

[DOI: 10.20472/IAC.2016.023.033](https://doi.org/10.20472/IAC.2016.023.033)

RATANA DAUNGKAEW

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand

KOOLCHALEE CHONGCHAROEN

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand

HIGHER EDUCATION POLICIES IN PROMOTING ASEAN COMMUNITY IN THAILAND

Abstract:

This study aims to explore any relevant information related to higher education policies in Thailand in promoting ASEAN Community. The study was guided by three broad questions: (1) What is the background of current higher education policies in Thailand; (2) What are the key domestic higher education policies currently in place that could be relevant to the AC; and (3) What could be some foreseeable challenges to the implementation of higher education policies promoting the AC? A qualitative approach was employed using document analyses and in-depth interviews with relevant government officials. The findings provide readers with a broad background on higher education in Thailand and the country's formulation of higher education policies for supporting the AC, as well as an overview of the latest National Education Reform (2009-2018) that emphasizes Thailand's potential to play a more active role as an higher education hub that develops human resources with the knowledge and skills sought by ASEAN countries. In addition, the study looks at current factors in the existing Thai higher education system that could potentially act as barriers in the implementation of policies promoting the AC, such as the English-language proficiency of Thai graduates; lack of manpower in technical and vocational fields; teacher preparation and quality assessment; and quality of higher education.

Keywords:

Higher education policy; ASEAN community, Thailand

Introduction

Since the ASEAN was formed on 8th August 1967, one of its seven aims has been for its member countries “to provide assistance to each other in the form of training and research facilities in the educational, professional, technical and administrative arena.” However, 48 years after the declaration, there are still no common education policies among the ten ASEAN countries - largely due to the fact that each member country’s struggle with its own rapid internal development and pace of growth over subsequent decades has made it challenging to design common educational policies that take into account regional perspectives and variances in historical background, and political, cultural, socio-economic, and environmental conditions (UNESCO, 2014). In the 13th ASEAN summit in 2007 in Singapore, ASEAN leaders signed an ASEAN Charter, comparable to a constitution, which framed the laws and organizational structures required in order to increase the AC’s efficiency beginning in 2015. As a result, all ten ASEAN countries committed to participating in the AC by cooperating for the promotion of the freer flows of goods, services, investment capital, and skilled labour by 2015. That will bring various benefits to ASEAN people such as the transfer of knowledge, language, and culture in the ASEAN region, especially the cooperation and mutual assistance in education and research arena among ASEAN higher educational institutions.

As mentioned above, a collaborative framework for an ASEAN Studies Graduate Program was developed by five open universities in the AC: Open University Malaysia (OUM) from Malaysia; Universitas Terbuka (UT) from Indonesia; Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) from Thailand; University of Philippines Open University (UPOU) from the Philippines; and Hanoi Open University (HOU) from Vietnam. The framework called for the five open universities (OU5) to conduct collaborative research in order to identify the higher education policies that could promote the AC as well as assess the readiness of member countries for higher education integration. Each OU5 research team was responsible for reviewing their own country’s higher education policy in relation to that of one of the other OU5 countries (i.e. each OU5 team studied its own policies as well as those of its agreed OU5 partner).

In Thailand’s case, STOU has been responsible for the study of higher educational policy in Thailand and Myanmar at the initiating stage. However, this paper will focus only on the study of higher education policies in Thailand with the aim of exploring any relevant information related to the ways in which Thai national higher education policies could promote the AC, particularly the ASEAN Social-Cultural Community. The questions of the study are as follows: (1) What is the background of the higher education policies in Thailand; (2) What are the key domestic higher education policies currently in place that could be relevant to the AC; and (3) What could be some foreseeable challenges to the implementation of higher education policies promoting the AC? The results of this

research are hoped to contribute to the development and enrichment of ASEAN Studies materials and assist in the general improvement of the program. Further, the study can contribute to domestic educational policy-making in Thailand and help guide higher education curriculum developments by other ASEAN countries.

