

International Programs in Thai Higher Education – A Solution to the Thai Higher Education Crisis?

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1. Introduction

The research question that initiated writing this book was whether international programs conducted in English have the potential to help solving the crisis of the Thai higher education system, and if so, what would they need to do to generate more income for universities, to improve the quality of education, and to support the necessary change processes in Thai higher education institutions.

Methodologies used for this research include document analysis, online surveys, and personal observation. The online surveys consisted of closed questions collecting demographic data, for which quantitative analysis was used, and open-end questions applying the qualitative research methodology of narrative inquiry (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013; Jovchelovith & Bauer, 2000; Kvernbekk & Frimannsson, 2013; Sikes, 2010; V. Caine et al., 2016). Observation served as an important component. The benefit of personal observation is the fact that it grows in a natural environment, thus allowing for a first-hand encounter with the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998). The author brought in over 15 years of teaching experience in international higher education programs in Thailand, as well as over a decade of international student mobility marketing at two universities in Thailand, which helped to put findings from literature review and data interpretation into perspective.

This book is divided into three parts. Part I (chapters 2 to 4) analyzes the complex political and socio-cultural environment of Thai higher education in which international programs exist, and explains the reasons for a remarkable resistance to adapt to changing markets and demands. Part II (chapters 5-9) of this book focuses on students as the main objects of Thai international programs from various perspectives and provides new evidence. Part III (chapters 10-12) focuses on the application and practical relevance of the research findings.

Part I begins with an overview of higher education research on Thailand (chapter 2), and continues with the relationship of Thai higher education institutions with globalization, internationalization, and the role of the Thai state (chapter 3). The Thai higher education system is interpreted with regard to being a reflection of the complex Thai political system. The national quality assurance system is investigated and explained in its role as a data collection tool that is detached from the development of educational quality. The readiness and willingness of Thai higher education institutions to look beyond the national market and to engage on the international higher education market place is inspected. The development of national-market student enrollment in Thai higher education solutions is explored. External drivers that have to potential to exaggerate the crisis of Thai higher education are identified by the growing number of foreign university branch campuses on Thai soil, and the upcoming wave of western university online degree programs. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of solution approaches in the current discussion to ease the crisis of Thai higher education, such as international higher education programs, dual vocational-higher education programs, and academic entrepreneurship, intrapreneurship, and change management.

Chapter 4 then aims to explore the nature of international higher education programs at Thai higher education institutions by analyzing the dimensions of 'international' applied. It begins with rise of international programs and the factors driving it, figures out the fee structure of international programs in Thailand, and evaluates language, cultural norms, and other hurdles to internationalization.

Part II (chapters 5-9) of this book focuses on students as the main objects of Thai international programs from various perspectives and provides new evidence. It begins with a critical analysis of state authority publications on the number of foreign students in Thailand, followed by an analysis of 'internationalization at home' against 'internationalization abroad' with regard to its effects on global, international and intercultural skills and sensitivity development. On a side note, it looks into the

common bias among Thai parents, after which foreign students always get the better grades and thus make Thai students look bad in international programs, using the grading data of the author over the period of one year, thus providing just one indicator; more research is needed. Interactions and actions within an international classroom and their influence on the outcomes in terms of learning and understanding are interpreted at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 6 introduces first evidence available in Thailand on foreign students as an economic factor, based on a 2017 online survey. It evaluates the expenditure of foreign students for their studies, the expenditure for accommodation, and the expenditure for cost of living. These data are then compiled to provide an overview of the annual expenditure (i.e., contribution to the Thai economy) of an average foreign student in Thailand.

