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## Sukavichinomics: Thailand's Preschool and Primary Education Reforms (1995–1997) and Progress Toward Education for All

By Dr. Lieutenant Colonel Thitha Rangsitpol Manitkul-Colonel Prang

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Central to this vision was the expansion of public early childhood centers—from only 74 in 1995 to 3,470 by 1997—and the integration of preschool into a holistic national education strategy.

Thailand's education policy during this period laid the groundwork for the "Education for All" framework, with reforms encompassing school infrastructure, teacher recruitment, curriculum enhancement, and administrative decentralization. These reforms laid the institutional and legal foundations for Thailand's shift to a rights-based, people-centered education system enshrined in the 1997 Constitution.

The success of these initiatives garnered international recognition and offers a compelling model for emerging economies navigating the intersection of equity, decentralization, and educational quality.

**Keywords:** *sukavichinomics, education reform, early childhood education, Thailand, education for all, 1997 constitution.*

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*Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:*



# Sukavichinomics: Thailand's Preschool and Primary Education Reforms (1995–1997) and Progress Toward Education for All

Dr. Lieutenant Colonel Thitha Rangsitpol Manitkul-Colonel Prang

This paper examines the transformative educational reforms implemented in Thailand during the tenure of His Excellency Mr. SukavichRangsitpol as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education between 1995 and 1997.

Emphasizing the rapid expansion of preschool and primary education, the study documents the establishment of over 3,400 public kindergarten schools under the Department of Religious Affairs —then under the Ministry of Education—as a cornerstone of national human capital development. These reforms institutionalized the right to 15 years of free education, expanded access for 4.35 million children, and aligned Thailand's national policies with the global Education for All (EFA) framework.

These reforms laid the legal and institutional foundations for a rights-based, people-centered education system, later enshrined in the 1997 Constitution. Thailand's case offers critical insights into how early childhood access, decentralization, and strategic leadership can accelerate equitable education outcomes.

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## I. STRUCTURE

### a) Introduction

This section introduces the central theme of the paper—Thailand's 1995–1997 education reforms under the leadership of His Excellency Mr. SukavichRangsitpol. It briefly frames the concept of "Sukavichinomics" and its significance in positioning early childhood and primary education as foundational to national development. It outlines the article's scope, methodology, and contribution to policy discourse on Education for All (EFA).

### b) Background: Thailand's Education Landscape Pre-1995

This section provides a historical overview of Thailand's education system prior to 1995, emphasizing key limitations such as inadequate early childhood infrastructure, fragmented governance, rural–urban inequality, and low enrollment rates in pre-primary education. It sets the context for the urgency and ambition of the subsequent reforms.

### c) Policy Vision and Strategic Leadership

This section analyzes the guiding philosophy behind the reforms, rooted in people-centered development as introduced in the 8th National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997–2001). It highlights Dr. Sukavich's strategic use of data, cross-ministerial collaboration, and legislative instruments to institutionalize education as a public right, setting the foundation for the 1997 Constitution.

### d) Expansion of Preschool Education

Focusing on the rapid scale-up of public early childhood education, this section presents data showing the growth of public kindergartens from 74 in 1995 to 3,470 by 1997. It details mechanisms such as budget reallocation, school construction, and municipal support. It discusses the philosophical distinction Sukavich drew between care and education and the inclusion of marginalized populations (e.g., rural, ethnic, and low-income children).

### e) Integration of Primary Education with EFA Goals

This section examines how Thailand aligned its primary education reforms with UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) goals. It discusses policies promoting

universal enrollment, provision of learning materials, free nutritious school meals, and health checkups for children aged 6–11. It also analyzes improved data systems that tracked out-of-school children and enabled targeted interventions.

#### f) *Decentralization and Community Empowerment*

This section describes the administrative restructuring that transferred decision-making authority to local governments and school boards. It explores how these shifts increased parental and community engagement in education. It also discusses the setup of Provincial Education Committees and the use of sub-district centers to monitor and support school performance.

