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## EFFORTS TOWARD INTERNATIONALIZATION IN THAI PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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### ABSTRACT

The purposes of this paper are 1) to understand the attitude of Thai private higher education institutions toward internationalization, 2) to clarify current issues through attitude surveys related to internationalization efforts, and 3) to gain a clue to consider on the future internationalization process and progress of Thai private higher education institutions. The research was a questionnaire survey with seven questions. Fifteen institutions (9 universities and 6 colleges) that cooperated with the response became the target institutions for analysis. Cronbach's reliability coefficient was 0.81. Through analysis and discussion, the internationalization efforts of universities and colleges differed in degree, and the domains of internationalization showed different processes. In the process of internationalization in the future, it is expected to utilize management approaches and formulate action plans specifically.

**Keywords:** Internationalization, Thai private higher education, Institution, University, College

### 1. Rationale of research

The political, economic, and cultural global phenomenon in the 1990s provided an opportunity to further accelerate the internationalization of higher education throughout the world. In fact, since the 1990s, there have been many conceptualistic definitions and specific discussions related to the internationalization of higher education, as seen in Paige (1993), Ellingboe (1998), Knight & De Wit (1999), Mestenhauser (2002), etc. In response to these discussions, since the 2000s, various evaluation indicators, contents, methods, and standards for internationalization of higher education have been proposed, developed, and established. For example, *Internationalization Laboratory by American Council on Education: ACE*, (2003-), *Mapping Internationalization: MINT* by the Dutch Organization for Internationalization in Education: Nuffic, (2007-), *HRK-Audit Internationalization of Universities* by German Rectors' Conference, (2009-), *Assessment of Internationalization*, Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders: NVAO, (2011-), etc (NIAD-QE, n.d.). It is well known that the publication of world rankings of universities such as *Quacquarelli Symonds: QS* or *Times Higher Education World University Rankings* has raised interest and attention for the internationalization of higher education.

In Thailand, regarding the internationalization of higher education, the word of *Internationalization* was clearly stated in *the 1st Long-Range Plan on Education Higher Education* (1990-2004), and since 1990, internationalization has been promoted systematically and actively. In addition,

*the 7th Education Development Plan* (1992-1996) created an opportunity to promote full-scale internationalization by opening international programs and accepting foreign students from countries around Thailand (Suzuki & Kampeeraparb, 2010, pp.57-58). In *the 2nd 15-year Long Range Plan on Higher Education* (2008-2022), International strategy for Thai Higher Education was developed. International strategies had three strategies: 1) to develop Thai higher education system and administration to enhance the capability of Thai higher education institutions, 2) to raise higher education quality to equate with the international standard, and 3) to improve graduates' characteristics to perform well in national and global communities (Kanvong, n.d., p.3). Furthermore, the operation of the quality assurance system for education after the enactment of *the National Education Act* in 1999 is inextricably linked to internationalization in terms of international validity, which means internationalization of education standards. Thai higher education institutions are currently in a situation where they must improve their status in the international community while promoting internationalization under the global age. In particular, private higher education institutions based on self-funded resources, in view of the strong nature and value of public goods in society, have the challenges of promoting their own internationalization, both home and abroad, according to their own mission and vision (Mori *et al.*, 2019, p.132).

The researcher himself as a department chair, Japanese for Business Communication at a private university, is responsible for cultural exchanges with Japanese people and international academic exchanges with Japanese universities. Therefore, to consider international or intercultural activities of the department seems to be a best opportunity for internationalization of faculty members' capabilities of management, education and research including the internationalization and future direction of private higher education institutions.

## **2. Previous research**

The research products of well-known researchers mentioned in *1. Rationale of research* are said to be basic books related to the internationalization of higher education institutions in the modern period. An overview of each study was summarized in Paige's paper (2005). There are both entire institution and departmental programs for internationalization assessment since the 2000. In addition, the internationalization dimension has been expanded, and specific discussions have been repeated on the contents and methods of internationalization process. The indicators and contents of major internationalization assessments in the world are listed in *Indicator projects on internationalization* (Beerkens *et al.*, 2010). In Thailand, under the leadership of the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) or the Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy (BICS), indicators for Thai higher education institutions is being discussed and established in partnership with prominent Euro-American institutions (OHEC, 2016; BICS, 2018).

## **3. Research objectives**

The objectives of this research were 1) to grasp the actual attitudes of Thai private higher education institutions toward internationalization, 2) to clarify the current issues through awareness or perception survey related to internationalization efforts by higher education institutions in Thailand, and

3) to gain clues about the future process and progress of private higher education institutions.

