

International Cooperation Strategies on Higher Education

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Abstract

International cooperation strategies in higher education were collected and synthesized using in-depth interviews and brainstorming (workshops and focus groups) with target groups, including experts, public and private university administrators, foreign students studying in Thailand, Thai students studying overseas, and lecturers in exchange programs. The higher education policies and country development plans are also analyzed in order to examine the possibilities for higher education cooperation within bilateral and multilateral contexts. The cooperation strategies in higher education between Thailand and other countries are as follows.

The international cooperation strategies in higher education at the macro level aim at strengthening and increasing the efficacy of Thai higher education so as to become a hub of education at the regional and international level, which will result in the growth of the education business and provide a source of income : 1) Thailand would become a hub of higher education in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) within the next 10 years (2007-2016); 2) Thailand would become a regional higher education hub in the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) within the next 20 years (2007-2026); 3) Thailand would be able to earn 8,000 million baht from the higher education business within the next 20 years (2006).

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In order to achieve this goal, the important strategies include improving the quality of Thai higher education, supporting higher education cooperation to meet international standards, facilitating regulations for international cooperation and development, advertising Thai higher education for better international cooperation, and enhancing the higher education market in Thailand. Moreover, the cooperation strategies of higher education at the bilateral, multilateral, and international level should be included, for example, the cooperation strategies between Thailand and the Southeast Asia Region, the cooperation strategies between Thailand and the East Asia Region, the cooperation strategies between Thailand and the Asia Pacific Region, the cooperation strategies between Thailand and North America, the cooperation strategies between Thailand and Europe, the cooperation strategies between Thailand and South Asia, the cooperation strategies between Thailand and the Middle East, the cooperation strategies between Thailand and South America, and the higher education cooperation at the multilateral level.

Keywords: *Strategies on Higher Education*

ยุทธศาสตร์ความร่วมมือด้านอุดมศึกษากับต่างประเทศ

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บทคัดย่อ

การสังเคราะห์ยุทธศาสตร์ความร่วมมือด้านอุดมศึกษากับต่างประเทศ โดยใช้ข้อมูลที่รวบรวมได้จากผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิ ผู้บริหารสถาบันอุดมศึกษาทั้งภาครัฐและเอกชน กลุ่มนักศึกษานานาชาติที่มาศึกษาในประเทศไทย นักศึกษาไทยในต่างประเทศ อาจารย์ในโครงการแลกเปลี่ยนระหว่างประเทศ และผู้บริหารหน่วยงานที่เกี่ยวข้อง ประมวลเข้ากับนโยบายอุดมศึกษาของประเทศและนโยบายการพัฒนาประเทศ ที่มีความเชื่อมโยงกัน รวมไปถึงการวิเคราะห์โอกาสการสร้างความร่วมมือด้านอุดมศึกษาในระดับพหุภาคี และทวิภาคี ทำให้ได้ยุทธศาสตร์การสร้างความร่วมมือด้านอุดมศึกษากับต่างประเทศที่เหมาะสมสำหรับประเทศไทย ดังนี้

วิสัยทัศน์ของยุทธศาสตร์ความร่วมมือด้านอุดมศึกษาไทยกับต่างประเทศในภาพรวม เน้นที่การสร้างเสริมความเข้มแข็งและเพิ่มขีดความสามารถของอุดมศึกษาไทยให้เป็นศูนย์กลางอุดมศึกษาของภูมิภาค และได้รับการยอมรับจากนานาชาติ โดยกำหนดเป้าหมายไว้ 3 ประการคือ

- 1) ทำให้ประเทศไทยเป็นศูนย์กลางอุดมศึกษาของกลุ่มประเทศอนุภูมิภาคุ่มแม่น้ำโขง (GMS) ภายใน 10 ปี (พ.ศ. 2550-2559)
- 2) ทำให้ประเทศไทยเป็นศูนย์กลางอุดมศึกษาของภูมิภาคอาเซียน ภายใน 20 ปี (พ.ศ. 2550-2569)
- 3) ทำให้ประเทศไทยมีรายได้จากธุรกิจอุดมศึกษาไม่ต่ำกว่าปีละ 8,000 ล้านบาท