#### g) *Teacher, Curriculum, and Administrative Reform*

This section discusses the efforts to elevate the quality of teaching and learning through teacher training, recruitment of 44,000 new teachers, curriculum innovation (especially life-skills education), and the development of decentralized teacher evaluation systems. It also touches on improved administrative coordination between the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Interior, and Ministry of Public Health.

#### h) *International Recognition and Regional Leadership*

This section highlights Thailand's recognition as a model country for early childhood and primary education reform by international organizations, including UNESCO and SEAMEO. It references awards such as the 1997 ACEID Award for Excellence in Education and honorary recognitions from international academic institutions.

#### i) *Challenges, Limitations, and Lessons Learned*

Acknowledging areas of resistance, implementation delays, and post-1997 policy discontinuity, this section reflects on limitations such as uneven quality between regions, sustainability of funding, and political turnover. It identifies lessons applicable to other developing nations: aligning education with national goals, investing in early years, and institutionalizing reforms beyond political cycles.

#### j) *Conclusion and Legacy*

This section synthesizes the key findings and reiterates the transformative legacy of the 1995–1997 reforms. It emphasizes the long-term influence of this period on Thailand's 1997 Constitution, future education laws, and decentralized governance structures. A forward-looking perspective highlights how these reforms remain relevant to global discussions on equity, inclusion, and lifelong learning.

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## APPENDICES

### *Appendix I: Educational Attainment of the Thai Labor Force (1995)*

In 1995, the educational profile of Thailand's labor force revealed deep structural inequalities. A staggering 79.1% had attained only a primary education or less, while just 6.4% had completed higher education. Notably, fewer workers had finished upper secondary academic (3.3%) or vocational education (3.2%) than those who had earned university degrees—highlighting both the narrow base of advanced education and the weak middle-skills pipeline. This imbalance reflected the country's urgent need for comprehensive educational reform, particularly at the secondary and post-

secondary levels, to ensure inclusive human capital development and long-term economic resilience.

"The labor force in 1995 remained predominantly low-skilled, with the majority receiving only basic education. A mere 6.4% had completed university, while middle-skill education—such as vocational training—was critically underrepresented." —Adapted from UNESCO (1995)








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#### Appendix II: Thailand's Comprehensive Education Reform under Sukavichinomics

In 1995, His Excellency Mr. SukavichRangsitpol, as Minister of Education, launched a nationwide education reform initiative designed to empower Thai citizens with the knowledge and skills necessary for improving their quality of life and contributing to peaceful global coexistence (International Journal of Curriculum Development and Practice, 1999). This comprehensive reform laid the groundwork for Thailand's constitutional right to free education and its commitment to Education For All (EFA).



Since December 1995, the reform process has been anchored in four key pillars:

-  **School Reform:** Efforts focused on standardizing the quality of education across public and private institutions, while expanding access at all levels—particularly in underserved areas.
-  **Teacher Reform:** Rapid restructuring of teacher training, recruitment, and professional development took place. Educational administrators received continuous upskilling to meet new quality standards.
-  **Curriculum Reform:** Teaching and learning processes were urgently redesigned to raise academic standards and ensure relevance across regions and education types.
-  **Administrative Reform:** A robust decentralization program gave schools greater autonomy, enabling locally adapted solutions through school-based management (SBM). Families and communities were encouraged to participate in decision-making processes (World Bank, 2004).
-  By 1997, this wave of transformation had tangible outcomes:
-  More than 40,000 schools were required to improve learning environments and involve local communities in school governance.
-  These institutions collectively welcomed 4.35 million students aged 3–17 from poor and remote families—marking a major leap toward equitable access to education.

