

Higher Level Distance Education in Thailand

by

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I. Introduction

The past decade has witnessed many major developments in distance education in Thailand. These include :

(1) An Open University employing the distance teaching and learning system has been established. It is a state university offering home-based education at the degree level, through the use of multi-media, to people all over the country. It was the first Open University to be established in Southeast Asia. The Open University referred to is Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) which was established in the year 1978. At present it has an enrollment of approximately half a million students of whom 90% are working adults. Each year approximately 12,000 students graduate from this University with Bachelor's degrees.

(2) The Department of Non-Formal Education has been established to provide the public with non-formal education. One method employed by this Department is the distance teaching and learning system, provided for the benefit of out-of school youth. The program offered is known as "Radio Correspondence Courses" and uses multi-media, or integrated media, to provide instruction through correspondence and radio.

(3) The Educational Radio Network of Thailand has been established in accordance with the World Bank's Loans for Education Development Project. Since 1984, programs have been broadcast nationwide. The following air time has been allocated to organizations concerned with education through the use of radio:

Organization	Hours Per Week	Nature of Program
Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University	$49\frac{1}{2}$	Educational Programs of the University
The Department of Non-Formal Education	$25\frac{1}{2}$ 20	Programs for Schools Programs for Radio Correspondence
The Teacher Training Department	$10\frac{1}{2}$	In-service Teacher Upgrading Programs
The Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives	7	Dissemination of Knowledge to People Engaged in the Agricultural Profession
The Ministry of Public Health	$2\frac{1}{2}$	Programs Aimed at Promoting Health Amongst the People

(4) A National Television Network for Education and Public Relations (Channel 11) has been set up. Through this network education programs and government public relations programs are broadcast nationwide, with each category occupying 50% of the broadcasting

time. This project, which has received unconditional aid from Japan, will go to air upon completion in April, 1988. It is scheduled to operate 18 hours per day and will allocate 9 hours broadcasting time per day to educational organizations. Upon completion of the new network, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University broadcasting time, currently $10\frac{1}{2}$ hours per week, will be increased to 26 hours per week. Broadcasting time for other educational organizations will also be increased.

II. Recent Developments in Higher Level Distance Education

1. Developments at Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University

(1) Program Development

At present STOU offers courses through 10 Schools : Liberal Arts, Educational Studies, Management Science, Law, Economics, Health Science, Home Economics, Agricultural Extension and Cooperatives, Political Science and Communication Arts. The 6th National Economic and Social Development Plan (1987-1991) provides for the establishment of the 11th School. This is the School of Sciences and Technology which will offer courses in the following three areas:

- (i) Computer Technology
- (ii) Printing Technology
- (iii) Electronics

Preparations are currently being made to enable these programs to be launched by 1989.

(2) Media Development

In 1985, STOU entered into a cooperative project with the University of Guelph, Canada, to develop a computer assisted instruction program called Videotex Integrated Teaching and Learning System (VITAL). At this stage, courses in Science, Mathematics and Statistics have been developed.

(3) Development of Area Resource Centers

STOU has set up a variety of centers throughout the country to provide education services to students. At present, there are 8 Regional Centers, 76 Local Study Centers, 74 Library Corners, 7 Agricultural Extension and Cooperatives Centers and 36 Health Science Centers. The University seeks cooperation from outside agencies to set up these centers and to use their existing facilities and resources. For example, cooperation is received from the Ministry of Public Health to use hospitals and nursing college facilities as centers where STOU students may gain practical experience.

Under the provisions of the Sixth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1987-1991), a new type of center known as the "Area Resource Center" will be established. Ten Area Resource Centers are planned to be set up throughout the country. These Area Resource Centers will serve as a network to provide media services and materials to students in regional areas. They will also serve to coordinate activities provided by regional and local study centers. For the current fiscal year (1988), the Government has allocated a budget for the establishment of one Center in the southern region. It is expected to provide services before the end of 1988.

2. Developments in Regional Cooperation

(1) Consortium on Innovations in Higher Education for Development

STOU has been designated by UNESCO as the Lead Institution for the Consortium on Innovations in Higher Education for Development. In cooperation with the

UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Asia and the Pacific, STOU has, on several occasions, served as the venue for various workshops and seminars on distance education. The UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok also supports the publication of the newsletter "Never Too Far". This newsletter provides a forum for the exchange of views amongst those interested in distance education at the higher education level.

(2) Asian Distance Education Research Group

Four institutions in Asia, through financial assistance provided by the International Development Research Council of Canada, undertook joint research projects on distance education. STOU, representing Thailand, conducted research on "Occupational Benefits of Open University Education"; Universitas Terbuka of Indonesia on "Open University Tutorial Systems"; Universiti Sains of Malaysia on "Off-Campus Program Student Characteristics"; and Allama Iqbal Open University of Pakistan on "Open University Drop-Outs". The work proceeded very well and was followed by a workshop on "Asian Distance Education Research" at STOU between 18-21 March, 1987. Researchers involved in the above projects participated in the workshop. A final workshop is planned to be held in Pakistan by March, 1988. Further cooperation in distance education research is expected to result from this joint project.