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กลยุทธ์ที่สำคัญในการทำให้เป้าหมายตามยุทธศาสตร์ภาพรวมไปสู่ความสำเร็จ ได้แก่ การเพิ่มขีดความสามารถของสถาบันอุดมศึกษาไทย การสร้างความร่วมมือเพื่อยกระดับ อุดมศึกษาไทยสู่มาตรฐานสากล การดำเนินความร่วมมือเชิงรุกในการสร้างความร่วมมือกับ ต่างประเทศ การปรับกฎระเบียบให้เอื้ออำนวยต่อการพัฒนาความร่วมมือระหว่างประเทศ การสร้างจุดขายของอุดมศึกษาไทยเพื่อโอกาสการระดมความร่วมมือระหว่างประเทศ และ การขยายโอกาสทางการตลาดของธุรกิจอุดมศึกษาไทย

นอกจากนี้ ยังมียุทธศาสตร์ความร่วมมือด้านอุดมศึกษากับต่างประเทศในเวที พหุภาคีและในเวทีขององค์กรระหว่างประเทศ เพื่อเสริมสร้างให้ยุทธศาสตร์รวมบรรลุ เป้าหมายได้อย่างมีประสิทธิภาพยิ่งขึ้น ได้แก่ ยุทธศาสตร์ความร่วมมือกับภูมิภาคเอเชีย ตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ ยุทธศาสตร์ความร่วมมือกับภูมิภาคเอเชียตะวันออก ยุทธศาสตร์ความ ร่วมมือกับภูมิภาคแปซิฟิก ยุทธศาสตร์ความร่วมมือในภูมิภาคอเมริกาเหนือ ยุทธศาสตร์ความ ร่วมมือกับภูมิภาคยุโรป ยุทธศาสตร์ความร่วมมือกับภูมิภาคเอเชียใต้ ยุทธศาสตร์ความ ร่วมมือกับภูมิภาคเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงกลาง ยุทธศาสตร์ความร่วมมือในภูมิภาคอเมริกาใต้ และ ยุทธศาสตร์ความร่วมมือในเวทีขององค์การระหว่างประเทศ

คำสำคัญ: ความร่วมมือด้านอุดมศึกษากับต่างประเทศ

Statement of the Problem

Globalization has exerted a great impact on the development of Thai higher education. In order to adjust competitive capacity for Thai universities, the 9th Higher Education Development Plan (1992-1996) established the goal of increasing the capability of universities to be able to depend on Thai wisdom and to create a learning society. The plan aims to develop Thai universities to be the “brain” of the country in order to be able to compete in the modern economic system and to improve the quality of Thai higher education in reaching the international standards.

In order to achieve this established goal, Thai Higher education needs to collaborate with other countries, and exchange academic knowledge and experiences with each other. However, many countries in the world are diverse in their level of development, in their economic level, and their level of advancement in research, technology, and human capital. Apart from these diversities, the variety of cultures, societies, politics, and geography has to be considered. Additionally, the movement in the world trade platform in services, the marshalling of countries at the regional level, between regions, and at the international level, become complicated factors that should be carefully considered for international cooperation.

In order to promote international cooperation for the greatest benefit of the country's development, the Office of the Higher Education Commission realizes the necessity to have strategies for promoting international higher education. These strategies shall serve as guidelines for increasing the effectiveness of international cooperation and responding to the needs of higher educational institutes and the direction of country's development.

