

**Linkage between Higher Education and Labor Market
in Thailand:
Collaboration between Higher Education Institutions and Workplace to
Develop Students and Personnel's Skills**

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Message from the author

The purposes of this article are to offer a picture of the brief situation of higher education institutions in Thailand, the Framework of Thailand's Second 15-Year Long Range Plan on Higher Education, and linkages between higher education institutions and labor market on students' skills development by cooperative education program/curriculum, including on personnel' skills development through training process. The author wrote this paper using documentary research and action research for presenting the paper in the International Seminar on Skills Development for the Emerging New Dynamism in Asian Development Countries under Globalization in March 5-7, 2011 at Nagoya University, Japan.

Introduction

Education is the most important factor for human beings. As Tilak (2003) pointed out the value of education is recognized in every society that education and knowledge are viewed as great wealth in themselves. Education creates and diffuses knowledge; it expands intellectual horizons and empowers the people to have better quality of life. Moreover, education is also regarded as the cornerstone of economic growth and social development. To fully accept that education is very important and necessary for human being, therefore, every country, including Thailand, attempts to develop its education. However, Thai education at all level is in the midst of rapid and dramatic changes forced by technology, innovations, free trade, and global competitions. Indeed, these changes bring to desirable and undesirable, or/and advantages and disadvantages for education institutions to handle. Particularly, the higher education level is regarded to be the foremost important education for national development and it enhances the capacity of competition in global situation. **“Better educational outcomes are a strong predictor for future economic growth,”** said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría. “While national income and educational achievement are still related, PISA [Program International Student Assessment] shows that two countries with similar levels of prosperity can produce very different results. This shows that an image of a world divided neatly into rich and well-educated countries and poor and badly-educated countries is now out of date.” (data available at <http://www.oecd.org>)

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The brief situation of higher education institutions in Thailand

For this session, the author will move on to review briefly the history of higher education in Thailand. As Tangchuang and Mousier (2010:90-100) had reviewed the 5 eras of history of higher education in the world – the original era was the Paris model which aimed to serve the church, next, the Halle model which served the nation-state, then the Berlin model aimed to serve the advancement of knowledge, after that Halle and Berlin models combined which aimed to serve the welfare state, and recently the Phoenix model which aimed to serve private interests or is market-driven. Indeed, in the contemporary, most higher education in the world, including Thai higher education is in the era of the Phoenix model. This model offers quite an advanced version of a market-driven higher education model that responds to these ideals. This, of course, paved the way for rethinking upon the role of higher education institutions.

From the demand of society, Thai higher education institutions increased at an impressive rate from the year 1985 to 2008. The total number of higher education institutions in Thailand at this moment is 169 institutions which classified into 4 categories: a) 65 Public universities which composes of 14 public universities, that were formerly called government universities and fully supported by the government, 40 Rajabhat universities (developed from teacher colleges) and 9 Rajamangala University of Technology, It was formerly polytechnic institute system and then renamed to Rajamangala Institute of Technology system before being granted the university status. b) 14 autonomous universities, c) 71 Private universities and colleges, and d) 19 Community colleges. (available at <http://www.seameo.org>)

Before the educational reform in Thailand, there was heavy criticism on higher education institutions for neither preparing students for the rapidly and permanently changing conditions they will face in life nor for the age of globalization. Therefore, the National Education Act of 1999 and the National Economics and Social Development Plans were intended to address these concerns. The education reform has dated for a decade but the criticism on higher education in Thailand hasn't faded at all, for example, Professor Dr. Kiengsak Chalearnwongsak, (2010) who is the reputation academic still points that most Thai higher education institutions provided curriculums to supply students' demands but neglected to respond to national needs, or market's needs. Indeed, this practice led to unemployment among graduates. (cited in <http://www.kriengsak.com/node/767>)

In addition, recently in 2010, the cooperation between the World Bank and the Office of Higher Education Commission Thailand revealed their findings in a report titled "Constructing the Competitive Capacity of Thai Higher Education in World Economics". Mr. Luis Benweniste, an expert on education from the World Bank, pointed that the investment in Higher education is important towards creating new knowledge that will lead to national economics and social growth. In Thailand, higher education faces financial and human resources limitations, in particularly, specialists in science and engineering. Apart from that, the relation between higher education institutions and industrial sector is weak. In terms of the quality of higher education, only 33 % of all students graduate, classified as 21 % male graduates and 34 % for females. Graduates who finish from the science and

engineering fields were the most unemployed at the rate of 40 %. This figure shows the irrelevant situation between employment and labor. In addition, graduates from social science over supply the needs of the market, while graduates from technology science and health science are scarce. (data from the Office of Higher Education Commission, 2010). However, higher education in Thailand is strong attempting to improve the system by setting a long framework for higher education that the author will review some data that relevant to the topic of this paper below.

