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Internal Quality Assurance of Private Higher Education Institutions in Thailand: A Comparison of Quality Assessment Result in 2012

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Abstract

This study compares the 2012 IQA assessment results of the private higher education institutions in Thailand classified by size of institutions, location or site of institutions and type (local or international type of institution). In addition, the study compares the IQA assessment results and the overall EQA assessment results of private higher education institutions in Thailand and compares the performance of Asia-Pacific International University with other private higher education institutions. There are several findings for the study. First, the results reveal the overall level of internal quality assurance was at 'very good' level. For each of the components, the institution received 'very good' in six of the components except the three components: Teaching and Learning; Research; and Internal Quality Assurance System and Mechanisms. Second, There was a statistically significant difference of quality level in the component of Administration and Management related to different size of institutions. Third, Institutions located outside Bangkok Metropolitan Region possessed a higher quality score in Student Development Activities. Fourth, there was no difference in quality level between institutions emphasising the Thai medium programme and institutions which emphasise the international programme. Fifth, there was no relation between the quality level of the IQA system and EQA system. Finally, the study found the high quality level of education in terms of input and process of AIU when compared with other private higher educational institutions.

Introduction

Before 1969, higher education in Thailand constituted a state monopoly, the sole prerogative of government agencies. Towards the end of the 1960s, there was a steadily growing demand for higher education. Public universities in those days could no longer cope with such an enormous increase in demand owing to lack of space and other facilities in their institutions. To solve the problem, the government then passed a landmark Private College Act in 1969 under which the private sector was authorised to operate higher education institutions with the right to confer degrees. By 1984, a certain number of private colleges that had consolidated their positions as fully fledged tertiary institutions were raised to university status. Another regulation was passed by the parliament, namely, Private Higher Education Act of 1979 as amended in 1992, and higher education institutions spread far and wide throughout the country capable of catering to the needs of all people. Private higher education institutions in Thailand fall under the supervision of the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC), Ministry of Education whose mandates are to manage and promote higher education with respect to the degree-granting institutions' academic freedom and excellence.

As the world has become increasingly complicated with greater competitions in all sectors of the society, Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Thailand was first introduced by the OHEC, on 8 July 1996. The policy stipulated that all higher education institutions including the private sector improve and enhance their efforts for quality of instruction and the academic learning environment. The introduction of the National Education Act in 1999 has given a new connotation to the terms 'internal quality assurance (IQA)' and 'external quality assurance (EQA)'. According to the second amendment of the National Education Act 1992 in 2002, quality

assurance in educational systems comprises of internal and external systems. For internal quality assurance, it is the responsibility of each academic institution and its governing organisation to oversee that such internal mechanisms are put in place and remain a part of the continuing management system. Thus, internal quality assurance focuses on self-assessment (input) and continuous improvement process (process). As for external quality assurance, the Office of the National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (Public Organisation) (ONESQA) is responsible for the external assessment of institutions at all levels. External quality assurance focuses on educational achievements (outputs and outcomes).

Internal Quality Assurance (IQA)

The IQA system was developed based on the Higher Education Standards published in the announcement of the Ministry of Education on 7 August 2006 which consists of 3 standards: (a) Standard for the Quality of Graduates, (b) Standard for Administration in Higher Education, and (c) Standard for Establishing and Developing Knowledge Based and Learning Based Society. Each Standard for Higher Education is related to the National Education Standards so that it can fulfil the purposes and principles of the national education administration programme. Furthermore, IQA system was developed under other standards set by the OHEC. These standards were extended to cover other areas such as standard criteria of higher education curriculum, standard criteria for student affairs, criteria for asking permission to offer and manage degree programmes in the distance education System, and higher education qualification framework. These standards aim to assist higher education institutions to develop professionally and academically as well as to promote the quality and standards of the education administration in the higher education level to the global standard.

