The current innovation in curriculum development in Thailand

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This article describes the significant changes in the economy, science and technology, social attitudes, beliefs, values and moral development and international relations with international community that warrant corresponding innovations in education to help achieve the national development goals. The education reforms cover school education reform, curriculum reform, teacher reform, and administrative reforms. Among the significant reforms are the emphasis on teaching core subjects of Thai, Mathematics and Science and the improvement of teacher education to upgrade quality of teachers.

Introduction

During the past decade, Thailand has clearly experienced rapid changes as a result of the introduction of modern technologies, and advanced telecommunications, as well as increasing exposure to foreign cultures. Significant impacts were changes on economic growth, social attitudes, beliefs, values and moral development of people, patterns of relations between Thailand and international community, political attitudes and behavior, natural environment. It is also anticipated that these impacts will keep on increasing.

Impact on economic growth

The recent economic development of the country has illustrated the tendency of the country's economy to move gradually away from relying mainly on agriculture to service and industry. The expansion of urbanization and growth of industrial and service sectors has been accelerating very rapidly compared with the slow expansion of the rural/agricultural sector in the past decade. Such an impetus of development has evidently created wider discrepancy of earning between those in agricultural and industrial sectors, and attracted the vast labor migration from rural to urban areas. This phenomenon has resulted in hindering the potentialities of rural people to develop themselves. The gap between these two sectors has become greater. It should also be noted that such rapid
transformation of the structure of economy leading to industrialization would generate a wide variety of occupations particularly in the service industry. Thus, it is foreseen that the imbalance between the urban and rural communities as well as between the industrial/service and agricultural sectors would be aggravated. In addition, the types of occupations and variations of economic needs would even be more diversified.

**Impact on science and technology**

The rapid pace of scientific and technological progress, combined with the increasingly significant role of modern mass media and information in daily living both at home and work, has resulted in creating people's greater dependency on information technology. On another level, the country also has to rely more and more on imported technology due to the fact that domestic capacity towards scientific and technological development is too limited to keep pace with the changing needs.

**Impact on ways of living**

The rapid flow of information resulting from advanced technological development has had a profound effect on people's lifestyle and cycle of socio-economic process, especially for those in the urban areas. The social and economic activities of city people have become and will continue to be more rushing as the pace of life quickens.

**Impact on social attitudes, beliefs, values and moral development**

As modernization takes its course, society becomes more and more open to foreign contacts, which consequently lead to cultural transmission. This exposure has influenced changes in attitudes, beliefs and values which orient people to lean towards urbanized living patterns such as recognition of individual accomplishment, competition, entertainment and consumption oriented behavior, etc. If overemphasized, these characteristics could bring negative consequences towards individuals, communities and the nation. Furthermore, a society experiencing such cultural changes also tends to give rise to many religious beliefs and diverse moral values. Under such circumstances, moral principles tend to become loose while ethical behavior of the people is inclined to deteriorate. It is likely that the negative impacts resulting from all the traits mentioned would be more crucial in the future if the citizens' moral development has not been sufficiently strengthened.

**Impact on the patterns of relations between Thailand and international community**

Due to the modern international economic order and the advanced
telecommunication and information system, the world has become smaller. Countries are closely linked together both in forms of cooperation and competition, particularly as far as economic trade and investment are concerned. Such circumstances will bring Thailand closer to other countries. Its role in the global community, especially in the ASEAN region will be even more significant.

Impact on political attitudes and behavior

The current situation has reflected that the public still lacks understanding of their rights and duties as citizens in a democratic society, for there is political apathy. This includes passive participation in political activities and deviational behavior in the election process such as the candidates’ attempt to buy votes as well as the voters’ expectation to receive cash in return for their votes. It is anticipated that such malpractice will spread and create more problems in the future.

Impact on natural environment

The expansion of the industrial sector, urbanization, and nomadic agriculture in recent years has extensively destroyed the natural equilibrium of the environment. The devastating effects have surfaced in the forms of the sharp reduction of woodland and fertile cultivated areas, and increase in water and air pollution. These acute problems will soon become aggravated unless measures for proper environmental and ecological protection and control have been laid.

Since the changes in Thailand has occurred at a rapid rate, many problems have arisen, particularly related to Thai people’s attitudes and behaviors such as the effects of modern technology on society, replacing indigenous knowledge in rural areas, often with debilitating effects. Rural people have become less self-reliant and have lost their sense of pride and much of their identity as knowledge passed down from generations has become increasingly lost. The influx of western culture, reflecting larger international forces, has impacted on attitudes and values of the population. As people increasingly adopt an urban lifestyle, cooperation among members of a community has declined. In terms of morals and ethics, aggressive and violent behavior has increased as religious practice declined. There is a real need to promote ethical development in children. The environment has changed because of industrial expansion resulting to loss of land, which has in turn increased illegal intrusion into forest.