Framework of the Second 15-Year Long Range Plan on Higher Education of Thailand

The Executive Report Framework of the Second 15 Year Long Rang Plan on Higher Education of Thailand point the goal of the Framework of the Second 15–Year Long Range Plan on Higher Education of Thailand, covering the years 2008-2022, is the Thai higher education system of high quality. Such system will lead to the production and development of qualified graduates, capable of life long work and adjustment. Knowledge and innovation, basic and critical for the country’s global competitiveness and supportive of sustainable development in every part of Thailand, will be major outcomes. With reduced expansion, universities should now focus on education quality, enhance its role in improvement of economic productivity of working population.

In addition, this framework guided future employment for higher education institutions must strive to work with enterprises in various economic drivers, namely, small and medium enterprises – SMEs, family – coutrooled business, and transnational enterprises. Working with specific industry groups and area-based industry clusters must be done.

Indeed, universities must play important roles in building manpower and capacity because the impacts will be strong felt with globalization or free trade in education services. Countries in the region are committed to building the ASEAN Community by 2015, in mutual recognition and standardization of education and mobility of student and labor, indeed, the Asia countries will see the prominence of China and India, this force, Thailand has to prepare for this phenomena. Technological changes lead to productivity and innovation in manufacturing and services. Business sector, agencies have developed master and strategic plans on science, technology, information and communication technology. These factors warn universities to recognize and be active partners in these. (data from the Executive Report Framework of the Second 15 Year Long Rang Plan on Higher Education of Thailand : 3-10)

Table 1 Number of labor in Asian Labor Market below will indicate the expectation on the situation of labor market in each country in Asia.

Table 1 : Number of labor in Asian Labor Market

Labour force (m)	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	% 2010-2014
Indonesia	113.30	114.90	117.00	119.30	121.60	123.40	7.40%
Malaysia	11.40	11.60	11.90	12.20	12.40	12.70	9.48%
Philippines	37.90	38.90	39.80	40.70	41.70	42.60	9.51%
Singapore	3.00	3.10	3.20	3.30	3.40	3.50	12.90%
Thailand	38.40	38.70	39.00	39.50	39.90	40.30	4.13%
Vietnam	46.60	47.60	48.60	49.50	50.50	51.60	8.40%
China	813.50	819.70	826.60	833.20	839.90	846.60	3.28%
Japan	66.20	65.80	65.50	64.80	63.90	63.00	-4.26%
Korea	24.40	24.50	24.50	24.50	24.50	24.50	0.00%
Australia	11.40	11.60	11.80	11.90	12.10	12.30	6.03%
New Zealand	2.30	2.30	2.40	2.40	2.40	2.40	4.35%
India	467.00	478.30	487.60	498.40	508.50	517.70	8.24%

From EIU cited in Dr. Suthat Setboonsang ²

Linkage between higher education and labor market

To enhance skills of students before going to work, higher education institutions facilitated work-based learning. thus, cooperative education was added into the curriculum. The details of cooperative education will be presented below.

Student's skills development by the cooperative education program

Due to globalization, education and skills needed to enhance success in the workplace have been changing rapidly. There are two means of developing skills. The first approach is to prepare skills for graduates within the educational institution, while the second approach is to develop skills for personnel in workplaces. Cooperative education (co-op) programs or curriculum has been exhorted worldwide as an effective means for developing graduates with desirable working competencies. In the past, students could acquire skills from serving apprenticeship in the workplace, but the duration of occupational training was short, approximately 1-3 months. To produce well practicable graduates, students should be able to practice their skills from industries or workplaces then in universities' laboratories or workshops. Therefore, higher education institutions attempt to set the system for supporting students' skills by using apprenticeship, internship and finally, cooperative education program. Pinpetch and Baum (2009) argued that cooperative education continues to be recognized as an effective means of support while providing students with valuable hands-on learning

² A representative Thai Trade, presented on seminar titled Towards Economics Asians Community: Opportunity and Ready of Thailand toward labor transfer, 22 July, 2010 at Miracle Hotel, Bangkok,

opportunities. It is an instructional method that links classroom instruction and work by providing practical experience that is relevant to the students' career goals. Originally, the cooperative education program in Thailand took place in the field of engineering, for example, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang, Thonburi and North Bangkok in 1971.

