courses where learners learn job-oriented or income-generating skills³ as well as local wisdom and traditions for the benefit of future generations and informal education where learners take short courses in life skills, such as health (HIV/AIDS), sufficient economy and so on. The academic courses have no room for change, whereas, in the case of vocational courses and informal education, some of the courses are flexible and can be changed according to the needs and demands of the learners⁴. As for academic courses, GNFE follows the credit system in Thailand, following formal education. Learners are required to take mid-term and final examinations as well as conduct research and do presentations. If a learner has work experience as a public health worker/volunteer or Tambon Administrative Office (TAO) staff, for example, these experiences can be credited. Therefore, learners can graduate from GNFE in a short period of time. Some learners have finished their studies within a year or 2 years.

Class Schedule: The class schedule of GNFE is usually conducted either on Saturdays or Sundays once a week because learners work and study simultaneously and it is difficult for them to study during weekdays. Sometimes teachers and learners can decide the class schedule at their convenience. Learners study independently at home in their free time during the week. Learners can also meet their teacher to solve their problems during the week by making an appointment. There are approximately 20 classes per semester.

Roles of Teachers: Each teacher of GNFE is in charge of one community learning center (CLC) and basically, this teacher teaches all eight subjects by her/himself. However, if a teacher experiences difficulty in teaching very specialized content, s/he asks the help from a *Sarah* (expert) or others who specialize in that field. The classes can be seen as interactive sessions between teachers and learners. In this way the role of teacher is advisor or facilitator rather than lecturer; they try to address problems faced by the learners during the course of their studies and answer their questions. Hence, a class of GNFE is called “teacher-learner meeting” by the local people.

²There are 8 subjects for academic course; 4 basic subjects (Thai, English, Mathematics, Science) and 4 experimental subject (Social Development, Art, Basic Skill, Moral Education).

³Agricultural course, Thai massage course, dress-making course, handcraft course and computer course are popular among learners in San Pa Tong and Mae Wang districts. The curriculum of vocational course is fundamentally organized based on the needs and demands of learners and communities.

⁴In the case of the San Pa Tong district, 10 out of 35 vocational classes are flexible to change according to students’ needs. The remaining 25 courses are called ordinary courses, which are fixed already and cannot be changed.

During weekdays when classes are not conducted, the teacher stays at the CLC and prepares for teaching, writing teaching plans which are required by non-formal education centers in the district, or meeting with learners if they have appointments in advance. Some teachers, particularly in the highland, go to “teaching points” in remote areas where CLCs are not located and teach there on occasion. GNFE teachers often attend community meetings, hearing voices from villagers and sharing information.

Certificate: Learners who graduate from GNFE can obtain a certificate equivalent to the certificate of formal education. Certification is one of the biggest incentives for learners to join GNFE. Particularly the high school certificate is valuable in Thailand in the sense that there is an opportunity to study further at universities⁵, or to get better employment, or to upgrade occupational and social status, to become a politician or local government official and so on.

