

**EFA Goal 1**  
**Early Childhood Care and Education**  
**By Office of the Education Council**  
**Ministry of Education, Thailand**

Dr.Waraiporn Sangnapaboworn  
Director of International Education Development Center  
Ms.Cuttariya Changdacha  
Educator, International Education Development Center

## **Introduction**

Thailand has recognized an importance of early childhood development for a long time. Early childhood is the foundation for all subsequent developments and sustainable development of human quality in a long run. Family acts as the main anchor of child development. The community and society play an active role in child rearing in all stages.

Proven theories and relevant research findings have substantiated that proper environment and care can affect the structure and effectiveness of the functioning of the human brain. The most important and necessary period for brain development is during 0-6 years of age.

## **The Development of Early Childhood Education in Thailand**

Prior to 1960 early childhood education was not yet introduced in the education system of Thailand. There existed only early childhood classes in private schools where teachers taught reading and writing to prepare children for the primary education level. It was not until the National Education Plan 1960 was promulgated that “Kindergarten” was recognized as one of the 4 levels of the education system which included kindergarten (later became known as early childhood education), primary education, secondary education, and higher education.

M.L. Pin Malakul Na Ayutthaya, as the Minister of Education, took an initiative to provide early childhood education in each province by establishing provincial kindergartens which admitted 5-year old children to attend classes from kindergarten to primary levels.

During 1966 – 1979 the provision of early childhood education was the duty of various organizations. Municipality was responsible for organizing early childhood education for children in municipal area; provincial administrative organizations for children living beyond the municipal area; and Department of General Education for early childhood education in primary schools reserved as an exemplary model in each province.

During the implementation of the 1977 National Education Plan (1977-1992), the government had expanded early childhood education or kindergarten in primary schools tremendously. After the establishment of Office of the National Primary Education Commission (ONPEC) in the Ministry of Education, the responsibility for providing early childhood education and primary education was entirely transferred from provincial administrative organizations to ONPEC.

Realizing the significance of the well-rounded development of the 3-5 year old children, the government launched the **Rural Kindergarten Project** by supporting facilities and having provincial kindergartens mentor rural kindergartens. Soon afterwards the school lunch program and supplementary food (school milk) program were introduced to improve the quality of life of young children all over the country.

Since the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All in 1990, the Thai government has placed more importance on both quantitative and qualitative development of early childhood education so that every child (3-5 year old) is given proper care and development to their fullest potential, cultivated with moral and ethical values, and equally well-prepared for primary education.

**The 1999 National Education Act** stipulated that early childhood education shall be provided in such early childhood development institutions as child development centers, public schools, private schools, and religious institutions.

### **Early childhood education administration and management**

The following agencies in charge of early childhood development for children in 0-5 age group are explained as below:

- 1) **Ministry of Education:** It is directly responsible for policy on development of education provision, educational quality and teaching and learning with the aim of

developing children as a perfect human in various aspects – physical, emotional, mental and social.

2) **Ministry of Public Health:** It provides services: parent preparation; pregnant care; mother and child health care – physical, mental and nutritional; vaccination to produce immunity to disease; Iodine supplementation, E.Q. and I.Q. enhancement.

3) **Ministry of Social Development and Human Security:** It provides assistance to poor family and children, disabled children, and orphans.

4) **Ministry of Interior:** LAOs are responsible for 17,821 early childhood development centres and prepare budget for remunerations of babysitters, materials, lunches, supplementary food (milk), etc.

5) **Ministry of Culture:** Religious institutions, with parents' participation, hold religious activities for children.

6) **Ministry of Labour:** It promotes development of labourers' children.

7) **Prime Minister's Office:** The Border Patrol Police Bureau promotes development of pre-school children living in borders of Thailand.

8) **Institute for Gifted and Innovative Learning:** It plays a key role in establishment of knowledge and understanding about a comprehensive approach to instruction using current research from neuroscience (Brain-Based Learning – BBL)

9) **Book for Children Foundation:** It produces books for children and launches campaign for parents and teachers to encourage children to love reading.

