

Higher Education Reform in Thailand

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Abstract

The need for current education reform in Thailand starts with the problem of low educational attainment of the Thai people due to the low transition rate of primary school graduates to lower secondary level. It was realized that to be able to compete in the world market, Thailand could no longer rely on cheap labor as an incentive to production and inducement of foreign investment. An attempt has been made to reform the Thai education system with a commitment to expand the basic education to 12 years in the year 2002. An increase in basic education will lead to a need to expand the supply of higher education in the future. With the advance in communication technology and increasing longevity, the new generation of students who look for higher education will vary in age, needs, and places of study. To meet this new challenge, the higher education institutions must be flexible in their management of resources, personnel and curricula design. All state universities in Thailand are scheduled to be autonomous by the year 2002. This will in effect change the status of people working in state higher education institutions from civil servants to university employees. It is also expected that some criteria based on quality and equity will be used in allocating government budget to these institutions. Accountability of state autonomous universities will be required, and there will be an external evaluation by independent organization every five years. Internal evaluation is expected to be carried out by institutions themselves annually. The imposition of the evaluation process is hoped to improve the quality of education provided by all higher education institutions.

I Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to discuss recent higher education reform in Thailand. We will look first at the reform that is taking place at the basic education level, which will affect the provision of higher education in the future. Proposed reform at the higher education level, based on the 1999 National Education Act, will be discussed, focusing on the aspects of autonomy and quality assessment, and their effects on the state university.

II The Thai Education System

The modern education system in Thailand started during the reign of King Rama V (1868–1910), when the first “national education plan” was proclaimed. However, the promulgation of

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compulsory education, which required every 7-year-old child to receive free primary education until the age of 14, started in 1921. Primary education at that time consisted of 4 years. It was revised many times to 5 and 7 years and has been finally set at 6 years since 1978. Since the education reform in 1974, after the event of the student uprising in October 1973, education has been viewed as a lifelong process. Two kinds of education; namely a way-of-life learning process (non-formal education), and classroom system education (formal education), were presented side by side in the National Education Scheme of 1991.

The current formal education system is a 6-3-3-4 system. Beyond the six-year compulsory primary education is secondary education, which is divided into two levels, lower and upper secondary. Each level requires three years of study. Higher education is the level of education beyond upper secondary. It is divided into three levels; lower than bachelor's degree, bachelor's degree, and graduate.

The educational management in Thailand falls under the responsibility of many ministries and agencies. The Ministry of Education (MOE) is responsible for preprimary up to the higher education levels. It also provides non-formal education or out-of-school programs and supervises private schools at all levels except the degree level. The Ministry of University Affairs (MUA) is responsible for higher education at the undergraduate and graduate levels at both public and private universities. The Ministry of Interior is in charge of administering and managing primary education in the municipalities of each province whereas the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration and the Pattaya City Administration are responsible for the management of primary education in their own jurisdictions. There are six other ministries that provide education in specialized fields for their own specific needs; namely Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Transport and Communications, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Ministry of Justice, and Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare.

In addition, there are other organizations involved in educational administration and planning at the national level; namely the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, the Office of the National Education Commission (ONEC) and the Budget Bureau. Regarding personnel administration, the Office of the Civil Service Commission is in charge since all teaching and supporting staff in public educational institutions are government officials.

III Pressures Leading to Recent Education Reform

The problems that led to recent Thai educational reform are as follows:

III-1 *Low Average Educational Attainment of the Thai Population*

Most Thai children leave schools after completing primary compulsory education. Even in the year 1998, it was reported that the average educational attainment of the Thai population age 15 and over was only 7 years. The younger age group of 15-21 possesses a relatively higher average number of years of education than the older ones due to an increase in the number of years of basic education (see Table 1). Regarding the Thai labor force, it was reported that over 75

Table 1 Average Educational Attainment of the Thai Population, 1996–98

Age Group	unit: year		
	1996	1997	1998
15 and over	6.6	6.8	7.0
15–21	8.8	9.0	9.3
15–59	7.2	7.4	7.6
60 and over	3.2	3.3	3.4

Source: [Thailand, ONEC 1999: 120]

Table 2 Transition Rate by Level of Education

	1986	1990	1995	1997	1999
Primary 6/ lower secondary	40.4	53.7	87.3	90.9	87.1

Source: [Thailand, ONEC 1999: 237]

percent of the labor force had no more than primary school education, about 15 percent finished secondary or vocational level, and less than 8 percent completed teacher training or university level [Thailand, ONEC 1997a].

III–2 *Low Transition Rate of Primary School Graduates to Lower Secondary Level*

Although secondary education was established in Thailand over a century ago, the transition rate from primary to secondary education has been relatively low, particularly for children in remote rural areas. In the year 1990 only slightly over 50 percent of those completing primary education were found to continue to the lower secondary level. However, in the later half of the 1990s when the Thai economy was booming, the average transition rate rose to over 85 percent (see Table 2).

III–3 *The Challenges of Globalization and the Advancement of Science and Technology*

In order to be competitive in the international market, Thailand can no longer rely on cheap labor as an incentive for production and for inducing foreign investment. The basic education of the Thai labor force has to be raised in order for the economy to be able to sustain its economic development. Hence there is a strong need to reform the whole education system.

