



Thailand's administration and policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Polwasit Lhakard^{1,*}

¹International Doctoral Program in Asia Pacific Studies, Major in Public Governance, Faculty of Social Sciences, National Chengchi University, Taiwan

Abstract

Public administration is enacted as a legal status. It is constitutional responsibility as specified in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand that the government has to perform its duties necessary for the highest levels of efficiency and effectiveness of society. This will ensure that the rights of people to receive benefits from the state truly happen. Public sector management is considered an important part of a relief mission, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, regulatory measures on policies and government agencies as tools have been deployed. This research article aims to study the public sector's policies and guidelines during the outbreak of COVID-19 by finding important research in the political, social, and economic structure of the government's adaptation. Qualitative Research with research synthesis on documents from relevant agencies, textbooks, academic documents, research papers, theses, the Internet, and online databases was conducted. The research synthesis adheres to the documents which are based on the truth and reliability. As for content analysis, a synthetic approach to research with a descriptive method on an economic system, political system, and social system was used. This can serve as a lesson to the government in terms of formulating policies and strategies to handle the pandemic in the future.

Keywords: administration, public sector management, policies, COVID-19, Thailand

Article history: Received 22 November 2021, Revised 1 June 2022, Accepted 6 June 2022

1. Introduction

Today, the world is facing the coronavirus disease pandemic (COVID-19). Thailand is another country that is currently facing a serious outbreak of this virus [1]. Even though now there are vaccines to limit the infectious disease outbreak, they still cannot put an end to this. In Thailand, there is still a new wave of outbreaks [2], causing more deaths every day. According to this pandemic, the role of government, which is the sector with the most power and resources, must be accelerated. The primary functions of government are stipulated in the Constitution. Under Section 5 of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2560 (2017), it specifies the primary functions of the government and its duty to make the rights of the people "tangible". The primary functions of government are important to its implementation for the benefits, security, and peace of the nation. The government must ensure that laws are strictly followed and enforced. Next, the government is responsible for making the rights of the people "tangible". The government must ensure that all children in the country receive education through collaboration between the public and private sectors. The government must operate, regulate, promote and support such educational management to be of high quality and meet international standards, as well as to continuously develop health services to be of higher quality and higher standards. The government must provide basic utilities needed for people's living according to the principles of sustainable development through basic structures or networks of basic public utilities necessary for their livelihood or security [3]. Regarding the

legal provision summarized above, it can be seen that the government's function is a compulsory condition that requires the government to perform its duties stipulated in the Constitution as a matter of importance, ensuring the rights of the people to benefit from the government occur [4].

1.1 Research objective

To study guidelines of Thailand's public sector management and policies in response to the situation of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

1.2 Research methods

The researcher used a qualitative research process with the document research method; synthesizing information from documents by studying and analyzing information from documents or documentary research to review concepts, theories, and related literature including Thailand's public sector management and policies through content analysis on the issues of the economic system, political system, and social system. For content scope, the study identifies the scope of Thailand's administration and policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the political, social, and economic structure of the government's adaptation.

1.3 Research scope

Documentary research and data synthesis related to guidelines for improving public sector management quality in the situation of COVID-19 pandemic. Document information, including research documents related to the planning and design of Thailand's management policy towards trade competition

*Corresponding author; email: polwasithakard@gmail.com

through an internet website, electronic books, newspapers, journal articles, and research articles.

1.4 Synthesis

By using a descriptive method, in this study, the researcher used the content analysis method and thematic analysis to familiarize with the initialization information by searching for substantial and re-examination by identifying and naming themes to formulate a policy proposal.

2. Literature Review

In this research study, it was found that the Thai government uses integrated work and networked government, which is a form of New Public Governance, allowing all sectors to participate in the operation of public services and public activities appropriately [5]. This includes policy networks that need to be consistently integrated with political, social, and economic systems by supporting development from various partners [6]. Especially the people, communities, and the private sector shall take part in providing quality public services and activities. The role of other sectors in society is strengthened and people are provided with easy access to public services, access the information on processes, and their role of participation in provisions of public services. The goals to focus on communication, and listening to people's opinions are driven and databases are linked for all sectors to participate appropriately [7] to create an environment for participation. Apart from that, promotion, monitoring, and evaluation are carried out continuously with concrete actions and building people's network to improve public sector management quality for public services. Witthayapipopsakul et al. [8] state that the policies to prevent coronavirus disease 2019 have been distributed to local government organizations. As a result of the government's establishment of the Center for COVID-19 Situation Administration and the policies passed through ministries, departments, and provinces, each province can issue various orders according to the situation of that province. Working together, the government has to provide public services and public activities for benefit of the people by the principles of sustainable development, and also to promote and support educational management for the people. This shall be by the laws of provision of public services and public activities which are appropriate and managed most efficiently and effectively.

