



3.5 National Recommendations for International Cooperation in Teaching

/Learning/Research

Country: Thailand

1. Higher Education System Context in Thailand

The educational system in Thailand includes nine years of compulsory basic education: six years of elementary school and three years of lower secondary school, which is free at public schools. There are also three years of pre-school and three years of upper-secondary education provided for free, but they are not mandatory. The obligatory education ends with grade 9, after which pupils can pursue upper-secondary education in a university-preparatory track, or continue their studies in vocational schools.

Regarding the higher education in Thailand, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation, under the Thai government, is the authority responsible for the oversight of the higher education institutions. This is a new Ministry, established in May 2019, under the concept of research and innovation integration, which focuses on promoting research work for commercial purposes, producing human resources in response to future needs, and developing innovation on a full-cycle basis.

The ministry is also meant to create new body of knowledge and upgrade the country's manpower, so that Thai people will be equipped with higher skills and capabilities, thus enabling them to move the country forward under the "Thailand 4.0" concept, which is a value-based, innovative, and technology-driven economy. The organizational structure of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation will include the Office of the Minister, the Office of the Permanent Secretary, the Department of Science Service, the National Research Council of Thailand, the Office of Atoms for Peace, and the Office of the Higher Education Commission.

In 2018, there were 310 colleges, universities, and tertiary academic institutes in Thailand, which are referred to as the Thai institutions of higher learning. These higher education institutions receive funding from the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation, and follow the national policy on internationalization.

2. National Policies and Programs for the Internationalization of HEIs

The internationalization of higher education is a way to improve the quality of education, produce globally-oriented students and staff, develop a multicultural learning environment for the benefit of all students, and turn out "internationally knowledgeable and cross-culturally sensitive graduates" by Jibeen and Khan (2015), who also advocate



that “the higher education institutions are essential actors in creating well-balanced and constructive internationalization strategies, and they must advocate for policy change at governmental level.”

In Thailand, the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) is “the central body to monitor and facilitate the overall education internationalization process” and “none is in the better position than the Office of Higher Education Commission (OHEC) to assume this role. With its influence on national education policies, some control over budget, and network across ministries, agencies, and governments, OHEC has perfect tools and mechanisms for the task.” (Kanjaniyot and Chaitiamwong, Feb. 26, 2018)

The Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) is a department-level agency of the Thai government which oversees the country's universities and other higher education institutions. The office was established in 1972 as the Ministry of State University Affairs, operating as a sub-ministry under the Office of the Prime Minister. From 1977 to 2003 was known as the Ministry of University Affairs, and then, it was reformed as OHEC under the Ministry of Education. In May 2019, OHEC was transferred to the new Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation.

The OHEC promoted two long-range plans on the internationalization of higher education, first from 1990-2004, and second from 1992-1996. Currently, OHEC is in the process of implementing a 15-Year Long Range Plan on Higher Education: 2008-2022, providing recommendations on directions for higher education development with diversity and differences that also help country's development. The Long Range Plan sets the directions for higher education development, lessen duplication, upgrade quality, and enhance efficiency.

Following the plan, the OHEC has encouraged higher education institutions to embrace the internationalization in their missions, to work in close collaboration with many leading institutions around the globe, as a mechanism to internationalize Thai higher education. The OHEC's Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy has defined the internationalization as follows:

“Internationalization is the development process through integrated university missions for staff and students at all levels to adapt themselves successfully in the VUCA world [volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity] and lead their lives meaningfully with cultural grace.” (Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy, June 2018)

All Thai universities are, therefore, encouraged to create their own internationalization definition, best responsive to their own contexts. OHEC also formulated a framework for higher education, under which it is required that the quality of graduates at every level of qualifications and course/field of study fulfills at least five domains of learning: ethics and moral, knowledge, cognitive skills, interpersonal skills and responsibility, and numerical analysis and communication and information technology skills.



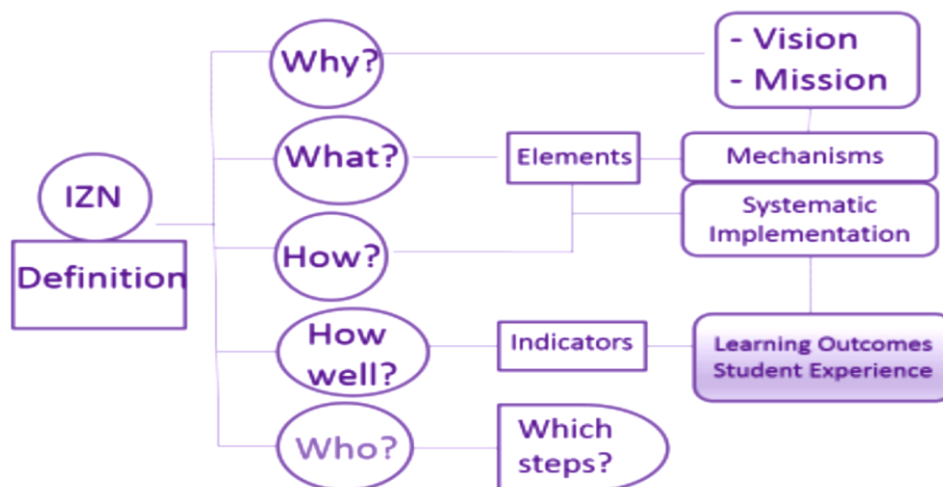
3. Internationalization of Universities in Thailand

OHEC emphasizes on the global aspect as a key element of internationalization as “fulfilling the quality of global citizenship,” which was incorporated into the national policy for the internationalization of Thai higher education institutions. This new national policy on internationalization strategy, aims at preparing graduates to become “global citizens” with multicultural understanding and capable to compete in the international job market.