-  Thailand received the prestigious 1997 ACEID Award for Excellence in Education from UNESCO.
-  The national education budget increased from 133 billion baht in 1996 to 163 billion baht in 1997, a 22.5% growth.
-  English language and computer literacy were introduced into first-grade curricula.
-  A significant career pathway reform enabled advancement from teacher level 6 to level 7 without the previously required academic portfolio.
-  A government commitment to free 12 years of basic education for all was enacted.
-  The Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997–2001) was explicitly aligned with the goals of the education reform.

These reforms were enshrined in the 1997 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, guaranteeing the right to education for all Thai citizens.

Moreover, the social impact of these efforts extended beyond education. According to the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) and the World Bank, Thailand experienced significant poverty reduction post-reform:

-  Household income in the northeastern region—the poorest in the country—increased by 46% from 1994 to 2000.
-  National poverty rates fell from 21.3% in 1994 to 11.3% in 2000.

Together, these outcomes reflect the transformative potential of education policy when aligned with strategic leadership and inclusive development goals.

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#### Appendix III: International Awards Recognizing Thailand's 1995 Education Reform

##### 1. 1996 – Honorary Doctorate in Education (Philippine Normal University)

During his official visit to the Philippines, H.E. Mr. SukavichRangsitpol was conferred an honorary Doctor of Education degree by the Philippine Normal University. The award recognized his vision for

educational reform and his distinguished leadership in educational management.

Source: *SEAMEO Photo Archive – SukavichRangsitpol*

##### 2. 1997 – UNESCO ACEID Award for Excellence in Educational Services

UNESCO awarded Thailand the ACEID Award in 1997 for excellence in delivering quality educational services, recognizing the successful implementation of inclusive reforms that expanded access and improved educational equity.

Source: *UNESCO ACEID Award 1997*

##### 3. 1998 – UNESCO Award for Innovation and Technology in Educational Administration

In 1998, UNESCO honored Thailand with an award recognizing the successful application of innovation and technology in the administration and delivery of education. This award highlighted Thailand's efforts to modernize educational governance and integrate ICT tools in school systems.

Source: *UNESCO 1998 Innovation and Technology Award*

#### Appendix IV: Four Pillars of the Thai Educational Reform Launched Since December 1995

As documented by UNESCO (2006)

Source: *UNESCO World Data on Education: Thailand (6th Edition, 2006)*

Link: *UNESCO World Data on Education – Thailand (2006)*

Since December 1995, Thailand embarked on a comprehensive and systemic educational reform grounded in four core pillars:

##### 1. School Reform

- National educational standards were systematically raised across all levels and types of schools.
- Major initiatives expanded access to quality education, especially in remote and underserved areas.
- Physical infrastructure and learning environments were improved for over 40,000 schools.

##### 2. Teacher Reform

- Comprehensive improvements in teacher recruitment and qualification processes.
- Significant expansion of in-service professional development and continuous training programs.
- Leadership training for school administrators and educational personnel was prioritized to raise institutional capacity.


##### 3. Curriculum Reform

- Curriculum design was revised to support modern, learner-centered education.

- Teaching methodologies emphasized active learning, critical thinking, and practical problem-solving.
- National learning standards were developed to benchmark student outcomes across subjects and grade levels.

#### 4. Administrative Reform

- A decentralized model of education management was introduced.
- Greater decision-making authority was devolved to schools and local education authorities.
- Community participation, including families and local stakeholders, was actively encouraged and institutionalized in planning and implementation.

 **Note:** These four pillars laid the foundation for Thailand's "people-centered" education model, which was later enshrined in the 1997 Constitution—specifically:

- Article 43: Right to Basic Education
- Article 80: State support for Early Childhood Education

Thailand's reform model has since been recognized by international bodies such as UNESCO and SEAMEO for its inclusive, sustainable, and locally adaptive approach.