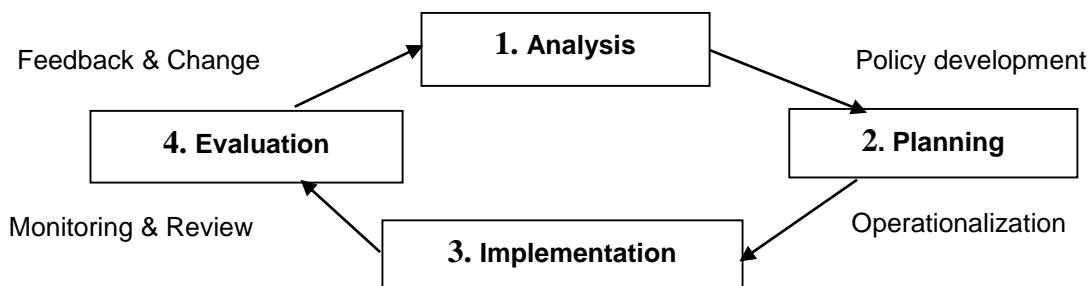
Objectives of the research

The objectives of the research were as follows: 1) To study the background of the higher education policies in Thailand; 2) To explore certain key higher education policies in Thailand currently; and 3) To investigate possible challenges that could arise during the implementation of higher education policies promoting the AC.

Theoretical framework

UNESCO's policy analysis model (2013, p. 8) was used to guide this study. The model splits the policy analysis process into four stages: the analysis of current situations; planning; policy implementation; and evaluation (as detailed in Figure 1).

Figure 1: The circle of education policy



Source: UNESCO (2013). *UNESCO Handbook on education policy analysis and programming*. Bangkok: UNESCO Bangkok, p. 8

Literature Review

This study focuses on Thai higher education policies in promoting the AC. Issues relevant to this subject area were reviewed as follows:

1. The ASEAN Community

According to ASEAN Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2013), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was set up under the Bangkok Declaration on 8 August, 1967 by five countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Following ASEAN's initial formation, several other regional countries have joined the Association, including Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia. ASEAN's existence revolves around the three broad objectives (often known as the three

pillars) of promoting economic cooperation; enabling further integration of societies and cultures; and supporting peace and security among member countries and the greater region. Under the pillar of politics and security, in 1976 ASEAN issued a joint declaration for South East Asia as a Zone of Peace, Freedom, and Neutrality; in 1995 formed the treaty on the Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone; and in 1994 initiated an ASEAN summit for the cooperation in politics and security in the Asia-Pacific Region. Under the economic pillar, ASEAN countries created the ASEAN Free Trade Area in 1992 to enable internal trade in ASEAN, reduce production costs and attract foreign investment, subsequently expanding the region's economic capabilities by setting up the ASEAN Investment Area (AIA). As part of the pillar of society and culture, ASEAN member countries have worked to adopt a number of specific measures intended to enhance the quality of life and support community development across the region.

In addition, all ASEAN member countries have been regulated by a shared ASEAN Charter since its creation on 15 December, 2008. The Charter, often represented as an ASEAN constitution, frames laws and organizational structures intended to increase ASEAN effectiveness in 2015. The objective of the Charter is to encourage ASEAN's efficacy as a people-oriented organization that observes operating regulations. Moreover, it assists in regulating the participation of a range of actors in the ASEAN region by identifying certain legal entities (i.e. juristic persons) and enabling their collaboration with a range of intergovernmental organizations.

1. Three Pillars of ASEAN Community

As briefly stated above, ASEAN's main goals are organized into three pillars:

2.1 The ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), with the goals of establishing rules, shared values and norms based on the cornerstone of non-interference in internal affairs; reinforcing community values; fostering unity, peace, and a sense of shared responsibilities embodied by domestic mechanisms capable of problem solving and conflict resolution in the region; and supporting exchange with non-ASEAN countries.

2.2 The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), which supports regional economic cooperation by consolidating markets and production systems into a single platform to serve ASEAN stakeholders and developing the capabilities for economic competition by identifying policy issues of mutual interest which enhance compatibility with global markets.

