

The Future of Thai Education

by

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Distinguished Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honor to be invited to present a keynote address on “the Future of Thai Education” at this workshop. I will present some forces of change first and then will focus on the education reform in Thailand.

1 Thailand in the Decade of Reforms

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are in the era of globalisation. Its process has and will continue to shape the world. It has created new political, economic and social orders. Under these rapid changes, all nations have to seek both cooperation and competition. Information and communication technology (ICT) becomes the very important tool connecting people from different parts of the world. The exchange of data and information is so rapid and convenient that we feel we live in the borderless world. The world community is facing two challenges : one is the rapid changes and the other is intense competition.

Countries around the world have to be prepared for these challenges. They have to strengthen their abilities for self-reliance and competition. A drastic change in the name of “Reform” becomes the urgent national agenda of many countries, including Thailand. In the past 10 years, Thailand has carried out three major reforms : political, educational, and bureaucratic.

Political Reform

This is the most important one because it is the foundation of the other two reforms. On the 11th of October B.E. 2540 (1997), the New Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand was enacted. This so called

“people-version” Constitution opened up a new chapter of history. The Constitution was drafted by the Constitution Drafting council consisting of 99 members elected by the people. This people – elected body utterly produced a new constitution that truly reflects popular wills on political stability, democratic principle as well as good governance as new benchmarks for a better society in which voices of all walks of life will be heard and effectively responded.

1.2 Education Reform

This is the result of the new Constitution. Section 81 stipulates the framework for education reform as follows

The State shall provide education to achieve knowledge alongside morality, provide law relating to national education, improve education in harmony with economic and social change, create and strengthen knowledge and instil right awareness with regard to politics and a democratic regime of government with the King as Head of the State, support researches in various sciences, accelerate the development of science and technology for national development, develop the teaching profession, and promote local knowledge and national arts and culture.

The Constitution called for law relating to national education. The National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999) was enacted and became effective on August 20, 1999. This act sets the framework for education reform of all types at all levels and of the whole system. As the result of this act, the Ministry of University Affairs and the national Education council have been consolidated to form the new Ministry of Education.

3 Bureaucratic or Administrative Reform

To modernize the administrative system of government organizations in line with political reform, Thailand has effectively implemented bureaucratic reform since October 2, 2004. Many Ministries have been restructured and new Ministries have been created. There are totally 20 Ministries now. Among new Ministries are :

- Ministry of Tourism and Sports,
- Ministry of Social Development and Human Security,
- Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment,
- Ministry of Information and Communication Technology.

Ministry of Energy,
Ministry of Culture

New ideas and approaches about management such as the concept of chief Executive Officer (C.E.O.) Administrative Integration and Result – Based Budgeting are adopted to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of public administration.

2. The Knowledge Revolution

The modern world is a world of knowledge-based development. Fundamental determinants of global competitiveness depend on access, creation and utilization of knowledge. They are also determinants of the level of development. Knowledge is, therefore, a dividing line and also a gap between advanced countries and developing countries. As knowledge increases, the gap is widened. Developing countries are lagging far behind. They need strategies and knowledge management in order to benefit from knowledge revolution. They have to develop knowledge-based economy through an access, creation, and use of knowledge. From knowledge revolution, developing countries can tap, adapt, adopt knowledge from abroad. Knowledge could be created and developed to meet special needs of the country.

Knowledge – based economy consists of the following important components:

- (1) Human Resource Development
- (2) Research and Development,
- (3) Dynamic Information Infrastructure, and
- (4) Science, Technology , Innovation.

Human resource development is required to produce knowledge workers for the knowledge-based economy. Research and Development is the foundation for access, creation, and use of knowledge. ICT is needed for easy access and dissemination. Science, technology and innovation are the sources of new quality products and services. These components are necessary for the knowledge-based society.

The driving force moving these four components is education. But only quality education can be the driver. Therefore, we need education reform for the development of knowledge-based society.

3. Education Reform for Development

3.1 Problems

Since the past decade, Thailand has accumulated problems of education for development that could be classified into four dimensions. Quantitative, qualitative, efficiency, and effectiveness.

On Quantitative

The problems of student number are due to the lack of educational opportunity. The gap is between the rich and the poor, the advantaged and the disadvantaged, the rural people and the city people. The direction for reform is to provide life-long education for all.

On Qualitative

The is concerned with curriculum and instruction. Teaching and learning process must be reformed. The curriculum must cover not only universal knowledge but also Thai and local wisdoms. Teaching must be student-centred. Rote learning must be replaced by training in thinking process, analytical, and problem-solving skills. Quality assurance system, both internal and external, must be implemented. Wherever the students are, in remote areas or in urban communities, there must be an assurance of quality and standards of education..

On Efficiency

In the past, decision-making power was centralized. Future direction is to decentralize to schools. School-based management and community participation have to be implemented in order to enhance efficiency.

On Effectiveness

The concern is with the cost-effectiveness and the quality of education. Budget allocation has to be shifted from supply-side to demand-side in order to get higher returns on investment in education. The most important aspect of effectiveness is the quality of graduates. In the world of competition and globalisation, we need knowledge workers and graduates who can function as global citizens. Education must aim at the development of these desirable abilities.

3.2 *Directions*

Directions of education reform for development are as follows

the Development of Potentiality and Quality of the Thai People.

Important measures include

extending compulsory education from six to nine years,
 providing basic educational opportunity for 2 years free
 of charge,
 providing vocational training and life-long education, and
 reform of teaching and learning and implementing quality
 assurance.

On Human Resource Development.

Important measures are

- (1) reform of vocational education,
- and (2) reform of higher education.

Human resource development should aim at producing quality
 knowledge workers in sufficient numbers.

On Research and Development.

In order to create knowledge, innovations, and technologies
 necessary for knowledge-based society, following measures are important :

Support and strengthen research and development of
 higher education institutions, government agencies, and
 private sector.

Mobilise resources and promote investment in Research
 and Development by using tax exemption as incentives or
 other measures as appropriate.

4. Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen,

I believe I have shown to you and shared with you how education is important to knowledge-based society. In the case of Thailand, the future of the country depends heavily on the future of education. I hope the education reform will be successful in moving the level of national development to the higher level in the near future.

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