#### Appendix V: Sukavichinomics' Administrative Reform

Administrative Reform through the Niti Bhokkhon School System

(Sukavichinomics' School-Based Management Model)

##### Introduction

Between 1995 and 1997, under the visionary leadership of H.E. Mr. SukavichRangsitpol—then Minister of Education and later Deputy Prime Minister—Thailand initiated a bold transformation in the management of its education system. Central to this reform was the decentralization of educational authority: shifting power from the central government to local communities and schools.

##### Philosophy of Reform

"At the very beginning, the crucial element to be considered for education reform is the management system. The administrative power, in particular, has to be shifted to local authorities, and local participation in the school management is essentially encouraged. We cannot deny that people who know more about the educational needs of local people are those who work and live within that community."

— H.E. Mr. SukavichRangsitpol, Keynote Speech at the Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation on Adult Education (UNESCO, 1996, pp. 53–56)

This statement encapsulates the core philosophy of the reform: placing decision-making power in the hands of those closest to the learners.

##### Key Reform Mechanisms

##### 1. School-Based Management (SBM)

In 1997, Thailand formally adopted School-Based Management (SBM) as a structural solution to long-standing inefficiencies in its educational bureaucracy. SBM empowered schools to:

- Manage their own budgets and resources
- Make staffing decisions independently
- Adapt curricula to fit local needs and cultural contexts



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##### 2. Establishment of Provincial Education Councils

To ensure meaningful community engagement, the reform introduced Provincial Education Councils composed of:

- Local educators
- Community leaders
- Government officials

These councils acted as conduits between national policy and local implementation, balancing community aspirations with administrative oversight.



##### Reference:

- World Bank. (1998). Education in Thailand. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/605431468777588612/text/multi-page.txt>

##### Rationale for Decentralization

- *Responsiveness:* Local stakeholders possess contextual knowledge of students' real needs.
- *Accountability:* Community involvement enhances transparency and educational responsibility.
- *Flexibility:* Schools gain agility in customizing education based on geography, socio-economic realities, and cultural diversity.

##### Challenges and Considerations

While the reform was visionary, implementation required attention to:

- Clear and consistent policy guidelines for local administrators.
- Capacity-building and training programs for decentralized leadership.
- Equity-based funding mechanisms to avoid regional disparities.

##### Conclusion

The Niti Bhokkhon model of administrative reform—widely known as "Sukavichinomics"—laid the



groundwork for participatory education governance in Thailand. It shifted the focus toward community empowerment, school autonomy, and localized accountability—principles that continue to inform modern education reforms. This approach reinforced a broader agenda centered on quality, equity, and learner-centered development.

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### Appendix VI: Sukavichinomics' OLD School Reform

*School Reform:* Renovation of Old Schools and the Achievement of "Education for All" through the Niti Bhokkhon School System (Sukavichinomics' School based Management) During Times of National Crisis.

#### Introduction

Between 1991 and 1997, Thailand experienced significant political and economic turbulence—including the 1991 military coup, the 1992 "Black May" protests, four general elections in four years (1992–1996), and the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. Despite these disruptions, the implementation of the Niti Bhokkhon School System—also known as Sukavichinomics—marked one of the most significant achievements in Thai history: the realization of "Education for All."

#### Timeline of Key Disruptions

- 1991: Military coup; the 1991 Constitution mandated only 6 years of compulsory education.
- 1992: Black May (พฤษภาทมิฬ) civilian uprising for democratic reform.
- 1992–1996: Political instability, marked by four general elections in just four years.
- 1997: Asian Financial Crisis severely impacted the national economy.

### Transformative Educational Reform (1995–1997)

Under the leadership of H.E. Mr. Sukavich Rangsitpol, the Ministry of Education launched a nationwide reform known as the "Education Revolution" (การปฏิรูปการศึกษา พ.ศ. 2538). Despite widespread instability, the following achievements were realized:

- Renovation of 29,845 schools across the country
- Improvement of 38,112 classrooms
- Upgrading of 12,227 multipurpose school buildings
- Renovation of 11,257 sanitary toilet facilities
- Expansion of access to free education—including tuition, learning materials, transportation, and meals—for all children aged 3–17

Through this reform, an additional 4.35 million children from poor agricultural families in remote areas were added to the existing 12.33 million in the school system—bringing the total to 16.68 million children receiving fully subsidized education.