2.3 ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), with the main goals of encouraging ASEAN as a people-oriented entity that enhances sharing amongst individuals; increasing quality of life for all communities across the region, in part by fostering the sustainability of natural resources; and reinforcing a shared ASEAN identity by focusing

on human resource development, the protection of social welfare, rights and social justice, the sustainability of environment, and inequities in development.

2. A Global Perspective on the Trends in and Current Situation of Higher Education

Our analysis of the contexts for sustainable education management focuses on following main elements (Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, 2014):

3.1 Current situation of global higher education

In UNESCO's July 2009 World Conference on Higher Education ("The New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research for Societal Change and Development") held in Paris, primary issues at play in the space of global higher education (as cited in Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, 2014) were identified as follows:

1) Higher education, linked with globalization trends, tends to focus on poverty alleviation and sustainable development (the concept of universal education), making education more accessible to different social groups (with an emphasis on gender equity in education), and the development of educational quality overall.

2) It is the responsibility of the higher education industry to lead poverty relief efforts by producing quality leaders with the social consciousness and sense of responsibility to effectively harness and manage new innovations and technologies as they arise.

3) The concepts of universality, regionalization and globalization are crucial to understanding patterns of higher education and research. The expansion of the concepts of universality and cooperation may be perceived in the new variety of partnerships that are continuing to emerge. In these relationships, borderless transfers of knowledge, practices and resources are marked by indicators like evolutions in quality assurance and global institutional rankings and budget allocations.

4) Equity and quality in educational management should be pursued by encouraging equal education access across environments and by reinforcing shared standards using quality assurance processes.

5) Learning, research, and innovation have to be integrated and respond to sustainability concerns as well as the objectives of knowledge-based societies, both at the local and national levels.

In short, as may be seen from the above, higher education globally is perceived as integral component of society capable of leading societal change and sustainable development on various scales.

3.2 Future trends of global higher education

A 2014 study conducted by Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University observed current trends in global higher education to posit possible future patterns:

1) With the increasing number of learners around the world, there will likely be changing to enrollment and application patterns. The need to access higher education has been increasing and will likely continue to do so in many countries around the world.

2) The many challenges for higher education span all stages of education, from initial access and entry up to graduation. One particularly critical need is the improvement of higher education entrance examination methods, to provide more opportunities for access to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This should be complemented with concurrent efforts to increase support mechanisms to such students throughout their higher education career up to graduation.

3) With the current diversification of educational offerings and applicants, new academic management systems capable of handling and administering such diversity are needed. Such systems must also respond to students' needs and enhance the quality of the higher educational experience and outcomes.

4) In term of privatization and budget allocation, there are more frequent instances of privatized departments in public higher education institutions being established due to compounding factors like increasing liberal sentiment, limits on public budgets, increasing overall costs of education, and higher expectations on educational returns.

5) With ongoing evolutions in new technologies, information, and communications, the ICT sector will have increasing impact on and connections to worldwide higher education.

In sum, the massive advancement of globalization has influence on all higher education institutions, which will need to prepare themselves to respond to students' interests and global changes. Addressing these challenges requires visionary leaders to craft and implement relevant policies as well as restructure traditional teaching and learning processes accordingly.

4. Thai Research Related to the Study

Sooksirisereekul (2015) studied the development of Thai educational institutions in regards to supporting the immigration of skilled ASEAN workers within the AC's economic framework. The objective of this study was to analyze the demand for international curricula at the undergraduate level (bachelor degree) in Thailand, for both ASEAN and Thai students. The sample included 91 curricula and 27 undergraduate respondents. The findings illustrate the strengths of international curricula, including the new curriculum popular among international undergraduates for its updated content and relevance to current employer needs, commensurate with the knowledge and skills demanded by the labour market. It was found that curricula should aim to meet the various needs of international undergraduates in five key areas: the languages used in teaching and learning; tuition fee levels; educational location; enrollment processes; and categories of

higher education institutions. The weaknesses of the curricula were included: needed improvements in international exchange programs in terms of contents to meet the real needs of undergraduates; needed improvements in the teaching process to increase the knowledge and skills of undergraduates in according with the changes; and needed improvements to the experiential education and actual applied knowledge components of a student's education.