A collaborative policy network is a phase of initiating a network of commitments towards a common goal, building a shared vision and creating mutual benefits, and developing collaboration strategies. These may be done by exchanging knowledge and this process may be called a learning group, resulting in that all parties will want to participate in a network. The government must also create a shared vision and create mutual benefits as a common point of interest that creates a common perspective on reasons for joining and the benefits that will be gained from joining the network. A shared point or issue of interest may be concrete or abstract. It comes from people's specific needs or problems in the community, such as an economic crisis during the coronavirus disease pandemic that everyone in a community can feel and everyone wants to

solve this problem [9].

This includes behavioral science of the government and people in adapting to COVID, whether it is a temporary adaptive behavior such as going out to meet and socialize with friends or family, going to a large opened-space, or a large closed space, or going to places where there are more than 20 people and traveling by public transport. This behavior is characterized as a short-term adaptation from the pre-pandemic period to during the pandemic period to protect themselves from contracting the coronavirus disease. However, after that, the behavior will begin to return to normality. This means that how often this behavior is performed is not different between the pre-pandemic period and the present period. New normal behaviors, such as avoiding touching eyes, nose, or mouth if they have not yet washed their hands thoroughly, trying to stay away from people who cough or sneeze, wearing a mask every time before leaving their homes or being in a public place, and washing hands with soap or alcohol gel before and after touching things, are some things that the government must consider in strategy and policy development for future management [10].

From the literature review on the adjustment of the government sector that may be ideas to illustrate the connection in terms of politics, society, and economy that can be used to formulate guidelines for public administration as follows: urbanization, participatory policymaking, and networking, human resources development planning, workforce and employment, inequality, civic participation, public finance, and justice. All of the above are linked to the economic sector and global governance, including geopolitics, immigration, international security, etc., which is an important reason that the government has to adapt fluently and necessarily now and in the future.

3. Research Results

3.1 Political system

the beginning of the outbreak, the public sector was rapidly making the public understand the coronavirus disease and its situation by producing media related to COVID-19 to educate people about this virus both online and in many places, as well as what to do when people need to go out in public to prevent themselves and people around them from getting the virus. The online media to educate people about COVID-19 and prevention methods was carried out. For example, what people should do when socializing or going out in public places, how to wear a mask and wash hands correctly, as well as observing themselves and anyone under their care regarding any symptoms that occur. Whether they are in a risk group or not, they should know the social distancing of at least 1 meter from each other for safety, how to take care of themselves, and also how to treat themselves when being infected with the COVID-19 virus. The Ministry of Public Health [11] has taken actions and measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, such as issuing the declaration of an emergency in all areas of the Kingdom of Thailand by the Emergency Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situations or Emergency Decree by General Prayut Chan-ocha, the Prime Minister on March 25, 2020. This Emergency Decree on Public Administration in Emergency Situations or Emergency Decree has been enacted from March 26, 2020,

onwards to control the spread of the coronavirus disease or COVID-19. In the beginning, people were prohibited from leaving homes throughout the Kingdom between 10 p.m. and 4 a.m., prohibiting or restricting certain operations or activities in accordance with the Emergency Decree and other relevant laws. The curfew is adjusted from 10 p.m. - 4 a.m. to 11 p.m. - 4 a.m. of the following day, reduced by 1 hour. Meanwhile, department stores have to adjust the opening-closing hours to be 10 a.m. - 8 p.m. On May 17, 2020, shopping malls were fully opened, except for an amusement park and various rides. There are also constant regulation controls of entry and exit of the malls; cleaning, checking temperature before entering and using services and signing in and out before entering the premises at both department stores and various shops through the registration system called, "Thai Chana" (www.thaichana.com) with QR code scanning in various places [12].