(3) Regional Resource Center

From 26 November to 3 December 1986, a Regional Seminar on Distance Education was organized jointly by the Asian Development Bank and Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University in cooperation with the Regional Office of UNESCO, Bangkok. The seminar was attended by 51 participants from 17 member countries of the ADB. Ten official observers from international organizations and government bodies also attended. Several recommendations addressed to the governments of the participating countries and to international and bi-lateral agencies have been made. One of these recommendations was the establishment of mechanism for regional cooperation in distance education. A proposal has been made to establish a "Regional Resource Center" for Asia and the Pacific. It will serve as a documentation center and promote cooperation amongst distance education institutions in the Asia and Pacific Region.

(4) The Asian Association of Open Universities

Realizing the significance of distance education in offering learning opportunities to mankind and recognizing that friendship and close exchanges amongst institutions of open higher learning can help develop distance education, the open universities within the Asian region have laid plans to found the Asian Association of Open Universities. One of the Association's main objectives is to expand educational opportunities available to all the people of the region and to improve the cost effectiveness of member institutions by exchanging management information, teaching materials and research.

The inaugural meeting is scheduled to take place in Bangkok from 12-14 November, 1987 and continue in Tokyo from 15-17 November, 1987. When established, the Association will play a vital role in promoting distance education in the Asian region.

(5) Bi-lateral Cooperation Between Allama Iqbal Open University and STOU

A proposal has recently been made for bi-lateral cooperation between the Allama Iqbal Open University and Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University. A project on "Multi-Disciplinary and Cross Cultural Post Graduate Courses on Women's Development Studies" is being worked out between the two institutions.

(6) Joint Production of Educational Media

The educational television program "Asian Society : The Impact of Rice Culture on Society" is being produced for distance education purposes under the International

Cooperation Project of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, Japan. Scholarships have been awarded by the Ministry to enable academic personnel from foreign institutions to work jointly with academic personnel from Japanese institutions in producing educational media for use in the distance teaching-learning system. Academic personnel from Japan, Thailand and the Republic of Korea are currently working together under this project in cooperation with the National Institute of Multi-Media Education, Japan. The television programs to be produced will cover a wide range of subject matter. Information will be collected and filming conducted in such different Asian countries as the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand. The program, which is a fine example of a joint production program, will serve to promote a good understanding amongst the people of those countries and the region.

III. Facilitating and Impeding Factors

The following factors are of major importance to the successful application of the distance teaching-learning system :

1. **Infrastructure:** As distance education employs the multi-media approach, it is necessary that it has an adequate infrastructure, such as a reliable postal service and an efficient up-to-date tele-communications system.

In the event that education is based on radio and/or television programs, a well equipped production center and a wide range broadcasting network is necessary. Without such supportive infrastructure as mentioned above, the system will not be able to reach its goals or target groups successfully and will be doomed to failure.

2. **Availability of Academic Resources:** The establishment of an open university requires academic personnel who can serve as course team members, course writers and part time tutors. Such resources should be drawn from various outside agencies, both public and private, and should include outstanding academics from other universities. The existence and sharing of such a pool of academic resources in society will facilitate the operation of distance education.

3. **Political Will and Cooperation:** The political atmosphere should be such that it is favorable and supportive of the establishment of an open university. The policy makers at the national level should possess a good knowledge and understanding of the distance education system and be willing to support its development.

4. **Complimentary and Supplementary in Nature:** Distance Education Institutions should be accepted as being complimentary to, rather than competitive with, conventional institutions otherwise there will be problems with regards to recognition and cooperation.

5. **Leadership:** The successful implementation of the distance teaching-learning system requires a strong and dynamic leader. The administrator of the open university should be a person of recognized capability, experienced in the application of distance teaching systems, innovative and possessing foresight. He should be acquainted with modern communication technology and be supported by a dedicated team skilled in planning and management of the distance education system.

Impeding factors are as follows:

1. **Resistance:** The operations of an open university will not run smoothly if existing universities do not recognize the potential and possibilities of the distance teaching-learning system being employed. If the attitude of the public is not favorable, or if they do not have faith in the system offered, successful implementation will be difficult to achieve.

2. **Lack of Cooperation:** Cooperation should be sought to utilize existing facilities to the maximum of use. To enable the open university to provide high quality education at a low cost, it is essential that the university receive cooperation from both the government and the private sector in using existing facilities. Lack of such cooperation will impede the successful operation of the system.

3. **Lack of Infrastructure:** Without suitable infrastructure, such as a printing office, postal service and tele-communications system, an effective delivery system cannot be developed. This will hinder the development of the distance education activities.