The IQA system for higher education in Thailand was first introduced by the OHEC in 2007. The underlying system was based on three basic cornerstones of quality, namely, Quality Control, Quality Audit and Quality Assessment. The framework based on background and nature of development of Thai universities, taking into consideration university autonomy and academic freedom, serves as a broad outline for each institution to adapt and modify to fit their traditions. There are 9 components of quality indicators and assessing guidelines. Within these 9 components, there are 44 indicators to determine the quality of higher education institutions. In 2010, the OHEC reviewed these indicators and criteria and revised the indicators within the 9 components. As a result, 23 indicators were determined as a basis for internal quality assurance for higher education. The framework of IQA system consists of 9 aspects of quality component: (1) Philosophies, Commitment and Objectives; (2) Teaching and Learning; (3) Student Development Activities; (4) Research; (5) Academic Services; (6) Preservation of Art and Culture; (7) Administration and Management; (8) Finance and Budgeting; and (9) Internal Quality Assurance System and Mechanisms. The IQA system requires preparing a self assessment report and an assessment by an auditing team annually. The current practice involves three levels of assessment: institutional level, faculty level and program of study level.

External Quality Assurance (EQA)

Since its inception in 2000, ONESQA has undergone three rounds of quality assessment at the national level. Each round focused on different educational problems and possessed different characteristics. Throughout the decade, the changing policy and rationale of ONESQA are reflected through its changing quality indicators. The first round of assessment happened between 2000 and 2005. It was mandated to last six years, as many policymakers envisioned that time was needed to establish ONESQA, revise the indicators and promote the policy to all the educational institutions. The first round of assessment included 8 quality standards and 28 quality indicators. The unit of the analysis was the institution itself. The second round of assessment occurred between 2006 and 2010. There were 7 standards and 48 quality indicators. The third round of assessment began in 2011 and will last until 2015. The indicators were reduced to 6 standards and 18 indicators. These standards are: (1) Quality Graduates; (2) Research and Innovation; (3) Academic Service; (4) Cultural Preservation; (5) Institutional Management and Development; and (6) Internal Quality Assessment (IQA).

Research Objective

Private higher education institutions in Thailand are undergoing a dramatic transformation. There have been several types of threat and pressure for the changes. The latest challenge for the private institutions is the soon coming of ASEAN Economic Community. However, the main challenge for the private institution

is the perceived position of the institutions at the lower end of the prestige hierarchy. The main reason for the perceived low quality is that private institutions rely on tuition payments, receive little funding from public sources and have no tradition of private philanthropy. As a result they are unable to compete for the best students (Altbach and Umakoshi, 2004). In order to change the perceived position and enhance quality, many private higher education institutions have been implementing some types of quality assurance systems especially the IQA. However, there have been some concerns about the ability of these institutions to improve their quality due to many factors as mentioned earlier. Thus, there are three main objectives of the study. First, the study aimed to compare the IQA assessment results of the higher education institutions in Thailand classified by size of institutions, location or site of institutions and type (local or international type of institution). Second, the study aimed to compare the IQA assessment results and the overall EQA assessment results of the higher education institutions in Thailand. Finally, the study aimed to compare the performance of Asia-Pacific International University with other private higher education institutions.

Methodology

The methodology used in this research is quantitative analysis by using statistical methods such as descriptive statistic, t-test, ANOVA and regression analysis. The data were collected from the assessment results of 41 private higher education institutions available on the CHE QA Online System for the assessing academic year of 2012. The average score for components/indicator groups or the overall picture of quality levels may be interpreted as shows in Table 1:

Table 1: Quality Level

Score Range	**Quality Level**
4.51 – 5.00	Very Good
3.51 – 4.50	Good
2.51 – 3.50	Fair
1.51 – 2.50	Improvement Required
0.00 – 1.50	Improvement Urgently Required

Research Findings

Demographic characteristics

Demographic characteristics of private higher education institutions are summarised in Table 2. The demographic characteristics show that 26.8 percent of private higher education institutions were small size institutions, 31.8 percent were medium size institutions, and 41.5 percent were large size institutions. Of the 41 private higher education institutions, 58.5 percent of the institutions are located within the Bangkok Metropolitan Region, while 41.5 percent are located outside the Bangkok Metropolitan Region. In addition, 87.8 percent of private higher education institutions offered mainly the Thai medium programme, while 12.2 percent offered mainly international programmes.

