The role of women in rural areas of Thailand in promoting lifelong education

Dr Sumalee Sungsri
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Abstract

The purposes of this study were to

1. seek general information about rural women
2. study rural women’s role in promoting lifelong education to their children and their communities
3. find out what enables rural women to promote lifelong education and what prevents them from doing so
4. identify guidelines for encouraging rural women to better promote lifelong education to their children and their communities.

The study sample comprised 560 rural women aged between 20 and 70 years. The sample was obtained from eight provinces throughout the country, two provinces from each region, using a stratified random sampling technique. Another four groups of women in four communities were also studied in depth. The groups, each consisting of 10 to 15 women, were selected from four different regions of the country. The instruments for collecting the data were a questionnaire for all 560 rural women, an interview format for the four women’s groups and a community survey form for surveying the four communities. The quantitative data from 499 returned and completed questionnaires were analysed by frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation and were compared by t-test, f-test and scheffe test. The qualitative data from interviewing the four women’s groups and from surveying the four communities were analysed by content analysis.
Findings

1. **General information about rural women:** Most rural women in this study were between 31 and 40 years of age. Most of them were agriculturists. They earned their living in agriculture with a monthly income of 2000 to 4000 baht. More than half had finished Grade 4 or Grade 6. Most were married with two to three children and their children still lived with them.

2. **Rural women’s role in promoting lifelong education for their children and their communities:** The study found that most rural women were not familiar with the term ‘lifelong education’. They were familiar with the types of lifelong education. They knew about formal education best and then about non-formal education. Not many of them knew about informal education. When women were asked to evaluate their role in promoting lifelong education as a whole, most of them stated that they promoted lifelong education at a moderate level.

3. **Factors enabling women to promote lifelong education:** Rural woman in the individual category stated knowledge as most important for their children and relatives. They also wanted people in their communities to gain knowledge. They liked education and they believed that it was their duty to support learning for their children and communities.

Women in the women’s groups stated that the factors enabling them to promote lifelong education were a formal group structure with good administration, (which would enable all members to participate) having a sense of belonging to the community, having a good, self-sacrificing leader and receiving support from concerned agencies.

4. **Problems prevented women from promoting lifelong education:** Rural women stated that the main obstacle was that they did not have any information as to where, when, how and by whom each type of education would be offered. Also, they did not have knowledge about lifelong education. They did not know to whom they could promote lifelong education and how they could promote it.
5. *Guideline for encouraging rural women’s role in promoting lifelong education:* Suggestions from women in both individual and group categories included the following:

- Women should be motivated to recognise the importance of lifelong education.
- Women should be encouraged to have direct experience of each type of education, so that they know and understand lifelong education in every aspect.
- They should be taught how to promote lifelong education, and to whom.
- They need to be given self-confidence that they have the ability to promote lifelong education.
- Rural women needs support to form groups that will enable them to
  (i) have more power to run activities
  (ii) follow up on activities
  (iii) ask for advice and support from related agencies
  (iv) help individual women participate in every step of group activities.
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About the author

Dr Sungsri is an Associate Professor in the School of Educational studies at Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University in Nonthaburi, Thailand. The university has about 300,000 students and some 2,000 staff. Dr Sungsri finished a B.Ed (Hons) degree and an MA. in Education at Universities in Thailand and completed her PhD. in Adult/Non-formal Education at Monash University, Australia. Her main responsibilities include providing Bachelors and Masters degree programmes in Adult Education. She also assists the Department of Non-formal Education, Ministry of Education, in organising activities and conducting research projects.

Dr Sungsri joined The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand under a staff exchange project between Thai Universities and foreign Universities, funded by the Ministry of University Affairs, Thailand.

At The Open Polytechnic, she has presented a number of papers on the findings of some of her research projects. The titles of her papers include Distance Education at Sukhotai Thammathirat Open University, Lifelong Education, Women Literacy, Distance Education for Unskilled Youth Workers and Distance Education for Elderly People.