4. **Wrong Attitude:** It is important for the staff of the open university to have a positive attitude towards distance education and understand how it differs from conventional systems. They should also possess skills appropriate to distance education.

5. **Capital Investment:** In the initial stages capital investment is required to finance the establishment of the university. Although an open university employing the distance teaching-learning system does not have on-campus students, it is necessary for it to have sufficient buildings for its headquarters, a production center, a printing office and delivery facilities. Without adequate finance, development will be slow and the quality and efficiency of distance education may be adversely affected.

IV. The Development and Uses of New Technologies

The distance education system currently employed by STOU uses a multi-media package which is comprised of the following different types of media:

1. Printed Materials

- These are the main media and are arranged in the form of self-instructional materials which include both texts and workbooks.

2. Audio

- Cassette Tapes Recorded with Course Block Materials
- There are approximately three to ten 60 minute (C60) cassette tapes for each course block.

3. Radio Programs

- There are approximately seventeen 20 minute programs for each course block.

4. Television Programs

- There are approximately five 30 minute programs for each course block.

5. Computer Assisted Instruction

- Provided for some selected subjects such as Science, Mathematics and Statistics. They comprise approximately 5 to $7\frac{1}{2}$ hours of each course block.

6. Tutorials

- Approximately 15 hours for each course block.

7. Practicum

- This is organized especially for those subjects which require practical experience. The number of hours devoted to practical training varies according to the nature of the subject.

At the Regional Seminar on Distance Education, held at STOU from 26 November to 3 December, 1986 under the auspices of the Asian Development Bank and STOU in Cooperation with the UNESCO Principal Office for Asia and the Pacific, it was recommended that feasibility studies should be initiated to evaluate the scope for geo-stationary satellite technology for edu-

cational links in countries where there is a prima facie case for using satellite TV and radio links. Governments of the participating countries and institutions concerned were urged to support the efforts of the developing countries in securing appropriate frequencies for operating geo-stationary satellites and in safeguarding the orbital positions necessary for their future geo-stationary satellites.

V. Recommendations for Regional Cooperation

1. A regional association for distance education should be established. It should have a vital role in promoting regional cooperation by exchanging information, teaching materials and research. It should help to propagate and promote a knowledge of education through the use of the distance teaching system and develop the system's potentialities. It should further cooperate with official bodies and other parties directly or indirectly interested in education at a distance.

2. A regional resource center should be established. Such a center should serve mainly as a documentation center where text and non-text distance education materials, such as course materials, pamphlets, films, microfilms, audio tapes, video tapes and other related materials, can be stored. The center should offer an information and materials exchange service for distance education institutions in the Asia and Pacific Region, as well as, training and research facilities in the area of distance education. It should have a role to play in organizing regional seminars, workshops, conferences and programs for visits by academics wishing to learn more about various distance education institutions.

3. Bi-lateral or multi-lateral cooperation in specific areas or programs. Four areas for joint efforts among distance education institutions can be identified: (1) media production, (2) training, (3) research and (4) joint use of materials and joint course offerings.

(1) Media Production

Joint production of media or instructional materials should be promoted among distance education institutions through bi-lateral or multi-lateral cooperation. Specific areas of programs can be selected to suit the needs and interests of the partners. As a variety of media are used in distance education, the area of interests can be grouped as follows :

Media	Area for Joint Production
Printed Materials	Production of Materials
Radio	Production of Radio Programs
Television	Production of Television Programs
Audio	Production of Audio-Cassette Tapes
Video	Production of Video Tapes
CAI	Production of Courseware
Home Experimental Kits	Production of Kits

The production of the program "Asian Society : The Impact of Rice Culture on Society" is a good example of how joint efforts can be applied to media production.

(2) Training

Training in the use of media is of major importance to the success of distance education programs. Training needs should be identified and joint efforts promoted as follows :

Media	Training Needs
Printed Materials	Joint Training in Printed Materials Production
Radio	Joint Training in Radio Programs Production
Television	Joint Training in Television Programs Production
Audio	Joint Training in Audio Cassette Tapes Production
Video	Joint Training in Video Tapes Production
CAI	Joint Training in Courseware Production
Home Experimental Kits	Joint Training in Production of Kits
Technical Support	Training Needs for Engineers and Technicians

UNESCO's Regional Office for Education in Asia and the Pacific has, on several occasions in the past, organized workshops for training in distance education. The workshops have been well received and of great benefit to the development of distance education.

(3) Research

Two areas for joint research can be identified here. They are (1) research in distance education and (2) disciplinary research.

The research carried out with the support of the IDRC, as mentioned earlier, is a good example of cooperation in this area.

(4) Joint Use of Materials and Joint Course Offerings

The joint use of media and materials is possible in cases where initial costs are high and for those subjects where course content can be integrated, such as Science and Technology. It is also possible to use course materials jointly for some subjects or as Joint Course Offerings at certain levels, such as Post Graduate Programs in Science and Technology.