Table 2: Demographic Information

Variable	**Number of Institution**	**Percentage**
Size of Institution		
Less than 1,200 student enrolments	11	26.8
1,201- 5,000 student enrolments	13	31.7
More than 5,000 student enrolments	17	41.5

Location/Site of Institution		
Bangkok Metropolitan Region	24	58.5
Outside Bangkok Metropolitan Region	17	41.5
Type of Institution		
Mainly Thai medium programme	36	87.8
Mainly International programme	5	12.2

Overall Level of Quality Performance

As shown in Table 3, the private higher education institutions received a 'very good' level of quality assurance score (Mean = 4.61, S.D. = 0.21) in 2012. The lowest quality assurance score was 3.97 and the highest score was 4.96. When considering each of the nine components, the private higher education institutions received 'very good' level of quality assurance in six components: Philosophies, Commitment and Objectives; Student Development Activities; Academic Services; Preservation of Art and Culture; Administration and Management; and Finance and Budgeting. The institutions received 'good' level of quality assurance in three components: Teaching and Learning; Research; and Internal Quality Assurance System and Mechanisms. The lowest assessment score received by one or more institutions was Research component with an average score of 2.94.

Table 3**:** Mean Scores, Standard Deviation, and the Quality Level

Component	**Min.**	**Max.**	**Mean**	**S.D.**	**Quality Level**
Philosophies, Commitment and Objectives	3.00	5.00	4.85	.42	Very Good
Teaching and Learning	3.46	4.69	4.10	.32	Good
Student Development Activities	3.00	5.00	4.79	.43	Very Good
Research	2.94	5.00	4.18	.58	Good
Academic Services	3.00	5.00	4.84	.39	Very Good
Preservation of Art and Culture	3.00	5.00	4.85	.53	Very Good
Administration and Management	3.50	5.00	4.69	.39	Very Good
Finance and Budgeting	3.00	5.00	4.95	.31	Very Good
Internal Quality Assurance System and Mechanisms	3.00	5.00	4.32	.65	Good
Overall Average	3.97	4.96	4.62	.21	Very Good

Level of Quality Performance Categorised by Size of Institution

The results of the one way ANOVA in Table 4 show that there was no statistically significant difference of quality level in overall average quality assurance score for the private higher education institutions regardless the size of institution ($p>0.05$). However, there was a statistically significant difference of quality level in the component of Administration and Management related to different size institutions ($p<0.05$).

Table 4: The Quality Level of Private Higher Education Institutions Categorised by Size

Valiance	d.f.	SS	MS	F	P
Philosophies, Commitment and Objectives					
Between Groups	2	0.092	.046	.248	.781
Within Groups	38	7.030	.185		
Total	40	7.122			
Teaching and Learning					
Between Groups	2	.242	.121	1.221	.306
Within Groups	38	3.760	.099		
Total	40	4.002			
Student Development Activities					
Between Groups	2	.023	.012	.060	.942
Within Groups	38	7.464	.196		
Total	40	7.488			
Research					
Between Groups	2	.497	.248	.732	.488
Within Groups	38	12.900	.339		
Total	40	13.396			
Academic Services					
Between Groups	2	.175	.087	.549	.582
Within Groups	38	6.045	.159		
Total	40	6.220			
Preservation of Art and Culture					
Between Groups	2	.427	.213	.758	.475
Within Groups	38	10.695	.281		
Total	40	11.122			
Administration and Management					
Between Groups	2	1.263	.631	4.836	.013
Within Groups	38	4.960	.131		
Total	40	6.223			
Finance and Budgeting					
Between Groups	2	.210	.105	1.081	.349
Within Groups	38	3.692	.097		
Total	40	3.902			
Internal Quality Assurance System and Mechanisms					
Between Groups	2	.784	.392	.926	.405
Within Groups	38	16.094	.424		
Total	40	16.878			
Overall Average					
Between Groups	2	.103	.052	1.233	.303
Within Groups	38	1.594	.042		
Total	40	1.697			

The quality level of Administration and Management was further tested to determine which of the means of the institutional sizes are significantly different from the others by the Scheffe's method. The results (Table 5), show that there was statistically significant difference in the pair of the size, of small size and large size institutions ($p<0.05$).