Research Objectives

- 1) To propose international cooperation strategies in higher education for achieving the goals of Thai higher education and government policies
- 2) To propose overall and regional Higher Education cooperation strategies and to define the roles of the government, the Office of the Higher Education Commission, and universities in implementing the strategies
- 3) To propose practical cooperation strategies in higher education

Scope of the Study

- 1) Study government policy concerning the relationships and cooperation with foreign countries
- 2) Study the educational cooperation between Thai organizations and foreign countries
- 3) Study the international cooperation of the Office of the Higher Education Commission and Thai universities at the bilateral and multilateral level
- 4) Study the international cooperation of the universities in other countries in order to learn from their lessons and experiences
- 5) Study and analyze the impacts of the implementation of the international cooperation between the Office of the Higher Education Commission and universities

Research Methodology

- 1) Study from secondary sources by collecting information which relates to or affects international higher education cooperation. The information includes

government policy on foreign affairs, international cooperative policy on higher education, the cooperative framework of international higher education both at the bilateral and multilateral level, and the higher education environment of Thailand and other countries.

2) Study from primary sources

- (1) Study and collect the information from interviews and focus groups
- (2) Collecting the opinions of experts, executives of public and private universities, and executives of related organizations
- (3) Collect information on higher education cooperation from universities and organizations in foreign countries, lessons relating to cooperation with foreign countries, and focus groups, including foreign students studying in Thailand and Thai students studying abroad.
- (4) The brainstorming of specialists and experts to collaboratively analyze advantages, disadvantages, strengths, and opportunities of Thai higher education cooperation between Thailand and foreign countries

Conclusion and Discussion

According to the study and analysis of policies, including higher education policy and overall linking policy on the country's development, the problems and necessities in developing Thai higher education to achieve international standards, and opportunities from higher educational cooperative platforms both at the regional level and in the context of bilateral and multilateral cooperation, conclusions could be made as follows:

Policy and Situation of International Higher Education Cooperation

The 9th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2002-2006) gave priority to the adjustment in economic structure for balance and sustainability by focusing on the development of science and technology, the increase of potential and competitive ability level. It is emphasized that personnel development and social protection in cooperation with structural adjustment for sustainable development of rural and urban areas, as well as natural resources and environmental management, are essential. (NESDB, 2002).

In terms of educational development of the country under the National Economic and Social Development Plan, the Educational System Reform is planned in accordance with economic and social change. Encouraging a life-long learning process to support a knowledge foundation is a rationale for proposing strategies of educational reform. The goal of higher education reform is that the university should be a source of produce qualified scholars that meet the requirements of economic and social development of the country. Furthermore, the university is also a source of knowledge production which is important for developing a knowledge-based society in the economic and social development of the country.

The frameworks with which the Ministry of Education's policy on foreign affairs can be pursued are as follows: 1) to implement the agreements made between the government and other countries to have effects in practice; 2) to promote the exchange of knowledge and experience with many countries. This exchange could be in form of seminars, collaborative projects, staff exchange programs, and communication via modern information technology systems; 3) to use education as an important strategic tool for building understanding and international cooperation,

especially at the regional level; 4) to support Thailand to be an educational center in certain academic fields in which Thailand has academic expertise or aspires to be a leader, such as medicine, tourism, aviation, etc; 5) to use the potentials of Thai academics in other countries to build an academic cooperative network with other academics in those countries; and 6) to support Thai students to study overseas in programs which are necessary and desirable.

The Situation of Development and Higher Education of the Country

According to the Economic and Social Development Committee's evaluation of national development during a half period of the 9th Plan, it was found that although the economy has fully recovered from the crisis during the 8th Plan period, the development of the economic system, the society, and the environment are still in balance, especially in terms of human development. There are in adequate human resource development. The graduates are not highly skillful. The production section is capital intensive, and a learning society is not widely promoted (NESDB, 2004).