3-2. Non-formal education system in the case of Chiang Mai

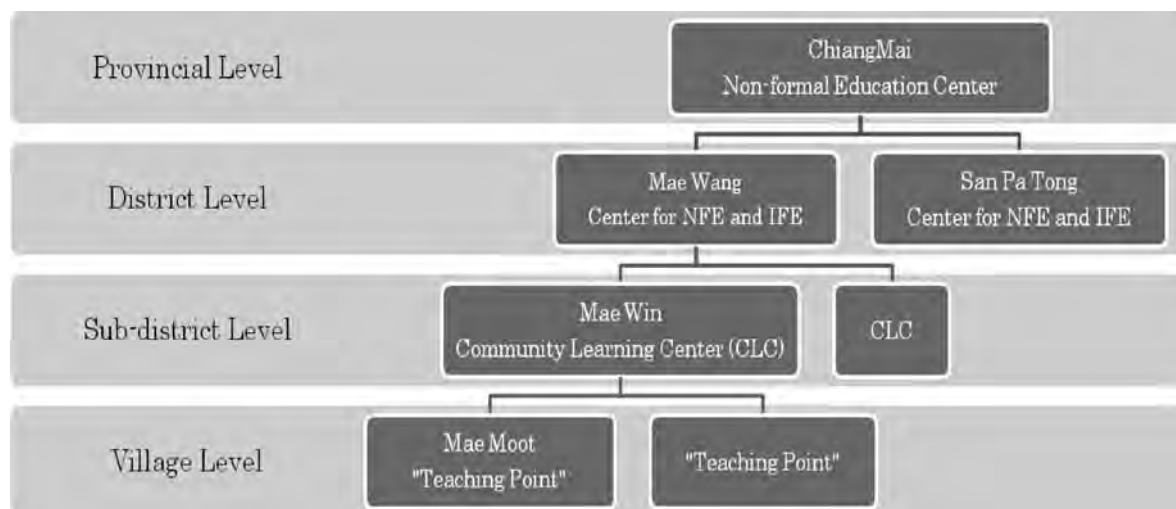
The non-formal education system in Thailand is thoroughly institutionalized as described above. In Chiang Mai, there is one non-formal education center which has branches called Center for Non-formal Education and In-formal Education in each district (*Ampher*). Under these centers, each sub-district (*Tambon*) has one Community Learning Center (CLC) where learners take classes. The first CLC was built in 1983 and the number has increased. Nowadays, the policy of non-formal education is “One *Tambon*, One CLC” in Chiang Mai.⁶ Under the policy, Chiang Mai has 209 CLCs in each *tambon*. Basically one CLC has one teacher and the teacher teaches all learners in the *tambon* with the help of some volunteers.⁷ However, the number of CLCs is inadequate because of the increasing number of learners and their demands, so in Mae Win *tambon*, for instance, they have a place called a “teaching point” where a teacher attached to Mae Win CLC can come and give some lectures to learners (See figure 1). It has been decided that one *tambon* can have one CLC but the number of teaching points is flexible and can be increased as necessary. For example, in Mae Win *tambon*, there is one non-formal education center and two teaching points for learners to take classes (See figure 2).

⁵ Graduates from GNFE have opportunities to study at Rajabhatt University, Sukothaitummatiras University (Open Universities), where special programs are provided.

⁶ Chiang Mai has 24 *amphers*.

⁷ In Chiang Mai, around 4000 people are working as volunteers in non-formal education.

Figure 2: Non-formal education system in Chiang Mai



Source: Authors

Figure 3: The map of Mae Win *tambon*



Source: Mae Wang district office

3-3. Characteristics of learners in GNFE

GNFE in Thai accommodates a diverse group of people of different grades, even teaching them at the same time and the place. There are largely three types of students observed in the field research which are; poor people, young people without formal education and middle aged learners.

Poor people: This group includes both some of population from young and middle aged people. They attend CLC because they have to work on weekdays to make a living at the expense of going to formal school. Therefore, studying at CLC is the only way for them to manage both work and study, aiming for better job opportunities, initiating new businesses, or going to university. If somebody has work on weekends, teachers respond flexibly to

them using private time.

Young people: Often in these cases, learners are dropouts from formal schools for a variety of reasons; they were once enrolled but quit because they have to help with household chores; they were expelled from school because of bad behavior; some simply shifted to the CLC because they didn't like the formal school setting. What seemed to be common among these learners is since they are still young, their parents tell them to go to CLC to get a high school graduate certificate as necessity. The Thai government has officially announced that those who are aged 16 or over are eligible to participate in CLC programs. However, in reality CLCs accept students younger than 16 if they are recognized by teachers as competent enough to join. In practice, a 13 year-old girl may choose to attend GNFE because she doesn't have access to formal school near her residence in a mountainous area.

Middle aged: These learners range from those in their late 40s, to early 60s. Even people who are already successful in their business come to CLC just to fulfill their desire to participate in lifelong learning. Others come to get a high school graduate certificate, ultimately to be active in local politics (like running for local politics elections or for the village head), because high school graduation is the minimum requirement for candidates.

3-4. Needs and Expectations of Learners

The education group conducted its research to ascertain the needs and expectations of learners in Governmental Non-Formal Education programs in the province of Chiang Mai. Our fieldwork was mainly conducted in two districts of Chiang Mai: the San Pa Tong and the Mae Wang District. During the course of our field survey, we found multiple types of needs and expectations of learners towards the GNFE system of Chiang Mai. These needs and expectations of learners can be summarized as follows.