Furthermore, there are other foundations and private agencies concerned such as Thai Breastfeeding Centre who promotes breastfeeding newborn baby to 2 year old children, Children Museum and various NGOs

## **Main Policies concerning Early Childhood Care and Education**

As mentioned above, the provision of early childhood care and education was emphasized in the 1999 National Education Act, which has been a blueprint for education reform of Thailand. Early childhood care and education was also an important issue stipulated in the National Education Plan and the National Education Development Plan. Moreover there are at least three main policies that support the development of education for pre-primary children.

1. **Long-Term Policy and strategy for Early Childhood Care and Development (0-5 Age Group) 2007-2011:** It focuses on development with quality and to the best potentiality of children aged 0-5. Family acts as a main anchor of child rearing. It also promotes encouragement of participation among all segments of society in providing

children with pleasant services and environment relevant to localities and conducive to early childhood development. The mentioned policy is composed of 3 main strategies: 1) Strategies for Strengthening Early Childhood Development, 2) Strategies for Strengthening Parents and Persons Concerned for Early Childhood Development, and 3) Strategies for Strengthening the Environment Conducive to Early Childhood Development.

2. **Regulation of the Office of the Prime Minister on Early Childhood Care and Development B.E. 2551 (2008):** It establishes a committee entitled “**National Committee for Early Childhood Care and Development.**” The committee consists of the Prime Minister acting as Chairperson, the Minister of Education as First Vice-Chairperson. The Ex-officio members include Permanent Secretary of the ministries concerned Scholar members with expertise in the fields of early childhood education, public health, psychology, etc. The representative of Office of the Education Council serves as Member and Secretary. The powers and duties of the Committee comprise: coordinating and integrating activities relating to early childhood care and development carried out by organizations of both public and private sectors; recommending and advising the Council of Ministers on a complete cyclical process on early childhood care and development; recommending the Council of Ministers to make amendments to the law, rules, regulations or relevant decisions in harmony with early childhood care and development; encouraging and providing support for research, innovations in learning management for the benefit of early childhood care and development; considering appropriate models of agencies concerned; appointing sub-committees; carrying out other assignments.

The aforesaid Committee plays a key role in proposing guidelines for early childhood development and establishing unity of agencies and organizations concerned for carrying out, under the same policy, early childhood development.

3. **The 15-year Free Education:** Although the National Education Act stipulated that the state shall provide at least 12 years of basic education, which is of quality and free of charge, the government’s policy was to provide 15-year free education which covers also pre-primary education. The free education was meant to offer children free textbooks, uniform, tuition, teaching equipment and child development activities, demonstrating the government’s high commitment to the development of early childhood by giving them more opportunity to equally receive education.

4. **Policy on a Love of Reading Enhancement for Young Children:** The policy was endorsed on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2009 by the National Committee for Early Childhood Care and Development. This policy encourages all segments in society to recognize an importance of love of reading beginning from young children. The activities include storytelling and book reading as well as promoting participation of parents and persons concerned in storytelling and reading together with their children.

## Facts and Figures about Early Childhood Development in Thailand

Since the issue of Jomtien Declaration on Education for All 1990, Thailand has accelerated an opportunity of access to pre-primary education including an increase of pre-primary classes in rural areas, an encouragement for local administrative areas (LAOs) to establish child centres for disadvantaged children (3,495 at present), as well as transferring child centres (14,326) under the supervision of different public agencies to LAOs in 2001 in order to encourage local participation in the operation of education. Therefore, kindergartens for 3-5 year old children are provided in public primary schools, schools under the supervision of LAOs and private schools.

According to proven theories, child nurturing and development, especially those below 3 years of age are mainly under the responsibility of families. In cases where the families could not take care of children, the latter would be sent to childcare facilities or child development centres, offering a variety of services.

Depending on data during 1986-2010, the number of pre-primary children receiving education kept increasing steadily. Beginning in 1986 when 2,869 out of 2,456,432 children of 2-3 years of age or only 0.1% registered in early childhood care center or kindergarten 1, the number increased into 42% in 1999. Besides for kindergarten, 781,531 out of 1,247,506 children of the age group received pre-school or kindergarten year 3 (5 years old), which accounted for 62.6%, the figures in 1999 indicated that out of 1,065,114 children, 975,580 children or 91.6% registered in kindergarten.