For the major problems of Thai higher education, Thai higher education is currently encountering some problems relating to the preparation for increasing its capability for international competition. Those problems are: 1) fundamental knowledge and skills are not strong enough, especially in the field of science, mathematics, and English; and 2) the overall direction of higher education development is not clear. Coordination is not fully facilitated. There is still an overlap in providing services. The interest in quality development is not strong enough; 3) for higher education problems, the university council, institutions, and faculty have not been able to adjust themselves to the rapid changes especially in the quality improvement of instruction and research standards.

Analysis of the opportunities to seek higher education cooperation in regional platforms

This study investigates the cooperation both at the regional level and in the context of bilateral and multilateral cooperation. The regional level covers eight regions, including Southeast Asia, the East Asia, the Pacific, North America, Europe, South Asia, the Middle East, and South America. However, only the Southeast Asia region is presented here.

According to the analysis of the opportunities to seek higher education cooperation in the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) group members can be classified into two small groups, which Thailand has an opportunity to set different initiations or emphases in seeking cooperation. The original members of ASEAN are Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand, whose development level is similar. However, Singapore and Malaysia are more advanced than Thailand in many aspects, especially regarding education. The new ASEAN members (most of them are in the Greater Mekong Sub-region) are Cambodia, Laos, Burma, and Vietnam, whose development level is lower than Thailand. Thailand serves as the provider for both academic and financial support, especially for higher education. Thailand continually offers scholarships to students from these countries to study in Thailand.

International Cooperation Strategies on Higher Education

Three main international cooperation strategies in higher education are proposed based on policy document synthesis, interviews, focus groups, and brainstorming: 1) overall international cooperation strategies in higher education; 2) cooperation strategies in Thai higher education with foreign countries at the regional level; 3) cooperation strategies on higher education in multilateral platforms and international organizations.

Overall International Cooperation Strategies on Higher Education

Strategic Framework

To strengthen and increase the capability of Thai higher education to be a regional center and to gain international acceptance, then educational business will grow up as an important source of revenue. In order to achieve such a framework, it is necessary to follow three strategies: 1) Thailand becomes a higher educational center of the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) within 10 years (2007-2016); 2) Thailand becomes a higher educational center of the ASEAN region within 20 years (1007-2026); 3) Thailand receives income from higher educational business no less than 8,000 million baht per year within 20 years (2026).

The strategies for cooperation strategy implementation are as follows:

- **Increase the capability of Thai Universities**

Improve the quality of curriculum and instruction. Prioritize and seek cooperation in curriculum development, which is important for national development. Continually motivate and support curriculum and instruction development in universities.

Develop educational staff. Provide training programs, scholarships, and personnel exchange programs in fields which relate to the needs of the country. Support research in order to develop research capabilities, build expertise in particular fields, as well as exchange educational staff and higher educational resources consistent with the commercial agreement of educational services.

Promote research collaboration and put research findings into practice. Support research activities that respond to the needs of the business and

industrial sectors and relate to national development policy. Encourage universities to join hands with the business and industrial sectors in conducting research. Stimulate technology transfer. Additionally, it is necessary to accelerate and enhance the effectiveness of research networks to connect with famous research organizations in foreign countries and encourage the management of intellectual property.

Seek other resources to support the potential development of Thai higher education by offering incentives to the private sectors to support resources and to seek support from international cooperative organizations by means of resource exchange to strengthen universities.

Strengthen the disciplinary networks among universities (consortium) by continually supporting academic activities. Set the direction of networks to support national development. Stimulate the establishment of disciplinary networks of universities in various fields. Create both national and international networks for curriculum development, credit transfer, and exchange programs for students, teachers, and researchers.

Develop an Educational Quality Assurance System to gain concrete acceptance for educational standards among Thai international universities.

Rank Thai Universities. Set up ranking systems, determine acceptable indicators of public and private university ranking, carry out evaluation for ranking, and publicize information about Thai university ranking.

- **Promote cooperation to improve Thai higher education toward international standards**

Building a model for establishing international cooperation by building on the strengths of the existing center of excellence in order to be a model for

establishing an excellence center in other aspects, and seeking cooperation with international universities in the fields which Thai universities are in a state of preparedness.