#### Population Impact

- Children already enrolled in the system: 12.33 million
- Additional children from impoverished families enrolled: 4.35 million
- Total students benefiting from the reform: 16.68 million
- Impact on Constitutional Reform

The success of these reforms energized parents, educators, and civil society, leading to broad public support for constitutional change. This momentum directly influenced the drafting and ratification of the 1997 "People's Constitution," which enshrined education as a fundamental right:

- *Article 43:* Guaranteed 12 years of free basic education
- *Article 80:* Secured 3 years of early childhood development support
- Affirmed nationwide equality in educational access—regardless of geography, income, or background

This was the first time in Thai history that free, equitable, and fully funded education—including lunch programs, transportation, and educational materials—was recognized as a constitutional right.

#### Role of Civil Society and Historical Clarity

The widespread mobilization of families, especially those who benefited directly from the reforms, played a pivotal role in embedding educational rights in the 1997 Constitution. Importantly, these achievements were secured through peaceful civic participation—not through violence.

It is essential to distinguish the peaceful democratic movement of 1997 from earlier events such

as Black May (1992). Historical accuracy helps prevent the repetition of tragedies, such as the loss of life and constitutional setbacks witnessed during the political unrest of 2010.

### Conclusion

The realization of universal, free, and equitable education during a period of national upheaval remains one of the most enduring legacies of H.E. Prof. Dr. SukavichRangsitpol. His leadership and the introduction of Sukavichinomics not only transformed Thai education, but also laid the foundation for one of Southeast Asia's most progressive constitutions—enshrining education as a right for every Thai child.



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### Appendix VII: Sukavichinomics' NEW School Reform

School Reform through the Niti Bhokkhon System

(Sukavichinomics' School-Based Management Model)

**■ Establishment of New Universities, Schools, Learning Centers, Libraries, and Museums Nationwide**

Under the visionary leadership of H.E. Prof. Dr. SukavichRangsitpol, the Niti Bhokkhon System—widely recognized as the “Sukavichinomics” school-based management model—spearheaded an unprecedented wave of educational infrastructure development across Thailand between 1995 and 1997.

These reforms aimed to equip the Thai people with “intellectual weapons” (อาวุธทางปัญญา) to overcome poverty and address pressing social challenges, such as drug abuse, through peaceful, sustainable, education-based solutions.

**■ Landmark Achievements (1995–1997)**

1. Established Mae Fah Luang University
  - Established on 4,997 rai of land in Doi Ngam

- Approved with a dedicated government budget in 1997 (B.E. 2540)
- 2. New Rajabhat Institutes
  - Founded in Roi Et, Kalasin, Si Sa Ket, Nakhon Phanom, and Chaiyaphum
  - Official founding date: April 20, 1997
- 3. Vocational Colleges
  - 278 new vocational institutions established nationwide
- 4. Specialized High Schools were established
  - 12 Somdet Phra Sri Schools
  - 2 Chulabhorn Science High Schools
  - 1 Golden Jubilee (Kanchanaphisek) School
  - Mahidol Wittayanusorn School
- 5. Junior's High Schools (โรงเรียนขยายโอกาส)
  - 2,685 new schools established to extend basic education access in remote areas
- 6. Early Childhood Development Centers
  - Expanded from 74 to 3,470 centers nationwide
- 7. Science Centers within Rajabhat Institutes
  - 17 new centers established to promote STEM education
- 8. Chalerm Phrakiat (Royal Jubilee) Libraries
  - 99 public libraries inaugurated nationwide on December 5, 1996
- 9. Thailand Science Park
  - Established in 1996 on Phahonyothin Road as Thailand's national hub for science and innovation
- 10. High School Libraries
  - 2,542 new libraries founded within high schools across the country