Recognizing this problem, the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB) has emphasized the role of the human factor as the most important factor in the development process in the Eighth National Economic Development Plan. The Office of the National Education Commission and the Ministry of Education also proposed recommendations on education reform of both the entire system and on specific issues. In addition, a non-government commission, the Commission on Thailand's Education in the Era of Globalization, supported by a private commercial bank — the Thai Farmers Bank Public Company Limited, has also recommended a radical reform of the entire Thai education system.

IV Recent Efforts in Expanding Basic Education to 12 Years

Because of the low educational attainment of the Thai population, continuous efforts have been made by several agencies in Thailand to raise the level of basic education of the population to the secondary level. As a consequence, it was finally put in the 1997 Constitution as follows:

Section 43. Individuals shall enjoy the equal right to receive basic education for the duration of at least 12 years. Such education, provided for all, shall be of quality and free of charge.

According to the 1997 Constitution, basic education will be provided for 12 years covering primary education (6 years), lower secondary education (3 years), and upper secondary education in both general and vocational streams (3 years). However, present compulsory education in Thailand, according to the 1999 National Education Act, is only 9 years, from primary level up to lower secondary level. Children are required to enroll in basic education schools until the age of 16, except those who have already completed the lower secondary level.

The target year for the provision of 12-year basic education as required by the 1997 Constitution is 2002. Meanwhile the ONEC and the MOE are working out the implementation plan leading to this target.

The extension of universal basic education to the Thai people implies a large increase in demand for higher education in the near future. It is estimated in the Ninth National Educa-

Table 3 Estimation of Number of Students and Enrollment Ratio of Higher Education Level

Level	unit: '000 persons				
	1987	1992	1997	2002	2006
Lower than bachelor's	160.5	188.2	337.0	474.0	583.0
Bachelor's	704.1	762.6	890.2	1,027.0	1,262.0
Higher than bachelor's	19.2	34.7	57.8	79.0	97.0
Total	883.9	985.6	1,285.0	1,580.0	1,942.0
Student/Pop (18-24)	11.9	12.5	15.9	19.7	25.0

Source: [Thailand, ONEC 1997b: 15]

Table 4 Enrollment Ratio

	1986	1990	1996	1997
Pre-primary (3-5 years old)	30.4	40.4	78.7	90.0
Primary (6-11 years old)	95.5	93.7	90.0	90.8
Lower secondary (12-14 years old)	34.3	37.3	72.5	74.2
Upper secondary (15-17 years old)	24.5	22.5	23.8	25.9
Higher education (18-24 years old)	4.8*	5.1*	16.4	19.4

Source: [Thailand, ONEC 1999]

* Excluded students of two open-admission universities

tion Plan (2002–2006) that the number of students at the higher education level in 2006 will be around 1,942,000 or about 25 percent of the population age group 18–24 (see Table 3). According to the Office of National Education Commission, the enrollment ratio of higher education in 1997 was 19.4 percent, which includes those in the two open-admission universities (see Table 4). Hence, the higher education sector needs to be reformed tremendously in order to be able to meet such a large increase in the expected enrollment ratio in the future.

V Problems of Inequity in the Thai Education System

V-1 *Inequity of Access to Public Educational Institutions*

It is generally known that the system of selection based on competitive entrance examination for each articulated level has essentially a barring effect on the opportunity to continue to higher levels of education, particularly for the children of lower economic status families. All public schools that have higher educational standards, or charge low tuition fees normally require some kind of competitive entrance examinations. Various methods have been introduced to reduce the adverse effect of these examinations such as assigning a quota system, or giving higher priority to students whose houses are located within the schools' catchment area etc. For the higher education level, the provincial universities and provincial campuses of Bangkok universities normally retain a quota system to fill 50 percent of seats available in each academic year with upper secondary school graduates from their respective regions. Some universities set up a special quota for secondary school graduates from remote rural areas or from low-income families in the cities who meet their specification. In general schools of high quality are concentrated in urban areas or big cities. Students in rural areas who have a strong determination for higher education have to migrate to these areas to get better secondary

Table 5 Selectivity Index and Gini Coefficient by Level of Education

Family Background	Student's Selectivity Index (Farmer = 1.0)									
	Primary		Secondary				Vocational		Higher	
	pub	priv	lower		upper		pub	priv	pub	priv
Professional	2.5	92.3	6.3	45.0	9.5	62.5	9.0	–	54.1	51.8
Business	1.5	29.3	3.9	26.6	6.4	26.6	6.3	–	30.9	37.9
Workers	1.6	9.7	1.5	5.2	1.5	4.5	1.5	–	10.1	8.6
Farmers	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	–	1.0	1.0
Others	1.3	24.1	2.2	15.5	2.6	14.7	3.4	–	0.8	0.4
Gini Coefficient	0.12	0.61	0.29	0.58	0.37	0.6	0.37	–	0.72	0.73

Source: [Vichai and Phitsanes 1994: 25]

Note: pub = public, priv = private

education in order to increase their chances of getting admission into state closed-admission universities. This process requires large expenses if their families do not have relatives or friends living in the areas where the schools are located. It was reported that the chance of entering a public university of children from professional families was about 54 times that of the children of farmer families, and about 31 times that of children of worker families [Vichai and Phitsanes 1994: 24]. The same report also revealed that the chances of being selected into public schools of children from professional and business families are found to increase as they climbed up the educational ladder, comparing to those of the farmers' children (see Table 5).

