Status of Education and Higher Education in Thailand: The Thai education system and the challenges to becoming a successful graduate.

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Thailand is an independent country that has never been colonized and is presently working towards returning to a Democracy under a Constitutional Monarchy. Thailand's education system transformed its Traditional education into the pattern of Western modernization in the era of king Chulalongkorn, the fifth king of the Chakri Dynasty, which ruled Siam from 1868-1910[1].Since that time, education in Thailand has been structured as K through high school education and higher education, that is provided mainly by the Thai government through the Ministry of education including pre-school, primary level of grads 1-5 and secondary level grads 6-10, and when successfully completed, then higher secondary education in grades 11 and 12. The higher education Ministries are the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ministry of University Affairs (MUA). Other Ministries are Public Health, Agriculture and Cooperatives, Defense, Transport and Communications, Justice, Science, Technology and the Environment, Office of the Prime Minister and the Thai Red Cross. Ministers and top officials have bachelor, master, MPhils, and Ph D degrees.[2,4]

Throughout this time, and in the world of globalization, higher education has become an important process to develop human potentiality as well as overall national development. In operation, higher education supplies the people that facilitate government, academia, business, industry, and the various occupations including the means to entrepreneurship. But there are obstacles to the Thai education system. The complex Thailand structure of higher education has lacked policy cohesion. Now salient points of government and management reform are being discussed, and a round-table discourse on policy studies of higher education are being carried out, all to affect reform. At the end of the 1980s, Thailand first began looking at the reform, or transformation, of higher education in a systematic manner, when MUA (Office of the Higher Education Commission : OHEC) prepared the first 15 years Higher Education Plan covering years 1990 to 2004. At that time the situation was one of economic support emphasizing international competitiveness. Ten years past that, it is still being debated whether the state of the economy set back the reforms. New issues have arisen. In 1997, a new Constitution was propagated and an Education Act was legislated for the first time in 1999. It is strongly believed that the higher education system still needs to be renovated, if Thailand is to move forward to being a country of relevance, and in order to have prominence in the new millennium with renewed confidence.[2]

  At the same time, the higher education system has suffered from intrinsic problems and crises, where there exists a low degree of collaboration between the modern economic sector and higher education institutions, and especially with Thai industries. In the world community there is demand for a quality workforce to support national competitiveness, whereas Thailand has witnessed a continuous decline in national competitiveness for the past five years. Based on the IMD (International Institute for Management Development) ranking, the overall competitiveness of the country dropped from 1997 to 2000, in the fields of science and technology. While in the past 15 years, there has been growing demand for higher education, there still exist limitations on admissions capacity instituted under MUA and MOE. Only 80% of high school graduates seeking admission can be admitted. The demand for placements in higher education continues to increase concurrently, and is putting severe pressure on education and the higher education systems, because of intrinsic weaknesses in the new policy of nine years compulsory

education and 12-years free basic education plans under the 1999 National Education Act (American College Testing).[5]

 With the transformation that introduced public education and institutionalization of schools over a century ago, Thailand brought basic education to the masses. Education used to be for boys only in the limited omain of temples, palaces and noblemen. The impact of acknowledging this led to the restructuring of the education system and higher education in the eight years past, which was represented in the conference of the World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Competitiveness Report 2014-2015 of the basic quality of education in Thailand is ranked as seventh in ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations).[3] Thus, to solve the problems of higher education in Thailand today, problems must be identified, including an awareness of the roles and the importance of higher education to national development and in the urgency of being competitive, and also good coordination between MOE, MUA, ONEC (Office of the Education Council) and higher education. Institutions need to be built. Likewise, a coherent government policy with clear continuity must be safely implemented, and the success of this reform must be sufficiently based in logic and with the necessary physical infrastructure development to go with it. This requires good management and improvements in the efficient use of manpower, all which will lead to the building of a state of higher capacity for good higher education.

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1. (Educational Reform, Phase I, 1868-1910: The Fifth Reign, the Visionary Reforms of King Chulalongkorn (King Rama V)

2. Krissanapong Kirtikara, Higher Education in Thailand and the National Reform Roadmap, Bangkok, 9 January 2001

3. [cited 2016 Jul 25]. Available from: https://www.weforum.org/

4. [cited 2016 Jul 25]. Available from: http://rayong.dlt.go.th/J103.htm

5. [cited 2016 Jul 25]. Available from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ACT_(test)