



**Essay**

## **Global Education for Asia in the Twenty-first Century**

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Professor Wichit Srisa-an is a prominent figure in Thailand education. As Foundation Rector for Suranaree University of Technology, Thailand's first university independent of the civil service and first university to provide cooperative education, Professor Srisa-an is a highly respected figure in the Asia-Pacific region. Professor Srisa-an holds vast experience and strong views on the educational requirements for Asia. This article, reproduced from an edited book of his writings on education in the region, presents his views on the challenges facing Asia as it seeks to join the global economy. His thoughts provide a unique insight into the development of tertiary education, including cooperative education (or experiential education as he refers to work-based learning in this article), in a rapidly developing region of increasing global importance (*Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 2002, 3(1), 1-4).

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The last decade of this century was marked by a number of significant social, political, economic and technological changes. Many formerly labeled 'developing countries' in the Asia-Pacific region have progressed to become newly industrialized countries. They have become partners of developed countries rather than recipients of aid. Not considering the localized revolutions or unrest in some countries, there was an end of the cold war and minimization of threats of nuclear warfare with the signing of nuclear peace agreement by the world powers. The relative peace allowed the pursuit of more productive endeavors like increased agricultural production assuring food security in many countries, enhanced industrialization in developing countries permitting more balanced trade relations and hence greater economic growth. Countries with formerly closed economies have adopted open market economies and have established new trade relations with other countries.

In addition, great improvements in mass transportation especially those of air transport have permitted mass movement of people to seek new employment, new homes or just for tourism and pleasure.

Another important technological development is in communication and information technologies (ICT). Developments in fibre-optics technology, cheaper television sets and personal computers as well as wide use of the Internet have allowed easy, fast and to some extent cheaper means of communication and access to

information. Thus, information has become a new form of capital and source of power.

All these developments have made the world smaller as any place is now more easily accessible. Both geographical and sociopolitical boundaries have diminished in importance. There is a free flow of information, manpower and capital in different countries. Instead of the state as the usual unit of polity, there is formation of larger groupings of different nations like the European Union (EU), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Asia Pacific Economic Corporation (APEC), and Non-Alignment (NAM) countries and others.

The globalization movement which started this decade will even be greater, stronger and wider in scope in the coming decades of the next century. Globalization will mean more interaction and greater cooperation regionally and internationally. However, it could also mean greater competition for resources including qualified manpower, markets, information and technology.

However, in spite all the great technological advancements, the individual person, the human being, is still and should rightly be in the centre both as the object and achiever of all these developments and progress. Therefore, everybody must be properly equipped with skills and knowledge as well with attitudes and perspectives as citizens of the worked to be able to adequately meet the challenges of the modern world which is multiple, complex and interdependent.

One of the most effective strategies to develop skills and to acquire knowledge as well as international ethos to meet the challenges of globalization is *education, a continuing or lifelong education - higher education for all*.

### **Vision and Philosophy of Borderless Education**

'Lifelong education' and 'higher education for all' are the major concepts of educational management in the era of globalization. In a democratic society having equal opportunity of access to quality education is part of human rights. All genders, ages, nationalities, religions, cultural minorities should have the same educational opportunity if education for all is to become a reality.

Education is a continuous process and must enable one to respond to social needs and improve one's quality of life. Education must be available both for the youth and adults, both formally and informally.

In the present fast-changing learning society, high technology becomes a means for producing the lifelong education required. Therefore, this is an era of matching needs and resources between a learning society and technological society. To meet the lifelong education needs of present and future societies, new educational systems and management must be developed and utilized. Among such new concepts are open education, distance education and borderless education, with virtual learning technology as an instrument or means.

In the past, borderless education was only an ideal of long distance education. It however lacked concrete means for implementation because of the inefficient quality of telecommunication systems, which are useful channels in knowledge and experience transfer between teachers and learners.

The traditional system or present educational system may be considered as 'limited education'. This system is limited in admission, limited in structure, limited in learning environment and limited in administrative autonomy.

Because of limited infrastructure (e.g., buildings, instructors, educational materials), the number of students must be controlled. Normally, a system of examination or grade entry requirement is used as means of selecting entrants. Learning must always take place in a classroom or at most with only supplementary field practice. This system of management is very restrictive and bureaucratic with most rules and policies promulgated by a ministry rather than the university itself.