V-2 Inequity in Public Resources Allocation and Inequity in Cost Sharing

If we look into the Thai government's allocation of educational budget, we find that the share of the educational budget has been around one-fifth of the total government budget, or around 3–4 percent of the national gross domestic product for over the past two decades (see Table 6). Although the Thai economy faced an economic crisis since 1997, the share of government budget for education remained relatively unchanged as a proportion of GDP, and continued rising in terms of total government budget. Slightly more than half of the educational budget has been allocated to the pre-primary and primary level. The share for the secondary level has been about 16–18 percent of the total educational budget. It was only 4–5 percent higher than the share for the higher education level despite the fact that the secondary education sector served

Table 6 Educational Budget as Percentage of Total Government Budget and GDP (Fiscal Year 1976–98)

Fiscal Year	% of Total Gov't Budget	% of GDP
1976–85	20.1	3.7
1986–95	18.5	3.2
1996	19.9	3.6
1997	21.8	4.0
1998	23.1	4.0

Source: [Thailand, ONEC: www.onec.go.th/index1.html (Table 12)]

Table 7 Percentage Distribution of Educational Expenditure by Level and Type: 1977–94

Fiscal Year	Pre-Primary and Primary	Secondary	Vocational	Teacher Training	Higher	Nonformal	Education Admin.	Total
1977–81	55.9	16.1	6.6	2.8	12.8	1.5	4.3	100.0
1982–86	57.5	16.5	6.8	2.3	11.1	1.8	4.0	100.0
1987–91	56.8	17.0	6.2	2.2	11.0	2.0	4.8	100.0
1992–94	51.0	17.9	6.2	2.3	14.1	2.6	5.9	100.0
Average growth rate								
1977–94	12.6	15.0	13.2	10.5	14.7	21.0	17.5	13.5

Source: [Vichai and Phitsanes 1994: 25]

a much larger number of students than the higher education sector (see Table 7).

Regarding per capita cost, the combined annual recurrent and capital cost per capita of closed-admission universities (the state universities which are usually regarded as having higher quality and require entrance examination) was about six times the per capita cost of the lower secondary level, and about five times that of the upper secondary level (see Table 8). When we compare the tuition and fees as a percentage of the total cost per capita (recurrent plus capital) by education level, we find that the said percentages are 4.4, 6.4, 2.6 and 16.9 for the lower secondary, the upper secondary, the closed-admission university, and the open-admission university (the state universities that do not require entrance examination) respectively. It can be seen that closed-admission university students bear a much smaller share of total cost of higher education provided for them, measured in ratio of tuition and fees to the total cost (around 2.6 percent) comparing to their counterparts in the private university who pay around 90 percent (Table 8).

It is also interesting to observe equity by comparing ability to pay as measured by the proportion of tuition fees to parents' income at each level of education. From Table 8, we find that

Table 8 Parents' Income, Tuition Fee, Annual Recurrent and Capital Cost per Capita:
Public versus Private Schools, 1990

unit: '000 baht per year

Level and Type of Education	Public School				Private School			
	Parents' Income	Tuition & Fee	Recurrent Cost	Capital Cost	Parents' Income	Tuition & Fee	Recurrent Cost	Capital Cost
Primary	82.6	–	5.0	2.0	215.5	1.4	3.9	4.8
Secondary								
Lower	121.9	0.4	5.9	3.2	252.8	2.2	4.6	4.8
Upper	141.9	0.8	8.9	3.6	288.3	2.9	6.0	5.8
Vocational	128.0	1.3	7.9	7.8				
Higher ed.								
MOE								
Bachelor degree								
RIT	148.5	3.2	13.6	9.8				
RI	133.9	1.6	10.6	7.7				
MUA (1987)								
Closed univ.	140.2	1.6	31.4	30.9	193.9	8.8	5.6	4.2
Open univ.	89.4	1.1	3.9	2.6				

Source: [Vichai and Phitsanes 1994: 7]

Notes: MOE = Ministry of Education

RIT = Rajamangala Institute of Technology under MOE

RI = Rajabhat Institute (four year program)

MUA = Ministry of University Affairs

Closed univ. = Closed-admission Universities (refers to state universities that require entrance examination)

Open univ. = Open-admission Universities (refers to state universities that do not require entrance examination)

the average income of parents of closed-admission university students is much higher than the average income of parents of open-admission university students (140,200 baht comparing to 89,400 baht), but the ratios of tuition fees to parents' income are almost the same (1.1 percent comparing to 1.2 percent). In addition, the average income of parents of students in the closed-admission university is more or less the same as that of students in the RIT (the Rajamangala Institutes of Technology under the Ministry of Education), but the tuition and fees of the former is only half of the latter. Utilizing these information, one may conclude that the differences in the tuition and fees of the public education institutions do not reflect equity in cost sharing in terms of the parents' ability to pay.