Cooperating to develop e-learning standards and a virtual university.

Promote cooperation between Thai and international universities in developing electronic media and e-learning systems in classrooms. Initiate a project of standard virtual university establishment to get Thailand ready for cross-border education under the quality control of instruction and evaluation of authorized organizations.

- **Conduct proactive cooperation in establishing cooperation with foreign countries**

Develop in-depth understanding about the targets by forming teams of educational experts who clearly understand the economic and social status of the target countries. Estimate their needs for higher education and the capability of Thai universities to be responsive and establish an information center for building international higher education cooperation.

Strengthen relationships with existing alliances and build relationships with new alliances. Encourage universities to engage in activities according to agreements made with foreign countries. Establish an organization for international education services, appoint marketing representatives of Thai higher education in the target markets, and encourage Thai universities to participate in activities with universities of the target countries.

- **Revise rules and regulations to facilitate the development of international cooperation**

Revise related rules and regulations. Study rules and regulations which cause problems so that the relevant organizations can revise these rules and

regulations. Facilitate visa permit procedure for foreign students. Consider relaxing some rules for foreign students so that they can work to broaden their experiences while studying.

- **Create Attractive Selling Points of Thai higher education for the opportunity of international cooperation**

Develop a body of knowledge which reflects Thai identity and wisdom to achieve international standards. Publicize them to gain domestic and international acceptance.

Develop a general body of knowledge by supporting research that creates the body of knowledge and building expertise in particular fields.

Use the prominent features of Thai art and culture as well as natural resources to promote cooperation. Publicize Thai art and culture as well as tourism resources to other countries. Promote the meetings of Thai people abroad for doing activities to publicize Thai art and culture.

- **Build up a market for Thai higher educational business.**

Create a market opportunity for Thai Higher Education Institutes by studying the manpower needs at the higher educational level of Thailand and target countries, and collect information regarding the distinguishing academic points of Thailand such as food and beverage, medicine, traditional medicine, agriculture, music, and art and culture in order to publicize and set up a marketing mechanism for strengthening the relationship and expanding cooperation.

Cooperation Strategies on Thai Higher Education with Foreign Countries at the Regional level: Cooperation Strategies with in the ASEAN Region

Strategic Framework

Since ASEAN members have a close relationship with Thailand in terms of race, history, and culture, it is appropriate to set the first priority to the ASEAN Region. The role of higher educational cooperation should be responsive to the ASEAN Declaration of Unity and support the policy of Thailand as the regional center with an emphasis on the social and economic security of this region.

Strategies for the strategy implementation are as follows:

- **Prepare for a Declaration of Unity among ASEAN nations**

Set an adjustment method of universities for the unity of ASEAN by brainstorming to set guidelines and plan for adjusting Thai universities. Set working plans which follow the guidelines for the adjustment of Thai universities, make an agreement among members to set a collaborative guideline, and pursue the established agreement framework.

- **Revise higher education rules and regulations which can be enforced by member countries**

Revise rules and regulations which cause problems for cooperation

- **Form an expert team in higher education to build cooperation in the ASEAN region**

Form an expert team in higher education to discuss a collaborative platform by marshalling experts in related fields and clearly appointing a person to be responsible for forming an expert team on ASEAN higher education. ASEAN would coordinate with related organizations to gain information on the overall movement of ASEAN group members. Collect, present, and synthesize information from different sources for common utilization.

- **Build up strength by using ASEAN academic features in order to promote cooperation from foreign countries**

Use existing organizations and ASEAN academic networks for the benefit of establishing cooperation with foreign countries outside ASEAN by establishing cooperation with non-ASEAN countries via specialized centers: the ASEAN Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO)/, Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS)/, Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation (ACMEC) and supporting the ASEAN University Network (AUN) to build the academic strengths of member nations. Establish new non-ASEAN alliances to support ASEAN activities by giving them opportunity for participation.