Table 5: A Scheffe's Method of Institutional Sizes Pairing Test to the Quality Level in Administration and Management

Size of Institution (I)	Size of Institution (J)	Mean Diff. (I-J)	Std. Error	P
Less than 1,200 student enrolments	1,201- 5,000 student enrolments	.09790	.14801	.805
	More than 5,000 student enrolments	.40107*	.13980	.024
1,201- 5,000 student enrolments	Less than 1,200 student enrolments	-.09790	.14801	.805
	More than 5,000 student enrolments	.30317	.13311	.088
More than 5,000 student enrolments	Less than 1,200 student enrolments	-.40107*	.13980	.024
	1,201- 5,000 student enrolments	-.30317	.13311	.088

Level of Quality Performance Categorised by Location of Institution

Table 6 shows a comparison of the level of quality performance of both institutions located within the Bangkok Metropolitan Region and institutions located outside the Bangkok Metropolitan Region in overall and in each of the nine quality components. The results of the t-test show that institutions located within the Bangkok Metropolitan Region and institutions located outside the Bangkok Metropolitan Region possessed no statistically significant difference in overall average of quality level ($p>0.05$). However, institutions located within the Bangkok Metropolitan Region and institutions located outside the Bangkok Metropolitan Region possessed a statistically significant difference in the level of quality in Student Development Activities ($p<0.05$). The results also indicate that institutions located outside the Bangkok Metropolitan Region received a higher quality score in Student Development Activities.

Table 6: A Comparison of the Quality Level in Overall and Each of the Nine Components Categorised by Location

Component	BKK (n=24)		Outside BKK (n=17)		t	p
		S.D.		S.D.		
Philosophies, Commitment and Objectives	4.88	.34	4.82	.53	.38	.38
Teaching and Learning	4.16	.32	4.01	.29	1.55	.40
Student Development Activities	4.69	.53	4.94	.17	-1.91	.00
Research	4.16	.63	4.20	.52	-.23	.24
Academic Services	4.83	.43	4.85	.34	-.16	.82
Preservation of Art and Culture	4.91	.41	4.76	.66	.91	.07
Administration and Management	4.80	.29	4.53	.47	2.29	.12
Finance and Budgeting	4.92	.41	5.00	.00	-.84	.09

Internal Quality Assurance System and Mechanisms	4.29	.69	4.35	.61	-.29	.56
Overall Average	4.63	.22	4.61	.20	.28	.84

Level of Quality Performance Categorised by Type of Institution

Table 7 shows a comparison of the level of quality performance of those institutions which emphasise the Thai medium programme and institutions which emphasise international programmes in overall and each of the nine quality components. The results of the t-test show that there is no statistically significant difference in quality level of overall average and in each of the nine components of quality ($p>0.05$). .

Table 7: A Comparison of the Quality Level in Overall and Each of the Nine Components Categorised by Type of Institution

Component	**Thai (n=36)**		**International (n=5)**		**t**	**p**
	$\bar{X}$	**S.D.**	**$\bar{X}$**	**S.D.**		
Philosophies, Commitment and Objectives	4.86	.42	4.80	.45	.30	.65
Teaching and Learning	4.07	.29	4.29	.46	-1.47	.14
Student Development Activities	4.82	.42	4.60	.55	1.06	.16
Research	4.17	.56	4.19	.77	-.06	.77
Academic Services	4.85	.39	4.80	.45	.25	.61
Preservation of Art and Culture	4.83	.56	5.00	.00	-.66	.16
Administration and Management	4.70	.36	4.60	.63	.53	.21
Finance and Budgeting	4.94	.33	5.00	.00	-.37	.45
Internal Quality Assurance System and Mechanisms	4.31	.62	4.40	.89	-.30	.23
Overall Average	4.62	.21	4.63	.20	-.14	.88

The Relationship of IQA and EQA

As shown in Table 8, the results of regression analysis indicates that there is no statistical relationship between the IQA assessment results and the EQA assessment results ($p>0.05$).

Table 8: Regression Analysis Results

Component	B	Std. Error	t	p
Philosophies, Commitment and Objectives	-.140	.149	-.935	.357
Teaching and Learning	.229	.201	1.139	.263
Student Development Activities	-.058	.161	-.358	.723
Research	.100	.143	.695	.492
Academic Services	-.022	.178	-.122	.904
Preservation of Art and Culture	.104	.131	.796	.432
Administration and Management	.070	.204	.344	.734
Finance and Budgeting	.077	.183	.423	.675
Overall Average	.468	.786	.596	.555

Level of Quality Performance: A Comparison between AIU and Other Institutions

According to Table 9, even though AIU may be a small size institution, its quality level is no different from the same size and different size institutions. As a matter of fact, AIU was better off in terms of Teaching and Learning, Student Development Activities, Preservation of Arts and Culture, Finance and Budgeting and Internal Quality Assurance System and Mechanism. Nevertheless, AIU scored lower than other institutions in the area of Philosophies, Commitment and Objectives, Research and Academic Services.