VI Trends that Lead to Higher Education Reforms

Currently many forces both external and internal have played important roles in signifying the need for education reform at the higher level all over the world as well as in Thailand. They may be put together as follows:

VI-1 Increase in social demand for higher education due to the expansion of basic education, economic growth and institutional factors. Higher education is no longer confined to a specific selected group in the society, but must be made available to the masses. Higher education is being considered as an instrument to obtain better employment as well as a means for upward social mobility. As to the institutional factor, many jobs require that the holders have a minimum of university degree; for examples the Members of Parliament and the Senate.

VI-2 Advancement in information technology has created the need to restructure and reform higher education to be more flexible and more open in dealing with lifelong education. In an era of an increasingly aging population, the new generation of students who will enroll in higher educational institutions will be less homogeneous in their age, needs, time requirements, and places of study. Higher educational institutions must be able to adjust themselves to the new circumstances.

VI-3 The globalization movement intensifies competition and cooperation among nations. Higher education must be reformed in order to be able to compete in the international environment. Participation in globalization of international activities and exchange programs requires the development of networks and updating of higher education programs. Hence higher education needs to be reformed in order to be able to benefit from the globalization movement [Japan, NIER/UNESCO-APEID 1998: 30-36].

VI-4 The economic crisis and other alternative programs that compete for public resources, such as welfare for the aged and other social safety net programs, will force the government to reduce the budget for higher education, or not at least increase spending on the higher

education. At the same time, an increase in social demand for higher education will put pressure on higher educational institutions to admit more students. The need to look for other sources of funding will force the higher education sector to reevaluate the situation and adjust to the new environment.

VI-5 In order to be able to respond effectively and efficiently to the changing global as well as domestic environment, the management of resources available to higher educational institutions must be flexible. There is an increasing trend for higher educational institutions to be more autonomous in managing their resources, personnel, curricula, and admission policy. This trend started in the United Kingdom in the early 1980s and is now spreading all over the world. There is also an increasing requirement from all parties concerned for higher education management to be accountable for their financial performance as well as for the quality of their education programs. Hence, management in higher educational institutions needs to be reformed in order to be able to meet these requirements.

VII Present Condition of Higher Education Provision in Thailand

The provision of education above the upper secondary level or the higher education level in Thailand is mainly under the responsibility of two ministries, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of University Affairs.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for public educational institutions providing education both at lower than bachelor's degree and the bachelor's degree levels. These institutions are Rajabhat Institutes, formerly teachers' colleges, Rajamangala Institutes of Technology, Colleges of Physical Education, Dramatic Arts and Fine Arts Colleges, Buddhist Universities, and formal public vocational education colleges. Currently, the Rajabhat Institutes (totally 36 institutes) have extended their curriculum to cover three areas: education, sciences and liberal arts. Some Rajabhat Institutes are capable of offering master's degree programs. The role of the Rajamangala Institutes of Technology is to produce teachers for vocational schools. According to the Office of National Education Commission [Thailand, ONEC 1997b: 10-11], the Ministry of Education has under its supervision 294 public colleges and public higher schools, plus 208 private vocational schools providing lower than bachelor's degrees.

The Ministry of University Affairs is in charge of supervising and coordinating public and private higher educational institutions that offer programs leading to bachelor's degree and higher level. There are totally 60 universities: 21 public universities (30 campuses), 37 private universities (39 campuses), and 2 autonomous universities. The two open-admission universities, Ramkhamheng and Sukhothai are included in the public universities [*ibid.*: 10].

There are other ministries and agencies which also provide higher education for their specific needs. For example the education and training of professional soldiers and police, specific technician training for the armed forces and for irrigation, railways, merchant marines, cooperatives, postal service, civil aviation, nurses, etc., are under the respective organizations. The

number of these institutions is 68 [*ibid.*: 11–13].

The expansion of higher education in the past decade in the public sector has been in the direction of increasing the number of higher educational institutions in the provincial areas outside Bangkok. Most of the increase in the demand for higher education in Bangkok has been met by private institutions, either by expanding the existing institutions or by the establishing new ones. The expansion of private institutions has been encouraged by an increasing relaxation of the Ministry of University Affairs in the control of tuition and fees. The increase in the demand for higher education was a consequence of the continuous economic boom prior to the 1997 crisis, which enlarged the job market for university graduates as well as increased parents' income.

Another recent development in the higher education system relates to changes in university entrance examination requirements. The national entrance examination, which used to be based on the result of an once-a-year exam, is being modified to a system that organizes entrance exams twice a year. Students can choose the best result. In addition, the average GPA of the last three years in upper secondary education will be counted for around 10 percent of total scores for admission. The intention of the change is to draw students' attention to the importance of the last three years of study in upper secondary school. This procedure is expected to solve the problems that have occurred in the past two decades where a large number of upper-secondary students in the formal-education system have left schools after getting a secondary education certificate from the Department of Non-formal Education, which is the equivalent to the certificate of formal higher secondary education. This certificate, which normally could be obtained within one year of enrolling in a non-formal education program, provides the right for the holder to sit for the university entrance examination. Many upper secondary students take this loophole as a short-cut route to finish the three years of formal upper secondary schools and concentrate in tutorial schools for university entrance examination.

VIII Higher Education Reform as Proposed in the 1999 National Education Act

As mentioned earlier, the ONEC, MOE, MUA and a non-government commission have worked out proposed reform of the education system. The resulting efforts appeared in the 1999 National Education Act. In this section, we will concentrate on the areas of reform that are related to the higher education level as appeared in the Act.