Economic, social, political, environmental and population developments in Thailand have created a series of problems that must be addressed by education. In 1996, Mr. Sukavich Rangsitpol, Minister of Education of Thailand, launched the current education reforms. The main aim of education reform is to enhance the quality of education from 1996 until educational excellence is achieved by the year 2007. The goal of the education reform is to realize the potential of Thai people to develop themselves for a better quality of life and to develop the nation for a
peaceful co-existence in the global community.

The objective of education reform is to create learning individuals, organizations and society. An educated person or the authentic learning outcome should possess the following abilities and characteristics which are based on Thai cultural heritage and appropriate level of education: good physical and mental health, critical thinking, intellectual inquisitiveness, professionalism, sense of responsibility, honesty, self-sacrifice, perseverance, team spirit, adherence to democracy, and love for the King, country and religion.

The education reform is conducted in 4 areas, school reform, teacher reform, curriculum reform, and administrative reform. From 1996, curriculum and teaching-learning has been reformed on an urgent basis to raise educational quality at all types and levels by:

1. Organizing teaching/learning processes that inculcate among the youth desirable traits as prescribed in the objectives of education reform.

2. Creating activities for preparedness among the learners while developing curriculum of all types and levels based on the following major principles:

   2.1 Creating a happy learning environment for the learner of all level;

   2.2 Organizing teaching/learning processes that require systematic thinking and emphasize practice rather than rote learning. The learner will be able to analyze, synthesize and build a core of knowledge that will form the basis for learning in the future world;

   2.3 Encouraging the learner to learn more from nature and the environment;

   2.4 Ensuring that the learner use the experience and knowledge gained from his/her family and community as part of teaching/learning activities according to the curriculum;

   2.5 Determining basic learning standards or requirements of the learner while encouraging each school and educational institution to develop and improve the basic standards as appropriate. The basic standards of vocational education will be determined in conjunction with professional institutions; and

   2.6 Allowing the local community and population to participate in curriculum development and textbook production in accordance with the needs of each locality.

3. Stepping up the improvement of teacher education curriculum that should contain more of the teacher content with the view of improving the quality
of teachers. There should be reform in the teaching-learning process as follows:

3.1 Learning how to learn should be made an integral part of all subjects being taught since it is an important tool for the learner to get new knowledge or information, to sort out and make meanings out of the acquired information.

3.2 A holistic and system approach to learning should replace the piecemeal and fragmented approach, as it will help broaden the perspective of learners strengthening their problem-solving abilities and application of knowledge in actual practice.

3.3 Personality and character training are crucial and essential for teacher education training. Teacher education curriculum has traditionally been conceived around knowledge and skills, concepts and theories. It is now being recognized that teacher education should focus not only on cognitive aspect but also on attitudinal and emotional ones. To achieve the character education goal, it is recommended that residential period for the trainee be required to foster cultivated individuals through group-living under supervision of role models.

3.4 A simplified version of the research process should be added into teacher education curricula as well as in the teaching processes to stimulate the spirit of inquiry.

3.5 Multiple approaches to teaching and learning must be encouraged. Individualized, problem-based, research-based and inquiry learning, group interaction and discussion should be more employed as they can help learners develop necessary skills such as thinking, problem-solving, group working and many others which are needed to good living.

3.6 Teachers-students relationships should be that of “good friends Kalayanamitr.” Warm, trusting, loving, and caring relationships are nurturing elements essential for effective teaching-learning process.

3.7 Teacher educators are encouraged to get more involved with the community and extend their teaching into the world outside their classrooms. They should try to use the problem-based approach to help their students develop understanding of the community and its problems and try to make use of the local wisdom to strengthen their community or solve community problems.

4. Emphasizing the core subjects of Thai, Mathematics and Sciences in the teaching/learning activities of primary education to provide the basis for further development of knowledge and skills.
5. Reforming the learning of foreign languages by providing access to English language learning to primary school first grade pupils.

6. Accelerating the improvement of teaching/learning outcome through developing teaching methods, technology and innovation, as well as school libraries. A learning network must be created to provide a link between formal and non-formal education to offer extensive services to the learner.

