

Educational Changes during the Year of 2004-2007 and Their Impacts upon Educational Provision in the Southern Border Provinces of Thailand

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บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาถึงผลกระทบที่มีต่อการจัดการศึกษาในจังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้ ซึ่งมีผลมาจากการเปลี่ยนแปลงทางการศึกษา การศึกษาในครั้งนี้จะมุ่งเน้นการเปลี่ยนแปลงการศึกษาที่เกิดขึ้นระหว่างปีพ.ศ. 2547 – 2550 การศึกษาดังกล่าวได้พบว่าในพื้นที่สามจังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้มีการเปลี่ยนแปลงทางศึกษานานใหญ่ถึงสองครั้ง ครั้งแรกเกิดขึ้นระหว่างปีพ.ศ. 2504 – 2508 การเปลี่ยนแปลงในครั้งนั้นมีวัตถุประสงค์หลักเพื่อเปลี่ยนแปลงปอเนาะเป็นโรงเรียนราษฎร์สอนศาสนาอิสลาม การเปลี่ยนแปลงดังกล่าวไม่มีผลกระทบต่อการจัดการศึกษาในโรงเรียนของรัฐ แต่การเปลี่ยนแปลงครั้งที่สองที่เริ่มตั้งแต่ปีพ.ศ. 2547 นั้นมีผลกระทบในแนวกว้างที่กระทบต่อการจัดการศึกษาทั้งในโรงเรียนเอกชนสอนศาสนาอิสลามและโรงเรียนของรัฐ ดูเหมือนว่าการเปลี่ยนแปลงทางการศึกษาดังกล่าวได้เน้นถึงกระบวนการสร้างสันติในพื้นที่ และเป็นที่ยังหวังว่าการเปลี่ยนแปลงดังกล่าวจะเป็นผลดีต่อการศึกษาของพื้นที่ในอนาคต

Abstract

This article aims to study the educational changes by emphasizing on educational changes during the year of 2004-2007 and their impacts upon educational provision in the southern border provinces of Thailand. The study has found that there are two upheaval educational changes in this region. The first changes were undertaken during 1961 – 1965. Those changes mainly aimed at transforming pondok to private school teaching of Islamic Studies. Those changes had no impact upon educational provision in public schools. The second changes that have been undertaken since 2004 have brought about very wide impacts upon educational provision both in Islamic private and government schools. Seemingly, current changes have been focusing on peace building process in the region. Educationally, it is hoped that the current changes will have good impacts upon the future educational provision in the region

Introduction

The southern border provinces of Thailand, consisting of Yala, Patani, Naratiwat, Satun, and Songkhla, have their own identity. The majority populations in this region, except Songkhla, are Muslims who are different from the majority populations of Thailand in terms of race, religion, language, norms, and culture. The estimated number of Muslim population in southern border provinces of Thailand varies from source to source ranging from two to more than five millions.

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The highest number of Muslim population was presented by Michel Gilquin (2005) in which he stated that the number of Muslim population in the far South is more than five million.

Historically, the southern border provinces of Thailand, formerly known as Patani, were influenced by Hinduism, Buddhism and local religions. They later embraced Islam. (Ibrahim Shukri, 1985)

Muslims in this region have their own language for daily communication. Muslims in this region will teach their children to speak their mother tongue from their childhood. They may learn to speak Thai after they enter a public school. In fact, Malay language for Muslim residents in this region carries more meaning than language itself for it implies that the one who speaks Malay is a Muslim. Muslim residents in this region will regard a person who can speak Malay as the one who is able to preserve his identity as a real Muslim.

From Islamic viewpoint a good Muslim is a person who strictly follows the teachings of Islam and practices accordingly. To be consistent with the teaching of Islam requires religious knowledge which can be gained through the process of education. This is the reason why education is very significant to all Muslims and this significance is the main force behind the establishment of a variety of educational institutions in Muslim societies, especially in this region.