VIII-1 *Restructuring the Administrative System*

The Ministry of Education, Religion and Culture will be established in the year 2002, which shall have the powers and duties to oversee all levels and types of education, religion, art and culture; the formulation of education policies, plans and standards; mobilization of resources for education, religion, art and culture; as well as monitoring and evaluating results in the fields of education, religion, art and culture (Section 31). Higher education shall be the responsibility of the Commission for Higher Education, which is to be one of the four main pillars of the Minis-

try (Section 34).

The merger of all government agencies responsible for education at all levels will, hopefully, make educational policy more unified, and make the transfer of credits accumulated by students within the same type of educational institution or between different types of institutions possible according to Section 15 of the National Education Act.

VIII-2 *Autonomy of State Institutions Providing Education at the Degree Level*

State institutions which provide education at the degree level shall be legal entities and enjoy the status of government or state-supervised agencies. These institutions shall enjoy autonomy; be able to develop their own system of administration and management; have flexibility and academic freedom, and be under the supervision of the councils of the institutions in accord with the foundation acts of the respective institutions (Section 36).

It is expected that delegating decision making power from the state to the higher educational institution regarding internal matters will help improve the efficiency of management of autonomous higher educational institutions. According to the Act, all state higher educational institutions are expected to fulfill this requirement by the year 2002. However, there are some institutions that were able to declare readiness and became autonomy earlier than the schedule, namely the King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Thonburi and the Faculty of Architecture of Chiang Mai University.

VIII-3 *Resources and Investment for Education*

The State shall be responsible for the distribution of budgetary allocations for operating and capital expenses of educational institutions in accord with the policies, the National Education Development Plan, and the missions of the respective institutions, which shall be allowed freedom in the utilization of the allocations and educational resources. In so doing, consideration shall be given to quality and equality of educational opportunity. For the state degree-level institutions which are legal entities and are state-supervised or public organizations, general subsidies will be granted from budgetary allocations (Section 60). In addition, state educational institutions which are legal entities shall be allowed to earn income and interest from their properties and services, and to charge tuition fees, etc. These income and earnings will not have to be submitted to the Ministry of Finance (Section 59).

This provision allows higher educational institutions to have a more flexible system of resource management to replace the former strictly itemized budgetary system. It also allows the possibility for retaining non-budgetary earnings for use in the institutions. However, the criteria for allocation of government funds will be changed by bringing into consideration the concern for quality of educational products and equality of educational opportunity. State universities in urban areas with more ability to render academic services to the community, and those endowed with properties which enable them to earn extra resources could be expected to be on a lower priority list for government budget allocation.

VIII-4 *Accountability in Utilizing Public Resource*

The administration of the higher institutions is required to be accountable for the utilization of the allocated budget, including those extra earnings and donated resources. They must be able to show that these resources had been used in accordance with their stated objectives and the purposes of the donors. There shall be a system for auditing, follow-up and evaluation, by internal units and state agencies responsible for external auditing, to assess efficiency and effectiveness in the utilization of educational budgetary allocations in line with the Principles of Education, National Educational Guidelines and the educational quality and standards required (Section 62). This system of post auditing will provide a check on the utilization of public resources by autonomous higher educational institutions.

VIII-5 *Quality Assurance and Assessment*

There will be an Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment responsible for the development of criteria and methods of external evaluation, conducting evaluations of educational achievement in order to assess the quality of institutions. Internal quality assurance shall be regarded as part of educational administration, which must be a continuous process. This requires preparation of annual reports to be submitted to parent organizations and agencies concerned, and made available to the public for purposes of improving the educational quality and standards, and providing the basis for external quality assurance. All educational institutions shall receive external quality evaluations at least once in every five years since the last exercise and the results of the evaluation shall be submitted to the relevant agencies and made available to the general public (Sections 48 and 49).

The Ministry of University Affairs has put great emphasis on the area of quality assurance and assessment as can be seen from the progress done in this area. We shall go into more details on this topic later.

VIII-6 *Participation of Private Sector*

Private educational institutions shall be authorized to provide education at all levels and of all types as stipulated by the law. Private institutions providing education at the degree level shall be allowed to function with freedom, develop their own system of administration and management, insuring flexibility and academic freedom and shall be under the supervision of their own council in accordance with the Act on Private Higher Educational Institutions (Section 45).

The administration and management of education by the private sector shall enjoy independence with the State being responsible for overseeing, monitoring, and assessing educational quality and standards. Private educational institutions shall follow the same rules for assessment of educational quality and standards as those for state educational institutions (Section 43). The State shall provide support in terms of grants, tax rebates or exemptions, and other benefits to private educational institutions as appropriate. It shall also provide academic support to private educational institutions to reach the standards required and to attain self-reliance (Section 46).