- **Create market opportunity for Thai higher educational business by allowing ASEAN countries to be clients**

Use marketing strategies to support Thai educational businesses by establishing centers for publicizing Thailand's educational services in all regions and using the Thai identity, environment, and nature to enhance the strength of Thai higher education.

Adopt the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP)/AUN method to create an international credit transfer system in the ASEAN region by setting criteria for credit transfer among ASEAN countries and publicizing these criteria to teachers and students.

- **Create cooperation under partnership and equivalent prestige among Cambodia - Laos - Myanmar - Vietnam (CLMV) countries.**

Adjust assistance among CLMV countries for interchangeable cooperation by studying the strengths of CLMV countries to establish appropriate exchange cooperation.

- **Create market opportunity for Thai educational business and build a market for Thai higher education in CLMV countries.**

Use the existing fundamental structure to create an opportunity for Thai higher education by providing educational services to CLMV students along the border of Thailand, establishing educational service centers so that the students from CLMV countries can come to study and return home, facilitating cross-border transportation for students studying in Thailand, and making educational investment in CLMV countries by introducing curricula and join establishing campus.

- **Encourage Thai students and Thai universities to pay more attention to CLMV countries**

Strengthen the centers which study neighboring countries. Funding the centers that study the neighboring countries to regularly organize activities and publicize information concerning the language and culture of the neighboring countries for teachers and students.

Cooperation Strategies in Higher Education at the Multi-lateral and International Organization platforms

Strategic Framework

Cooperation in multi-lateral and international organizations platform are important tools for economic and social improvement. Thailand should raise issues regarding higher educational cooperation in such platforms.

The strategies for cooperation strategy implementation are as follows:

- **Create higher educational cooperation in multi-lateral platform to seek cooperative issues and the participation in cooperative frameworks in which Thailand takes part as a member**

Use mechanism of ASEAN platform to present issues on international higher educational cooperation, establish cooperation with non-ASEAN countries which have a relationship with ASEAN, create a role for higher education leaders among CLMV countries, and give advice for capacity building to open free trade to CLMV countries.

Use mechanism of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) platform to benefit education, research, training, academic cooperation, preparation for free-trade agreements, and information and news on APEC.

Use mechanism of GMS and ACMEC platforms to improve the standards of local universities in Thailand's region to be cooperative centers as well as provide educational services and training in the fields in which Thailand is specialized, and use higher education mechanisms to help reduce problems of poverty by providing distance education.

Use mechanism of Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand-Economic Cooperation (BIMST-EC) platform to create higher educational cooperation by cooperating with India for the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) instruction.

Use mechanism of Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) platform to stimulate the creation of continuity in generating ASEM capital during annual conference of Ministers of Education in order to strengthen the relationship among ASEAN countries and cooperation with European nations and to connect the role of ASEM with educational quality assurance members.

- **Higher educational cooperation among international organizations**

Use mechanism of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to establish cooperation on educational quality assurance, credit transfer between international educational institutes, and the development of Thai university curricula to gain international acceptance. Furthermore, the educational information and news which UNESCO gathers from its members can provide benefits as a part of the operation of an information center and to be widely publicized to the public.

Use mechanism in framework to take advantages of Centers of excellence and cooperative network for existing development and reducing poverty problems. There are three centers in Thailand, the SEAMEO Regional Center for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO-RIHED), the SEAMEO Regional Center for Tropical Medicine and Public Health (SEAMEO-TROPMED), and the SEAMEO Center for Archaeology and Fine Arts (SEAMEO-SPAFA). Moreover, Thailand might corporate with extra members and related organizations to gather resources and a body of knowledge among members.

Seek an opportunity in World Trade Organization (WTO) and Free Trade Agreement (FTA) framework to negotiate about education under WTO and FTA framework. This aims to bring about common benefits within and between countries.

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