OHEC also defined the dimensions to determine the internationalization at Thai universities, as for example: the level of understanding of internationalization among university stakeholders including administrators, faculty, staff and students; the alignment of internationalization with university’s vision and mission; clear internationalization strategies and sustained direction for long-term internationalization strategy; university’s strategic network(s) that facilitate internationalization; international methodologies in teaching and learning (e.g. enhancing learners’ critical thinking, participatory behavior, and ability to engage in logical open discussions); overall student-exchange opportunities available; linkages with foreign institutions in terms of teaching and learning, research, services, and/or development projects; and support services available for all groups of learners (domestic and international).

The indicators for internationalization are also emphasized by OHEC as follows: number and diversity of student-exchange programs, number of subjects and study programs with clear international content and number of beneficiaries, number of research projects in collaboration with foreign partners, funding and manpower allocated to determine solutions for international issues, and number of opportunities to build understanding among high-ranking administrators, faculty, and staff regarding desirable characteristics of internationalized learners and graduates (trainings, study visits, collaborations with international organizations, shadowing programs for administrators, etc.).

OHEC proposes the following thinking processes for the internationalization of Thai universities:





4. Problems and Challenges

Throughout the process of internationalization of Thai higher education, the challenges arise mostly from the different ways to interpret and implement the national policy at each institution. For example, during the recent decades all universities established new international programs, either separately or in parallel with the existing programs of study. Also, the partnerships with foreign institutions are also sought for collaborative research and exchanges. However, there are still a number of challenges to be overcome.

As highlighted by Kanjananiyot and Chaitiamwong (Feb. 26, 2018) a few challenges arose in the process of internationalizing Thai universities. One barrier that slowed down the internationalization is the national educational reorganization process, which pushed each university to determine their own directions as they may be considered necessary. Another challenge is the increase of the number of universities to be under the responsibility of OHEC, from 78 in 2002 to 173 in 2014, which made it harder to promote internationalization, due to different stages of development and specific contexts.

One more difficulty was the establishment of quality assurance systems for assessment, namely the Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) and External Quality Assurance (EQA), which shifted universities' focus on quality assessment as imposed by the Office of the National Standard and Quality Assessment (ONESQA), and OHEC. The achievement of these two assessments is proven by the completion of indicators prescribed by the two agencies.

Moreover, since the internationalization and quality assessment are under two different national offices, the internationalization indicators are not clear for these evaluations and each university must introduce further quality indicators.



5. National Recommendations and Conclusions

According to the problems and challenges in implementing national policy, we would like to refer the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) for the national recommendation. As OHEC had invited experts from within and outside the Asian region to offer consultations and develop guidelines for the internationalization of Thai Higher Education Institutions (Kanjaniyot and Chaitiamwong, 2018), Therefore, this enabled the formulation of several recommendations to be followed by Thai universities on the road towards their internationalization.

One of the recommendations is for universities “to offer training for staff to enhance favorable international qualities while creating more interuniversity networks.”

Another recommendation concerns the visionary leadership of Thai universities “in order to realize more in terms of the quality dimension – the key to a successful internationalization process. This will in turn ensure that the alignment and integration of policies from a broad framework with consistent elements as well as the maximization of resources available will lead to the collective implementation of the desired goals.” (Kanjaniyot and Chaitiamwong, 2018) However, the framework of internationalization has to be clearly outlined by the national policy in order to accelerate its implementation at university level.

As Kanjaniyot and Chaitiamwong (Feb. 26, 2018) mention, despite some gaps of implementation due to the change of administration with new policies, the internationalization efforts move on though much more slowly through existing projects. During the past several years, the movement is significantly fueled by the ASEAN integration in 2015 with the national dream of becoming regional education hub. Several exchange programs and efforts were seen, for example, ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) Program (previously known as M-I-T– Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand Exchange Program), promoting student mobility with credit transfer in the ASEAN region as part of the harmonization of higher education in Southeast Asia; and Thailand-ASEAN Exchange Program, which is a one-way exchange since 2012 to enhance students’ competencies to meet the demand of ASEAN labor market, and to strengthen the relationship and the integration of ASEAN Community through education. Experts from the US and EU have also been invited to produce policy recommendations and related guidelines.

Notwithstanding the difficulties and challenges encountered, Thailand’s educational internationalization will be furthered at national and institutional levels in order to increase the quality of education and produce global citizens which are also the aim of this project as well.



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