

Higher Education Quality Assurance in Thailand: A Help or Hindrance in Improving Quality?

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ABSTRACT

About 20 years ago, quality assurance (QA) was introduced in Thailand to improve educational management processes and raise standards. While many problems remain unsolved, concrete developments are being seen, with more students from rural schools accepted into leading universities and a reduction in educational inequality. QA uses systematic processes to bring continuous improvements and publicly discloses assessment results so that stakeholders may make wise educational choices. While some may view it as a time-consuming or burdensome, by utilizing technology and making QA part of routine work processes, such fears may be allayed. Quality assurance furnishes practical guidelines that – if embraced and consistently practiced – can improve the quality of higher education in Thailand so that it will become comparable to that of other leading countries.

Keywords: Quality assurance, higher education, Thailand, improving educational quality and competitiveness

Is it time for Thailand to take the quality of its education more seriously? Would doing so lead Thailand toward becoming a world leader in quality education at the international level? Studies show that education directly affects the population's

potential because human resources are a crucial factor—in fact, the most important factor—for developing a country and the world. How can a nation develop if education is not viewed as one of quality and the population lacks competitiveness? Providing high-quality education that meets international standards is essential to Thailand's short-term and long-term development. However, the problems with the quality of Thailand's higher education system have revealed some adversities (Chaemchoy et al., 2021).

Research shows that the knowledge levels of the Thai population are substandard since curricular programs have yet to be developed or kept up to date. Further assessment of the quality of education in Thailand has shown that it continually ranks in the lower percentile among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member countries (Kaewvisit, 2021). It has been found that most Thai universities need to be more efficient, with clearer goals. According to the UK-based Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings (2022), rankings of the top public universities in Thailand have continued to decline between 2020 to 2022. The best Thai universities were ranked as numbers 208, 215, and 224, and some universities were ranked as low as 3,000 in the world, falling behind universities in some underdeveloped countries.

Part of the weakness of Thai education comes from its archaic education system (ASEAN Community, 2017). (An important aspect that should be considered to improve this situation is educational quality assurance, which may become essential in driving the quality of Thai education to equal that of the world's leading nations (Kanjanapanyakom, 2011). For example, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report, Finland has one of the best levels of educational quality in the world (Leverage Edu, 2022). In Finland, efficiency and excellence are critical factors in the quality of education and training (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022).

In Thailand, Quality Assessment (QA) came into effect on November 4, 2000, following the passage of the 1999 National Education Act (Office for National Education Standards and Quality, 2017). The objective was to develop quality assessment criteria and methods for all educational institutions in Thailand to meet the required standards and to present the assessment results to relevant agencies and the public. Although up to now only a few problems have been solved, but concrete developments are starting to be seen. On one hand, more students studying in local educational establishments are being accepted into quality universities, representing a reduction in educational inequality between urban and rural societies. On the other hand, some universities in Thailand have had to close or improve study programs that failed quality assurance assessments (Thai PBS News, 2018). These issues are the positive effects of the quality assurance system. However, it is often argued that the educational quality assurance system does not reflect reality and leads to unnecessary additional work in Thai education. However, we do not believe this is true.

The first reason is that the educational quality assurance process is a management tool. Responsible persons within Thai education take the development of quality standards (Zaki, 2020) and modern management directions (Padubchiy, 2010) seriously, resulting in educators being empowered to make concrete and continuous quality improvements to meet international standards.

The second reason is that educational quality assurance is a systematic process to prevent poor educational management within Thailand. It protects consumers and creates equal opportunities for access to quality educational services (Lo, 2014). Educational quality assessment emphasizes practical ways to achieve comprehensive learning standards. It employs a transparent system that can be constantly monitored to develop Thai instructors and learners whom relevant parties will recognize. This procedure enhances quality in the work of a program, faculty, and university, as well as in teaching, learning, educational evaluation, and student outcomes.

The last reason is that higher education quality assessment results are publicly disclosed, helping stakeholders such as students and parents make educated choices based on the quality of educational programs (Beerens & Udam, 2017). This transparency helps to ensure that educational institutions within Thailand meet required industrial and community standards. It helps to guarantee that the quality of graduates at all levels will bring maximum benefits, meeting the needs of society and the nation (Saenpakdee, 2016).

Nevertheless, some groups claim that educational quality assurance is a time-consuming process (Allais, 2009) that increases workload (Sathityaphong, 2018), stress, and anxiety while blocking creative thinking (BBC News, 2018). These issues are minor problems that can be resolved. If you think quality assurance in Thai education is a waste of time, and an extra workload that causes stress and anxiety, ask yourself about your planning process. Suppose QA work is conducted systematically; as part of your routine, you would keep reports updated all year without procrastinating until the last minute. In that case, the educational quality assurance process will be helpful to you. Moreover, technological tools can make these tasks even more effective, so the issue of blocking creativity is even more implausible, allowing you can add whatever you wish to convey that is beyond the scope)Ng, 2007(of the educational quality assurance requirements.

In conclusion, we believe that educational quality assurance furnishes guidelines to improve the quality of higher education in Thailand so that it may become comparable to that of the leading countries. It furnishes systems and mechanisms for controlling, monitoring, and evaluating the performance of each component according to specified indices. This process will help administrators take quality standards within Thai education seriously and prevent ineffective teaching and learning management. Emphasis on personnel development benefits students and parents, and the disclosure of quality assurance information inspires confidence that excellent services are being provided by Thai institutions that can effectively produce young graduates according to the needs of industries and communities. Therefore, higher education institutions within Thailand must develop knowledgeable personnel with positive attitudes to participate in implementing educational quality assurance regularly. Furthermore, these education organizations within Thailand should use information technology in the management system to make the quality assessment tasks more accessible and less time-consuming.

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