#### 4. Guideline for research

As shown in Figure 1, the guidelines in this research set six concepts as the contents of internationalization efforts, namely, 1) *Strategy*, 2) *Rationales*, 3) *International dimensions*, 4) *Funding*, 5) *International exchange*, and 6) *International research*. Thai private higher education institutions, both at home and international, are influenced by Thai society and educational policies or the educational trends and circumstances in the international community. It is in a situation that Thai private higher education institutions cannot ignore them.

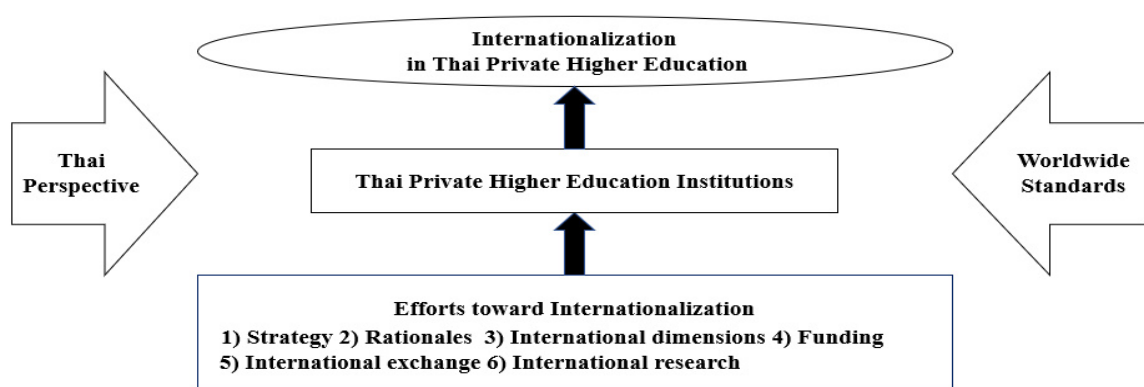


Figure 1 Guideline for research

#### 5. Research methodology

##### 5.1 Research design

The plan of this research was designed as follows: 1) Consideration on the contents, number of questions, and composition of questionnaire (content validity and construct validity), 2) Confirmation of contact information for private higher education institutions, international department and a responsible person, 3) Determining respondents at each institution, 4) How to distribute questionnaire and collect responses, 5) Creating a questionnaire and letter of request, 6) Confirmation of response results (valid or invalid response), 7) Quantify valid response as data (statistical processing), 8) Data analysis of valid responses, 9) Overview of overall characteristics and individual trends through patterns of response behavior by data analysis, and 10) Summarizing the results of analysis for discussions.

##### 5.2 Target group

As of 2018, there are 73 private higher education institutions in Thailand. The breakdown is 42 private universities, 11 private institutes, 20 private colleges (OHEC, 2018, pp28-44). However, 11 institutions (5 universities, 2 institutes and 4 colleges) that did not specify e-mail address were excluded from target group, thus, target group in this research was 62 institutions: 37 universities (59.68%, rounded off to two decimal places, hereinafter the same shall apply), 9 institutes (14.52%) and 16 colleges (25.81%).

### 5.3 Variable

Explanatory variable means variable that represents some sort of causes, that is, 6 items concerning efforts toward internationalization were regarded as corresponding to this variable. Response variable means variable that represents the results of cause, and 3 response variables were *1 point* (a little), *2 points* (quite a lot), and *3 points* (very much) indicating ordinal scale as qualitative variable for 6 items.

### 5.4 Research instrument

Questionnaire survey consisted of 7 question items, and questions from No. 1 to 6 were closed-ended questions by choosing single answer from the 3 scales of *1 point*, *2 points* and *3 points*. Question No. 7 was an open-ended question in which the total points of questions from No. 1 to 6 were entered (lowest points = 6 and highest ones = 18). The contents of 7 questions in the questionnaire were adopted from questions that designed by Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy: BICS, OHEC, Thailand (BICS, 2018, pp.75-77). In addition, a full-scale survey using BICS' questions have not yet been conducted.

### 5.5 Data collection

The questionnaire was sent to each contact person of 62 institutions by an e-mail with *Google form* (as an electronic questionnaire) on July 7, 2019, and the acceptance of response was over a period from July 8 until 15, 2019. The result of collecting responses were the number of receiving reply mail, and the total was 15 institutions (9 universities, 0 institute and 6 colleges). These 15 institutions were the ones that cooperated in response to the questionnaire survey. As for the target institutions, although one university responded anonymously, 14 institutions covered four typical regional divisions in Thailand. That is, there were 9 institutions from the central region (26 provinces), 1 institution from the northern region (17 provinces), 3 institutions from the northeast region (19 provinces), 1 institution from the south (14 provinces). In particular, the central region was occupied by 3 institutions from Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, 4 institutions from Bangkok Metropolitan Region including 5 provinces adjacent to Bangkok, and 2 institutions from other provinces (20 provinces). Cronbach's reliability coefficient was 0.81 (Cronbach' alpha).

