

The Challenges of Creating and Maintaining Higher Education Quality under Conditions of Rapid Economic Development in Thailand*

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I. Overview on Facts and Figures on Higher Education in Thailand in 2006

1. Number of population	= 65 millions
2. Per capita income	= US\$ 3,000
3. Labor Forces	= 33.2 millions
4. Education system	

Level	Duration (years)	Ages
Degree		
-Master & Doctoral	3-5	-
-Bachelor	4-6	18-21 yrs. and above
-Diploma	2	

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Level	Duration (years)	Ages
Vocational Education		
High School	3	15-17
Lower Secondary Education	3	12-14
Primary Education	6	6-11
Kindergarten	3	3-5
5. Number of Students		

Completed Grade 12 (High School)	Vocational Education	Universities
Total = 400,000	380,000	1,800,000
Graduate = 400,000	Certificate = 60,000	Bachelor = 320,000
	Diploma = 42,000	Master = 60,000
		Doctoral = 1,200

6. Number of Universities

6.1 Public University	78
6.2 Private University/College	70
6.3 Community College	18
Total	166

7. Main Exports and Imports

7.1 Exports

- Auto Parts
- Electronics and Electrical Equipments
- Rice & Agricultural Products
- Garments

7.2 Imports

- Oil & Gas
- Steel & Chemical Materials
- Heavy Equipments

8. Main Impacts on Higher Education

- 8.1 Population growth and greater demand for Science & Technology program of study
- 8.2 Quality of education at basic education level
- 8.3 Advanced Technology
- 8.4 Globalization
 - Free Trade
 - ICT
 - Environmental and climate change
 - Employment
- 8.5 Life Long Learning and Learning Society

II. The impact of the changing world on Thai higher education.

Thai higher education has to adapt itself more enthusiastically with the mainstream of globalisation with an ultimate goal of maintaining of our national identity and ethnic harmony as well as to keep up with the global trend of liberal democracy and beefing up of our security measures against terrorism. It has been very heavy burdens for Thai higher education institutions to sail along the changes with the world, particularly in the past years. Cultural tolerance among different ethnic communities becomes an immediate issue to be addressed which will involve higher education unavoidably. Our situation deteriorated further with the drastic changes in our political scene especially the changing of government and the aggravation of the situation in the South of Thailand where majority of the population are Muslims. As a result we are facing with a new dilemma of multi-culturalism which is very new to our society. It is the present Thai government policy to make use of education to alleviate the turmoil in the South of Thailand. Thus, world changes had had immediate effect on our social development which can be cured effectively by education. In addition, a large part of our higher education system need to be renewed. It can be assumed that changing world scene had had impacted on our higher education as follows:

1. Geographical, political and economic grouping of the world constantly transforming in every region of the world have had immediate effect on our higher education in the forms of free trade and trade liberalisation both at bilateral and multilateral levels; together with the grouping of alliance countries in different regions as trading, security, and community blocks.

2. Rapid changes in science and technology that requires competent workers with new knowledge and skills, therefore, higher education need to produce graduates with new competencies necessary for their professions.

3. Global competition aggravated by progressive information and communication technology transforming the world borderless, and global competition had never been more intense. Thai higher education is given the task to enhance the country competitiveness including competition on educational services.

4. Limitation of resources for the support of higher education both qualitatively and quantitatively has compelled Thai higher education institutions to seek additional resources externally and synergize their collective strengths to form networks for mutual benefits.

5. Expansion of business and other real sectors required high performance workers as a result university graduates must have competent

up-to-date professional skills together with necessary entrepreneurial skills.

6. Fostering of intellectual property rights and patents generated by university research activities and learn to manage them effectively to earn financial resource to support higher education further and to encourage business incubators and spin-off enterprises with the cooperation of private sectors.

7. Balancing social sciences and humanities with pure sciences and technologies disciplines in order to keep the well balance between technological progress and preserving national cultures and local wisdoms.

All the mentioned factors earlier have been brought to shape present day Thai higher education by rethinking our mission. The tasks ahead are inputs for the formulation of our Second Long Range Planning for Higher Education to be presented subsequently.

III. Issue of this article is related to education reform in Thailand.

With the dawn of the new millennium number of enrolments in Thai education institutions increased dramatically. This is partly due to the enforcement of the National Education Act of 1999 together with the Thai constitution which guarantee opportunities for equal access to 12 years of basic education. As a consequence of the laws enforcement

had direct effect on numbers of higher education enrolment. There is a phenomenon increase of numbers of institutions of higher learning since the upgrading of teacher colleges into multi-disciplinary universities. At present, there are about 260 institutions of higher learning throughout the Kingdom. Out of these numbers, 166 higher education institutions are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. The rest are under different Ministries and agencies. There are 72 public higher education institutions, 6 autonomous universities, 70 private higher education institutions, and 18 community colleges delivered around 8,000 study programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Numbers of lecturer are 57,122 and about one-fourth of these numbers hold Ph.D. qualifications. Total enrolment is estimated at 2,122,356 students of which 74 per cent study in the field of social sciences and humanities and 22 per cent in sciences and technology, and 4 per cent in health science.