3.2 Social system

The government tries to change the social behavior of people. For example, registering on Thai Chana's website creates a norm for the society for the government to systematically analyze data of service users in the use of public spaces. This system was designed by the Ministry of Public Health [13]. It can be accessed through the website, www.thaichana.com, or scan QR codes provided by department stores or shops by scanning and registering personal information. Then the system will store the information of service users and after using services, they have to scan QR code to check out from various stores. The system also has a service evaluation form for cleanliness and prevention of coronavirus disease in department stores or shops where their service is being used. In addition, there are preventive measures in various areas such as using and providing public services, including services provided by the public sector. The Department of Land Transport has created a policy of "A few little adjustments to defeat COVID-19" for taking public transport to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19. The measures issued by the public sector and responses to those measures, either by the public sector or the private sector, are aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19. People can use services in many places safely which will prevent further spread of the virus with periodic control and easing of lockdown measures in accordance with the government controls. According to the first phase of easing lockdown measures, the social distancing of 1 meter between shops and people, wearing a mask, and washing hands with alcohol gel are carried out. Restaurants must be well ventilated. As for the second phase, more places are allowed to be opened such as shopping malls but are permitted to open until 8:00 p.m. Fitness centers, gymnasiums, swimming pools, libraries, and restaurants are also allowed to be opened. Filming locations are limited to 50 people. Then the third phase, the time of banning people from leaving homes is adjusted to 11:00 p.m. - 3:00 a.m. and shopping malls can be opened until 9:00 p.m. Cinemas, theaters, entertainment theaters, and zoos or animal venues can be opened. Later, the fourth phase is conducted. Restaurants are permitted to be opened for drinking alcohol on their premise. Organizing a concert, a music event, tutorial schools, government agencies, schools, educational institutions, meetings, seminars, and other

activities under government controls are allowed. Then, as for the fifth phase of easing lockdown measures, opening 24 hours is carried out. This includes opening schools, both public and private schools. Department stores can be opened until 10:00 p.m. These will help people return to their normality in a new normal way of life [14].

3.3 Economic system

The government issued control measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 in Thailand as the country has been affected in many aspects. The Prime Minister sees the importance of monitoring and solving the problems that arose from these coronavirus infections. Statements through the television pool of Thailand were done and an open letter was sent to the top 20 Thai billionaires asking them to cooperate with the government in solving the COVID-19 problem. Three issues of Emergency Decrees to raise loans to remedy and restore economy as affected by the COVID-19 pandemic were published, totaling 1.9 trillion baht. On April 21, the Social Security Office revealed that more than 1.2 million insured persons with social security have applied for compensation and confirmed that the Office has more than 160,000 million baht for unemployment cases. This does not affect its stability. The government has revealed that the cost of medical care for COVID-19 patients is approximately 1 million baht per person [15] and the Ministry of Finance has planned that people will receive 5,000 baht of compensation from the government through the website for all 11 million people [16]. The government has also organized a package known as "We Travel Together" from the coronavirus outbreak in Thailand. People can register through the website. The duration of the package is 4 months. The original package, called "We Travel Together", was changed its name to "Let's travel" and "Happiness-sharing trips" in one package. According to the package, the government subsidies for accommodation at 40% of room rate per room per night (up to 3,000 baht per room per night) and airfare. Eligible people will be entitled to a refund of their air ticket prices. The government will pay them back 40% of ticket prices through the "Paotang" application but limited to no more than 2 air tickets with 1,000 baht per seat, and 1 room booking. This campaign also included rental cars and non-public transport. The above mentioned is a stimulus measure to boost the domestic economy in all sectors of the country [17].

4. Research Discussion

The study results of Thailand's public sector management and policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are discussed as follows:

4.1 Political system

The government has tried to obtain and provide vaccines to people despite a delay and no variety of vaccines at the beginning. In terms of administrative mechanisms, committees have been set up along with integrated and networked management. The committees from various agencies will be responsible for the procurement of the COVID-19 vaccines [18]. There is a working group of experts to determine a vaccination plan for

the COVID-19 in order to provide a type of vaccine suitable for use and set the target group for access to vaccines. In addition, preparing operations, supervising, monitoring, and solving problems are integrated and carried out appropriately. There is also a collaboration with the education sector in developing vaccines within the country. During the first period of the pandemic, the Ministry of Public Health has placed importance on safety and the benefits that will be obtained by the people. Therefore, all COVID-19 vaccines introduced to the country must be reviewed and accepted by academic committees/subcommittees, the Subcommittee on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Vaccination Program Administration, and several working groups and this caused some delays. As for financial management, the National Strategy has been transformed into concrete actions focusing on goal achievement. There is fiscal management at the macro level based on efficiency and transparency, as well as the integration of systematic monitoring and following up on economic, monetary, and fiscal stability. An annual expenditure budget is prepared and monetary and fiscal policies are put together to implement fiscal policies to help people and take care of economic sectors affected by the COVID-19 outbreak urgently. Loan spending has been followed up. Emergency Decree empowers the Ministry of Finance to borrow money to restore the economy and society affected. The government has issued measures to reduce the cost of living, and a plan to speed up the disbursement of new compensation payments to all affected groups such as informal workers, self-employed persons, farmers, eligible insured persons with social security, etc. Based on the ideas of Schedler and Proeller [19] to be in line with the integrated development after COVID-19, it will be the political sector that has shifted from thinking and acting in a fragmented way to thinking and acting holistically. It is a development that requires collaboration to be established by the integration of issues such as the economy and health together with the local government, etc. In addition, the administration of the public sector in service or dealing with public problems should be joint management (co-governance), Apart from jointly organizing, it is necessary to take responsibility and allow more sectors to participate.