### ■ Additional Milestones

Under the Ministry of Education's directive His Excellency Mr. SukavichRangsitpol's leadership:

- Over 30,000 local museums, folk heritage centers, community learning centers, and local public libraries were established nationwide
- A nationwide grassroots network of educational and cultural institutions was established to promote lifelong learning and sustainable development

### ■ Conclusion

These transformative initiatives dramatically expanded access to educational and cultural resources across Thailand—particularly in rural and marginalized communities. They reflect the enduring belief that knowledge is the most powerful tool for overcoming poverty, building peace, and fostering national resilience through nonviolent, education-centered development.



"This holistic transformation embodied the core principle of Sukavichinomics: that sustainable national development begins with decentralization, empowerment, and the democratization of knowledge."

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### Appendix VIII: Sukavichinomics' Teacher Reform

#### 1. The Central Thesis: Educational Reform Begins with Teachers' Learning

His Excellency Mr. SukavichRangsitpol underscores a powerful idea: classroom transformation is impossible unless teachers themselves undergo a transformation in how they learn. Reform must start with teacher training—not in content alone, but in learning methodology.

"If teachers' learning emphasizes memorization... it is unlikely that school learning will include high-order thinking."

#### 2. Failures of Past Reforms: The Case of New Math

The speech critiques past educational reforms, like "New Math", for:

- Focusing only on content delivery.
- Ignoring how teachers learn and internalize new methodologies.
- Leading to superficial changes without conceptual understanding among teachers.

#### 3. Inductive Thinking and Constructivist Pedagogy

The future demands citizens who are critical, adaptable, and inductive thinkers. Teachers must therefore:

- Model inductive reasoning by going through the same thinking processes as students.

- Be trained to collect, classify, and evaluate data; and conceptualize and test alternatives.
- Shift from being knowledge deliverers to learning facilitators.

#### 4. Professional Practices and Reflective Teaching

A reflective teacher:

- Treats each class as new.
- Adapts based on learner needs.
- Engages in ongoing self-assessment and professional dialogue.
- Promotes student ownership of learning—key to developing self-esteem and motivation.

"The reflective teacher is also a learner."

#### 5. Indicators of Progressive Classrooms

Twelve features of effective, student-centered learning environments are proposed, including:

- Hands-on, inductive, and experiential learning.
- Emphasis on higher-order thinking and self-assessment.
- Cooperative learning and democratic classroom practices.

These are hallmarks of 21st-century learning long before they were widely adopted internationally.

#### 6. Advanced Propositions for Systemic Reform

The speech concludes with three powerful, forward-looking questions:

- Should teaching and learning be the core of all educational reform?
- Should we use the constructivist model (learning by doing) for teacher development?
- Should SEAMES (Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization) coordinate regional collaboration on teacher learning?

These questions remain valid—and urgent—for any education system aiming for sustainable development.

### Implications for Thai Educational Reform and Beyond

This speech by His Excellency Mr. Sukavich Rangsitpol is foundational for understanding the paradigm shift he led in Thailand's education reform during the mid-1990s. It aligns with the broader vision of the 8th National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997–2001), where education was placed at the heart of human-centered development.

### Key takeaways

- Educational reform is not merely administrative—it is pedagogical.
- A "learning society" begins with teachers who are learners.

- True reform cannot occur without reflective, empowered, and professional teachers.

### *Historical and Contemporary Relevance*

His Excellency Mr. Sukavich's ideas anticipated global education movements:

- Constructivism and inquiry-based learning.
- Teacher as reflective practitioner (Donald Schön, 1983).
- Learning to learn as a core 21st-century skill (OECD frameworks).
- Child-centered education emphasized in the Thai 1999 National Education Act.

Today, in light of post-COVID learning loss, AI disruption, and rapid globalization, the principles laid out in this 1996 speech are more relevant than ever.