This provision indicates a change in the government's attitude towards the role of the private sector in educational services from controlling to encouraging. This lenient attitude has prevailed even before the existence of the 1999 National Education Act. It is one of the factors that have contributed to a continuous increase in the participation of the private sector in the provision of higher education in the past decade. The most active participation of the private sector in providing higher education programs is at the bachelor's degree level. It is reported by the Ministry of University Affairs that total enrollments in private higher educational institutions in 1998 in the bachelor's degree program was almost the same as the enrollments in public limited or closed-admission universities (see Table 9). In fact, the number of new students enrolled in private institutes in the bachelor's degree program in that year was somewhat higher than the number of enrollments in the public closed-admission universities in the same program (see Table 10). The number of enrollments in the bachelor's degree program in the two open-admission universities are around three times of those enrolled in the public closed-

Table 9 Number of Total Enrollment by Types of Institution and Levels of Education, 1998

Types of Institution	Levels					
	Total	Non-degree	Bachelor's	Graduate Diploma	Master's	Ph.D.
(Grand total)	1,033,325	8,997	947,907	1,332	73,364	1,725
1. Public institute	843,488	8,954	767,460	1,332	64,070	1,672
1.1 Limited admission university	242,012	2,761	180,642	1,145	55,864	1,600
1.2 Open university	587,604	6,193	575,186	59	6,166	
1.3 Autonomous university	13,872	–	11,632	128	2,040	72
2. Private institute	189,837	43	180,447	–	9,294	53
3. Public : Private	82 : 18	99 : 1	81 : 19	100 : 0	87 : 13	97 : 3
4. Public (1.1) : Private	56 : 44		50 : 50		86 : 14	97 : 3

Source: [Thailand, MUA: www.mua.go.th/data/mis/main2.html] (Table 2.2)]

Table 10 Number of New Enrollment by Types of Institution and Levels of Education, 1998

Types of Institution	Levels					
	Total	Non-degree	Bachelor's	Graduate Diploma	Master's	Ph.D.
(Grand total)	321,533	6,250	290,802	835	23,096	550
1. Public institute	261,813	6,250	234,585	835	19,613	530
1.1 Limited admission university	73,898	1,173	53,983	689	17,559	494
1.2 Open university	183,008	5,077	176,691	18	1,222	–
1.3 Autonomous university	4,907	–	3,911	128	832	36
2. Private institute	59,720	–	56,217	–	3,483	20
3. Public : Private	81 : 19	100 : 0	81 : 19	100 : 0	85 : 15	96 : 4

Source: [Thailand, MUA: www.mua.go.th/data/mis/main2.html] (Table 2.1)]

admission universities. As to the programs higher than the bachelor's degree, most enrollments are found in the public closed-admission universities.

The promulgation of the 1999 National Education Act is expected to bring about changes and new initiatives in the management of education and to provide the basis for the implementation of educational reform [Thailand, ONEC 1999: 41]. In fact, many policies were already included in the Eighth National Education Development Plan (1997–2001); for example, the promotion of basic education, the improvement of administration and management, and the quality assurance policy. It is hoped that the inclusion of these policies in the 1999 National Education Act will make it more difficult for politicians to make any arbitrary changes in education policies, and that these policies must be pursued no matter what political parties may form the government.

We will from now on concentrate on some effects of the reform on public higher educational institutions in Thailand.

IX Effects of Being Autonomous Entities of the Public Higher Educational Institutions

According to the 1999 National Education Act, all state higher educational institutions are scheduled to be independent from bureaucracy and become self-administering organizations by the year 2002. The effect of this change on the state universities may be elaborated as follows.

IX-1 Changing the Status of Personnel in the Higher Educational Institutions from Civil Servants to University Employees

According to this change, the lifetime employment system will no longer apply to teaching and supporting staff. It will be replaced by contract employment where the extension of the contract is dependent on the evaluation of performance. Although there is some compensation in the form of a better salary structure, many people still feel that the new structure is not attractive enough, taking into consideration the instability of employment, an increase in teaching load, and a requirement in research and publication as stipulated by the Ministry of University Affairs. We will have more discussion on this point under the topic of quality assurance.

Actually, the idea of a state supervised university system is not a new concept at all. It was initiated over 20 years ago when Professor Puey Ungphakorn was the rector of Thammasat University in 1976. However, for some unknown reasons, it was not carried through. Another attempt took place during the Anand Punyarachun's government which reactivated this idea with many incentives offered to persuade state universities to become autonomous entities. However, it was said that the present movement that pressured state universities out of the civil service system was from the Asian Development Bank. It came with the contract agreement for higher education loan to the country [Varaporn 1998: 143].

The removing of state universities from the civil service system in Thailand has created confusion among people working in these institutions. Many faculty members expressed their discontent due to uncertainty in the fairness of the process of evaluation, and their doubts about

the continuity of financial support from the government. They were afraid that autonomous universities may be put under so much pressure to cutting costs that they may be forced to close some theoretical courses that have low number of enrollments, but to open more courses that provide skills to be used directly in employment. There are also many supporters of the new system. These supporters are optimistic about the improvement in the system of management and the more equitable utilization of public resources (see the “pro” and “con” arguments in [Sarakadee 2000]). Recently, a petition from Chulalongkorn University was submitted to the government to allow its staff to choose between remaining and leaving the civil service system [*Bangkok Post*, June 5, 2000].