4.2 Social system

The government wants to change people's way of life to facilitate public health services as a mainstay's integration of health services, policies, and activities in multisectoral coordination. They reinforce capacity building in the people's sector, creation, and manpower development to improve the quality of life of people in the 5 areas, namely rural areas, cities and urbanization, a half city half rural areas, special economic zone, and other special areas. Regarding the COVID-19 situation in Thailand, the problem has been solved by using the government's measures, asking the public for cooperation, the practice of medical and public health officials as well as village health volunteers (VHV) with primary health care system that supports such idea which is consistent with the concept of Te-jativaddhana, Suriyawongpaisal, Kasemsup, and Suksaroj [20]. Since the end of 2019, coronavirus infections have affected the social quality and quality of life for a large number of people and caused various problems including public health problems,

economic problems, and mental health problems. In addition, many have seen an increased number of social issues, especially in socially vulnerable groups or even those who are infected with COVID-19. Therefore, improving people's social quality of life and preventing the spread of COVID-19 is important. Policies have been developed for people's way of life, such as providing assistance according to their problems and organizing a team of officers to the areas to prevent the spread of the pandemic. Aid measures including necessary goods to alleviate urgent needs, allowance but not cash handouts, creating proactive measures to monitor and prevent high-risk groups, measures for monitoring, preventing, and controlling the disease, improving quality of work-life during the pandemic are carried out, and the most important part is about new normal behavior or new life standards after the COVID-19. The government needs to draw people and communities to participate in community-based disease surveillance.

4.3 Economic system

The government needs to quickly restore the economy by issuing policies to revive and stimulate the economy. The government has implemented various important measures to aid and provide remedies to alleviate the economic impacts on the people and businesses. Under the policy measures to control and alleviate the impacts of COVID-19 on the Thai economy, financial measures of low-interest loans, and debt restructuring are carried out. As for fiscal measures, they include an increase in the tax-deductible limits, tax deferrals, and funds transfer to compensate income to those affected by offering discounts on electricity and water bills, and lowering the rate of contributions to social security funds for employers and employees to alleviate the impacts on the people. The Bank of Thailand (2021) mentioned that the public sector should have the measures desired to solve the issues, and also quickly implement front-loaded measures when the economy was affected to prevent negative impacts reflecting on the economy and to reduce long-term cost-scarring effects which will increase and are difficult to address if not taken care of promptly. For example, laid-off workers may take a long time to reenter the labor market. As to fiscal measures, the government should expedite various relief measures to support the economy, especially the approval of projects under the Emergency Decree authorizing the Ministry of Finance to raise loans to solve problems, to remedy and restore the economy which will be due to expire. As for finance and credit measures, debt reductions are implemented for affected businesses and financial liquidity should be given through existing schemes for the next phase. The public sector should focus on support measures to restore the economy by accelerating disbursement to maintain employment or to reshape business models to be in line with the new context after COVID-19. It complies with the guidelines of the Office of the Commissioner [21]. In the development and formulation of Thai public policy, big data should be used to make forward-looking decisions that may be foresight analysis of the country's structural issues, such as the problem of inequality and poverty is taken seriously. Through rapid communication of information and the presence of central government agencies, both public and private, share information on an epidemic, illnesses,

treatment, and loss to lead to well-being.