7. Improving the teaching/learning process by creating diversity both in its form and content; promoting flexibility of school hours; and providing opportunities for learners to earn while they learn.

8. Accelerating the teaching/learning of democracy by developing a sustainable democratic curriculum and promoting democratic behavior in teachers, which reinforces the students’ learning process by providing role models.

9. Reforming the testing system to ensure that it conforms with the test standards emphasizing the learner’s actual behavior and using test results to develop the learner and the teaching/learning process. Selection of learners of all types and levels of education will be based more on continuous assessment rather than examination. Admission by quota will be increased.

10. Developing and promoting a network of educational institutions and agencies both in Bangkok and in the provinces to technical devolution. Curriculum innovations have been developed to implement the aims of education reform which are as follows:

10.1 Developing teaching-learning process of learning happily.

10.2 Developing teaching-learning process of thinking to enhance the R’s.

10.3 Developing teaching-learning process of increasing learners’ morality, values, ethics, discipline and team spirit.

10.4 Developing teaching-learning process of constructing the knowledge and cooperative learning.

10.5 Developing teaching-learning process of increasing aesthetics.

10.6 Developing English language curriculum for first-grade primary students.

10.7 Developing the evaluation system by using portfolio assessment to evaluate students’ performance and the product of their works.

All the innovations have been disseminated to the administrators, supervisors,
teachers through seminars, conferences and workshops. It should be noted that teaching-learning process is still focused on transferring academic knowledge to learners and on rote-memory learning rather than on enhancing people's capabilities in acquiring knowledge, creativity, and problem solving. The measurement, evaluation and entrance examinations at all levels of education have not yet reflected the overall curriculum objectives. The objective of curriculum innovations has not been achieved because of lack of support in terms of readiness of schools, administrators, teachers and communities and budget allocation.

Globalization that makes the world accessible and the era of information society have unavoidably affected Thai society with both desirable and undesirable impacts. Quality of the Thai people is thus the key factor to enable the society to develop in the right direction.

The Desirable Thai Society can be defined as "the society of learning, of competitiveness and cooperation, having capacity, discipline, morality, freedom, justice, happy people, happy families, strengthened communities, peaceful, balanced and steady economy, sustainable environment, recognition of human rights; being prosperous and at peace with neighboring countries and the global community; co-existent and in harmony with nature." The Vision of Educational Development means "having a high quality and efficient education process aimed at a balanced physical, intellectual, spiritual, and social development, and relevant to the needs of individuals, communities, society, and the nation.

According to this concept, education will be based on learner-centered system. Learners will be the center of development, so that they can pursue knowledge by themselves, and seek lifelong learning through diversified education services provided by all sectors of society."

These problems mentioned above required immediate actions so as to promote the role of education in enhancing people's quality, which is the highlight of national development, and so as to respond to national development needs amidst the rapid change. Since education is very important to the development of the Thai quality of life, the Office of the National Education, under the national Education Commission has been designated as the office responsible for the formulation of the Eight National Education Development Plan (1997-2001) in accordance with the National Education Scheme and in relation to the socio-economic development of the country.

The objectives and the policies for Educational Development under the Eighth Plan are as follows:

1. To expand an extensive and equal provision of basic education for all people; and to extend basic education to secondary education level.

2. To improve the quality of education and its relevance to the needs of individual, communities and the nation, and to enable learners to achieve
their full potential for self-development.

3. To enhance Thai education in strengthening the national potential for self-reliance, and to contribute to national economic stabilization and the role of Thailand in the global economy.

To achieve these objectives, the following policies, targets and major programs for education development are formulated:

Policies on Education Development

1. To accelerate an extensive and equal expansion, and further extension of high quality basic education services for all.

2. To reform the teaching and learning system to enable learners at all levels to achieve their full potential in academic knowledge and basic skills, as well as to acquire desirable characteristics.

3. To reform teacher education and teacher education system so as to enable teachers to improve teaching and learning and help learners live a happy life in a changing society; and to improve the teaching profession and enhance the status of teachers.

4. To accelerate the production and development of middle level skilled and higher level skilled manpower to enhance national economic potential, progress and stability within the global community, in the context of Thai tradition and in the spirit of self-reliance.

5. To reform educational administration and management to be more flexible; to decentralize educational management so that all sectors of society are appropriately involved in decision-making providing equitable, high quality, and diversified models of education.

It should be noted that the aims and policies of the Eight plan (1997-2007) are in accordance with the education reform (1996–2007), that provides the directions to develop quality of Thai people in the future world.

References


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