On the contrary, open education, distance education and borderless education, are the forms of 'expanded education' which give everybody fair opportunity. They decrease limitations to learning and teaching. Among the forms of distance education in developed countries are external studies, extension programs, extra-mural studies, open education or open learning. With the use of high technology in information technology (IT), students do not have to attend courses in classrooms. The major factor is IT, no matter what level of education is being considered as 'educational media'.

In the past, experiments on open education with educational media involved both specific media and

multimedia. The first prevailing medium was correspondence teaching using generally printed materials supplemented by tapes. Later, radio and television were also used. Now computer aided teaching-learning packages are also available. However, no single medium can meet all the educational needs of very varied clientele. Each medium has its strengths and weaknesses, each complementing one another. Use of multimedia is therefore being recommended.

Today, IT as multimedia via computer network, and two-way communication media, help create the so-called virtual learning which is a highly efficient educational technology. It allows the expansion of education; that is, it makes education borderless.

Thus, the new form of distance education can have audiences or students from many places where communication and IT networks are available. It is the virtual learning environment.

### **Needs for Human Resources Development in a Borderless World**

To meet the challenges of a borderless community, the graduates of schools and colleges must be able to work and live in an environment that is increasingly becoming global. Global citizens must have global competencies such as, (1) ability to use international or regional language, (2) knowledge and understanding of others, (3) ability to use information technology/computers, (4) possession of learning and management skills and some degree of competence in various technical fields, and (5) knowledge and appreciation of global values.

The first competence necessary in the borderless world is language and communication. English becomes a must for international communication. Regional language is also necessary for communication across the borders in a region. One language is not enough; a second or third language is needed. One must be multilingual to function in the borderless world. It is through language that one is able to share ideas, literature and culture, beliefs, aspirations and common tasks to be performed. With actual contacts with foreign students and professors, the practical applications of the language skill will also be enhanced. More cosmopolitan people will inhabit the cities and the members of work teams will be multinational, multidisciplinary and multilingual.

Another kind of language that has to be learned is the computer language. With the use of Internet as source of information one must be knowledgeable of the computer language. Language learning will be made easier through the use of multimedia instructional packages, which can be conveniently accessed both at home and in school.

The knowledge and understanding of others are necessary for transactions across the borders. One needs to know one's own strengths and weaknesses as well as those of others. Knowledge and understanding of other cultures, values, and ways of life are necessary for the graduates to be able to live without biases and prejudices and to work harmoniously together with respect and consideration for others as well as tolerance for differences.

The competency to acquire, analyze and use information is urgently needed. With the geometric information explosion, it is no longer possible for a teacher to be the sole provider of information to students. Instead, the new teacher must guide the student in the collection, analysis and use of information. The whole world is now the source of information not anymore only the teacher or the university library. Students and more so faculty members need to use electronic mail and the Internet in pursuing their academic interests and careers. With these tools one can work across the border and have quick access to the latest information. The professors are now an education or learning facilitator rather than an instructor.

The fourth kind of competence is learning and managerial skills as well as specialization of certain technical field. As specialization in various professions grows, education is called upon to provide the workforce with adequate technical training to serve the more diversified and complicated production and service sectors. There will be a need to balance the general education for life and the specialized education for work.

With an information explosion, it is no longer possible to include everything in the curricula of specific degree programs. The student must be able to learn by her/himself. An important part of education would be learning how to learn. There will also be need to bring close cooperation between the university and the workplace so that the workforce can be continuously trained and up-graded throughout the professional life. This availability of opportunity to learn from joint programs between universities and industries is one form of lifelong education needed in a globalized world. This lifelong learning must be based on the appreciation of this philosophy and development of correct attitude of continuing search for new information and knowledge. A global citizen must therefore know how to learn - where to get information, how to get it, what information to get and how to use it. Education must endow learners with an inquiring spirit that will help them find enjoyment in learning and thus make life-long learning a rewarding experience for all.

A university graduate must have managerial skills. Entrepreneurial spirit and management skills will give individuals more freedom and alternatives in their careers and make the world of work more challenging and enjoyable.