In the past, Muslim educational institutions in this region did not assure the government that their educational provision helped promote the awareness of Thai nationality.(Prakit,1973). Many reports had indicated that there was a variety of educational provisions provided in Muslim educational institutions. The Thai authorities feared that someone may manipulate this variety to intensify the current violence. Meanwhile, there were accusations that some of the above educational institutions had a link with the current unrest in the deep South (Nantanon, 2005). This accusation has intentionally or unintentionally imposed educational change upon Muslim educational institutions in particular. This imposition has mainly focused on educational provision provided in Muslim educational institutions; in the mean times, educational provision in government schools has also changed to suit the current situation. The current educational changes in the Deep South were proposed in order to promote a process of building peace which has been done along with other options, such as the founding of the Committee of Educational Strategy of Southern Border Provinces of Thailand and the Office of Educational Strategy for Peace Building in 2005.

In fact, there are two upheaval educational changes in this region. The first changes were undertaken during 1959 – 1965. Those changes aimed at transforming pondok to private school and no changes in public schools were included in those aims. The second changes have been undertaken since 2004. These changes have very vast impacts covering educational changes both in private and government schools. These changes will be discussed in the following sub-topics.

Educational Change in Current *Pondoks*

The unrest in the South is always assumed to be made by separatist movements. Due to the above notion, some *pondoks* have been looked down as being homes or training places for youths to act against the government. This accusation has been made against some *pondoks* because there are gaps of communication between *pondoks* and the government. The government does not really know what is going on in *pondoks* and neither does it know whether *pondok's* activities would threaten national security or not. Moreover, in the history of our neighboring countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, *Tok gurus* and religious scholars were among those who were heroes of independence. It is feared that some *pondoks* in the far South might take part in the struggle for independence as has been done by *pondoks* in some neighboring countries. Hence some *Tok gurus* in the far South have been viewed as social parasites and some *pondoks* have been accused as fostering separatist activities. In fact, *Pondoks* are open for all those who have no chance to learn their religion elsewhere. Students of a *pondok* vary in ages because some of its students are those elders who chose to stay in a *pondok* area in order to learn about religious teachings.

As far as educational change in *pondok* is concerned, there has been an attempt to register all existing *pondoks* to ensure that they are under the supervision of the government authority. In fact, previously some *pondoks* wanted to register with the government but found it impossible to do so under the existing rules for registration. The assumption of the authority that *pondoks* did not wish to register was not really correct since many unregistered *pondoks* did not meet the requirements for registration.

When the government revised the rules for registration many *pondoks* took this opportunity to register. A survey in February 2004, one month after the outbreak of the current unrest, showed that there are 126 registered *pondoks* in the southern border provinces of Thailand, 54 *pondoks* are in Patani, 28 in Yala and 44 in Narathiwat.

On 28 April 2004, the Ministry of Education introduced new regulations for *pondoks* (2547 BE/2004 B.C.) These regulations aimed at increasing the number of registered *pondoks*. In May 2004, 214 *pondoks* in the southern border provinces of Thailand registered with the government. By July 2004, 249 were registered, 150 in Patani, 53 in Yala and 46 in Narathiwat. By December 2004, 255 were registered. The findings of the latest survey in 2006 indicated that there are more than three hundreds registered *pondoks* in southern border provinces of Thailand.

After registration, *pondoks* are called "*pondok institutes*" not *pondok schools* as before. The above survey also shows that there are 307 Islamic private schools, 75 in Yala, 171 in Patani and 61 in Narathiwat (The Office of the Authority Supervision 12, 2004: 1)

Many options have been proposed to register *pondoks* in order to ensure that education provided in *pondoks* helps support the process of building peace in the region. In fact, *Pondok's* students live in solitude and simplicity. Rarely, do they get involved in worldly affairs especially in political activities. They are searching for knowledge especially pure Islamic knowledge. Islam is

a religion of peace. Islam teaches Muslims to choose the middle path, not to be extreme, rightist or leftists. Taking the middle path is the teaching of pure Islam. *Pondoks* will teach Muslims to love all human beings because Islam is sent to be *rahmat* - mercy for all creatures. *Pondok* does not teach man to harm himself or others. All these are the basis for *pondoks* to educate people of various genders and ages.