IX-2 *Less Reliance on Government Sources of Funding*

Currently the main source of revenue of all state universities in Thailand comes from the government budget. Government funding accounts for approximately 80 percent of total state universities' revenue. From the experiences of the developed countries that have adopted the autonomous university system, it indicates that sooner or later the autonomous universities will be forced to diversify their source of funding. There will be pressure on them to rely less on government funding. In Britain, although higher educational institutions remain nominally independent and autonomous, the system has been increasingly subjected to central control, through the higher education funding councils set up by the government in 1993. The funding councils have immense power to steer the system in different directions through control of the public purse. In particular they are able to control the rate of expansion of the system, especially at undergraduate level, with an extraordinary degree of precision, and they retain punitive powers to discipline any institutions which attempt to ignore necessary constraints [Ford *et al.* 1996: 10]. The higher educational institutions also find themselves in an environment that they have to compete for both students and research funds [*ibid.*: 11].

The state universities in Thailand could foresee their future following a similar path as the British system. However, there are also some advantages in the system which they should study in order to improve their system. As mentioned earlier the student's share of the cost of higher education at this level in term of tuition and fees is very low. There is, therefore, room to raise this part of revenue, provided that potentially good students from low income families have enough support either in scholarships or student loans. The state universities in Thailand could always find additional sources of funding if they want to. Many state universities found that there is a large potential market for educational programs beyond the bachelor's degree level which require less investment in term of buildings but could make much more revenue in term of tuition and fees [*Bangkok Business News*, August 29, 2000]. There is also voluminous work on how to generate income from non-government sources [see for example Ziderman and Albrecht 1995; Warner and Leonard 1997].

IX-3 *Being Called to Account for Their Performance*

There has been an increasing trend to call state autonomous universities to be accountable for

their financial performance, usually through some kind of post-auditing. This trend follows the devolution of responsibility of management to universities. Autonomy and accountability are considered two sides of the same coin [Japan, NIER/UNESCO-APEID 1998: 7]. Accountability need not, in principle, be always upwards. Indeed, it ought to be downwards too, or there will be no satisfactory check on the use of powers [Evans 1999: 3]. This means that in principle there should be a balancing mechanism in the system which would make it possible for individuals to criticize or make suggestions for change without placing themselves in professional jeopardy, or make it difficult for the management to cover-up their mistakes.

Academics have a professional responsibility to use their intellectual tools, and a further duty to create more such tools in the minds of the students they teach. Teachers are accountable to their professional colleagues to insure that the integrity of their discipline is upheld and that students develop positive attitudes towards the subject and its use in the society [Frazer 1992: 17]. Hence the concept of accountability of higher educational institution is not confined to efficiency in the utilization of resource, but it deals with the quality aspect of management and all academic activities as well.

Accountability means that the autonomous state universities must stand ready to be evaluated on its performance. The evaluation on performance shall be made on the quality of academic activities, efficiency in administration and financial aspects. We will elaborate in the following section.

X Quality Assessment of Higher Educational Institutions

This topic has received the most attention of the Ministry of University Affairs among all aspects of higher education reform. After the 1999 National Education Act has been put into action for one year, it was reported by the Office of the Education Commission that Chapter 6 which dealt with educational standards and quality assurance made the most progress [*Bangkok Business News*, September 17, 2000]. The Ministry of University Affairs has proclaimed a quality assurance policy for institutions to be implemented for better productivity since July 1996. The system of quality assurance, according to the Ministry, is composed of internal and external quality assurance. *Internal quality assurance* consists of institutional activities to gain trust from the administrator and university council on the quality of the educational process. The process of internal quality assurance includes quality control, quality audit, and quality assessment. *External quality assurance* refers to a mechanism to examine the institutional quality system by professional outsiders. The process of external quality assurance comprises auditing, assessment, and recognition.

The Ministry has developed nine aspects of higher educational criteria as a guideline for quality assessment. They are

- aspect 1: mission/objective/planning,
- aspect 2: teaching and learning,
- aspect 3: student recreational activities,

- aspect 4: research,
- aspect 5: social academic service,
- aspect 6: preservation of arts and culture,
- aspect 7: administration,
- aspect 8: budgeting,
- aspect 9: quality assurance and enhancement.

For each aspect, there is a list of items to be covered. For example, in aspect 2 teaching and learning, items to be covered are curriculum, faculty, teaching/learning process, students, assessment, and supporting resources. Within each item, there is a list of sub-items to be included. For example, under the item of curriculum, the sub-items included are preparation of personnel for curriculum, and development system of intellectual content; under the item of faculty, the sub-items are job description, qualification, instructor/student ratio, academic position, working teaching load, assessment of teaching, research, and academic service, recognition award(s), performance satisfaction, etc. [Thailand, MUA 2000].

The Ministry has also prepared documents to be used as guidelines for the implementation of internal quality assessment: namely, performance indicators, self-study reports, and an auditing and assessment of quality assurance mechanism handbook. These documents were disseminated to university staff. Seminars and training were organized to ensure higher educational institutions' awareness of the importance of quality assurance of educational services at this level. The Ministry had expected to be able to fully implement the system of quality assurance and accreditation by the year 2000. According to Section 49 of the 1999 National Education Act, an Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment will be established as a public organization responsible for the development of criteria and methods of external assessment. After the Office is officially established, it will assume the responsibility of external assessment of all educational institutions, from the basic level to the higher level of education. All educational institutions will receive an external quality assessment at least once every five years. It was stipulated that within six years since the enforcement of the 1999 National Education Act, every education institution must receive the first external assessment. The results of the assessment will be submitted to the relevant agencies and made available to the public [Thailand, ONEC 1999: 208].