In the study of Wongboonsin et al. (2011) on the attitudes of engineering students towards free trade in the AC, the data were collected using multistage sampling of 102 students. Participants comprised students studying at the bachelor, master, and doctoral degree levels from four public and private educational institutions, as well as executives from each institution. The findings reveal that awareness of ASEAN's free trade policies was not significantly different between students from different institutions and fields, but that such awareness was significantly different between students from different learning outcomes and educational levels. While one third of the students were confident that they intended to study abroad, forty-two percent of students did not want to work in the foreign countries, mostly because of the difficulties in using foreign languages (particularly English). Students who wanted to work in foreign countries chose Japan, America and Singapore as their top choices, citing their desires to learn and use updated technologies and their perceptions that these countries have more desirable conditions than others (defined as stable social conditions, comfortable base salaries with more opportunities in learning new languages, exposure to interesting cultures, etc.). The researchers observed that most students preferred to work in foreign countries not in the AC (except Singapore), since Thai students are not as aware of opportunities within the AC itself. The study additionally suggested that undergraduate students should learn about and be better informed on issues related to business management in order to develop more entrepreneurial capabilities and other skill sets relevant to working at an international level.

Research Method

A qualitative approach was employed for this study, which primarily used document analyses and in-depth interviews with relevant government officials. For document analyses, researchers predominantly studied and analyzed data related to higher educational issues taken from various sources. The primary source of data was academic information from electronic media or websites of relevant organizations. As for the in-depth interviews, researchers used a purposive random sampling for selection of participants. Four key interview subjects were the officials in charge of the development of higher education policy, executives of higher educational institutions and relevant agencies, and other support staff involved in the institutions. The research tools were common semi-structural interviews constructed by the OU5 research teams. Direct note-taking and audio

recordings were used to capture the data. The audio of the interviews were later transcribed to allow easier interpretation and analysis. This study employed the sequence steps for qualitative data analyses: Initially, the data were transcribed; then, the information was coded and categorized with descriptive words; lastly, the information was synthesized and categorized into the emerging themes relating the research questions to broader concerns and concepts.

Findings

Referring to the three research objectives, this section discusses the answers to the research objectives pertaining to higher education policies in Thailand, including background, higher education policies, and challenges in implementing higher education policies in promoting the AC.

1. Background

The Office of the Higher Education Commission Thailand (OHEC, 2014) is the principle governmental body on policy, strategy and development of higher education in Thailand, providing recommendations in respond to the socio-economic development of the country including the various educational needs of the population. OHEC also has the mandate and authority to manage higher education practice, with respect to degree-granting institutions' academic freedom and quality assurance.

OHEC is directed by the Higher Education Commission (HEC). According to Article 16 of the Ministry of Education's Regulatory Act, the HEC has the authority to formulate higher education development policies and plans corresponding to the National Economic and Social Development Plan and National Education Plan. The HEC sets standards, provides resources, and carries out the necessary activities, inspections and evaluations of higher education institutions, on the basis of academic freedom and excellence of each individual degree-grant institution. The Board of the HEC is also tasked with issuing regulations, criteria, and official orders as deemed necessary.

Regarding the structure of the Thai higher education system, there are two main streams: diploma and degree. Diplomas are attained primarily by students who have pursued a vocational path in high school and take between one and four years to complete. In comparison, degrees consist of both undergraduate and graduate coursework. The majority of undergraduate degrees take four years to complete, with additional years added for specialized subjects like medicine and architecture. At a graduate level, degree coursework provides students with more in-depth knowledge in specific fields of study.