The majority of learners interviewed missed schooling as children and they want to improve their educational qualifications as adults. They believe that it's never too late to study and GNFE is the last opportunity for them to get educated. The majority of learners regard GNFE as a means to improve their communication skills including Thai and English. A substantial number of learners think that GNFE can offer them the opportunities for self-sufficiency. In order to become eligible for employment, they need educational qualifications. Some learners want to join the ongoing economic activities in their area including Royal Project and other income enhancing opportunities offered by the Thai government and other Non-governmental Organizations. Some learners think that GNFE can increase their sources of livelihood as they can use their skills to earn money. Many learners think that GNFE can help them to perform their jobs especially agriculture in a better way. By joining GNFE programs they can learn the modern techniques of agriculture. The use of modern techniques can enable them to earn more money. Some learners want to start their own small businesses after completing GNFE. GNFE education can give them the necessary skills for starting their own small businesses. Some learners joined GNFE simply to enhance their knowledge and know more about their national and international surroundings and they believe that GNFE can give them knowledge including the knowledge about world history and other countries and societies.

The majority of learners believe that GNFE is the key to achieving economic independence in their lives. They think that they can work and study simultaneously. Some learners joined GNFE programs simply because GNFE institutes were easily accessible to them. It is convenient for them to approach these institutes and they can spare some time for their studies.

Some female learners joined GNFE programs to get enough knowledge in order to be able to teach their children at home by themselves. They want to help their children to be educated. Many learners regard GNFE as a means to improve their social status and get respect as contributing members of Thai society. They think that the

role of education is very important for social emancipation in Thai society. Many successful businessmen join GNFE programs just to get the educational qualifications. They think that it is very important to elevate their social status.

A large number of learners are attending GNFE just to get formal qualifications as they think that a diploma can open up new windows of opportunities for them in politics and services sector etc. These learners think that the employment opportunities in the rural areas are getting fewer and they have to look for jobs in urban areas. In order to get jobs in urban areas, they need formal qualifications. GNFE is the best opportunity to get these formal qualifications. Many learners think that GNFE can help them to get a better paid job. Some learners believe that GNFE can offer them the opportunity to get into higher education. These learners want to attend universities or other institutions of higher education. They think that higher education is the key to getting a decent job. These learners think that GNFE can facilitate their entry into the higher education system of their country and they can attend the higher education institutions.

Some learners joined GNFE programs to increase their knowledge and skills in regard to their existing jobs including health care etc. These individuals are already working and they want to improve their educational qualifications in order to get promotions or increase their knowledge about their profession. Some learners think that GNFE can give them enough confidence to talk to foreign tourists, so they focus on improving their communication skills especially in English language. A small number of learners are already working as tour guides or photographers.

Many learners told that they have joined GNFE upon the advice of their relatives, friends and seniors. They regard their seniors as success stories and they think that they can also get the same kind of benefits and economic opportunities once they complete GNFE. Some learners regard GNFE activities as a useful platform for social gatherings and to make new friends and discuss the problems of the local communities. GNFE learners can look at local problems and find solutions to these problems through local wisdom and shared knowledge. These GNFE learners want to expand their social network in the local area. Through GNFE they can get to know more people and discuss various social, economic and cultural issues with them. Many learners think that because the GNFE is free of cost, they find enough motivation to join because they do not have to pay anything. For this reason they can afford to study. The majority of learners believe that GNFE is more practical compared to formal education, and that it is in fact the training for life and survival insofar as it can enable them to start their professional lives successfully. In this way, some learners are hoping to gain professional experience so that they may be able to get a better job.

3-5. Suggestions and Comments on NFE by learners

Suggestions and comments about NFE are divided into five categories: suggestions of curriculum, teachers, learning environment of NFE, budget and other comments.

Regarding the curriculum of NFE, learners suggested that they would like to learn how to grow vegetables without using fertilizer, specialized English classes and cooking classes. Also, there are opinions which say NFE should provide curriculum which have more information than the current one.

Many suggestions and comments about teachers raised by learners said teachers should have knowledge. Interviewees thought teachers did not have enough knowledge to teach learners. In order to solve this problem, they thought teachers should have time to study themselves. Because of a lack of knowledge on the part of teachers, some people suppose, learners cannot get adequate answers for their questions. Another line of thought

was that teachers do not choose appropriate teaching methods for learners. In CLC, learners have different backgrounds, therefore teachers should not follow one particular teaching method. According to learners, teachers should choose an appropriate teaching method for each individual learner. Not only commenting on teachers' ability, interviewees also mentioned teachers working time. Teachers only have to be in class on lecture day, for the rest of the weekdays, teachers go to some other place to teach or plan activities. Some learners complain that teachers are not available when they want to ask questions. Learners also mentioned about teachers character. To be enabled to ask questions actively to teachers, they want teachers to be open-minded.

