

THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL BASIC EDUCATION MODEL FOR THAILAND IN THE FUTURE

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Abstract

This research aims to study the future condition of Thai society, the future Thai basic education and the development of a future international basic education model for Thailand that employs the EDFR – Ethnographic Delphi Futures Research Technique. The study finds that the future Thai society will depend on: population trends and a changing family structure; the traditional culture of the Thai tradition; economic trade networks; decentralized political power structures; responses to a deteriorating environmental situation; and the continued emphasis on modern science and technology. The educational system that will embody these social goals will be highly humanistic, with both students and teachers having the opportunity to grow into educated and well-rounded men and women who can manifest their freedom in their community-based educational endeavors.

INTRODUCTION

Education is an important factor forming effective citizens and thus has a significant economic, social, and political impact on society. A high level of education encourages environmental responsibility and lays the basis for the continuing development of technology. It is widely acknowledged that the Thai educational system is not up to the standards of certain other countries at the same economic level and this has had a negative impact on development. There is thus a need for national educational reform. In response to the demands of an era of globalization there has been the adoption of the National Education Act, B.E. 2542 (1999) as a means for reform that will contribute to national development (Kaewdang, Rung, 2000, p.45).

Along with national education, international education, addressed to citizens of neighboring countries, also can contribute to economic, social and political development by enhancing the mutual understanding of language, culture and technology. The potential for mutual learning and vision through this means has been affirmed by the government policy of the former Thai Prime Minister proposing that Thailand become a center of education for neighboring countries. (The Education Committee, B.E. 2544 (2001), p.142). In particular, we are concerned with international basic education, where basic education is defined in terms of the basic knowledge necessary for future studies and vocational success that should be acquired before reaching the Matayom 6 level.

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There is, however, no current model for international basic education in Thailand, with various international schools differing in curriculum, practices, criteria and educational indicators. To remedy this, the present study will focus on the education model established by the National Education Act, B.E. 2542 (1999) as applied to international basic education. After this act has been in effect, the word “the basic education” has been launched. This research can help devise a vision of the future and provide input for the decision makers who must devise the policies and strategies that will lead to the effective management of international basic education. More specifically, the purpose of this study is

- 1) To study the future Thai society,
- 2) To study the future conditions of the Thai basic education, and
- 3) To develop a model for the future of international Thai basic education.

For the purpose of the study we will mainly be concerned with the period of B.E. 2547–2556 (A.D. 2004–2013).

The research is centered on the examination of the organizational system (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1985, P.15) and its external relationships. It thus assumes that developments in Thai environment will affect society and thus basic education and international basic education.

To obtain the data for the study, 24 academic and practical experts in basic education and international basic education were selected through purposive sampling. They are all experienced in basic education and international basic education and were interviewed, using the Ethnographic Futures Research technique — and asked to complete a questionnaire that consisted of 105 relevant items. All subjects were interviewed and 20 completed the questionnaires within a period of 32 days. These research materials were

analyzed in multiple rounds of analyses and interpretations.

The study revealed important contextual information about Thai society. The Thai family, for example, can be expected to shrink down to a unit of two children. This would be a continuation of a trend of the past twenty years, a period in which the rate of population increase has declined and the average age has grown. Thus the number of pre-schoolers and young students has declined while that of working age and older has increased. This shift has occurred because of economic necessity, limited natural resources, and the availability of birth control, which has allowed citizens greater freedom of choice with regard to family structure.

Thai national customs will be recognized and promoted but there will also be increased trade, with significant competitiveness, for international trade relations. At the same time there should occur an expansion of trade that is part of an economic globalization that encourages interaction of various countries throughout the world, including such economic groups as North American free trade area (NAFTA), Asia Pacific economic cooperation (APEC), and the Asia free trade area (AFTA). This is part of efforts by the WTO to make trade fairer (Education Committee, 1997, p. 8). With this, however, competition becomes more severe and those countries with greater economic power are able to create the rules for world trade. Political and public administrative decentralization are predicted, however slowly. Montri Supaporn (2003, p. 13) suggests that this slow pace will continue.

Modern technology will be used to address issues of economic and social development but there will also be wider damage of the natural environment. Politically, the nation will be increasingly decentralized, with more power

going to regional and local organizations, but the process will be slow and difficult.

Regarding Thai basic education it is found that there will be greater equality of opportunities, with everyone having a chance to obtain an education that would provide a foundation for the requirements of life in the modern world and have as its aim the development of well-rounded citizens through a wide ranging curriculum covering eight fields. This is supported by Vichai Tansiri (1999, p. 57), who cited Section 10 of the 1999 National Education Act which states that free and equal education must be provided for citizens for at least twelve years. The products of such an education will be knowledgeable, capable, skilful, and well-rounded. They will be aware of contemporary world and will be able to anticipate problems concerning the future and to cope with the world market competition. At the same time they will be able to maintain the identity and self-esteem of being Thai (Pusadee Trongtorkarn, 1997, p. 34).