Chapter 7 introduces new evidence of experiences that international students made (i.e., both foreign and Thai students in international programs) when studying in Thailand in a variety of fields at various universities, as gained from an open-end question online survey in 2017. Beginning with their first impressions during the onboarding and social and academic adjustment phase, students' perception of how 'international' Thai international programs are, their social interaction experiences with foreign or Thai fellows in class, the experiences of foreign students with their lecturers, and with the program office and administration provide valuable insights. Since most foreign student who stay for more than a semester in Thailand try to learn speaking Thai, their experiences with that endeavor are explored. The satisfaction level of foreign students with regard to their decision to study in Thailand is then contrasted to their willingness to further their academic education in Thailand after graduation. Selected comments that students were asked for beyond the previous questions in the survey conclude this chapter.

Chapter 8 provides new evidence on the customer and consumer attitudes of international students in Thailand, both Thai and foreign. After introducing the 2017 customer and consumerism survey, students' self-perception in their potential role as a customer is explored, followed by their degree eligibility perception, and the level of their focus on monetization and labor market orientation. Selected answers to the open-end question why or why not students in international programs see themselves in a customer role conclude the chapter.

Chapter 9 focuses on the international interest in information on international programs at Thai higher education and on how student life looks like in Thailand, as exemplified by the studyinthailand.org project since 2008, which is the only comprehensive database on studying in Thailand available. Data from Google Analytics provide an overview of how much interest is out there all over the world, and, as represented by the share of unique site visitors from Thailand, gives a hint on the level of interest among Thai students to study in an international program. Data also identify ex-servicemen and servicewomen from the U.S. forces as a particular market segment studying on GI benefits.

Part III (chapters 10-12) focuses on the application and practical relevance of the research findings. Chapter 10 uses common international accreditation guidelines to draw a mental image of how a good international program should look like, as opposed to the reality of Thai international higher education programs. Guiding principles of such a set of standards are explained, followed by the role of strategy and innovation, which takes the steps of vision, mission, impact and innovation, research impact and its alignment with the institution's or program's mission, and the role of financial control and allocation of resources in quality higher education.

The role of an international program as an inclusive community for diverse participants is explored and explained by the role of students from admission over progression to career development, faculty sufficiency, deployment and management, and professional staff sufficiency and deployment.

Teaching and learning standards are introduced through focusing on curricula management and the assurance of learning, the relationship between student-faculty interaction and teaching effectiveness, academic and professional engagement, student academic and professional engagement, and faculty qualifications and engagement.

Chapters 11 and 12 then provide recommendations for the application of the research findings from a more practical viewpoint that aims to trigger development initiated by all stakeholders involved.

Chapter 11 focuses on recommendations to reinvent international programs in Thai higher education with the goal to replace the dominance of bureaucracy by the dominance of quality education and teaching and learning. A framework for developing a sustainable international program strategy is introduced, followed by an exploration of the expectations of foreign students with regard to the student mobility recruitment process. Social and academic integration issues during the onboarding of new foreign students are introduced, followed by the opportunities to design internationally attractive degree programs by internationalization and regionalization of its courses. Students' demand for inspiring and motivational lecturers, as derived from the experience survey and personal observation, are explained against students' general expectations on the learning environment they prefer. The need for ongoing faculty and professional staff training as a foundation for quality improvement is introduced, combined with the need for service orientation of international program office and administration. The chapter ends with an exploration of the necessary transparency and accountability across all processes and against an institutions mission, goals and expected outcomes.

Chapter 12 focuses on strategies, processes and best practices for successful international higher education marketing. Research findings by the author and other researchers show the direction for qualitative target group analysis. Human interfaces and their effects on the recruiting process are introduced and exemplified. Factors of influence on foreign students' decision-making are analyzed and explained. The professional and target-group centered development of Web design and Web site contents, the use of emails and social networks as important elements in an international program's communication strategy are discussed, and international graduate summer universities as a successful international communication tool are introduced.

Chapter 12 reflects the initial research questions underpinning this book through the findings in a concluding chapter, encompasses a discussion of the impact the research findings might have on academia and policy makers.

The book concludes with some thoughts about the role of the case of Thailand, which is in the focus of this research, and whether the findings of this research may have meaning beyond Thai borders (chapter 13).