Regarding suggestions and comments about learning environment of NFE, learners commented about the insufficient number of computers. Many learners answered they feel an immediate need of computer skills. Therefore the lack of computers was an issue for learners. Other comments on facilities in regard to the location of NFE schools were raised by learners in the highland, Mae Moot. Learners complained about the distance from their home to NFEs, which meant that some learners had to pay money for transportation and it takes time to go to school. Therefore, one learner said NFE should have more distance learning. However, on the other hand one other learner said several CLCs should be combined together to facilitate new friendships. Because the village they live in is not big, learners already know all the other learners in the CLC, hence it is difficult for learners to make new friends. In terms of the building itself, in most cases the building is old. Many learners complained about this problem, related to the budget of NFE.

The budget of NFE is related to most of the comments which have been already raised, the number of teachers, computers, NFE venues and the number of schools. To gain stable financial resources, learners suggested government support to be necessary, to prevent CLC from having to collect donations from each learner to compensate.

3-6. Teachers' expectations of learners

Teachers have various expectations towards their NFE learners. We can categorize their expectations into the following three groups: expectations for higher education, expectations for income generation and expectations for personal improvement. The first group of expectations suggests that with the equivalent certification to formal education, teachers want learners to proceed to higher education, ie university. The final goal for learners might be a better job, however teachers have a strong desire for learners to go on to higher education, both in the highland and lowland. The second group of expectations can be divided into two different types: using the learned skill itself, or formal certification. The first expectation is that with the skill learners get from non-formal education, they can gain employment or improve production in their current position. The latter suggests that with the certification of graduation of non-formal education, learners can get promoted or employed in the secondary industry section.⁸ The third group of expectations can be seen as knowledge enhancement or personal development. Since some students are expelled from formal school for reasons of personality, teachers may have an expectation that they want their learners to grow and change. In addition, interestingly, in both the highland and lowland, some teachers said that they expect their learners "to be a good Thai citizen". It is clear in Thai non-formal education curriculum that this aspect is one of the objectives of Thai education.

⁸ In Chiang Mai, even to work in a factory in San Pa Tong, a high school graduate certification is required.

3-7. Government Officers on GNFE in Chiang Mai

Korsornor is the Thai word for GNFE. The Director of San Pa Tong NFE centre explained that *Korsornor* includes everything that is not covered under formal education. This includes academic courses and vocational training.

The Ministry of Education allocates the budget for GNFE and transfers funds to the NFE Centers. However the budget allocated by the central government is insufficient. Sometimes the NFE Centers also receive donations from public.

NFE centers do not construct new buildings for the establishment of teaching centers. Rather, they utilize existing buildings as teaching centers. This includes disused schools and office buildings of the local government. NFE centers can refurbish these buildings in collaboration with the local community in order to make them suitable for conducting classes.

GNFE in Chiang Mai is free and students are not supposed to pay any kind of tuition fee. They can also borrow textbooks from the library. However students and local community members can offer donations for the promotion of GNFE.

Under the GNFE system, two types of subjects are offered to the learners. These two types are:

- 1- Basic Subjects. Thai Language, Mathematics, Science and English.
- 2- Experience Based Subjects. Community Development, Social Development and Basic Skills.

In addition to this, every learner is supposed to conduct research on the concept of job and the available job opportunities in the area. The guidelines and examples for this research activity are provided in the textbook. The GNFE learners choose one type of job and write a concept paper on it.

Classes for GNFE are generally conducted on the weekend for six hours. These classes can be seen as interactive sessions between the teacher and the learners. Teachers act as facilitators and try to address problems faced by learners during the course of their studies. The rest of the days learners study by themselves at home. Learners can also meet their teacher during the week by making an appointment to solve their problems. Learners can also seek guidance from their seniors and graduates of GNFE. The schedule of GNFE has been designed while keeping in view the needs of GNFE learners. Generally learners work and study simultaneously and it is difficult for them to join classes during the week. Sometimes teachers and students can decide the class schedule according to their convenience. Therefore, the system of GNFE is very flexible in order to facilitate learners and teachers.

