

Delivering Speech by
H.E. Mrs. Nongnuth Phetcharatana
At a seminar “Internationalizing WU”
25 August 2017
Walailak University

The activeness of the university in effort to improve the quality of higher education and to become a world class institution. Education is one of the key agenda in the conduct of Thailand's relations with many countries. The main objective are to promote sharing of knowledge and best practices from abroad, promote scholarships , training and exchange program. Educational exchange is a soft diplomacy which has proven to be an effective tool in promoting people to people understanding among countries, no matter they are developed, developing or less developed. It also serves well in meeting the ultimate goals of Thailand's 20 year National Strategic Plan. Two out of the six goals are mostly relevant to education: one is to develop human capability and potentials, another is to promote Thailand's competitiveness.

I commend the effort of this university in gearing the higher education towards the excellence and world- Class University. The success will be not only for Walailuk but also the next generation students who will be the future human resource of the country.

To share views with the faculty members of Walailak University regarding educational system in western countries where I served as a Thai diplomat particularly the United States, Germany and Austria. My 35 years work experiences in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand have involved with academic network and education cooperation with foreign countries, the

area which can build on further development of the country in all dimensions, whether they be economic, innovation, scientific and technology, development, and several other fields. Without qualified manpower and standard knowledge, how can the nation advance its economic and society and be capable to compete with others.

I truly hope that my remarks can be useful to Walailak University in advancing its international curricula. Speaking from the viewpoint of a person who experienced first-hand with education system in abroad, as a diplomat and as a mother of two children attending schools in foreign countries, my comments will touch upon some elements in the Education system in Western countries.

Cultural differences affect local teaching and learning styles. In Thailand, teachers are revered at all times. Children would readily follow their teachers' orders and would seldom disagree with what teachers say. Children in Western countries are outspoken and they are not afraid to express their thoughts and opinions. In western schools, teachers are given due respect but they are not revered. Students are more open with their criticisms and a teacher who comes to school unprepared will not be able to hold his students' attention

Teacher-Student relations are more open in western system. Students spent time in the class discussing with teachers and friends, not taking notes all the time. Students do projects in group that can promote their research skills, teamwork and problem-solving ability. The conduct of seminar classes and group discussion would allow creative and analytical thinking, and encourage for more forward looking opinion.

Class size in western schools are usually not exceeding 30-40 students. Seminar or tutoring classes are smaller than lecture classes.

In the class, students do not rely solely on inputs from the professors but also from book assignments and other sources. Interactive learning style is aimed to help the students understand the concept rather than memorizing and that students can learn to apply to real life situation.

In western countries, examinations emphasize comprehension and writing skills, as well as an essay type of test. The grading are not based solely on test results. Class participation (discussion) and papers/projects are counted in grading.

Use of e-learning methods and knowledge databases

a) On the primary and secondary education levels, students can benefit from the use of standardized e-learning methods. In American and international schools, for example, educational software were utilized for teaching grammar and language skills. Interactive learning tools can also help students develop technical skills on the side.

b) On the university level, students had access to a diverse range of knowledge databases containing journal articles, news clippings, research papers, etc. Aside from serving as a useful and reliable source of information, it also allowed students to develop research skills.

Universities in western countries aimed to nurture and promote creative and independent thinking. They provide programs such as developing and implementing a business model, debate clubs, having an active student council, etc.

They also focus on extracurricular activities in order to foster career skills such as teamwork, leadership, communication, problem-solving, etc., and to give greater importance to EQ development

For Example: C.A.S. program under the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma which stands for Creativity, Action and Sports. Its objective is to encourage students to become well-rounded in these 3 areas. Creative

activities range from those of performing arts, fine arts, innovation and design, etc. Action means taking initiatives to make a difference in the local community, usually through charitable activities such as fundraisers. Sports include participating in athletic teams or recreational activities, whether within or beyond the school and whether on a friendly or competitive level.

Cases on practical learning

The studies in Germany are in some aspect more theoretical than in other countries and they consist of many lectures from the professor. In the lecture there are all students of one year and there are just a few exercise lessons in which the theoretical part can be practiced and proofed in reality. At the end of every term the students get grades for their final examination and for speeches, assignments and practical projects.

Practical education can also be offered in internships which are an obligation in some subjects. For some weeks or months the students have to work in a company and use their theoretical knowledge in real life situations to gain experience. This is also a good chance to find a job for the working life after university.

UNIVERSITIES OF APPLIED SCIENCES in some countries in Europe such as Germany, Austria, provide curricula that is strongly practice-oriented. The course work provides the theoretical background and prepares students for the real-world requirements of professional life. Internships and practical semesters form an integral part of the degree programs. U of Applied Sciences have linkages with various industries and business which provide internships to students in respective fields of their study.

In China, the practical learning has also been promoted. From my contacts with big business in China recently, Alibaba provides serious training to young startups and SMEs on E-commerce skills. Huawei and ZTE, both are the largest ICT companies in China with worldwide business and production,

have set up their own universities in 魏城, the IT city of China. The China Railway, which is the government enterprise involving construction business of high-speed trains all over China (now more than 30,000 Kms. long) has its employees from top executives down to technicians graduated from specific railway university.

Practical learning should help reducing gaps between the university and the business and bring about win-win partnership. The era of Industry 4.0 makes it important for the academic world to catch up with the speed of knowledge and innovation technology. The inputs and outputs of the universities are to be relevant with the global changes. They should be able to adopt and adapt, otherwise they risk to be out of the loop.

How best practices can be successfully applied to Thai University? As the competition among universities are tougher regionally and internationally.

- adaptive curricula with flexibility (some leading universities in the US start to broaden the curricula and do not categorize fields of study)
- sending right messages
- good websites to communicate and outreach to public and target groups
- information/ university branding/ video clip
- highlight the value of location i.e. Green, Beach area, city culture, south location etc.
- improve campus facilities to attract students on Gen X, Y such as modern dorm rooms, cafe, student clubs, fitness, sport complex, etc.
- participate in overseas education fairs,

- establish contacts with high school student Counsellors,
- establish formal links with other institutions and think- tanks within the country and abroad in order to conduct joint seminars or scholars exchanges.

Conclusion: There's an opportunity in every crisis. Whether we can see it or not depend on one's vision. Aging society may cause concerns over declining student enrollments in universities. Internationalizing our academic institution can be the best way to sustain and excel further. The establishment of ASEAN Economic Community has given an opportunity for promoting education in ASEAN. Walailak has its geographical advantage in Southern Thailand which has unique culture. The majority of ASEAN population is Muslim and Walailak's Southeast Asian Center can do more to promote ASEAN studies as well as ASEAN plus three studies. ASEAN plus China, Japan, South Korea are Thailand's key partners in promoting regional economic integration. The University can enrich its international curricula with strong regional elements which can successfully attract APT students as well as APT partner universities.