The cooperative education program is named by Professor Dr. Wichit Srisa-an, a former Minister of Education, he facilitated this concept at Suranaree University of Technology in 1993 while he was a president of that university. Then Walailak university facilitated the cooperative education program in 1998, after that this concept spread to many universities in Thailand.

Chinvorarat (2001:60) reported that some programs/universities failed due to lack of mutual understanding between industries and universities. In addition, Chinvorarat had suggested that there are 5 key elements to make cooperative education program possible, by starting with the co-op students who must be well prepared and have fundamental knowledge in their fields of study. The second element is the industries or workplaces that must strongly support this program throughout the entire period. The third element is the university or higher education institution which must set close collaboration with industries or workplaces, and set appropriated supervisions. The fourth element is the supervisor or mentor at workplaces who has a significant role in teaching and monitoring the co-op students to gain skills and work experience. The last element is the government – the Ministry of Education, to support policies that will encourage industries or workplace to fully support the cooperative education program. The number of domestic workplaces which have joined the cooperative education project at higher education level is 3,834, while 59 workplaces are located are overseas. ([www. mua.go.th/users/bphe/cooperative](http://www.mua.go.th/users/bphe/cooperative))

Moreover, Chinvorarat, S. (2001:63) concluded the research finding that the cooperative education for engineers is one of the useful tools to increase efficiency of education in practical way, it has served the demand of industrial of theoretical and practical engineers. In addition, the research suggested that cooperative education will not be successful with only the effort of higher education institutions. It needs contribution and full collaboration from industrial sectors or workplaces, and the strong support from the government as well.

This means that not every workplaces or careers could provide work based learning. In the field of industrial tourism, cooperative education program seems fit to, but for other fields they needed to be considered the factors like the possible of duration of apprenticeship that cooperative education program needed more time (4-18 months) to practice at workplace, nature of Thai students that trend to be dislike to study and work as the same time, supervision system in higher education institutions, and mentor's capacity from workplace who will be the main role to support student learning at workplace.

Labor/Personnel's skills development in workplace/organization

The issue on Thai labor or personnel's skills had been discussion unhappily that Thai labor had low skills, low education and low productivity, of course, low income. For example, the study of Tangchuan et al (2007) and recently, the research titled "Schooling Access Inequality and Educational Wage Trends in Thailand, 1986 -2009" by Lathapipat,³ the study found that between 1986-2009 wages of workers educated to high-school level increased more slowly than wages of people with primary and college educations. "It is peculiar because industries such as food processing still want to hire unskilled labor while high-tech industry demands college graduates," So workers with primary school education or foreign laborers from Burma are in high demand in labor-intensive industries.

Although, the number of students entering universities has increased substantially but the quality of education is vastly different between institutions. Those graduating from top universities get much higher pay. However, Industries also need to upgrade by hire qualified personnel, invest more on modern technology and personnel's skill development. There are few food producers such as CP Group that can invest in research and development which leading to innovative products.

Indeed, developing skills for labor/personnel is a key factor to support organizational growth and competition. Some workplaces in particular industrial organizations in Thailand still neglect to develop their labor' skills, even though the Ministry of Labor had attempted the implementing of the Skills Development Promotion Act 2002, that means the workplaces had to conduct training and development for their labor/staff, but the cooperation from workplaces were still less. The author suggest that to support skills development, it is needed the collaboration between higher education institutions and workplace.

In general, most of workplaces use training technique to develop staff or personnel in workplace. However, the researches like Tangchuan et al (2007); Rupavijetra (2008) reported that the labor in Thailand was intensive labor, for education level of Thai labor was low, in small business organizations, there was less training program to enhance their staff's skill improvement. For joint venture and large size of industrial organizations, managers in industrial sector prefer their labor/personnel to have cognitive skills in order to improve performance, but mostly of training programs conducting were focusing on technical and behavior skills for examples, personality improvement, time management, human relation principles and so on.

According to the roles designated to academics in higher education institutions consist of 4 duties which are teaching, researching, providing academic services to the community, and preserving culture and environment. The third role, providing academic services, could be accomplished by acting as a

³ Thailand Lacks labor skills and competitiveness, **Business News**, Nov. 30, 2010, available at <http://Thailand-business-news.com>

trainer, consultant, project conductor on aptitudes and skills, or responding to the society's demands through teaching, and research. The Second 15-Year Long Range Plan on Higher Education of Thailand had pointed the role and task of higher education institutions must work closely with workplace.