There is also a specified age limit for joining GNFE programs. People within the age group of 16 to 60 years can join GNFE activities. However, in special cases this age limit can be relaxed while keeping in view individual potential and other special circumstances. Sometimes, formal education institutions can also recommended students for the GNFE track.

In Northern Thailand, the majority of GNFE learners are farmers and most are adults who want to improve their academic qualification. In highlands, the majority of learners belong to various hill tribes.

The NFE center recruits teachers for GNFE. It advertises vacant positions in media. At this stage, any qualified person can apply for a post. Generally, local applicants are given priority in the selection process. The salary of GNFE teachers varies and depends upon academic qualifications and professional experience. However, it ranges between 8,000 and 9,000 Bahts per month.

GNFE offers a wide range of vocational training courses for GNFE learners. These courses have been designed and selected while keeping in view the needs, expectations and aspirations of GNFE learners. Under the

vocational training program 35 courses are offered to learners. The first 25 courses are called ordinary courses. These ordinary courses are fixed and do not change. However, there are ten special courses which are flexible and can be changed according to the needs and demands of students.



Source: Authors

4. Analysis

In this section, we aim to answer the main research question by addressing two related questions:

- 1) What opportunities does governmental GNFE offer to learners?
- 2) What kind of expectations do the learners have toward GNFE?

To answer these questions, we categorized the expectations of learners into four groups: accessibility, attainment of a high school certificate, getting academic knowledge and getting vocational skills. The first expectation is accessibility. One of the characteristics of GNFE in Thailand is that it is open to all people. In fact, the majority of learners in GNFE are adults who missed out on the chance to participate in formal education. Most have a job, thus it is difficult to attain balance between learning and working. GNFE has been designed to fit in with their daily lives. Classes are held only once a week and learners don't have to attend all classes. This system helps learners to keep a balance and concurrently learn the curriculum. In addition, "One CLC in One Tambon" and some additional teaching points can help learners to access GNFE. However, the number of teaching points is still not sufficient to cover demand.

The second expectation is the attainment of a high school certificate. Most learners want to get a high school certificate from GNFE which is equivalent to one from formal education, completed in a shorter time than in formal schools. The graduate can use the certificate as a point of status and/or to go on to higher education.

According to this, it can be said that this expectation has been met by the system of GNFE. However, although officially universities are open for anybody, it is very difficult for GNFE graduates to pass the entrance examination for a research university. This is not because of the certificate but the level of the education which they have received. As a result, most GNFE graduates can go on only to professional/vocational universities. Rajabhat University is one such institution, which accepts GNFE graduates setting a special course.

The third expectation is the attainment of academic knowledge. Some learners participating in the basic education course of GNFE put much expectation on getting academic knowledge. There are two ways of learning in GNFE: self-learning and teacher-learner meetings (classes). GNFE supports independent study by lending textbooks for free through the development of libraries. According to a librarian in San Pa Tong, the library is well used by learners to study or hold meetings among themselves. On the other hand, Teacher-learner meetings are not efficient enough. The main reason for this is the lack of teaching staff. Each CLC has only one teacher. The teacher teaches all the learners in a CLC concurrently taking charge of eight subjects in the basic education course. Many learners mentioned that they do not have enough time to talk to a teacher in class. Moreover, there are wide gaps among the subjects according to the teacher's knowledge/specialty. To rectify these problems, some teachers hold individual lectures or tutoring for learners who want to learn more, and take professional development courses to improve their own abilities.

The last expectation is the attainment of vocational skills. Some learners want to 'improve their skills', and others want to 'get new skills'. To reflect these expectations, GNFE have a system to collect requests for new vocational skill courses using comment paper or a notebook in which learners write comments. However, although some CLCs successfully implemented new courses from such requests to learner satisfaction, not all expectations can be reflected in the courses because of limited budget.

Ultimately, it can be said that GNFE has been trying to meet various learner expectations as much as possible. However, it is difficult to meet all expectations because of limited budget and shortage of teaching staff. Generally speaking, GNFE is considered as a good way for adults to get a high school certificate in a short time, and most of the learners are satisfied with its contents and enjoy learning. Its curriculum and systems have been well developed to fit the learners' daily lives and GNFE has the important role to help people to access life-long learning, but it has to be more improved in terms of quality.

5. Conclusion

This research has investigated what kind of opportunities GNFE offers and learner expectations toward GNFE, and discussed to what extent these two sides - supply side and demand side correlate.