This paper is derived from one of Dr Sungsri’s national research projects, in which she studied lifelong educational practice in six countries (including New Zealand), together with current lifelong education practices in Thailand. She then proposed a strategy for lifelong education in Thailand for the 21st Century to the National Education Commission, to assist them in developing a national lifelong education policy. One of her conclusions was that lifelong education will never be successful without the cooperation of every sector in the country, government, non-government, local agencies, the religious sector, and especially families that include women. The role of rural women in promoting lifelong education was investigated and guidelines were proposed for encouraging rural women to maximise their role. The results of this study were presented at the Asia-Pacific Regional Forum for Lifelong Education, 8–13 September 2001, organised by UNESCO, which was held in Chiang Mai, Thailand. This paper was also published in Thai in the Journal of the Non-formal Education Department.
The Role of Women in Rural Areas of Thailand in Promoting Lifelong Education

Introduction

Village life in Thailand

Most Thai villagers are farmers. Each day, they usually get up very early in the morning, about 4 or 5 a.m. Men gather farming implements and go to their rice field on the backs of their buffaloes. Women prepare breakfast and lunch. After giving their children breakfast and sending them to the village school, the women will bring breakfast and lunch for their family members in the rice field by walking or by bicycle. The villagers usually live as extended families, where grandfather, grandmother, uncles, aunts, and other relatives will live together in the same household. All family members will help each other work in their rice field. Even grandparents, if they are strong enough, go to work. If they are too old, they will stay at home and help with housework or prepare the dinner for family members to come back to from the rice field in the evening. Otherwise, one of the daughters will prepare dinner when they come back from the rice field. Young children who are not old enough to go to school will stay with their grandparents and learn from them skills, traditions and culture.

Every member of the family will come back home around 5.30 or 6 p.m. The women will prepare dinner, while the men and other members of the family do other things, such as lighting fires to protect their cows and buffaloes from mosquitoes, drawing water from the village pond, cleaning their house, and so on. They take a bath at the village pond or at their own latrines using water from the village ponds. Then they make themselves ready for dinner. All family members will gather around on the floor and have dinner together. After dinner, most of them usually sit under their house to talk, and some of their neighbours will join them. Most village houses have only one floor, which is raised high, leaving an open space under the house, where they can do all sorts of activities, such as silk weaving, repairing farm instruments, relaxing, and so on. They usually go to bed around 9 or 9.30 p.m. because they have to get up very early. Their life cycle will be like this most of the time, particularly during the farming season, which lasts about 8 months of the year. They have a few weeks break a year while waiting for their rice to grow and become ready for harvesting.
Villagers actively participate religious activities. Most of them, particularly the elderly people, will give food to monks every morning, making merit. They usually go to make merit at the village temple every monk day, which is twice a month. Moreover, there are a number of religious ceremonies throughout the year, for which most villagers will stop work and enjoy the activities. Most celebrations occur during daytime and in the evening. This is their main recreation. The evening ceremonies are usually held in the grounds of the village temple. They may have a lot of entertainment activities, such as movie shows, Thai classical music and dance, story shows, Thai folksong bands, and so on.

Villagers are very willing to help in the activities of their village temple and in other village activities. They respect the abbot, village headman, village teachers and elderly people in the village. These people will be their advisors for all sorts of issues. Villagers live together in their village as relatives. They address older people as brothers, aunts, uncles, fathers, mothers, grandfathers or grandmothers according to their ages. They will help each other in many activities, such as building houses, growing rice, harvesting rice, or looking after children while the parents are busy. Their neighbours will help them in turn.

**Rural education**

Education is considered to be an instrument that enables people to adjust properly to the rapidly changing social environment. Therefore education is necessary throughout life. The education that people obtain during their initial schooling is not enough to remain useful for their entire lives. It is only a starting point and the basis for further education. The rest of people’s lives is much longer than the school age period. They will be faced with various
problems and more complicated situations for which education is still needed. Education for people beyond school age may take other forms than that of formal school education. It may be in the form of non-formal education or of informal education. However, the types of education (formal, non-formal, and informal) are components of lifelong education. In other words, ‘Lifelong education is the whole picture of education. It is the whole education for human life from birth to death. It helps people to adjust themselves with the present changing world and continuously develops people to their full capacity. It exists in all sources of learning, whether Informal or Non-formal or Formal education.’ (Sunanchai, 1989, p. 9). Therefore, people should receive lifelong education throughout their lives.

There are various learning sources that will enable people to receive education. Education is gained not only in schools or in institutions but also at work, at home and in communities. In rural communities, where people have considerably less chance to receive formal education, they receive most of their education from their family and their community, both directly and indirectly. Families are the first school for all people, and families are a source of learning not only initially but throughout people’s lives.