Each higher education institution has different background and its own characteristic and their strengths in different disciplines are varied. On the advantage side, Thai higher education institutions have great variety but on the opposite side it poses challenges for educational administration to manage

quality and maintain standards of our higher education.

Reform of Thai education was promulgated to enhance quality of education, provide opportunities for equal access to education, development of teaching and learning methods, promote life-long learning into the age of knowledge-based society in order to improve our quality of life while maintaining equilibrium of intellectual, moral and cultural merits. In addition, education must play a pivotal role to instill children to become competent and good citizen. Stakeholders are encouraged to play a part in the delivering of education on the basis of learner's centric. The Thai education reform can be concluded as follows:

1. Reform of teaching and learning process

- Learners should be encouraged to develop their performances to the fullest under the belief that all learners have ability to learn and improve themselves and they are the heart of teaching and learning process.

- Lessons and educational activities must be arranged by focusing on students' interest and their skills and their individuality must be kept into consideration.

- Analytical, managerial, and confrontational skills must be trained in order that students can apply and use these skills.

- Providing opportunities for students to learn from their direct hands-on experiences, love to read and train them to think critically in order that students can learn to do themselves and eager to learn all their life.

- Learning media must be integrated by balancing knowledge, ethical morality and suitable characters.

- Teaching and learning environment should be enhanced in order to facilitate students' learning ability.

- Encouraging the use research as a teaching methodology to enhance students' learning.

- Learning should be created at anytime and anywhere.

- Educational technology must be effectively used.

2. Reform of standards and quality of education. It is important to learn how to implement quality assurance as a tool to improve and secure quality and standard of education. However, higher education institutions had been encouraged to build up their own internal quality assurance system but how the system will be sustained and constantly improved. In addition, we will have to learn how to make use of the results of our external assessment implemented by the Office of National Education Standard and Quality Assurance every 5 years in order to improve the quality of our higher education.

3. Reform of educational resources and investment. Mobilization of resources from both public and private sectors should be vigorously enforced. In addition local administration, communities, foundations, religious bodies, business and industrial operators, and stakeholders must contribute to higher education in some ways or another.

Interim assessment of the Education Reform suggested that with all the attributes mentioned earlier, higher education institutions found achievement for these attributes were difficult to be fulfilled. As a consequence the Ministry of Education announced a new set of higher education standards in the year 2003 specifying clearer quality and standard requirements. The standards are also used for the promotion, protection, ensuring, evaluating and assuring Thai higher education quality.

There are 3 set of standards as follows:

Standard 1: Suitable characteristics of Thai graduates as Thai and global citizen.

Standard 2: Education delivery mode.

Standard 3: Guidelines for the establishment of learning organization and knowledge society.

After the announcement of additional national higher education standards in 2003 education standards for basic, vocational and higher education were later announced in 2006 as follows:

1. Standard of quality of graduates
2. Standard of higher education management
 - 2.1 Standards for good governance and higher education management
 - 2.2 Standards for missions of higher education management
3. Standard of the establishment of knowledge-based society and learning organization.

Since the announcement of higher education standard in 2006, the direction for higher education development has been clearer defined. Nevertheless, it will be more effective if higher education institutions would voluntarily follow the guidelines to formulate their objectives, strategic plan, and quality assurance accordingly. Since Thai higher education institutions enjoy total academic freedom and management autonomy, what the Commission on Higher Education can do is convincing them to follow all these prescribed standards voluntarily.

IV. Challenges for Thai higher education development.

After the Education Reform had been fully implemented, Thai higher education has experienced progression in many aspects including equity and better access to higher education; more diversity delivery mode and

study programmes catered for different social and economic needs such as distance learning curriculum, double degrees curriculum, education for disadvantaged and in-service employees; collaboration with private sectors; internationalization of higher education; academic cooperation with foreign partners; international curriculum; and harnessing ICT for higher education development. Concurrently, Thai higher education has been facing pressures both from internal and external forces. Internal and external pressures included phenomenal increasing number of students, changing structure of population, call for greater accountability for quality and management of higher education institutions, changing roles of higher education institutions in social and economic development, enhancing the country competitiveness in the age of free trade in educational services, constraint of resources, impact from new technology and education reform. These pressures slowed down the development of Thai higher education as well as requiring for greater accountability in quality. The constraints had had impact on Thai higher education as follows:

1. Diminishing higher education quality leading to many shortfalls such as quality of university graduates and their employability, left behind new knowledge

and technology, and shortage of qualified lecturers.