Therefore, it was a great opportunity for the author to have an opportunity to collaborate with industrial business organization to conduct training program and research for 70 new first line managers in the joint venture organization in 2010. This collaboration was success as workplace accepted and supported the ideal and operation. So the author acted as the trainer could propose the step of follow up after training and use work performance appraisal method, as well as the author used training method which focusing on cognitive skills. The result of this collaboration, found that samples were pleased with the training program, following step could lead samples to be concerned and developed themselves for better practices on duty of the first line managers. Of course, the performance of samples tended to be pleased with middle managers, and subordinates, included the quantity and quality of work showed high points.

The last session of the paper the author will raise the challenges of higher education in Thailand are as follows:

Challenges of Higher Education institutions in Thailand

There are some challenges of higher education in Thailand that needed to be discussed and solve the problems as follow.

1. The Minister of Education referred to the 2010 report of the Institute for Management Development (IMD), which ranked Thai education as 47th among 58 countries, as an evidence that education and higher education institutions in Thailand are still at lower levels than many other countries in the global arena. Thai universities were ranked 32nd, with a score of 5.25 out of 10, in responding to competitive proficiency. Higher educational level achievement of the country was ranked 45th. The transfer or exchange of knowledge between universities and business sector was ranked 31st, scoring 4.48 out of 10. As for English proficiency, tested via TOEFL scores, Thailand was ranked 54th with 72 points from a full score of 120. Furthermore, technological skills ranked 52nd scoring 6.14 out of 10. Moreover, rankings made in 2010 to determine the first 200 higher education institutions of the world by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) included only 7 Thai universities in the list, while as over 56 Japanese universities were included. The Minister also stated the scarcity of teachers in the Ministry of Education in terms of quantity, teachers teaching irrelevant to their educational qualifications, and the incapability of recruiting talented teachers to create new generations of teachers.

In the next 10 years from now, he said, over 200,000 teachers will be retired. As a consequence, it is the Office of Higher Education Commission's duty to recruit talented professors to teach in various fields in order to support universities to the international level. Apart from creating adequate teachers and professors in time for the mass retirement, the whole system of teachers and professors need to be improved. It is further asserted by the Minister that the Ministry has upgraded

its human resource management system of government officials in higher education institutions and has presented this to the Board of Ministers. The Ministry of Education is determined to urge educational reform in the second decade, to organize education, and to supervise and develop teachers who are among the key factors toward success in educational reform.

2. The problem of higher education is a result from the quality of education at school level or basic education. This is a truth we cannot avoid. Basic education in Thailand has also been in difficulty and needs to be considered as an aspect that led to the current state of higher education. The PISA 2009 revealed that among 3 categories, the results were as follows:

- Reading assessment; China scored the best average of 556 points followed by South Korea and Finland. While as Hong Kong, Singapore, and Japan scored among the Top Tens. Thai students though, had an average score of 421, positioned 47– 51 among 65 countries. It was also found that students in the capital city, Bangkok, and from surrounding cities had better reading skills than every other region, especially those in demonstration schools.
- Mathematics assessment; China scored best at 600 points followed by Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taipei. The Top Ten group also includes Finland and Japan, while Thailand ranked 48-52 from 65 countries. Students in Bangkok and surrounding cities tend to learn math higher than in other regions. While the overall average score is 476, students from demonstration schools scored equivalent to international standards.
- Science assessment; With an average score of 575, China ranked 1st followed by Finland, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, and South Korea. Thai students scored 425 positioned in the range of 47-49 from 65 countries. Highest average scores which met international standards were from demonstration schools.

3. Internationalization of Higher Education In the atmosphere of globalization and an interdependent world, Thailand's higher education institutions have to rethink their roles in relation to other academic institutions especially those of their neighboring countries. Hence, academic exchange programs, international student exchange programs, Asian studies, and a host of others. In internationalizing higher education institutions in the Asian region, one should bear in mind that English literacy and fluency, which is a prerequisite for meaningful cooperation, is still a major constraint for quite a number of institutions to render such exchange programs and other academic cooperation, feasible, practical and viable.

However, in the case of Thailand, this is understandable since Thailand has always remained independent and has never been colonized by the West; it has its own distinct culture and written language. Since then until now, Thai people are ignored in practice English or foreign language, it leads to be obstacle to develop to be international and global competition and society.

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