The last competence, that is, knowledge and appreciation of global values, is very important for sustainable development. Without them, there will be no social development. Among the necessary global values are respect for human rights, democracy and concern for the environment. They have to be promoted and appreciated. Every person must have high moral values and must be ethical in everyday activities and work.

Appreciation of common values would reduce conflicts and differences and thus promote attainment of peace and prosperity. Equal rights, justice and freedom for all humans should be the ideology as well as a basic requirement of a civilized world of tomorrow. Global environmental degradation has become a global concern as one realizes that we are living in only one global ecosystem

and the effects of environmental degradations cannot be confined within national boundaries.

These characteristics, whether technical knowledge, managerial or communication skills learning techniques or attitudes and values are the critical means of achieving peace and prosperity among mankind now and the future. All these competencies must be provided through global education.

### **Global Education Management System**

To achieve borderless or global education there would be a need to redesign educational provision to a dual-mode delivery system of face-to-face and distance-mode utilizing in both cases high technology information and communication technologies, multi-media (printed, audio-visual, telecommunication) as well as computer-aided teaching-learning packages. The university must have a multimedia production centre that would produce the teaching-learning materials required.

The borderless education management in terms of virtual university must make learners and instructors develop a sense of belonging to the university; and be useful for enabling learner and instructor to interact as if in the same room. The training of the staff would also help inculcate the correct philosophy of global education and develop the appropriate attitudes towards the system. The provision of this continuous system of feedback and interaction between professor and learner and among learners make learning "real"

### **Success Factors for Borderless Education System**

Lastly, allow me to consider at least three factors which I consider important for successful implementation of a borderless education system. These factors include (1) accessibility of the programs to learners, (2) quality knowledge base, and (3) provision of experiential education.

#### **Accessibility to Learners**

Being borderless means promoting equity and providing education opportunity to as many learners as possible. A higher education for all means accessibility of programs to those without previous degrees, those who want to obtain additional degrees, those who want to change their field of specialization, those who want to enhance experience without obtaining a degree or those who want to study just for pleasure.

It is borderless in the sense that there will be no boundaries for the venue of learning-it can be a classroom, the field, the place of work or even at home.

The borderless education management must provide suitable knowledge base both under the 'real environment' and the 'virtual environment' knowledge base is a kind of database, which compile knowledge in the form of information and experiences. Students of both face-to-face and distance modes could quickly reach, search, and exchange and compile information and knowledge of

various forms. Thus, quality knowledge base is an important factor in the success of borderless education.

Accessibility to such a knowledge base can be enhanced by development of appropriate delivery system as through interactive electronic media. This availability to a greater number of learners can also be achieved through establishment of a system of network or linkages between universities nationally, regionally and internationally. Such networking would facilitate sharing or exchange of courseware, mobility of professors and students and collaborative research in borderless education. That is why, I am looking forward to the discussion during this Conference [editor's note: the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization 1996 conference - see bibliography] of the proposal for such a network for distance and multimedia education in the Asia-Pacific region.

Such networking would also help breakdown the cultural barriers between regions as multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural teams produce courseware.

### **Experiential Learning**

Curriculum development must be based on experiences of members of society so that their actual needs could be served. The things learned must support not only basic knowledge, but must be relevant to the world of work. The use of resource persons or experts from the community, like from the industries and government agencies, would allow the transfer of knowledge, information and real experiences to the students.

This practice like in cooperative education would permit the use of theoretical knowledge obtained in the university in industries or environments of real situation. Students in borderless education system must therefore take courses in cooperative programs just like the regular students.

Similarly, staff from private sectors and industries as well as government agencies must be supported to study in borderless education programs for continuous updating of their knowledge skills or for new activities in the future, that is, they should have access to life-long education.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I hope the ideas and thoughts presented on the philosophy, vision, goals and objectives as well as strategies for the implementation and management of borderless education system aimed to develop global competence of global citizens would be useful as starting points for further discussion during the working group sessions. I look forward to the fruitful exchange of ideas and experiences by the distinguished resource persons and participants of the Conference so that the present and future programs for borderless education in the region could be further improved and better serve the needs of our society.

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