2. Lack of ability to act in response to local social needs and inability to enhance the country competitiveness in the international communities.

3. Majority of higher education community in Thailand considers delivery of higher education as social services and not as commodity while under the World Trade Organization agreement, higher education in many other countries is one of the service commodities and consequently tradable. Therefore, there were academic debates whether delivery of higher education should be considered as commercialization of educational services despite the fact that government subsidy for higher education is becoming limited.

In conclusion, the said shortfalls had impact on widening gaps of quality in higher education and there is an important task ahead for Thai higher education institutions to improve their delivery qualitatively and be able to react in response to social and economic needs better and meet most of the social expectations.

In order to overcome challenges in Thai higher education and lay firm foundation for the development of Thai higher education following measures have been formulated so as to be able to address development of effective

educational output, improvement of learner competency, involvement of stakeholders in higher education planning, reacting better to the country's needs, and enhancement of global competitiveness.

1. Guarantee satisfaction of learners and stakeholders on the output and outcome of the delivery of higher education as well as enabling higher education relevancy to national social and economic development and enhancement of the country's competitiveness.

2. Enable higher education institution to be able to develop its academic strengths and expertise while maintaining its own identity and characters, updating teaching and learning along with global social and economic changes, and improving higher education quality up to international standard.

3. Provide public with easier access to database and information on higher education quality and standards in order to support public with better information for making decision for university admission.

4. Create quality culture throughout higher education institutions as an integral part of working life.

V. Improving and maintaining quality of Thai higher education: addressing challenges.

In addressing challenges mentioned in the third topic, Thai higher education

community in cooperation with relevant stakeholders in Thai society are trying to identify means to improve and maintain quality of Thai higher education. Joint efforts had been made to develop a roadmap for the development of Thai higher education quality for the year 2005 to 2008. The roadmap called for the upgrading of university graduates, quality of faculty members, quality of research, quality of teaching and learning, and quality of higher education management regulated by prescribed higher education standards and effective higher education monitoring and evaluation system.

Major issues to be addressed challenges in order to improve and maintain quality of Thai higher education will be presented as follows:

1. Academic management is one of the most important elements to develop quality of higher education and following factors should be addressed:

- build and manage mechanism that will allow flexibility at the same time strengthening potential for changes in the academic management system,

- encourage inter-disciplinary study programme by synergizing strengths from different disciplines to meet with the needs of the changing world,

- develop innovative teaching methods and incorporating research and development as part of teaching and learning process,

- provide opportunities for private sector and stakeholders to participate in curriculum and teaching development to be relevant with social and economic needs including develop new and innovative curriculum for the future such as artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, biotechnology and so on,

- develop a National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education to support quality assurance process and ensure consistent achievement of standards and reliable communication.

2. Utilization of innovative and suitable technology for teaching and learning development. Rapid advancement of information and communication technology had made access to knowledge a crucial element to join global competitiveness. Information and communication technology must be harnessed to enhance capacity to generate new body of knowledge and share it evenly. We need to encourage our faculties and students to make use of this new technology to gain better access to knowledge sources around the world effectively and efficiently. We invest heavily in ICT and only people in the circle have access to it. Following

recommendations are made to make use of ICT more cost effectively:

- establish consortium of networking to share resources and transfer new know-how among faculty members,

- incorporate e-learning with conventional teaching method to enhance effectiveness of student learning including exploration the use of multi-modal and multi-media as alternative teaching,

- modify educational access opportunity by harnessing ICT for distant education so learners can have access whenever and wherever they can,

- utilize ICT to promote life-long education as well as providing platform for knowledge management in learning organization that will ultimately leading to knowledge society.

3. Financing is the most difficult problem for higher education management at the moment and it becomes global phenomenon. New approaches should be explored by taking into account financing both supply and demand sides before appropriate higher education financing can be made. Other factors are also needed to consider including needs of national social and economic development, personal need of student and faculty member. Higher education can no longer rely on any single source of financial support, therefore, educational resources mobilization, utilization

and distribution must be sought from stakeholders from public, private sectors, communities and local administration. Institutions of higher learning must also learn to be more accountable for their own financial resources by developing more flexible financial management, increasing better financial performance, and delivering quality educational outputs. Following intervention and additional resources need to be explored:

- raise student's contribution incrementally to share higher education cost,
- control expenditure on educational services and administration,
- balance capital, art and cultural conservation cost, environmental preservation and other lower priority spending,
- enhance research capacity to increase revenue from research and academic services,
- manage intellectual property and patent to generate funds, and
- raise additional fund from charitable foundation, alumni.