In order to comply with the requirement of the Ministry of University Affairs, every higher educational institution has set up a project of education assessment to work out criteria for internal assessment. For example Thammasat University, under the responsibility of the Vice Rector for Academic Affairs, has set up a project of quality assessment in 1998 and works closely with each faculty towards the preparation of data bases, quality indicators, and necessary procedures for internal assessment. Within each faculty, a committee for quality assessment was also set up with many subcommittees to work out the process and to prepare the first self-assessment report by December 2000. These activities have consumed a considerable amount of time of faculty members and supporting staff who are currently assigned to the process.

XI Concluding Remarks

Education reform in Thailand is moving in the right direction in the sense that it attaches higher importance to the basic education of the masses. The expansion of basic education to the masses in both quantity and quality should have been done decades ago. Resources for higher education should be diverted into the basic education level for the masses, and those who receive the benefits of higher education should bear a higher share of the cost than at the present time. This will reduce the inequity problem existing in the Thai education system.

According to the World Trade Organization agreement, education is being considered as a public service. As a result, foreign educational institutions will be allowed to set up their branches at their own discretion in any member countries. Hence, it is essential that the quality of Thai educational institutions at all levels must be improved in order to be able to compete effectively with those of the foreigners.

At the basic level of education, competition may not be as strong as the higher levels. In addition, at the basic level of education, emphasis should be on the national cultural value which should be carried out by domestic educational institutions rather than by foreign institutions. At the higher levels of education, however, academic and technical skills will be more emphasized since they are related to employment opportunities. In this respect, foreign educational institutions will have an advantage over the domestic ones. Competition for students and faculty members may be severe in the future.

Autonomy of public higher education by transferring decision making for resources and personnel management to the organization level is one way to improve flexibility in management. The system of the civil service and the government budget bureau are too rigid to be able to cope with changes that take place so quickly in the educational world. Without autonomous decision making in personnel matters, higher educational institutions could not attract new competent faculty members, but would continue losing their good ones to the business sector due to wide difference in salary scales. However, in order to make sure that the flexibility in management would improve the efficiency of performance of the organization, accountability of management is required.

Since state autonomous higher educational institutions also receive resources from other sources beside the government budget, funding agencies need to have some assurance that the scarce resources handed over to higher educational institutions be maximally utilized. Society needs to know that not only are the higher educational institutions producing quality graduates required in the system but that the process of doing this is effective and efficient [Woodhouse 1996]. The problem is how to evaluate the effectiveness and the efficiency of higher educational institutions.

In order to evaluate a program of study, not to mention the whole institution, we should take into account the whole educational process starting with the input, e.g. quality of those entering and qualifying in such program; the process of educating or training them, e.g. teachers, teaching method, facilities and equipment, etc.; the final output — the graduates, e.g.

their knowledge in the field of study compared to their entry point, their ability to get appropriate job within an appropriate length of time, etc. [Olmesdahl 1999]. The whole process should be evaluated systematically.

Performance indicators have been widely used to indicate the efficiency or cost effectiveness of institutions concerned. To their many proponents, performance indicators are clearly needed by governments and by institutional managers. They are intended to be useful, simple, reliable, and objective. However they must be used with great care, otherwise they could be harmful to the institution's program and the system that used these indicators. The use of indicators across institutional and country boundaries is fraught with difficulties. The major reasons relate to the nature of the organization(s) and the data per se. The nature of the organization(s) relates to the characteristics of institutions of higher education, variables representing their goals, and differences in their program structure and composition. The data problem relates to difference in the basic definition of the data elements concerned, verifiability of the data, aggregation level and dispersion of the data [Kells [1994]: 193–194]. Hence the assessment of effectiveness and efficiency of institutions' performance using performance indicators should be carried out carefully, particularly in making comparisons across institutions.

If we are going to apply private business concepts to quality assurance, the center of interest should be the customers of the higher educational institutions; namely, the students or recent alumni, the employers of the graduates, and the sponsors of research projects. They should be allowed to express their opinions regarding the academic content of the curriculum, whether it is up-to-date and relevant, whether the academic training prepares students for lifelong learning and whether the research work produced is of high academic quality. Their views should be included in the evaluation of the higher educational institutions.

If quality improvement of educational institutions is to be actualized, it must be a continuing and repeating process [Thailand, ONEC 1998]. It is a good thing that educational institutions are starting self-assessment process, and are preparing to be assessed by outsiders. In the process they will learn to find out their weakness and ways to improve their performance and outputs. The public university system has long been secure and stable, which causes the system to tend to resist change, just like any bureaucratic organizations. However, due to resource and time limitation of administrators and faculty members, various aspects of quality assessment should be ranked according to their urgency. Top priority should be given to the teaching and learning aspect, and extend to research and social academic service later. It should not cover too many aspects at the same time. The Ministry of University Affairs should be realistic regarding resources, time, and institutional culture. Besides, we have to be aware that the process of quality assessment itself takes time and resources of the institution away from delivering high-quality education or research.

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