The management of such education will increasingly use technology to provide the opportunity for autonomous study and educators will be encouraged to pursue personal development on their own also. The success of the system will be based on fact-oriented evaluation procedures. Communities will be more involved in managing basic education in this decentralized environment and options will be increased by the combined efforts of both the private and governmental sectors.

International basic education will encompass elements of Thai and international elements. The international basic education will be encouraged by the desire of parents to gain foreign language skills. International schools with foreign curriculum will become fewer but the Ministry of Education approved curriculum that uses English will become more prevalent. Like Thai basic education there will be an emphasis on do-it-yourself processes

for creative thinking, language skills, computer literacy, and cross-cultural learning. The focus will be on creating worldly international citizens. All of these goals can be realized. In general the goals of the international basic education program would coincide with those expressed by Suleewan, Allen and Grammer (1999, p.15): 1) to enhance diversity; 2) to encourage empathy; 3) to encourage multilingual citizens; 4) to focus on global education; and 5) to use the international program curriculum.

These are critical goals for the modern world, where interaction with members of diverse cultures and language communities is inevitable. Students need to be able to communicate and to understand each other's beliefs and customs; they must be internationalists. Past experience at international schools has shown that such institutions encouraged cultural understanding of those whose nationalities, genders, cultured, and religious beliefs differed from their own. As a starting point towards the introduction to world cultures, students will gain competence in English during their studies (Jaruariyanon, 1999, p. 120)

The program will involve a twelve-year educational course addressed to students who are to be recruited by a school committee and credits will be accepted from other countries and degrees from the school will be accepted internationally. The course of study will be organized into three levels in accordance with the American system which has been increasingly adopted in international education. This involves elementary school (grades 1-5), secondary school (grades 6-8), and high school (grades 9-12).

The schools will be self-capitalized and the major part of the budget will be provided by tuition and fees, which they will be free to establish, and with additional governmental aid in the form of low-interest loans, long-term loans, tax-free supplies, free-of-charge visitors or free-of-charge

visas. The teachers will be well-trained and well-supported and the buildings will be appropriate and flexible. It is not necessary to have beautiful buildings as long as classrooms are convenient, clean, and safe.

Chainarong Montienvichienchay (1974, p. 72) stated that beautiful buildings are not as important as suitable classrooms that can put in the suitable number of students (mostly about 15-25 students) for the efficiency of teaching and learning that affect students. Cleanliness and safety are the most important in school surroundings and locations. Schools should be in a convenient location, with a safe atmosphere and orderly surroundings.

Students will have a voice in the educational policy-making and other decisions and everyone will be involved in the management of the program. Not only will the programs be carefully assessed in multiple ways, but students will be encouraged to assess themselves. In devising these programs an up-to-date curriculum developed in accordance with international standards and using a child-centered teaching style, one supplemented by technology, will be adopted. This will generally make use of English but will include many races and nationalities. Just as learning will not be passive, teachers will be encouraged to develop through research and the analysis of problems.

For the assessment and evaluation, there should be actual evaluation, different measurement in students' activities, observation, assignment, assessment, assessment without comparing students with others. The actual assessment is a genuine ability assessment that relies on fewer tests. This is in accordance with the ideas of Wiggins (Wiggins, 1989, pp. 141-147) which cited that the actual assessment is done from the actual event, from the work or genuine work rather than multiple choice tests and is the assessment that affects the practice in daily life.

Financing is, of course, critical for such programs and the study found that international basic education should be funded through a lump sum allocation by the government, with the details managed by the School Committee.

To fulfill the goals of international basic education, the financed program should focus on quality, on self-reliance, creative thinking, language, computer literacy, and cross-cultural understanding. As advocated by These Vichai Tansiri (1999, p. 69), the emphasis would be on learners' interest and ability. Underlying all would be an education that encourages students to deal with the real, that expands the love of knowledge and reading, and that encourages a wide scope of interests. In addition to academic education, the students would be trained to live good moral lives. The central requirement is that the curriculum be current and that it encourage thinking and problem-solving rather than rote (Wilawan Jaruariyanon, 1999, p. 121).

RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the general projections, this study came up with a number of practical recommendations for international basic education;

1. To increase more time in studying the Thai language and Thai culture for Thai students from 5 periods into 7 periods per week.
2. To support establishing more international schools that will encourage existing international schools, both private and state-owned, expand.
3. To have international schools in every part of the country.

4. To make certain that international schools should be open to needy students.
5. To develop the curriculum more often to cope with the world situations and Thai culture.
6. The teaching force should consist of members of various nationalities, who hold a bachelor's degree in the field of teaching, and who have a road vision and international understanding.
7. International schools should encompass many nationalities and languages along with their own culture. This has been shown to enhance learning and to exchange knowledge. They should have 2-3 elective courses in language to help learners.
8. International schools should have school committees to build school criteria in selecting newcomers.
9. For international schools, the government should support low-interest loan for long-term payment, make supplies tax-free, inland tax and entry visas.

CONCLUSION

To admit frankly, the research so far carried out cannot be claimed thorough or complete. Therefore, some more research still needs to be done to study the efficiency in managing international basic education in Thailand as well as to explore the barriers that hinder or slow down the progress.

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