Table 1 Enrollment ratio by grade : academic years 1986-1999

Grade	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Total	23.2	26.6	28.6	29.3	32.9	34.6	38.3	44.1	48.5	55.0	58.9	68.1	70.3	66.1
Center/Kindergarten 1	0.1	5.8	7.5	9.6	12.6	13.7	19.4	21.6	26.6	28.9	31.4	47.7	50.4	42.0
Kindergarten 2	29.2	22.4	23.3	20.1	22.6	26.9	30.3	49.5	60.6	76.1	82.6	84.3	88.3	88.3
Preschool /Kindergarten 3	62.6	71.0	74.5	76.1	82.8	83.4	83.7	83.7	80.1	86.1	90.5	93.0	91.9	91.6

Table 1 (continued) Enrollment ratio by grade : academic years 2000-2010

Grade	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total	68.6	69.0	70.3	69.7	65.6	64.9	64.8	64.9	69.4	71.9	75.0
Center/Kindergarten 1	43.6	43.0	44.3	47.6	43.2	43.3	46.7	48.5	57.0	60.7	64.4
Kindergarten 2	92.8	94.8	94.6	87.6	87.3	85.8	81.6	81.0	79.8	81.6	86.0
Preschool /Kindergarten 3	92.7	92.5	95.3	94.5	89.0	88.0	85.3	82.5	83.8	83.6	83.8

Table 2 Number of population by age : years 1986-1999

Age	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Total	4,947,528	4,888,832	4,835,016	4,787,264	4,450,160	4,417,272	4,386,456	4,356,232	4,325,328	4,294,224	4,279,840	4,265,576	4,250,616	4,232,336
age 2-3	2,456,432	2,412,784	2,375,752	2,345,528	2,206,864	2,197,624	2,186,432	2,174,072	2,160,912	2,147,224	2,142,944	2,133,656	2,121,384	2,106,320
age 4	1,243,590	1,235,334	1,226,339	1,217,045	1,117,067	1,106,296	1,097,144	1,088,686	1,080,253	1,071,941	1,067,587	1,065,043	1,063,226	1,060,902
age 5	1,247,506	1,240,714	1,232,925	1,224,691	1,126,229	1,113,352	1,102,880	1,093,474	1,084,163	1,075,059	1,069,309	1,066,877	1,066,006	1,065,114

Table 2 (continued) Number of population by age : years 2000-2010

Age	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
<b>Total</b>	4,034,959	3,924,399	3,814,212	3,760,783	3,757,475	3,788,738	3,853,912	3,917,533	3,894,682	3,802,475	3,671,207
age 2-3	1,975,268	1,911,529	1,855,196	1,852,183	1,881,969	1,910,704	1,955,718	1,989,179	1,941,376	1,850,241	1,770,371
age 4	1,022,263	996,179	967,991	943,555	930,460	938,782	952,646	969,607	980,943	975,226	939,823
age 5	1,037,428	1,016,691	991,025	965,045	945,046	939,252	945,548	958,747	972,363	977,008	961,013

Table 3 Number of students pre-primary by grade : academic years 1986-1999

Grade	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Total	1,147,920	1,298,256	1,382,812	1,402,443	1,463,660	1,527,851	1,679,502	1,922,973	2,097,431	2,361,930	2,522,478	2,906,701	2,987,486	2,796,266
Center/Kindergarden 1	2,869	140,488	178,399	226,289	279,063	301,621	423,557	468,886	574,435	620,627	672,883	1,016,924	1,068,825	883,626
Kindergarden 2	363,520	277,158	285,333	244,415	252,195	297,853	332,484	539,022	654,956	815,711	881,520	897,831	938,694	937,060
Preschool /Kindergarden 3	781,531	880,610	919,080	931,739	932,402	928,377	923,461	915,065	868,040	925,592	968,075	991,946	979,967	975,580

Table 3 (continued) Number of students pre-primary by grade : academic years 2000-2010

Grade	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total	2,769,826	2,706,442	2,682,835	2,620,197	2,466,693	2,460,545	2,497,928	2,541,736	2,703,946	2,735,093	2,752,738
Center/Kindergarden 1	860,405	821,953	822,630	882,023	813,559	827,849	913,353	964,973	1,105,767	1,122,623	1,139,462
Kindergarden 2	948,192	943,948	915,873	826,214	812,357	805,749	777,567	785,400	783,023	796,096	808,037
Preschool /Kindergarden 3	961,229	940,541	944,332	911,960	840,777	826,947	807,008	791,363	815,156	816,374	805,238

Remark: There were only 2-year kindergarten provided in 1986 and 1987.