In July 2009 the Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education and the operational guidelines were released to serve as guidelines for higher education institutions in

developing and improving their programs of study and teaching standards. The framework requires that the quality of graduates at every level of qualifications and course / field of study fulfills the domains of learning set by OHEC. Therefore, OHEC has a significant mission to encourage full-fledged quality assurance systems within all public and private higher education institutions (OHEC, 2014).

Currently, OHEC supervises 171 higher education institutions in total in Thailand (80 public universities, 71 private higher education institutions, and 20 community colleges) (OHEC, 2014).

1. Higher Education Policies

The former Ministry of University Affairs (MUA) which has been changed to Higher Education Commission (HEC) has taken the initiatives to formulate Thailand's First Long-range Plan for Higher Education Development (1990 – 2004) in responding to changing environments. At present, HEC has formulated the Second 15 – Year Long Range Plan on Higher Education (2008 – 2022), which has been considered a significant innovation in higher education administration in Thailand. The objective of the plan is to provide recommendations on the development of higher education in Thailand that take into account the diversity and differences of the country and are responsive to the country's development. The key theme of the Long Range Plan is the effort to eliminate persistent problems of Thai higher education in order to set the right directions for higher education development, lessen duplication, upgrade quality, and enhance efficiency.

To strengthen Thai higher education systems, the Long Range Plan has set a major goal to be achieved by developing Thai higher education institutions into 4 categories: (1) research and graduate universities, (2) specialized and comprehensive universities, (3) 4 – year universities and liberal arts colleges, and (4) community colleges. The four groups of higher education institutions have differentiated missions and goals. Each institution is encouraged to excel in accordance with its mission and receive its budget from the government in line with its mission. In addition, institutions are encouraged to conduct a self-assessment based on key performance indicators and classify themselves under one of these four categories. With these categories, the approach could foster more harmonious growth and complementary specialization within each subsector that allows response to the complexities of national economic growth and social development needs.

A new movement in higher education in succession to the Second 15-Year Long Range Plan on Higher Education is the announcement of the 11th Higher Education Development Plan (2012-2016) formulated as a direction to strengthen Thai higher education. The

targeted vision of the plan is that higher education is the source of knowledge and manpower development for the nation's sustainable development, and thus should create lifelong learning opportunities (in line with the 11th national Economic and Social Development Plan (2012 – 2016)) on the basis of the sufficiency economy philosophy, play a greater role in the AC, and move towards international standards.

The four strategies employed to drive Thai higher education towards the targeted vision are as follows: 1) Change of organization system to drive higher education holistically; 2) Capacity building of teachers and encouraging professional experts to become teachers; 3) Elevation of graduates' quality; and 4) Higher Education financing reform.

Thailand has now entered the Second Decade of National Education Reform (2009-2018) with an emphasis on the provision of quality education and manpower development as the key to national development and enhanced competitiveness. In this context, OHEC has also implemented a strategy highlighting four priorities enhancing the quality of 1) new-age citizens; 2) new-age teachers; 3) educational institutions and new-age sources of learning; and 4) new educational management.

In order to bring the policies into concrete practices relevant to the AC, the OHEC established a strategic plan for supporting the AC in 2015 (OHEC, 2010) in order to guide Thai higher education institutions in formulating their own strategic planning and policy (in both the short and long-terms). In doing so, OHEC expects to raise quality of graduates to international standards and lead the country in terms of regional and global competitiveness. According to the strategic plan, Thai graduates are expected to have abilities and responsibilities as members of the AC and international communities. To achieve this vision, Thai higher education has to follow three strategies - increasing the competencies of graduates with international quality standards; building the strength of higher education institutions in order to develop the AC; and promoting the role of Thai higher education in the AC.