The Thai government provides extensive educational opportunities for the out-of-school population mainly through non-formal education. This is not a complete pyramidal institutional system in charge of NF educational affairs from national level down to local level, but does provide various programs targeting diverse groups of people. The NFE system in Thailand is thoroughly institutionalized. In Chiang Mai, there is one NFE center which has branches called Centers for NFE and IFE in each district (*Ampher*). Under these centers, each sub-district (*Tambon*) has one Community Learning Center (CLC) where learners take classes.

After conducting the interviews, we found that GNFE in Thailand has provided very comprehensive courses, and has tries to meet the diverse expectations of learners consisting of different age groups through its institutionalized but nonetheless flexible systems. GNFE offers a certificate equivalent to the certificate of formal

education, which is very unique compared to other countries. Characteristics of learners of GNFE in Thailand are diverse. In the field research, largely three different kinds of characteristics of learners were observed which are: the poor, young people and the middle aged. The borderline between poor, young and middle aged learners is blurred, yet each group of people come to the CLC holding their own differing expectations for GNFE such as acquisition of certificates, vocational skills or knowledge to fulfill their desire for learning. GNFE has been trying to meet various expectations from learners, but it is impossible to cover all expectations with its limited budget. Although GNFE has an important role to help people to access life-long learning, it must be improved in terms of quality. However, despite efforts to meet the needs of people, authors found some mismatches. According to suggestions and comments about NFE, learners mentioned that they want teachers of NFE to have better teaching skills, deeper knowledge of teaching areas, and more dedicated teacher-student time to address questions. In respect to leaning environment, lack of facilities including computers was a matter of concern. In addition, budget limitations were also seen as a big problem by learners.

With the Thai government's promotion of dissemination of formal education furthermore in the future, the scale of GNFE may be reduced. Having said so, in light of lifelong-learning, GNFE will probably not become extinct. Hence, GNFE may continue to make more effort to respond to the expectations that Thai people have. In this respect, challenges that GNFE would deal with are: teacher numbers, specialized teacher education, and budgetary constraints. These three challenges are closely linked to each other. As stated above, since only one teacher is deployed in one CLC or teaching-point, students complain about lectures that are not meticulous. It is conceivable that taking charge of all eight subjects is too much of a burden for teachers. Therefore, teachers with specialities in at least secondary levels would help learners' further learning. In addition to this, more than one teacher needs to be deployed in one CLC or teaching point. However, current GNFE budgetary conditions don't allow for such developments. Furthermore, further development of GNFE would be a dilemma for Thai government, in that a choice would have to be made between GNFE and FE on a budgetary level. Over time with FE promoted, the role of GNFE may change, thus expectations would also change. The line between GNFE and FE may be blurred.

One limitation of our research was that we did not have a chance to observe GNFE classes due to the short break after examinations. Therefore, our research findings are based only on interviews of GNFE directors, teachers and learners. We conducted interviews of learners, but many of them had already graduated several years ago, and hence the number of interviewees of currently enrolled learners is quite limited. It is rather difficult for us to gain updated information regarding GNFE. We would like to investigate further the expectations towards GNFE from more diverse stakeholders including parents and villagers. In addition, we would like to research the process of implementation of GNFE in different provinces in Thailand.

Appendix 1

Table3. Core Types of NFE Programs and Activities

Core Types of NFE Activities	General Description	Involved Providers
1.Literacy and Numeracy	<p>1. Organized to provide adults with knowledge and tools to improve their lives. Help adult learners learn basic skills in reading, writing, calculating, problem-solving.</p> <p>2. Curriculum is designed to be responsive to the needs and conditions of various target learners, such as specific curricula for the southern Thai Muslims, northern hill-tribes, etc.</p> <p>3. Literacy program has curriculum equivalent to grade four of formal schooling system.</p> <p>4. Main objective is to enable the target people to read, write, and make them realize duties of the citizens in the constitutional monarchy system.⁹</p>	<p>(1)ONEFC</p> <p>(2)Regional Non-Formal Education Centers</p> <p>(3)Provincial NFE Centers</p> <p>(4)District NFE Centers and CLCs</p> <p>(5)Military, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Public Health</p> <p>(6)Religious organizations</p> <p>(7)Sub-district administrative organizations</p> <p>(8)APPEAL/UNESCO, UNICEF, ACCU</p> <p>(9)Local wisdoms, indigenous people, experts</p> <p>(10)Local NGOs</p> <p>(11)Community cooperative shops</p> <p>(12)Private bodies, Community</p>
2.Equivalency Program (NFE Basic Curriculum)	<p>1. Organized for youth and adults over 15 years old, who did not have access to or who withdrew or missed formal primary/basic education.</p>	<p>(1)~ (7)</p> <p>(8)UNESCO</p> <p>(9)Industrial factories, entrepreneurs</p>