Educational Change in *Tadika*

Currently there are nearly one hundred thousand Muslim children studying in *Tadika*. Mostly *Tadika* students are also studying in public schools. Formerly *Tadika* provided only religious education and no modern subjects were taught. The medium of instruction was the local Malay language although text books were in standard Malay or Arabic. Since Islam teaches its followers to begin their religious practice when they are seven years old, it is necessary for them to start learning their religion as the way of life from childhood. The content taught in *Tadika* is mainly focused on a basic teaching of Islam.

At present there are 1,343 *Tadikas* scattering throughout three southern border provinces of Thailand. There are a variety of *Tadika* in the region. Each group of *Tadika* implements a different curriculum; there is no unified curriculum implementation. Since nearly all *Tadikas* teachers do not possess any academic degree, they may be easily manipulated. This does not support peace building process sought by the government.

To ensure that *Tadika* is not manipulated by insurgents; the following options and alternatives are proposed:

1. Teaching of Islamic studies by using Thai language as a medium of instruction. This proposal is not obligatory to all *Tadika* but only to those *Tadikas* which are ready to teach in Thai. In fact, this proposal is very alien to Muslim communities and hardly gains any positive response from Muslims in the region. It is believed that this attempt will be far from success.

2. Encouraging *Tadika* to transform into part of the formal education system. Formerly the majority of *Tadikas* have no written curriculum so that some academics have regarded *Tadika* as an informal education institution. It is quite difficult to know what had been taught and done in *Tadika*. This is the main reason why written curriculum has been proposed for current *Tadikas*. When *Tadika* follows a written curriculum, educational provision in *Tadika* is recognized. At present, the Office of the Authority Supervision 12 is assigned to regulate rules for the transfer of credit from *Tadika* to other educational institutions. The sole attempt to bring *Tadika* to offer formal education will be gained negative responses from Muslim community in a long run.

3. Training *Tadikas* teachers for teaching and learning and instilling in their minds the awareness of peace building process since the status of *Tadika* teachers are not much different from *pondok* teachers.

Educational Change in Islamic Private Schools

The government has regarded the previous transformation of *pondoks* into Islamic private schools in the 1960s as the starting point of social segregation of different believers, Muslim and non-Muslim. This segregation made the majority of Muslims study separately in Islamic private schools, while there was no such separation in amongst those studying in government schools. The current figure shows that at the secondary level, more than 70 percent of Muslims are in Islamic private schools while nearly 30 percent are in government schools. (The Committee of Educational Strategy for Southern border Provinces of Thailand, 2006) This scenario did not please the authorities and also did not support the process of building peace in the far South; in the meantime, it did long-term harm to national security. In addition, the authorities fear that the content in the current curriculum in Islamic private schools may be misinterpreted by some teachers to support the current unrest. To overcome this shortcoming, many alternatives have been proposed. The establishment of unisex and multi-faith public schools is one alternative. The Committee of Educational Strategy for Southern Border Provinces of Thailand appointed by the Ministry of Education believed that if Muslim and non-Muslim are studying together at the same institution, it will support the process of reconciliation and peace building. This proposal was proposed by the Committee of Educational Strategy for Southern border Provinces of Thailand in 2004. In order to achieve the above proposal, various actions have been implemented. One of those actions is to revive previously outstanding government schools so that they will gain high respect and positive responses from Muslim communities at large. This policy aims at attracting more Muslims to government schools so as to reduce the number of Muslim students who prefer to study in Islamic private schools. The above committee believed that if they, Muslims and non-Muslims, spend their daily lives together, in the long run they will be able to live together in a spirit of reconciliation and tolerance.

Educational Change in the Higher Educational Institutions

The escalation of violence in southern border provinces of Thailand has attracted attention of various higher education institutions, especially those in the far South, who are watching the incident of unrest with a very serious concern. During the current unrest higher education institutions in the far South have been questioned by peoples as to what extent local universities share their concern with the issue of unrest in the South. In fact, higher education institutions have a bona fide role to play in promoting, facilitating and building peace. Currently many higher education institutions have participated in the peace building process.