5. Conclusion

All of the above information explains the role of government in managing three systems-political, social, and economic systems-and how the government deals with the COVID-19 pandemic through measures and government agencies. Here only the countermeasures related to government agencies are addressed. It was found that the government's countermeasures given to relevant agencies for implementation are constitutional state duties that fully meet the needs of the people and help those affected by the COVID-19. However, there are still some areas that need to be driven, especially economic measures. There is also a clear controversy among many packages and schemes that the government has attempted to address but not yet meet the objectives of the state's role in alleviating hardships of people in times of crisis. Nonetheless, with all of this being said, the government's role in managing the COVID-19, although acting by constitutional status, has been heavily criticized for handling the crisis in many areas. The government still tries to do its best with cooperation, integration, and networking of all sectors to help patients and those affected.

6. Recommendations for Future Research

1. Comparison between Thailand's and foreign countries' models for improving public sector management quality
2. Comparison between the policies of the public sector before and after the COVID-19 pandemic

References

- [1] P. Okada, et al., Early transmission patterns of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in travelers from Wuhan to Thailand, January 2020, *Euro-surveillance*, 25(8) (2020) 2000097.
- [2] Ministry of Public Health, Guidelines for community-building happiness by the sub-district quality of life management mechanism, a new way of life, safe from Covid 19, Northeastern region, the fiscal year 2021, Thailand, Bangkok: Ministry of Public Health, 2021.
- [3] Community-Public Health Professional Act, <https://www.ilaw.or.th/node/1453> (accessed September 22, 2021).
- [4] A. J. He, Y. Shi, H. Liu, Crisis governance, Chinese style: Distinctive features of China's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, *Policy Design and Practice* 3(3) (2020) 242-258.
- [5] C. McLoughlin, Factors affecting state-non-governmental organization relations in service provision: Key themes from the literature, *Public Administration and Development*, 31(4) (2011) 240-251.
- [6] G. Lotta, E. Marques, E., How social networks affect policy implementation: An analysis of street-level bureaucrats' performance regarding a health policy, *Social Policy and Administration* 54(3) (2020) 345-360.
- [7] A. Zarychta, T. Grillos, K. P. Andersson, Public sector governance reform and the motivation of street-level bureaucrats in developing countries, *Public Administration Review* 80(1) (2019) 75-91.
- [8] W. Witthayapipopsakul, A. Kulthanmanusorn, V. Vongmongkol, S. Viriyathorn, Y. Wanwong, V. Tancharoensathien, Achieving the targets for universal health coverage: How is Thailand monitoring progress?, *WHO Southeast-Asia Journal of Public Health* 8(1) (2019) 12-20.
- [9] S. R. Smith, Street-level bureaucracy and public policy, *Handbook of public administration* (2003) 354-365.
- [10] S. Balsari, C. Buckee, T. Khanna, Which Covid-19 Data Can You Trust?, <https://bit.ly/3dA1IDG> (accessed September 5, 2020).
- [11] COVID Situation Report, Available online in August 25, 2021, Available from: <https://covid19.ddc.moph.go.th/th>
- [12] T. Thosawat, Development of people's social quality of life and prevention of the epidemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), *Maha Chulalongkorn Rajavidyalaya University Journal* (7)9 (2020) 40-55.
- [13] Department of Disease Control, Guidelines for COVID-19 Vaccination Service in the Epidemic Situation Year 2021 in Thailand, Bangkok: Department of Disease Control, 2021.
- [14] S. Mathuros, Online education management in the era of NEW NORMAL COVID-19, *Journal of Panyapiwat Institute of Management* 15 (40) (2021) 33-42.
- [15] Private hospitals explain the cost of treatment for COVID-19: NHSO opens a list of free government payments. <https://www.prachachat.net/marketing/news-664963> (accessed September 22, 2021).
- [16] Board screening loan spending, Economic and social recovery plan from the impact of the Covid-19 virus, Bangkok: Loan Expenditure Screening Committee, 2020.
- [17] Office of the Commissioner, Economic and social rehabilitation plan from the impact of the Covid-19 virus, Thailand, Bangkok: Office of the Commission, 2020.
- [18] R. Forman, S. Shah, P. Jeurissen, M. Jit, E. Mossialos, COVID-19 vaccine challenges: What have we learned so far and what remains to be done? *Health Policy* 125(5) (2021) 553-567.
- [19] K. Schedler, I. Proeller, The new public management: A perspective from mainland Europe, In *New Public Management*: Routledge, 2005.
- [20] P. Tejativaddhana, W. Suriyawongpaisal, V. Kasemsup, T. Suksaroj, The roles of village health volunteers: COVID-19 prevention and control in Thailand, *Asia Pacific Journal of Health Management* 15(3) (2020) 18-22.
- [21] Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, Master Plan under the National Strategy Issue 20, Thailand, Bangkok: Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2021.