4. Governance should be put into practice so as to direct higher education management more effectively. Higher education institution should adopt forward-looking governance to manage its affairs more suitably by focusing on institution's mission, management system, develop clearer

direction through participatory process, transparent recruitment and remuneration system, and fair evaluation process. To have effective governance following issues should be included:

- encourage decentralization and delegation of authority and administrative power in order to facilitate more effective and flexible management and be able to catch up with rapid changes,
- empower good governance in all levels of institution together with developing reliable accountability process and visible to the public,
- encourage participatory decision making and development,
- harness information technology to support data and information processing to support higher education management, distribution of information evenly to academic community, and support development of research and teaching and learning,
- nurture new generation of executives and coaching them as modern professional and academic leaders, and
- establish networking for the exchange and sharing of information and experiences.

5. Quality assurance should be promoted as value-added, on-going process for the continuous improvement leading to academic excellence. Each individual

institution must be encouraged to develop its own flexible and adaptable quality process. We should bear in mind that quality assurance should be measured by social demand, satisfaction of stakeholders and employer, international compatibility. Steps to ensure quality assurance will be as follows:

- assure monitoring and evaluation mechanism to be effective and quality assurance process will be perfectly put in place and participants keep 'quality culture' in their heart,
- find out best practice how institution do well in each quality indicator and disseminate lessons learned to other institution,
- formulate accreditation system comparable to international standards,
- develop recognition process for degree equivalency with foreign qualifications,
- encourage students to participate in quality assurance process, and
- establish public information system to disseminate performance of higher education institutions.

Please see attached figure 1 for Roadmap for quality.

6. Research and intellectual property management should be further strengthened. Research is one of the important means to improve quality and source of the generation of innovation and new body of knowledge

that can be transferred not only to develop teaching and learning but also can be transferred to manufacturing and real sectors. We have been urging our universities to strengthen their endogenous capacities in order to be less dependent on external source of technology. It is more crucial to encourage full cycle of research activities from creating research topic and researchers, transferring of technology for commercial use, protecting and managing intellectual property right. It is suggested that we should focus our research activities on its output which should be used for developing new body of knowledge and should be transferred to real sectors benefiting economy. In our case we encourage our universities to concentrate their research activities on development of agriculture and agro-industry to support our economy. In order to make use of research activity to benefit our society as a whole following issues should be incorporated in research planning:

- formulate direction of research to be in line with academic and national development,
- establish research linkage with industry and private sectors to gain synergy,
- promote value added to output of university research and transfer know-how into commercialization,

- involve community into research activities and transfer knowledge to grass-root level in order to train them to be able to solve their community problems and to make community development more sustainable,
- develop protection and management of intellectual property right and patent.

7. Academic collaboration among universities should be promoted by linking higher education institutions nationally and internationally. With the emerging pressures of globalisation, rapid technological change, and trade liberalization, higher education is not free from these external pressures. At present, higher education institutions are looking for partners and forming academic networks to exchange and share their knowledge and experiences. In the age of globalization, it is necessary to allow opportunities for faculty members and students to be exposed to global perspectives in order to be global competent and be able to communicate better with international communities. In this regard, our universities should promote exchange of faculty members and students regionally and internationally, organize academic symposium jointly to share knowledge regularly, promote joint research activities internationally and encourage crossed disciplinary research so as to transfer know-how among different

disciplines, and share innovative knowledge and new technologies among members of the network.

After listening to a long list of challenges that need to be address in order to improve quality of higher education, please let me a few more minutes to share with you our effort in Thailand to lay groundwork for higher education development in the long run. The objective of our Long Range Planning for Higher Education is to provide clearer guidelines for our higher education institutions to develop their vision, mission, goals, and formulate strategic planning in order to develop effective higher education development plan. We expect the formulation to be concluded by the end of September before dissemination to our universities. We are in the process of investigating external environment of our higher education that will have impact on our higher education in the future. We are also exploring future opportunities for our higher education and forecasting complications and obstacles that might lie ahead of our academic community. Goals and key success factors are at the sametime being identified to formulate a clear direction for development and serve as guide for implementation.

To conclude my presentation, I would like to emphasize here once again that to

maintain quality of higher education, it is our academic community to keep development process dynamic and at the same time we need to leave some room for modification of our work plan and to improve constantly. With better quality higher education it is expected that our graduates will have better

responsibility and be able to response better to social and economic needs. Our higher education has four ultimate missions namely: development of human resources; social development; economic development; and enhancement of the country's competitiveness as shown in this diagram (figure 2).