2. Challenges in Implementing Higher Education Policy Promoting ASEAN Community

According to observations of Thai higher education policies and operation, it is found that there are some challenges that could potentially bar the Thai higher education system from full participation in the AC:

3.1 The English Language Proficiency of Thai Graduates

According to a survey of English language proficiency of Thai graduates conducted by Chulalongkorn University's Academic Testing Center (as cited in National Statistics Office, 2004, pp. 5-7), in the TOEFL exams Thai graduates in the science

stream earn 450 points, those in the social sciences and humanities stream earn 444 points, and those in the international curricula stream earn 489 points. Overall, these scores reflect that the English language proficiency of Thailand's graduates are lower than the international standard required for further study in most master's degree programs (550 or above). In contrast, graduates from Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia, Myanmar, Vietnam and Cambodia score an average of 500 on TOEFL (see Table 1).

Table 1: The TOEFL Score of ASEAN Graduates

The average score	Country
Higher than 550	Singapore, Philippines
Higher than 500	Malaysia, Indonesia, Burma, Vietnam, Cambodia
489	Thai Graduates of international courses (Chulalongkorn University)
450	Thai Graduates in the field of Science (Chulalongkorn University)
444	Thai Graduates in the field of Social Science and Humanities (Chulalongkorn University)

Sources: The survey of Thai graduates' capabilities of using English language, Academic Testing Center, Chulalongkorn University (as cited in National Statistical Office, 2013, p. 4)

The above-mentioned data are consistent with the data collected by EF (Education First) institution (as cited in National Statistical Office, 2013) which tracks the English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) of adults in their various non-native countries. The survey data related to ASEAN member countries revealed that ASEAN countries score lower than the international average, with Thailand ranking #42 out of the overall 44 countries surveyed. When compared with other ASEAN countries, Thai people have lower English language proficiencies than Malaysians, Indonesians and Vietnamese. According to interviews conducted with executives in the Thai higher education sector, these difficulties with English in Thailand may be traced back to factors such as Thai people's negative attitude towards and lack of interest in learning the English language, as well as the belief among Thai people that English language is hold as castes.

3.2 Lack of Manpower in Technical and Vocational fields

In Thailand, there has been an oversupply of graduates in social sciences and humanities fields. In contrast, the graduates in the fields of science, technology and vocational subjects are less than expected. This is because only 34 percent of grade 9 students continue their studies in vocational education, whereas 66% pursue their basic education (Sukhothai Thamathirat Open University, 2014). As a result, human resources in the fields of science and technology have remained in high demand. Also, there has been increasing demand for graduates of vocational subjects. In other words, the supply of labour currently does not correspond to the demands of national labour force and Thai graduates continues to lack essential knowledge and skills for employment. For instance, knowledge and skills still lacking includes the ability to communicate in foreign language, application of computer skills and IT knowledge, knowledge in relation to administrative management, knowledge related to basic calculation abilities and teamwork skills, and the ability to systematically analyze issues and problem solve, etc. This brings to the inadequacies of skill labours in Thai vocational careers and hence it cannot meet the demand of regional labour market. As the access to ASEAN community can cause more shift of Thai skill labours to other ASEAN countries with higher remuneration that can cause more serious shortage of skill labours.

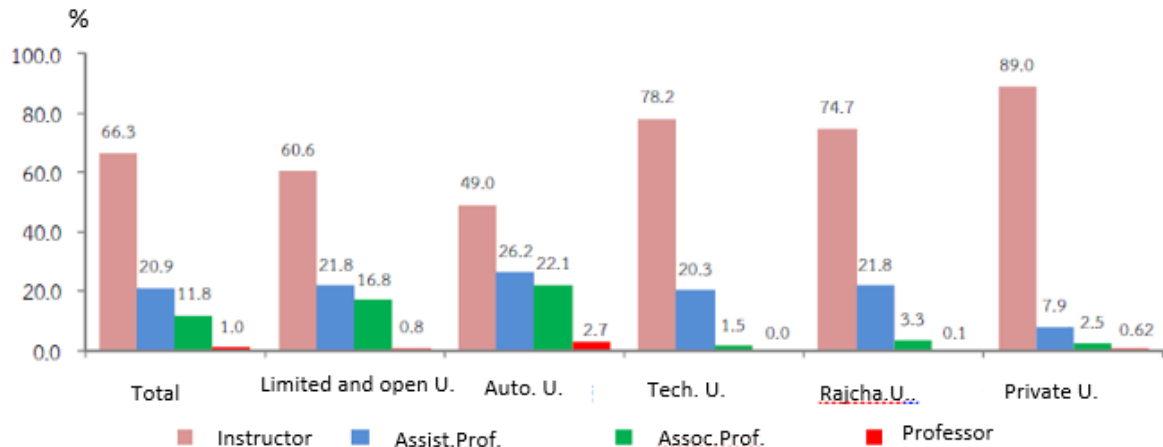
A survey conducted by MOE in 2007 (as cited in UNESCO, 2012) revealed that employees with a college degree or above represented only 10% of total employment in Thai enterprises. There are a greater number of job vacancies because applicants are confronted with the lack of both basic and technical skills demanded by enterprises. Also, there is high staff turnover linked to more intense competition among companies for qualified labour. As a consequence, the ability of Thai companies to increase their productivity was limited by the shortages and mismatches of skilled labour and inadequacies in the technological innovation system.