### 5.6 Data analysis

The average value of each question item ranged from about 50% to 70% in all institutions (Table 1). The mean value of each question was relatively higher for universities than for colleges. Question No. 6 was the lowest item in universities (55.67%) and colleges (39.00%).

**Table 1** Average points of question No.1 - 7

Question No.	University/ $\bar{x}$	College/ $\bar{x}$	All institutions	SD
1	2.33 (77.67%)	1.83 (61.00%)	2.13 (71.00%)	0.62
2	2.11 (70.33%)	1.83 (61.00%)	2.00 (66.67%)	0.63
3	2.33 (77.67%)	1.67 (55.67%)	2.07 (69.00%)	0.85
4	1.89 (63.00%)	1.33 (44.33%)	1.67 (55.67%)	0.79
5	2.00 (66.67%)	1.33 (44.33%)	1.73 (57.67%)	0.68
6	1.67 (55.67%)	1.17 (39.00%)	1.47 (49.00%)	0.62
7	12.33 (68.50%)	9.17 (50.94%)	11.07 (61.50%)	3.64

## 6. Research results

### 6.1 Strategy

In universities, *2 points* (44.44%) and *3 points* (44.44%) were the same score (Table 2), however, most colleges concentrated on *2 points* (83.33%).

**Table 2** Effort toward strategy

	1 point	2 points	3 points	Total
1. Strategy	Little or no strategy	Progressive strategy	Comprehensive strategy	
No. of universities	1 11.11%	4 44.44%	4 44.44%	9 100.00%
No. of colleges	1 16.67%	5 83.33%	0 0.00%	6 100.00%
Total	2 13.33%	9 60.00%	4 26.67%	15 100.00%

### 6.2 Rationales

*2 points* were the most in both university (66.67%) and college (50.00%) (Table 3). Universities had *3 points* at 22.22%, while colleges had *1 point* at 33.33%.

**Table 3** Effort toward rationales

	1 point	2 points	3 points	Total
2. Rationales	Rationales external and less contextual	Rationales growth driven and aspirational	Rationales are central to institution mission	
No. of universities	1 11.11%	6 66.67%	2 22.22%	9 100.00%
No. of colleges	2 33.33%	3 50.00%	1 16.67%	6 100.00%
Total	3 20.00%	9 60.00%	3 20.00%	15 100.00%

### 6.3 International dimensions

In universities, *3 points* showed 55.56% (Table 4), while in colleges, *1 point* showed 50.00%. Incidentally, *3 points* at the college were 16.67%. Universities and colleges indicated contrasting results.

**Table 4** Effort toward international dimensions

	1 point	2 points	3 points	Total
3. International dimensions	Dimensions constrained by resources	Dimensions are broad and deep	Dimensions are well defined and institution wide	
No. of universities	2 22.22%	2 22.22%	5 55.56%	9 100.00%
No. of colleges	3 50.00%	2 33.33%	1 16.67%	6 100.00%
Total	5 33.33%	4 26.67%	6 40.00%	15 100.00%

### 6.4 Funding

*1 point* showed the highest in both university and college, and the total was 53.33% (Table 5). In universities, *3 points* showed 33.33%, on the other hand, there were no *3 points* in colleges.



**Table 5** Effort toward funding

	1 point	2 points	3 points	Total
5. Funding	Budget for international initiatives are low	Increasing investment in internationalization	Significant, including third parties and research	
No. of universities	4 44.44%	2 22.22%	3 33.33%	9 100.00%
No. of colleges	4 66.67%	2 33.33%	0 0.00%	6 100.00%
Total	8 53.33%	4 26.67%	3 20.00%	15 100.00%

### 6.5 International exchange

In universities, *2 points* were the highest, or represented 55.56%, while in colleges, *1 point* was 66.67% (Table 6). In all institutions, 46.67% scored *2 points*.

**Table 6** Effort toward international exchange

	1 point	2 points	3 points	Total
5. International exchange	Low numbers of study abroad/exchanges, international students and staff	Good relative percentage of study abroad/exchanges, international students and staff	High percentage of study abroad/exchanges, international students and staff	
No. of universities	2 22.22%	5 55.56%	2 22.22%	9 100.00%
No. of colleges	4 66.67%	2 33.33%	0 0.00%	6 100.00%
Total	6 40.00%	7 46.67%	2 13.33%	15 100.00%

### 6.6 International research

Although in universities, *1 point* and *2 points* were the same number (44.44%), in colleges, *1 point* was 83.33%, or the highest (Table 7). *3 points* were only one university (11.11%).