In Thai society, particularly in rural areas, women play a significant role in imparting knowledge and skills to their children and family members. This is because they are close to them and can spend more time with them. Most of them work at home as housewives, while men work on farms, in rice fields or in other places. Therefore, children from birth will obtain knowledge and skills directly and indirectly from their mothers and their extended families. Children will absorb vocational knowledge and skills, the way of life, tradition and culture, beliefs and attitudes, which they cannot find in any textbook. They will then have the basic grounding to enable them to become good adults.

Women transfer their knowledge and skills not only to their children and to members of their families but also to other children and other people in their communities. As we can see, women participate in a number of community activities.
They are thus well-placed to promote education for their families and communities. Also, as in other countries, they make up about half of the population of the country (National Statistic Office, 1998). So, if we can promote their role appropriately, women will enhance lifelong education in Thailand.
The study

To find out what women do to promote lifelong education and how they can be empowered to promote it to the best of their ability, the author conducted research over the years 2000 and 2001.

Research objectives

The research had four main objectives:

1. to study the general background of Thai rural women
2. to study rural women’s role currently in promoting lifelong education to their children and their communities
3. to identify the factors that enable rural women to promote lifelong education and those that prevent them from doing so
4. to establish guidelines for encouraging rural women to better promote lifelong education.

Research design

This study is quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative data was collected from rural women throughout the country. Then four women’s groups in four provinces were interviewed in depth to obtain qualitative data.

Study samples

Thailand comprises four regions: the northern, the southern, the northeastern and the central regions. There are 76 provinces.

To select the samples for this study, the researcher firstly used random sampling to obtain two provinces from each region. Thus a total of eight provinces were studied. They were Chiangrai and Lampoon from the northern part, Ayuthaya and Nakorn-Pratom from the central part, Mookdaharn and Khonkean from northeastern part and Nakorn-Srithammarat and Trang from the southern part. Then, for each province, the researcher used a stratified random sampling technique to select about 70 women aged from 20 to 70 years with different educational backgrounds and occupations. This made a total sample of 560 women.
For the second round of data-collecting, four women’s groups from four provinces, one from each region, were selected for an in-depth study. Each group comprised 15 to 20 women. The four provinces were Lampang in the northern part of Thailand, Ayuthaya in the central part, Udon-thani in the northeastern part and Phuket in the southern part.

**Instruments for data collecting**

The following were the instruments for this study.

- **A questionnaire for 560 rural women:** The questionnaire contained four parts. Part 1 was composed of questions that would obtain the general background of rural women. The questions in part 2 investigated the current role of rural women in promoting lifelong education to their children, relatives and communities. The questions in part 3 sought factors that enabled rural women to promote lifelong education to their children and their communities or prevented them from doing so. The questions in part 4 were designed to identify guidelines to enable rural women to maximise their role in promoting lifelong education.

- **An interview format for four women’s groups:** The questions in the interview format were designed to identify the current role of women’s groups in promoting lifelong education to their communities, factors that enable women’s groups to promote lifelong education, and guidelines to enable rural women to maximise their role in promoting lifelong education.

- **A community survey form:** This form was used to gather general information about each of the four communities of the women’s groups, such as the educational institutions available, the non-formal and the informal education activities available, the educational background of people in those communities, and the interest in education of people in those communities.

**Data collection and data analysis**

The researcher sought the help of the administrators of the provincial and the district non-formal education centres in each sample province in order to collect all data. Each non-formal education centre provided assistance in collecting data from the 560 women. The researcher gave questionnaires to those of the 560 women who could read and write well. Those who could not read and write well were interviewed by the researcher.
Focus group interviews were used for the women’s groups. For the communities, the researcher surveyed each community every day during the period of data collection.

Of the quantitative data from the 560 women, 499 questionnaires were completed for analysis. They were analysed for frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation and compared by t-test, f-test and Scheffé test. The qualitative data gathered from interviewing four women’s groups and from surveying four communities were analysed by content analysis.