### *Suggested Use and Next Steps*

- Use this document as a reference point for designing modern teacher professional development programs.
- Advocate for teacher training curricula that integrate inductive reasoning, reflection, and student-centered pedagogy.
- Propose a policy brief linking Sukavich's propositions to current regional or national education strategies.
- Engage SEAMEO and other regional bodies in a renewed dialogue on teacher reform in the age of digital and lifelong learning.

### *Reference:*

- Rangsitpol, S. (1996, January 6). Teachers' Learning in a Changing World. Paper presented by H.E. Mr. Sukavich Rangsitpol, Minister of Education of Thailand, at the Symposium on Educational Reform in Southeast Asia, Chiang Rai, Thailand. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20190620103917/http://www.seameo.org/vl/library/dlwelcome/publications/report/thematic/96symp31/96annex2.htm>

### *Appendix IX: Sukavichinomics' Curriculum Reform*

#### ◆ Vision and Objectives

Launched in 1995 by H.E.Mr. Sukavich Rangsitpol, Thailand's then-Minister of Education, this education reform aimed to:

Enhance the quality of Thai education from 1995 to 2007.

Empower Thai people to improve their quality of life and contribute to national development.

Foster a learning society where individuals, institutions, and communities continuously learn and grow.

Promote holistic development: physical, intellectual, emotional, ethical, and social.

#### ◆ Core Reform Areas

The reform focused on four pillars:

- School reform
- Teacher reform
- Curriculum reform
- Administrative reform

#### ◆ Key Curriculum Reform Strategies

##### 1. *Student-Centered Learning*

Promote happy learning environments.

Shift from rote memorization to critical thinking, hands-on learning, and problem-solving.

Use nature, community, and local knowledge as learning resources.

Develop basic educational standards with local adaptations.

##### 2. *Localized Curriculum Development*

Communities were encouraged to participate in curriculum design and textbook development.

##### 3. *Teacher Education Reform*

Focused on personality, ethics, and professionalism, beyond just content knowledge.

Introduced residential training to build character through group living.

Integrated research, inquiry-based learning, and community engagement into teacher training.

Encouraged strong teacher-student relationships based on trust and care (Kalayanamitr – good friends).

##### 4. *Emphasis on Core Subjects*

Prioritized Thai, Math, and Science in basic education.

Introduced English from Grade 1, ahead of regional trends.

##### 5. *Reforming Assessment Systems*

Promoted portfolio assessment and continuous evaluation over high-stakes exams.

Encouraged quota-based admissions to reduce exam pressure.

##### 6. *Lifelong Learning and Learning Networks*

Connected formal, non-formal, and informal education into an integrated learning system.

Promoted use of libraries, media, and technology in schools.

##### 7. *Civic and Democratic Education*

Integrated democracy education into curriculum and teacher behavior.

#### ◆ Key Innovations Introduced

Happy learning

Thinking-centered learning (beyond the 3Rs)

Moral and character development

Constructivist knowledge-building  
Aesthetic education  
English for primary students  
Portfolio-based assessment and cooperative learning

#### ◆ Achievements and Challenges

##### ✓ *Strengths:*

Progressive vision aligned with global trends  
Strong emphasis on learner autonomy and community engagement  
Early emphasis on English language learning  
Foundation laid for lifelong learning society

##### ⚠ *Challenges:*

Political Challenges to Sukavichinomics: Vision Without Recognition (1999)

Despite the comprehensive and forward-thinking framework known as “Sukavichinomics”, launched in 1995 by H.E.Mr. SukavichRangsitpol, the education sector in Thailand faced a significant disconnect between policy vision and institutional practice. While the 1999 National Education Act drew heavily—almost verbatim—from His Excellency Mr. Sukavich’s learner centered vision, it failed to acknowledge its origin and deliberately omitted credit to its political architect.