**Table 7** Effort toward international research

	1 point	2 points	3 points	Total
6. International research	Few international partnerships/ projects	Higher numbers of active over passive partnership/ publications	Mostly active partnership with extensive participation in international publication and global networks	
No. of universities	4 44.44%	4 44.44%	1 11.11%	9 100.00%
No. of colleges	5 83.33%	1 16.67%	0 0.00%	6 100.00%
Total	9 60.00%	5 33.33%	1 6.67%	15 100.00%

### 6.7 Comprehensive self-evaluation of internationalization efforts

The total number of points from Question No. 1 to 6 was a maximum of 18 points for 1 university and a minimum of 6 points for 1 university and 1 college (Table 8).

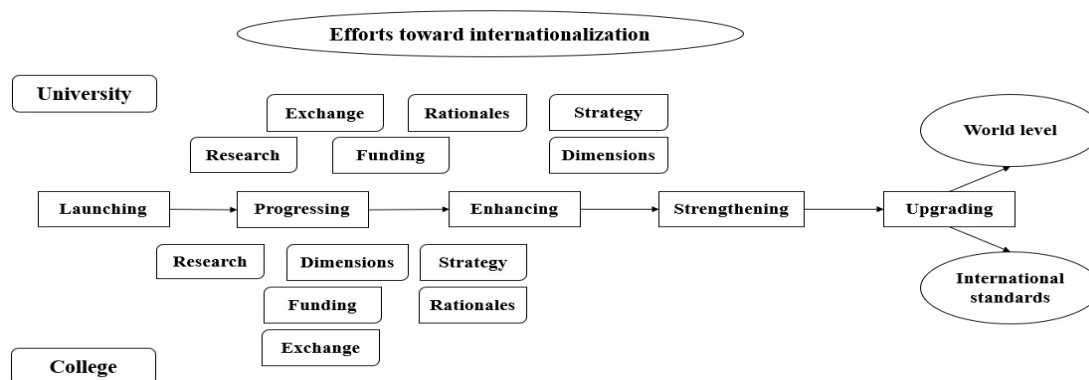
**Table 8** Comprehensive self-evaluation of internationalization efforts

Points	University	College	Total				
18	1	0	1	9	0	1	1
17	1	0	1	8	1	1	2
14	1	1	2	7	0	1	1
13	2	0	2	6	1	1	2
11	2	1	3	Total	9	6	15

Dividing into three score groups, low score institutions of *6-8 points* (33.33-44.44%) were 2 universities and 3 colleges, intermediate score ones of *9-14 points* (50.00-77.78%) were 5 universities and 3 colleges, and high score ones of *15-18 points* (83.33-100.00%) were only 2 universities. As seen in Table 1, the average values for universities and colleges were 12.33 points (68.50%) and 9.17 points (50.94%), respectively, however, both institutions were included in the intermediate score institutions (*9-14 points*).

## 7. Discussions and conclusions

As can be seen from *6. Research results* and as shown in Figure 2, regarding the degree of internationalization efforts of Thai private higher education institutions, it was found that some efforts have already been made.



**Figure 2** Internationalization efforts in Thai private university and college

At the same time, different development processes were revealed between universities and colleges. Besides that, the degree or extent of efforts also differed in each domain (6 items) of internationalization between universities and colleges. The left-to-right arrow in the middle of Figure 2 means the development stage, and a sequence of development process consisted of five stages: *launching* (or beginning), *progressing* (or increasing), *enhancing* (or expanding), *strengthening* (or prompting) and *upgrading* (or raising the rating). Universities are required to enhance *Rationales* and *Funding*, and strengthen *Strategy* and *International dimensions*. On the other hand, colleges are required to enhance *Strategy* and *Rationales*, and progressing *International dimensions* and *Funding*. The common items of universities and colleges that need to further progress are *International exchange* and *International research*. It is indisputable that further efforts are required to reach world-class level or international standards.

## 8. Suggestions

### 8.1 Suggestions for applying research results

Although the extent of efforts towards internationalization of Thai private higher education institutions is still inadequate, in view of the objectives, goals, means or measures, output, and outcome of internationalization, it is expected to incorporate management methods such as SWOT analysis, the PDCA (plan-do-check-act) cycle, roadmap and benchmarking (or best practice), and to formulate short-, medium- and long-term action plans specifically. Based on the results and interpretations of this research, an institution-wide engagement is required by appropriately utilizing these management frameworks and approaches to effectively and efficiently solve the problems. In any case, as shown in Figure 2, paying attention to each of the six aspects of internationalization efforts, it will be essential to raise the level step by step while giving priority in the process of promoting internationalization.

### 8.2 Suggestions for further research

It is true that the research on the extent of internationalization efforts by Thai private higher education institutions has made it possible to objectively grasp the degree of achievement of internationalization and to clarify the challenges. However, in order to solve and improve the issues, it

will be necessary to elucidate the factors and causes that hinder or slow the movement of internationalization efforts for future research.

## 9. Acknowledgements

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