**Main findings**

**General background of rural women**

The rural women in this study came from eight provinces throughout the country: Khonkean and Mookdaharn from the northeastern part, Chiengrai and Lampoon from the northern part, Nakorn Pratam and Ayudhaya from the central part, and Nakornsrithammarat and Trang from the southern part. Most of the women were between 31 and 40 years of age and were agriculturists, earning their living in agriculture, with monthly incomes of 2000 to 4000 baht. More than half had finished Grade 4 or Grade 6. Most were married, with two to three children still living with them.
Rural women’s role in promoting lifelong education to their children and their communities

The study found that most rural women were not familiar with the term lifelong education. They were familiar with the components of lifelong education: formal, non-formal and informal education. They knew formal education best and then some activities of non-formal education. Not many of them knew informal education. After the researcher explained and introduced some examples, they understood and realised that they had been involved with this type of education. When women were asked to evaluate the extent to which they promoted lifelong education as a whole, most stated that they promoted it at a moderate level.

The roles of women in promoting each type of education were as follows.

Most women stated that they had promoted formal education quite a lot, especially to their own children. They gave financial and material support and encouraged their children to attain the highest educational level possible. They worked very hard in order to have money for their children’s education. As for other children in their communities, women regarded these children as their own or as their nieces and nephews. They offered suggestions and moral support to help them to continue their study. The women’s groups promoted formal education for the community by volunteering to cook lunch for children, thus participating in the school lunch programme. They also played a part in all school activities.

Most rural women promoted non-formal education by supporting their own children who did not have a chance to continue basic education in the formal school system to do so in the non-formal education system at different levels (equal to education grades 4, 6, and 12 of formal education). They also encouraged them to attend vocational training courses, such as mechanics, air-conditioning repairing, dress-making, flower-making, agriculture, and so on. Together with their neighbours, they themselves sometimes participated in vocational training programmes or attended lectures by resource persons on related topics such as health and hygiene, agriculture, local politics, and so on. Women’s groups had a better chance to promote non-formal education to their communities than individual women. They did this by co-ordinating with related agencies to organise basic education programmes and vocational training courses in their communities, encouraging their neighbours to attend those courses, setting up vocational groups, finding markets for vocational products, and inviting the appropriate agencies to speak on topics related to their lives, such as health, nutrition, law, and so on. Women’s groups also looked after the community early childhood centres and organised activities for elderly people.
Most women promoted *informal education* individually by encouraging their children, their relatives and their neighbours to listen to and/or watch useful news, radio and television programmes, and community news towers. They also brought books and printed materials home. They encouraged their children, relatives and neighbours to read at the village reading centres and local libraries. They took their children to places where they would learn, such as historical places, museums, botanical gardens, temples, parks, zoos, and so on. They promoted local tradition and culture to the young. Women’s groups performed a better promotional role by being committee members of village reading centres, village news towers and community learning centres. As committee members of community learning centres they took turns to look after the place and to ask for the donation of books to put in those centres. They encouraged their neighbours to exchange ideas and experiences through organised meetings or discussion groups called the ‘Village Floor’. They also surveyed relevant information and brought it to their communities.
Comparison of the level of promotion of lifelong education by rural women according to their age, income, region, educational background and number of children

Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>F-ratio</th>
<th>F-Prob</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20–30</td>
<td>2.3264</td>
<td>0.3840</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31–40</td>
<td>2.2852</td>
<td>0.2978</td>
<td>4.1505**</td>
<td>0.0094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41–50</td>
<td>2.3873</td>
<td>0.2323</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 and over</td>
<td>1.9866</td>
<td>0.4530</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** α = 0.01

Figure 1 Comparison by age of rural women’s level of promotion of lifelong education

It was found that women promoted lifelong education to their children and communities to a degree that varied according to their age, the statistically significant level being 0.01.

According to the Scheffé test, women aged between 20 and 30, 31 and 40, and 41 and 50 had promoted lifelong education to their children and their communities to a higher degree than those over 51 years of age.

In a comparison of the level of promotion of lifelong education by different age groups of rural women according to the type of education, the result was as follows:

- Women aged between 31 and 40 and between 41 and 50 promoted *formal education* to their children and their communities more than those aged between 20–30 at a statistically significant level of 0.01.

- Rural women aged between 41 and 50, 31 and 40 and 20 and 30 had promoted *non-formal education* to their children and their communities more than those aged 51 and over at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

- There was no significant difference among women in different age groups in promoting *informal education* to their children and their communities.
### Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>( \bar{X} )</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>F-ratio</th>
<th>F-Prob</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No income</td>
<td>2.0357</td>
<td>0.3204</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower than 2000 baht</td>
<td>2.2388</td>
<td>0.4341</td>
<td>1.0874</td>
<td>0.3608</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000–4000 baht</td>
<td>2.2971</td>
<td>0.3207</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher than 4000 baht</td>
<td>2.2689</td>
<td>0.3847</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2** Comparison of rural women’s level of promotion of lifelong education by income

The study showed that there was no significant difference among rural women with different incomes in promoting lifelong education to their children and their communities.