In the past 20 years (1990-2010), the proportion of children attending kindergarten 1 (age 2-3), kindergarten 2 (age 4), and kindergarten 3 increased steadily from 12.6%, 22.6% and 82.8% in 1990 to 64.4%, 86.0%, and 83.8% in 2010, resulting in the total increase from 32.9% in 1990 to 75.0% in 2010 as shown in Figure 1.

However, some children are still left behind and lack opportunity of receiving the services. This problem may arise from nurturing by family, financial insufficiency, sickness, disability, as well as transportation inconvenience particularly in remote areas or geographical limitation. Thai government realized its responsibility for solving this problem in order to provide pre-primary education to all Thai children in accordance with the EFA goal.

In addition, when comparing the number of children receiving in various early childhood care and development institutions, it can be seen that the number of children receiving care and education in public institutions is higher than private institutions because most kindergartens are provided in public schools under the supervision of Office the Basic Education Commission and early childhood development centres are under the jurisdiction of LAOs which are public agencies as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 1 Enrollment Ratio of Early Childhood Care and Education: Academic Years 1986-2010

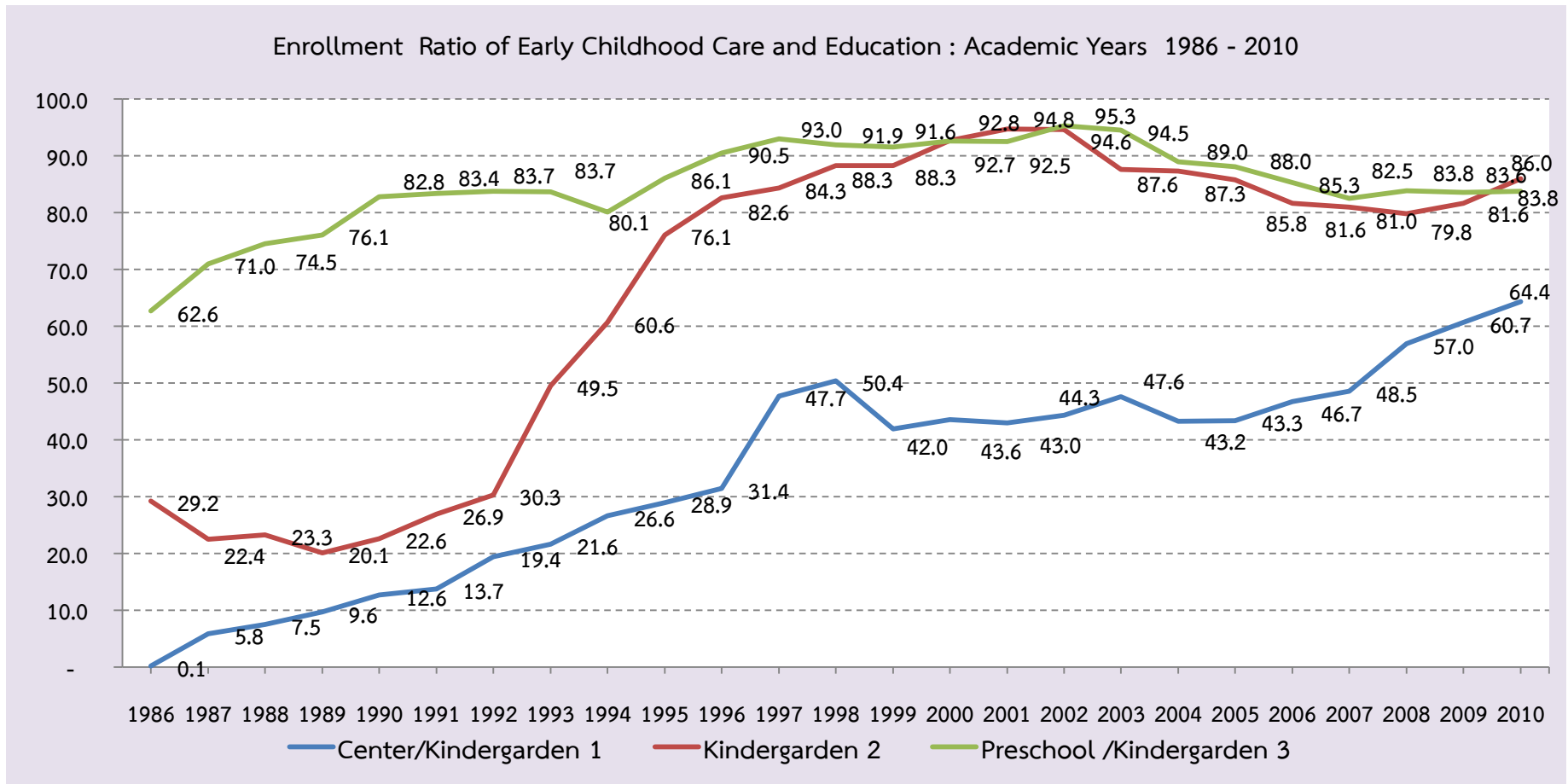
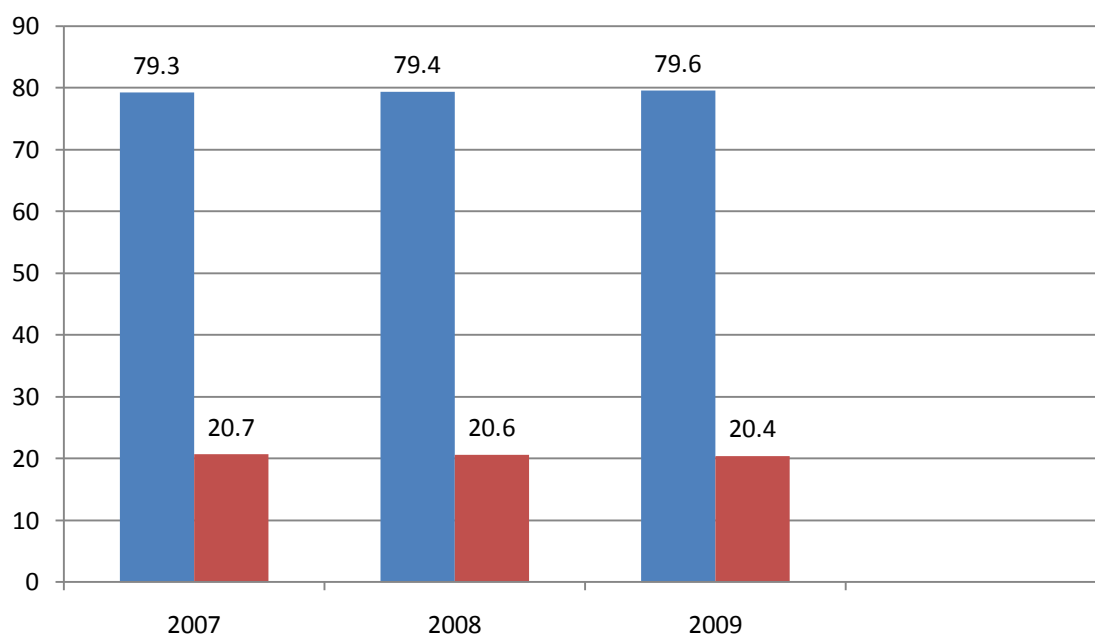


Figure 2 Percentage of Preprimary Students in Public and Private Educational Institutions (2001-2009)



Source: Office of the Education Council

One difference between public and private education concerning early childhood education is the fact that public kindergarten offers 3-year program while the latter provides 2 year program.

### Some Outstanding Projects

The following are some outstanding projects which facilitate both the quantitative and qualitative development of early childhood care and education in Thailand.

1. **Research for early childhood development with quality:** Since 2003, Office of the Education council in collaboration with Book for Children Foundation apply “Book Start” Programme initiated in the United Kingdom to test it in Thailand under the project entitled “First Book for Children aged between 6 months to 6 years (Bookstart).” The activity of the project is distribution of Bookstart book set to parents of 106 families. Parents will read the books around 5-15 minutes in everyday, anytime, anywhere to their 6-9 moth old children sitting in their laps. According to the study, Bookstart book set not only encourages children in first 3 years of age to learn amazingly a lot of new knowledge, but also establish warm atmosphere in the home. Parents and children can stay closer and feel happier.