⁹ Sheldon Shaeffer, UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education Director (<http://www.unescobkk.org>)

¹⁰ The curriculum integrated all subject contents into situations. Therefore, it is thought to be suitable for adults working lives. This has been its outstanding point. The curriculum identified 2 subject areas as: Fundamental Experience Subject Area and Supplementary Experience Subject Area (Elective).

	<p>2. Three levels of NFE Equivalency Program (Basic Curriculum) are equivalent to each level of formal education: Primary Education Adults Curriculum¹⁰; Secondary Education for Adult Curriculum¹¹; and Upper secondary curriculum¹².</p> <p>3. Two modes of study: NFE distance education and NFE group study.</p>	
3.Life-skills training program	<p>The program comprising of knowledge, attitudes, and skills organized to increase abilities of individuals to solve the problems they are facing and prepare them to adjust in the future. Problems are related to family, health, medias, environment, ethics and moral, social problems, HIV, drug addict, etc.¹³</p>	<p>1.Ministry of Education (ONFEC),Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Interior</p> <p>2.Provincial NFE Centers, Provincial Public Health</p> <p>3. District NFE Centers</p> <p>4.National NGO</p> <p>5.Religious bodies</p> <p>6.Local NGOs</p> <p>7.Sub-District Administrative Organizations</p>
4.Non-Formal Vocational Training (Income generation)	<p>1. Vocational Education and Skills Training is designed to promote the public welfare or upgrade quality of life through vocational development by providing four types of vocational education and skills training:</p>	<p>1. Office of Vocational Education Commission, Office of the NFE Commission; Department of Labor Force Development; Ministry of Labor Force; Department of Community Development; Ministry of Interior; Ministry of Defense</p> <p>2.Provincial NFE Centers facilitate</p>

¹¹ This curriculum was modified and improved to make it more equivalent to the formal school's lower secondary education curriculum.

¹² The curriculum was modified and made it more responsive to the people's way of life, needs and socio-economic changes.

¹³ This is a Study of Life Skill Activities of Non-Formal Target Population.Bangkok,DNFE.2003:11