In a comparison of the level of promotion of lifelong education according to each type of education by rural women with different incomes, it was also found that there was no significant difference in level of promotion.

### Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>( \bar{X} )</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>F-ratio</th>
<th>F-Prob</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northeastern</td>
<td>2.3626</td>
<td>0.2644</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>2.2854</td>
<td>0.3147</td>
<td>8.8076**</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td>2.4149</td>
<td>0.2534</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>1.9083</td>
<td>0.4099</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( \alpha = 0.01 \)

**Figure 3** Comparison of rural women’s level of promotion of lifelong education by region

The study showed that there was a statistically significant difference of 0.01 in the level of promotion of lifelong education among rural women living in different regions.

According to the Scheffé test, women who lived in the northern, northeastern and southern parts of the country had promoted lifelong education more than those in the central part.
In a comparison of the level of promotion of lifelong education according to each type of education among rural women in different regions, the result was as follows.

- Rural women in the northern and northeastern parts had promoted *formal education* to their children and their communities more than those in the central part, at a statistically significant level of 0.01.

- Rural women in the northern, northeastern and southern parts had promoted *non-formal education* to their children and communities more than those in the central parts at a statistically significant level of 0.01.

- The result for *informal education* was the same as it was for non-formal education.

**Educational background**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>$\bar{X}$</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>F-ratio</th>
<th>F-Prob</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not finished primary sch.</td>
<td>1.9021</td>
<td>0.4470</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>2.3010</td>
<td>0.3093</td>
<td>6.8783**</td>
<td>0.0019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education &amp; higher</td>
<td>2.3403</td>
<td>0.2963</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4** Comparison of rural women’s level of promotion of lifelong education by educational background

The study showed that there was a statistically significant level of difference 0.01 in the promotion of lifelong education among women of different educational backgrounds.

According to the Scheffé test, rural women who finished primary and secondary school had promoted lifelong education more than those who did not finish primary school, and women who finished secondary school had promoted lifelong education more than those who finished primary school.
When the comparison of levels of promotion of lifelong education included types of education, the results were as follows:

- Rural women who finished primary education and those who finished secondary education had promoted formal education and non-formal education to their children and their communities more than those who did not finish primary education, at a statistically significant level of 0.01.

- There was no significant difference in the level of promotion of informal education among rural women with different educational backgrounds.

**Number of children**

The study showed that there was no significant difference in the level of promotion of lifelong education as a whole among women according to the number of children they had.

When the comparison of levels of promotion of lifelong education included types of education, it was found that there was no significant difference in the level of promotion of formal education or non-formal education among women with different numbers of children. However, it was found that rural women with up to three children had promoted informal education to their own children and their communities more than those with four children and over, at a statistically significant level of 0.05.

**Factors enabling women to promote lifelong education**

Rural women identified a number of factors that encouraged them to promote lifelong education. The most important factor was that they wanted their children and relatives to have the chance to obtain knowledge in order to be able to develop themselves. One woman said, ‘I would like my children to have as much higher education as they can, because it will help them to get a good job. Then they will not have to work as hard for a low income like us.’

Secondly, they recognised the advantages of education, they wanted people in their community to obtain knowledge, they liked education, and they believed that it was their duty to support learning for their children and communities.

Women in women’s groups stated that a number of factors enabled them to promote lifelong education. A formal group structure with good administration would provide the opportunity for all members to participate. They said that working in a women’s group gave women more power than they would have
as individuals to ask for assistance from concerned agencies and to introduce useful activities into their communities. A sense of belonging in the community is another factor that motivated them to develop their own community. One of them said, ‘We were born here, we grew up here, we live here, so we would like to see our community be developed. If I can contribute or do anything for our community, I am more than happy to do it’. Other factors were having a good and self-sacrificing leader and receiving support from concerned agencies. They said the group’s leader is very important. Whether or not the activities of the women’s group are continued very much depends on the group leader. By devoting her time to the activity and having the confidence to go ahead, the group leader will motivate the group members to follow, because most women regard their leader as an example. The women’s group said that support from concerned agencies was very necessary too. Because most of the women have little education, live in remote areas and do not know much about education activities, suggestions from concerned agencies would be very useful for them to follow. Concerned agencies could help them with the first step. Then they could carry on themselves.