3.3 Teacher Quality

The quality of teachers is one of the main challenges faced by Thai higher education. Regarding the qualified labour (those with college degrees or higher) as mentioned above, teacher-quality is believed to be critical to the production of a qualified labour force. Many problems of teacher-quality are caused by shortages of teachers and instructors (particularly those of quality), especially technical instructors. Such shortages directly contribute to decreased quality of undergraduates and graduates in the country. According to data collected by the OHEC, it was found that overall, 66% of instructors in higher education institutions in Thailand are not senior professors - meaning that the majority of instruction is conducted by associate professors, assistant professors and instructors. Senior professors conducted only 1% of instruction. In a comparison of institutions, it was found that autonomous universities have the most professors, representing 2.7% of full academic staff. In Rajabhat University, only 0.1% of the

academic staff are senior professor, and there are no senior professors in Rajamangala University of Technology, as shown in Figure 2 (National Statistical Office, 2013, p.4).

Figure 2: The percentage of instructors in higher education institutions as classified by academic position and original affiliation



Sources: The data processing from the higher education information technology system, OHEC (as cited in National Statistical Office, 2013, p.4)

3.4 Quality of Education

Currently, youth, undergraduates and graduates are confronted with new patterns of working life which are distinct from the current work situations. They need to be equipped with expertise in specific fields, demonstrate indispensable attributes for working in the new era, and be more focused on issues of morality and values, in order to be able to live more happily in real-life situations. Therefore, there has been more focus on the demand side of higher education that has caused increasing competition among higher educational institutions to improve their management efficiency and effectiveness to respond the societal needs (UNESCO, 2006). However, the demand side of higher education has to be confronted with many barriers that obstruct the quality of education such as the rapid expansion of various types of higher education institutions, the limitation of government budgets, and over-reliance on fee-paying students. Nevertheless, to increase and maintain the quality of education inside the expanding system, accreditation and quality assurance mechanisms need to be utilized as the main tools.

3.5 Global Standards and Local Relevance

In the current era of globalization (which places greater emphasis on knowledge-based economies), Thai higher educational institutions should be prepared to meet both regional and global standards. However, local relevance is still a significant

concern and should not be discounted in favor of international aspirations. In most Thai universities, there have been attempts to become comprehensive universities and develop cooperative agreements with renowned universities from abroad, without adequate consideration of local needs and interests. Hence, there needs to be encouragement of more learning programs and research activities that have local relevance (UNESCO, 2006).

3.6 Equal Opportunity of Access to Higher Education Institutions

The increasing numbers of students in higher education are caused by a shift from higher education as an elite good to higher education as a mass good, as well as changes in the concept of lifelong learning and advancements in technology. However, the greater access to higher education for socio-economically disadvantaged students should be facilitated more by government policy and higher education institutions themselves. Also, more scholarships need to be provided to these students to study within the country and abroad.