Table 9: A Quality Level Comparison between AIU and Other Institutions

Component	**Small Size (n=11)**	**Medium Size (n=13)**	**Large Size (n=17)**	**Total (n=41)**	**AIU**
Philosophies, Commitment and Objectives	4.82	4.92	4.82	4.85	4.00
Teaching and Learning	4.21	4.01	4.10	4.10	4.47
Student Development Activities	4.82	4.81	4.76	4.79	5.00
Research	4.28	4.02	4.23	4.17	4.16
Academic Services	4.91	4.88	4.76	4.84	4.00
Preservation of Art and Culture	4.82	5.00	4.76	4.85	5.00
Administration and Management	4.89	4.79	4.49	4.69	4.75
Finance and Budgeting	5.00	4.85	5.00	4.95	5.00
Internal Quality Assurance System and Mechanisms	4.55	4.23	4.24	4.32	5.00
Overall Average	4.70	4.61	4.57	4.62	4.60

Discussion and Conclusions

This study examined the overall and each of nine quality components of 41 private higher education institutions. There are several findings from the study. The results reveal that the overall level of internal quality assurance was at a 'very good' level. There are at least three main reasons for the high quality level. First, the IQA focuses on the input and process of educational management. Most private higher education institutions have been in the process of enhancing their quality and position. The efforts should be revealed in the future for the EQA system result. Second, private higher education institutions have been implementing these quality components and indicators for the second year. They have learned lessons from the previous year to improve the score in 2012. Third, the assessors were selected by the institutions to audit the quality of the institutions. The institutions tend to select generous assessors to gain a high quality score.

For each of the components, the institution received 'very good' in six of the components except for three components: Teaching and Learning; Research; and Internal Quality Assurance System and Mechanisms. The main reason for receiving lower score for these components is the academic competence in terms of research and academic output. The low research and academic output are also connected to the qualifications of lecturers in terms of doctoral degree holders and academic title. However, the quality level in these areas will improve since most of the lecturers and institutions have realised the importance of the research commitment. Many of them are in the process of changing their role from mainly teaching to both teaching and researching.

The results reveal a statistically significant difference of quality level in the component of Administration and Management related to different size of institutions. Larger size institutions are not effective in education management compared to smaller size institutions. Similar to other studies, the size of an institution poses a major obstacle to the development of institutional policies as long as there is strong involvement of the institution's management, and sufficient funding and adequate facilities (Martin, 2000; OECD, 2010).

Institutions located outside the Bangkok Metropolitan Region possessed a higher quality score in Student Development Activities. This means the Institutions located outside the Bangkok Metropolitan Region would emphasise more on the plan, implementation and evaluation of extracurricular activities than the institutions located within the Bangkok Metropolitan Region. This might be because of the traffic condition and the limited space for activity in the capital city.

The study also found no difference in quality level between institutions which emphasise the Thai medium programme and institutions which emphasise the international programme. This is because the internal quality assurance is a mandatory part of the education administration process that should be maintained on an ongoing basis. In other words, the entire institution, regardless of programme, must maintain the quality standards required by the OHEC. That makes no difference in the quality level for these institutions.

Though the OHEC developed the IQA system to improve the effectiveness in education administration and to prepare for the external quality assessment, the result of this study found no relation between the quality level of the IQA system and EQA system. There might be two reasons for the finding. First, the IQA's indicators are not related to the output and outcome indicators of the EQA system. Second, there IQA's indicators were set for the early stage of education development but the EQA's indicators were set with an expectation of high level of quality education. More time is needed for the private higher education institutions to develop their quality level according to the expectation.

AIU is a small size private higher education institution located about 150 kilometres outside the Bangkok Metropolitan Region. International programme of education is the main emphasis of the University. The study confirms the high quality level of education in term of input and process of the University when compared to other private higher education institutions. The emphasis in the development of the physical, the mental and the spiritual powers of AIU, has created quality education systems for students and other stakeholders.

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