**Problems preventing women from promoting lifelong education**

Rural women stated that the main obstacle was that they did not have any information as to where, when, how, and by whom each type of education would be offered. They also said that they did not have knowledge about lifelong education: they did not know what lifelong education meant, that it is a composite of formal, non-formal and informal education. Some did not know what each type of education meant and how each related to them. They did not know to whom they could promote lifelong education and how to promote it. They lacked confidence and felt that if they had a poor educational background, could they promote education to other people?
Guidelines for encouraging the role of rural women in promoting lifelong education

Rural women suggested a number of guidelines for empowering rural women to exercise their full capabilities to promote lifelong education in their communities:

1. Women should be motivated to recognise the importance of lifelong education. Since most rural women are far away from any kind of educational activity and their daily lives do not involve any kind of education, they may not know much about the advantages of lifelong education (recommended most).
2. Women should be supported to participate in each type of education in order to receive direct experience of each. In this way, they will understand each type of education better and accept that they have the capability to promote lifelong education.

3. Updated information should be sent to women about educational activities available in their own area or nearby.

4. Women should be taught how to promote lifelong education and to whom. Most of the women have no idea how they can promote lifelong education to others. They stated that this activity was the key to promotion of lifelong education.

Apart from suggestions that were similar to those of their counterparts in the individual category, women in women’s groups provided the following suggestions:

1. Provide knowledge and understanding of lifelong education among rural women in order to help them become confident that they have the ability to promote lifelong education. Even women in a group may not have any ideas about how to promote lifelong education. They would like concerned agencies to advise or train them first.

2. Encourage and support rural women to form women’s groups, which will enable women to pool their ideas and will give them more power to run activities. As a group, they have more power to work, co-ordinate, negotiate, ask for assistance from concerned agencies and introduce activities into their communities.

3. Follow up the activities organised. Women said that this could help them learn whether or not they had gone in the right direction. If not, they could adjust before it was too late. They would like personnel of the concerned agencies to follow up on their work. Since they do not know much about education, advice at every step, particularly at the beginning, is very necessary.

4. Ask for advice and support from related agencies.

5. Let rural women participate in the activities of the women’s groups at every step.
Suggestions from the study

Useful recommendations can be drawn from the findings of the study. The following were the main recommendations made to related agencies to support women to have a greater role in promoting lifelong education.

1. Related agencies should develop knowledge and understanding about lifelong education among rural women. They should understand the concepts, principles and activities of lifelong education as a whole and of each type of education. They should know and understand what each type of education activity looks like. They should realise that they are already involved in some types of education.

2. Related agencies should provide knowledge and suggestions to rural women about how and where to promote lifelong education and to whom to promote it. They should provide real examples and share in the process of promoting lifelong education.

3. Rural women need self-confidence and related agencies should help them develop it. Most rural women lack self-confidence because they have had little education and have been out of the formal school system for a long time. They are afraid that they do not have the ability to promote education to anybody.

4. Related agencies should encourage women to get together to form women’s groups. Women’s groups with a good administrative structure, good working systems and good leadership will help women to develop more confidence, more ideas, and more power and to participate more in the promotion of lifelong education.

5. Rural women should be encouraged to participate in community activities of various kinds. The more they participate, the greater the knowledge, understanding and confidence they will gain. Then they can encourage other people to participate and promote lifelong education to others.

6. Related agencies should work with people in each community to construct and develop various types of community learning centre. Community learning centres will support women’s role in promoting lifelong education and help to create a learning society because women can assist in administering and organising some activities. Moreover, if they have the knowledge, understanding and strategies to promote lifelong education, they will be even more able to perform their role in promoting lifelong education to their society.
Conclusion

This study has showed that women in rural Thai societies have a significant role in imparting knowledge and skills to their children and their communities. They can certainly help in promoting lifelong education. At present they have already promoted some types of education, but they are not yet familiar with the term lifelong education. If they know and understand more about lifelong education and their roles, they will be able to promote it to their children and their communities.

The researcher believes that the result of this study could be useful to all concerned agencies providing formal, non-formal or informal education. Such data could be used as a basis for planning activities that help women to effectively manage their role in promoting lifelong education to all.

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