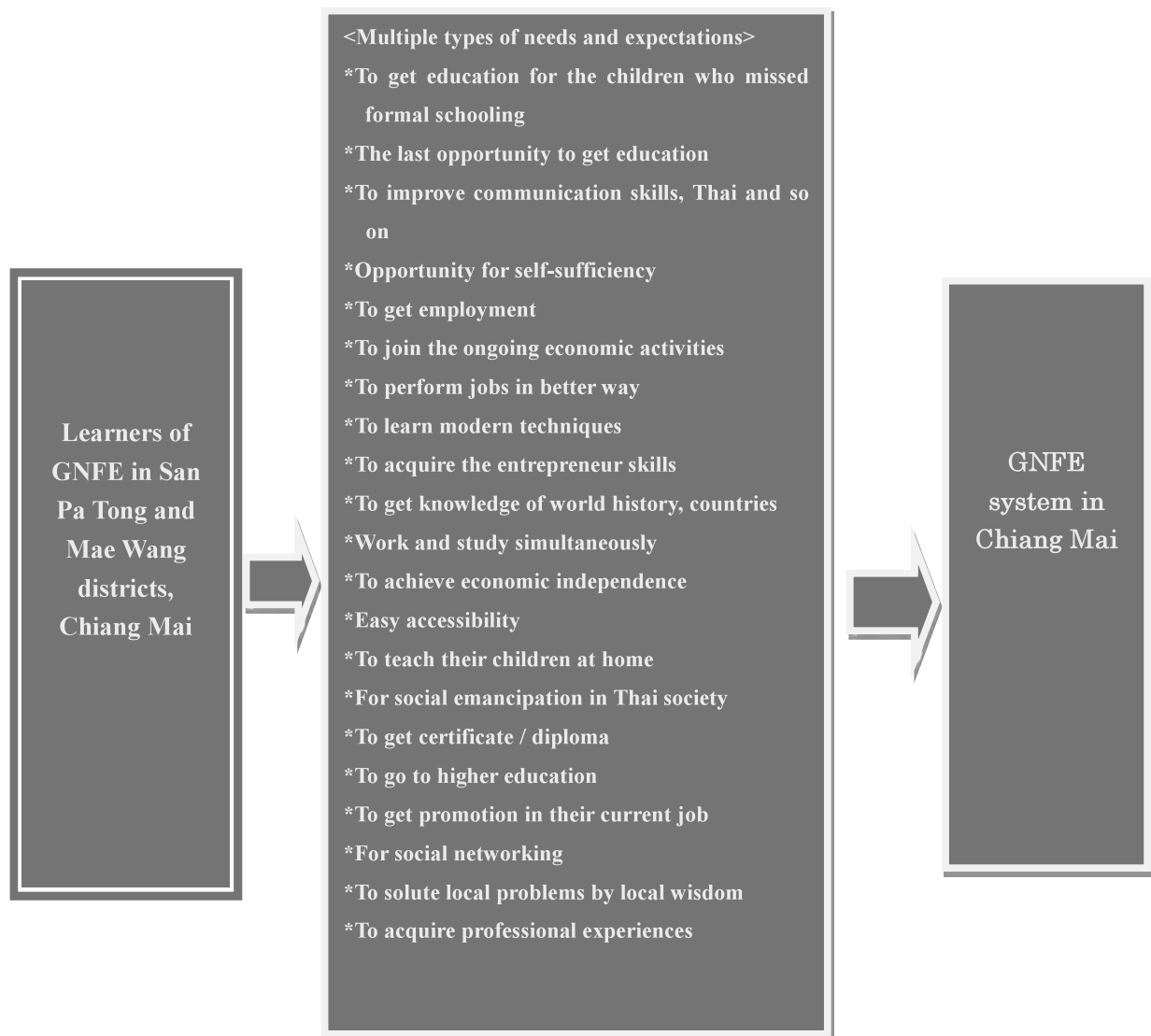
	<p>(1)Interest Group</p> <p>(2)Short-Term Vocational Course</p> <p>(3)Vocational Certificate Curriculum: 3-year vocational certificate curriculum program provided for those who completed primary education or grade 6 and would like to seek knowledge and understanding about the world of work, knowing oneself and society, the way to achieve and make decisions to choose the occupation suitable to the needs of individuals and communities. The students who completed this program will obtain the certificate equivalent to grade 9 or lower secondary education in formal schooling system.</p> <p>(4)NFE Occupational Certificate Curriculum: A 3-year NFE occupational certificate curriculum program is provided for those who completed lower secondary education and are working in business sectors or have been self-employed for at least 3 years. Learners who completed this program will be offered a vocational certificate equivalent to grade 12 or upper secondary education in formal schools.</p> <p>2. Aim to increase productivity</p>	<p>NFE District and NFE Community Learning Centers</p> <p>3. District NFE Centers organize NF vocational training.</p> <p>4.Local wisdoms, indigenous people, experts</p> <p>5.Local NGOs</p> <p>6.Sub-districts Administrative Organizations</p> <p>7. Community cooperative shops.</p> <p>8.Private bodies</p>
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	and income, and to provide skills and knowledge for self-employment and employment. Credits can be transferred to NFE Basic Education or for further study.	
NFE activities not examined in detail		
4.Information Service (Informal Education)	<p>1. Provided in terms of informal education or lifelong learning through various kinds of media to give people access to educational opportunities at any time they need them.</p> <p>2. Public Library (847 public libraries) regarded as the academic resource centre for people to search for knowledge and information they require.</p> <p>3. Community Learning Centre (8,057 CLCs) provide knowledge in terms of lifelong learning for the community.</p> <p>4. Educational Radio and Television Programs produced by the Centre for Education Technology and Regional Non-Formal Education Centers aim to provide opportunities for the entire population to acquire knowledge and up-to-date information equally.</p>	
5.Science Education	Organized by The National Science Centre for Education to provide knowledge and exhibit science and technology for the public. There are currently 14 Science Centers established in Bangkok and other provinces operated under ONFEC.	

Source: UNESCO (2007). compiled by authors.

Appendix 2

Figure 4: Needs and Expectations of Learners



Source: Authors

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