Furthermore, obvious change in child nurturing can be seen, when parents or babysitters spend more of time to stay with children - singing, telling story, and reading with their children. Six years of monitoring families' behaviors reveal that book is the process of building good relationship between parents and children, including child rearing, establishing physical, emotional, social, moral and intellectual foundation for children. It can be found that children participating in Bookstart Project have better development in all aspects in accord with their age than other children.

**2. Research and development of model of learning activity in accord with potentiality of children at the age of 0-3 years and model of learning activity in accord with potentiality of children at the age of 3-5 years:** the research can be a guideline for child nurturing with quality, focusing on process of holistic children development – physical, mental, emotional and social. Additionally, the research concentrates on development of children's potentiality, encouraging children to have positive thinking, to make good thing, have social skill, good attitude towards learning.

**3. Establishment of standards of child development center:** It allows children to receive good services and circumstances. Agencies concerned are able to use, as a guideline for early childhood development, the standards of following aspects: administration and management, personnel, child development center, child quality, and network building and participation. Establishment of these standards can upgrade more systematically the standards of child centers in communities.

In addition to this, there are many other initiatives. For example the **Public initiatives for early childhood development:** They include various projects such as Newborn Consoling Bag Project, Thai Breastfeeding Centre, Young Children Caravan Project. Moreover, Thai government encourages workplaces to facilitate child caring of their employees or staff. This activity let the parents take care of their children thoroughly and leads to warmth atmosphere between parents and children.

## Challenges and Emerging Issues

Despite the fair success in EFA movement to provide primary education in Thailand, there are still some problems and obstacles as follows:

1. Parents and babysitters lack knowledge and understanding regarding child rearing, brain development in leaning age. As a result, children cannot be developed in accord with their age and their potentiality.

2. Due to the fact that various agencies are responsible for early childhood care and development services, occur considerably the lack of cooperation and coordination

among the agencies – both public and private – as well as other organizations concerned. In addition, these agencies and organizations have different standards in providing early childhood care and development services.

3. Lack of accurate and updated information provokes ineffective and inconsistent policy implementation.

4. Unequal development in urban and rural areas, family backgrounds, poverty, and disadvantage cause children to suffer from unequal opportunity and deficient quality of development.

5. Family problems such as sickness, divorce, etc. make children to live with single mother or father. These children may suffer from insufficient warmth which, according to research findings, affects them more than primary children.

### **Future Directions**

In order to materialize the stipulations in the 1999 National Education Act, Thailand has launched the policy on the Second Decade of Education Reform which focus on 3 main pillar of the reform policy implementation, firstly increasing an access and opportunity to education, secondly improving the quality of education, and thirdly the encouragement of participation in education from all segments of society.

Regarding early childhood care and education, the National Policy Committee on the Second Decade of Education Reform decided that, along with the reform of basic education, early childhood care and education will be especially focused. Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva himself as the chairman of the National Committee for Early Childhood Care and Development and the chairman of the National Policy Committee on the Second Decade of Education Reform stated clearly that his government will motivate the participation from all agencies concerned both in national and local levels, in public and private sectors, including teachers, parents, and babysitters in order to form a collective effort to reach every young child and to develop them physically, mentally, intellectually, emotionally and socially to their fullest potential so that they will be quality children and well-prepared for learning in primary education level.

### **Conclusion**

Thailand pays strong intention to follow EFA commitment, supervising and monitoring seriously early childhood development and educational provision which comprises establishment of early childhood development centers for all young children

especially disadvantaged children in rural areas. In addition, Thailand can increase proportion of young children enrolling in pre-primary classes which is ranked top of Asia. Furthermore, Thailand focuses on conducting research for early childhood development, encouragement of participation among parents and LAOs in early childhood development. At the same time, Thai government issued Policy and Strategy for Early Childhood Care and Development, appointed the National Committee for Early Childhood Care and Development. She also authorized full budget for early childhood development without budget cutting even in the period of economic crisis of 1990s. These actions confirm strong intention of Thai government to give a strong importance to education including early childhood education. At present, the Council of Ministers extends the period of free education from 12 to 15 years under the Policy on “15 Years of Free Education” which covers young children (3-5 years of age). This policy leads to complete child care with quality.

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