As far as higher education institutions in the region are concerned, four main institutions namely, Prince of Songkla University (PSU), Yala Islamic University (YIU), Rajaphat University Yala, and Princess of Narathiwat University are watching the unrest with a serious concern. As a result, a Peace Study Center was founded at PSU Hadyai Campus in 2005. YIU published books on Islam and peace written by its rector, Dr. Ismail Lutfi, which were distributed throughout

Thailand. In addition, researches on peace have also been conducted by PSU, YIU, and Rajaphat University Yala. These endeavors show that higher educational institutions in the region are becoming more involved in peace education efforts. As far as the PSU's tasks are concerned, there are four main activities namely, teaching, research, academic service and cultural promotion and preservation.

With regards to teaching, the University Council of PSU encourages its College of Islamic Studies to offer specific courses in Peace Studies at undergraduate and conduct research in the same area at postgraduate levels.

With regards to researches, many researches relating to peace have been undertaken with the aim to contribute to the promotion and facilitation of peace. For example, the College of Islamic Studies, PSU is conducting research about the needs of the people in the southern provinces with the aim to reduce conditions that support unrest in the South. Prof. Srisompob of PSU is conducting research with aim to find a proper model of administration relevant to situation in the three southern border provinces of Thailand. Besides these researches, many researches relating to peace building are also being conducted by Mahidol, Chulalongkorn, Taksin and Burapha Universities.

Academic services related to peace work are being given priority. Seminars and workshops have been held to enhance the awareness of the Peace Studies fields and to finding ways how to bring about a peaceful resolution of the crisis. Training for peace building is another focus area.

With regard to the promotion of culture, the College of Islamic Studies, PSU is playing a major role in designing activities for promoting the real understanding and acknowledgment of cultural diversity among different believers in the region.

Not only higher education institutions in the southern border provinces of Thailand but also universities in other parts of Thailand, such as Mahidol University, Thammasat University and even Khon Kaen University are also involved in activities to restore the peace in southern border provinces of Thailand through their teaching, research, and academic services. The unrest in the far South is no longer the concern of higher educational institutions in the region only but it has become a national issue in which all higher education institutions have become involved.

Educational Change in Public School

Many researches show that educational provision in public schools does not meet the needs of local people. Though public schools have provided Islamic studies subjects for Muslims, the time given to Islamic subject is too little and inadequate to meet the real needs of Muslim students who eagerly need to learn their religion through education provided in government schools. Previously only two hours a week was given to Islamic studies while seven to eight areas of Islamic studies had to be covered. The research on the "Needs of people in southernmost

provinces of Thailand, Yala, Patani, and Narathiwat” (Ibrahem and others, 2005) clearly indicated that two hours a week of Islamic studies subject in public schools were inadequate. Local Muslim residents have demanded from time to time so that the government has mandated public schools in the region to increase hours for Islamic studies. Unfortunately those demands did not get any positive responses. The shortcomings of the educational provision of Islamic studies in public schools indirectly forced nearly all Muslim children studying in public schools to study their religion in *Tadika* on weekends or holidays. If these students have been inculcated with distorted knowledge, it will be harmful for the process of peace building sought by the government. To overcome these obstacles, a radical change in government schools is inevitable. The government has now allowed public schools to increase the hours for Islamic studies. All public schools are allowed to implement the curriculum equivalent to that of Islamic private school. Islamic studies subjects may be provided parallel with the teaching of secular subjects. The current allocation given to Islamic studies subjects is up to ten to fourteen hours a week. This increase is an endeavor to reduce the number of *Tadika* students who are so burdened with their study both of traditional and secular disciplines. Currently there are more than one hundred of public schools implementing two curriculums in the same time, namely, Curriculum of Islamic Studies of 2003 and National curriculum of 2001. These schools will offer both religious and secular subjects. Probably, religious subjects will be taught in the morning and secular ones in the afternoon or vice versa.

Conclusion

The current educational changes focusing on peace building process in the southern border provinces have great impacts upon educational provision in Muslim educational institutions in particular and public schools in general. Educationally, the current changes are different from all former changes. The endeavor to bring religious subjects to public schools is a new practice done by the current government. It is believed that the current changes will create the atmosphere of competition between Islamic private schools and government schools and this competition is expected to bring about the positive impacts upon educational provision in the region.

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