3.7 Increasing the Demand of Financial Support for Higher Education

To date, there has been too much emphasis on the supply side of higher education, especially the budget system. As a result, quality improvements are not successfully encouraged through market competition, particularly in the science and technology fields. Thus, more attempts have been made to empower OHEC to function as the sole agent who is responsible for higher education budget allocation. This aims to employ higher education financing as a mechanism to monitor the higher education provision to meet national standards (UNESCO, 2006).

Conclusion and Recommendation

The OHEC, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, has been aware of the significance of being well-prepared for access to ASEAN community in 2015. To achieve this, higher education institutions are the main mechanism for operating in the right track of higher education policies and plans as well as strategies for promoting the AC. The study reveals that the current situations of Thai higher education drive competition in the AC. This is because Thai higher education is equipped with strengths in various aspects such as the clear specification of policies, strategies and regulations for access to the AC. In addition, Thai higher education has the academic potential to offer academic service to neighboring ASEAN countries. However, there are many challenges, especially in terms of the need of improving English language proficiency of Thai students, the inequality of academic quality, need for more emphasis on teaching and learning (rather than research), the current production of graduates inconsistent with ASEAN's economic demands, and the lack of manpower in technical and vocational fields.

The study suggests that Thai higher education has to be continually developed in accordance with the challenges mentioned above. Particularly, it is recommended for Thailand to expedite the improvement of curricula and teaching and learning at all educational level with the aims for improving Thai youth's English language skills. Also, Thai higher education institutions should consider the pool of personnel and labour forces of neighboring countries who may be interested in studying Thai language and culture and participating in various courses in Thailand to increase their capacity to deal in the Thai market and work with Thai people, or simply in returning to work in their home countries.

References

- ASEAN CHARTER. [Online] Available from: <http://www.thai-aec.com/>. [Accessed: 3rd January 2015].
- ASEAN DEPARTMENT. MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. (2013) *ASEAN Mini Book*. Bangkok: Page Maker.
- NATIONAL STATISTIC OFFICE. (2013) *Thai Universities with the ASEAN Community* (in Thai). [Online] Available from: <http://www.nic.go.th/e-book/university-asean/university-asean.pdf>. [Accessed: 1st January 2015].
- OHEC. (2010) *The Strategies of Higher Education in Thailand for Supporting ASEAN Community in 2015* (in Thai). Bangkok, Thailand: Bangkok Blog.
- OHEC. (2014) *Study in Thailand 2013*. [Online] Available from: <http://inter.mua.go.th/main2/article.php?id=475>. [Accessed: 3rd January 2015].
- SOOKSIRISEREKUL, S. (2015) *The Development of the Thai Higher Educational Institute to Support the Mobility of Skilled Labor among ASEAN Countries under the Framework of ASEAN Economic Community* (in Thai). Bangkok: Thammasat University.
- SUKHOTHAI THAMMATHIRAT OPEN UNIVERSITY. (2014) *The 15-Year Long Range Development Plan (2013-2027) of Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University* (in Thai). [Online] Available from <http://www.stou.ac.th>. [Accessed: 15th January 2015].
- Wongboonsin, P. et al. (2554) *Career Mobility into the ASEAN Workforce* (in Thai). Bangkok: International Institute for Trade and Development.
- UNESCO. (2006) *Higher Education in South-East Asia*. Bangkok, Thailand: UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education.
- UNESCO. (2012) *UNESSCO National Education Support Strategy (UNESS) Thailand 2010-2015*. [Online] Bangkok, Thailand: UNESCO Bangkok. Available from: http://www.unescobkk.org/fileadmin/user_upload/epr/UNESS/uness_thailand_2011.pdf. [Accessed: 20th January 2015].
- UNESCO. (2013) *UNESCO Handbook on Education Policy Analysis and Programing*. Bangkok, Thailand: UNESCO Bangkok.
- UNESCO. (2014) Education Systems in ASEAN+6 Countries: A Comparative Analysis of Selected Educational Issues. *Education Policy Research Series Discussion Document*. [Online] No. 5. Available from <http://unesdoc.unesco>. [Accessed: 25th February 2015].