*Key Challenges in 1999 (as officially documented):*

A mismatch between assessment systems and curriculum goals.

Limited readiness of teachers, administrators, and schools.

Insufficient funding and infrastructure

Institutional resistance from deeply entrenched hierarchical structures.

Yet behind these surface-level technical challenges lay a deeper ideological resistance:

Many Thai educators and technocrats refused to accept His Excellency Mr. SukavichRangsitpol’s leadership in education reform due to his identity as a politician rather than a career academic. This led to active efforts to replace or overshadow his ideas with their own models—ironically, often by copying his exact vision without attribution.

This lack of recognition was not merely an oversight but reflected a structural bias within the Thai education establishment against political figures, even when they introduced groundbreaking and globally aligned reforms.

*The Unacknowledged Irony:*

The 1999 Education Act, heralded by some as the “landmark reform of the century,” repackaged His Excellency Mr. SukavichRangsitpol’s original reform

framework, presenting it as a technocratic achievement—without acknowledging its political origins. This has led to historical distortion and a failure to credit one of the most impactful visions in Thai educational history.

#### ◆ Legacy and Policy Implication

Sukavichinomics’ Curriculum Reform was a visionary and holistic reform that:

“Laid the foundation for learner-centered education, character development, and community-based curriculum in Thailand.”

While full implementation was hindered by Thai Educators, its ideological framework and innovative practices remain highly relevant in contemporary education policy and reform efforts.

The Sukavichinomics Curriculum Reform, introduced in 1995 under the leadership of H.E. SukavichRangsitpol, marked a watershed moment in Thailand’s educational history. More than a set of policy recommendations, it offered a visionary, values-driven blueprint for reshaping the educational system around three interconnected pillars:

Learner-centered pedagogy rooted in cognitive and emotional development.

Moral and character education as an explicit objective of schooling.

Community-based curriculum design emphasizing decentralization, local wisdom, and participatory governance.

This holistic framework emerged not merely as a technocratic solution but as a political and philosophical reimagining of what Thai education should achieve. It challenged the top-down, exam-centric model that had long dominated Thai schools and sought to align education with democratic values and human development.

Yet, despite its ambition and early implementation across pilot provinces, Sukavichinomics encountered institutional resistance. As the political tide shifted and bureaucratic actors reclaimed the policy space, many of Sukavich’s innovations were quietly absorbed into subsequent legislation—most notably the 1999 National Education Act (NEA)—without proper attribution or contextual acknowledgment.

The irony is profound: while the NEA is often hailed as a groundbreaking reform, it borrows heavily from Sukavich’s 1995–1997 initiatives. However, these foundational ideas were rebranded as bureaucratic innovations, detaching them from their political and visionary origins. This “policy plagiarism” not only distorts the historical record but also obscures the vital role of political imagination in shaping meaningful reform.

### *Implications for Future Reform*

The legacy of Sukavichinomics carries enduring implications for education reform in Thailand and beyond:

*Vision Must Precede Structure:* Sustainable reform begins with a coherent and ethically grounded vision. Legal and administrative frameworks are necessary but insufficient without a guiding philosophical core.

*Character and Community Matter:* Education policy must transcend academic achievement to nurture responsible citizens, moral judgment, and social belonging—especially in diverse and rapidly changing societies.

*Intellectual Honesty and Historical Integrity are Non-negotiable:* A system that fails to acknowledge its reform architects risks repeating cycles of appropriation and erasure, undermining trust in policymaking and discouraging future innovation.

In an era marked by globalized education agendas, technological disruption, and increasing inequality, the uncredited legacy of Sukavichinomics offers an important counter-narrative. It calls for reform that is ethically conscious, locally grounded, and courageously political. Recognizing and restoring such erased contributions is not merely a historical correction—it is a prerequisite for designing future reforms that are both authentic and enduring.

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*Note: The full article is available in PDF format from the Japan Curriculum Research and Development Association.*

