



RIHED OCCASIONAL PAPER SERIES

an analysis of access
to higher education
in thailand

varaporn bovornsiri

THE REGIONAL INSTITUTE OF HIGHER EDUCATION
AND DEVELOPMENT

RIHED OCCASIONAL PAPER No. 23

An Analysis of Access to Higher Education in Thailand

Varaporn Bovornsiri

REGIONAL INSTITUTE OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT
SINGAPORE

1985

An Analysis of Access to Higher Education in Thailand

® 1985 Regional Institute of Higher Education and Development, Singapore

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published and Distributed by
Regional Institute of Higher Education and Development

Room 803, 8th Floor RELC Building
30 Orange Grove Road
Singapore 1025.

Distributed in Southeast Asia by
Information Publications
#02-06, 1st Floor,
Pei-Fu Industrial Building
24, New Industrial Road,
Singapore 1053.

AN ANALYSIS OF ACCESS
TO HIGHER EDUCATION
IN THAILAND

THE AUTHOR

Varaporn Bovornsiri is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Higher Education, Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. She was also the Associate Dean in Planning and Development before her current appointment to RIHED as senior researcher.

Dr Varaporn took her B.A. in Economics at Chulalongkorn University and an M.A. in Education from Arizona State University where she also did her Ph.D. in the Sociology of Education. She had directed several research projects in Thailand covering areas which include: vocational-technical education, systems of higher education, education of Thai farmers and role of women in educational development.

She is the author of *Vocational-Technical Education and the Thai Labour Market* and has also co-written *Systems of Higher Education: Thailand, Higher Education in Thailand, Thailand — Vocational Education Project II — Sectorial Survey Team's Report Vol. I-II* and *The Effect of Education Upon Thai Farmers*.

The author is responsible for the choice and presentation of the facts contained in this publication and for the opinions expressed which are not necessarily those of RIHED and do not commit the Institute.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was made possible by a UNESCO research grant administered through Regional Institute of Higher Education and Development. I would like to record my thanks and to acknowledge the support I received from RIHED. A special word of thanks and appreciation to Dr Amnuay Tapingkae, Director of RIHED, for his support and suggestions. My deep gratitude also goes to Dr V Selvaratnam for kindly providing research facilities; Dr Banphot Virasai for his invaluable guidance; Mr Salman Kasenda for his many useful suggestions. I also wish to thank Mr Chris Yap for his final editing and Miss Carole Leong for typing the manuscript.

In Thailand, my deepest gratitude goes to Professor Dr Sippanondha Ketudat, President of the National Petrochemical Corporation Ltd for his encouragement and support in various ways. I am also indebted to Professor Dr Pote Sapianchai, Secretary-General of the Office of the National Education Commission and Professor Dr Wichit Srisa-an, Deputy Permanent Secretary of State in the Ministry of University Affairs, for the valuable information and knowledge gained in this area of study. My special thanks to Dr Gerald Fry, Dr Ken Camp, Dr Chayan Vaddhanaphuti and Mr Decha Sripipatanakul for their valuable comments and assistance.

Finally, my heart-felt appreciation goes to my friends at the Office of the National Education Commission for conducting the field work, especially to Miss Vichitra Prasatvethayakul for her continuous support in providing primary and secondary data on Thai higher education.

To all these people and to those unmentioned, I really appreciate their contributions towards making this published study a reality.

Varaporn Bovornsiri
1985

Contents

	Page
List of Tables	vi
Acknowledgements	viii
1 Introduction	1
2 Access to Higher Education in Historical Perspective	7
3 Factors Affecting Access to Higher Education	31
4 Evaluation of Admission Policies and Procedures	45
5 Summary	57
Appendix I	63
Appendix II	64
Appendix III	65
Appendix IV	67
Bibliography	71

List of Tables

	Page
2.1 First-Year Undergraduates in Government Universities, 1982	16
2.2 First-Year Undergraduates in Private Higher Education Institutions, 1982	17
2.3 First-Year Undergraduates in Government Colleges, 1982	18
2.4 Total Undergraduate Enrolment in Government Universities, 1982	19
2.5 Total Undergraduate Enrolment in Private Higher Education Institutions, 1982	20
2.6 Total Undergraduate Enrolment in Government Colleges, 1982	21
2.7 Total Graduate Enrolment in Government Universities, 1982	22
2.8 Undergraduate Fields of Study in Government Universities, 1982	23
2.9 Undergraduate Fields of Study in Private Higher Education Institutions, 1982	24
2.10 Undergraduate Fields of Study in Government Colleges, 1982	25
2.11 Graduate Fields of Study in Government Universities, 1982	26
2.12 Number and Percentage of Thai Students at Higher Education Institutions Abroad by Country	27
3.1 Group Means and Proportions of Academic Achievement and Socioeconomic Background of First-Year Students by Type of Institutions	36

	Page
3.2 Loadings of Standardised Discriminant Functions on Access to Various Types of Higher Education Institutions	39
3.3 Percentage of Students Admitted under the Quota System of Regional Universities	41
4.1 Number of Qualified and Successful Candidates for the Joint Entrance Examination 1969-84 and Changes in Their Index Numbers	49
4.2 Number of Graduates from Ramkhamhaeng University between 1974-81	51

1

Introduction

BACKGROUND

The origins of Thai universities date back to 1917 when the first institution, Chulalongkorn University, was formally established through the amalgamation of the School of Civil Servants, the Royal Medical College and the Engineering School. More recently, tertiary level education has expanded rapidly. Major factors that contribute to this increase in demand for higher education are Thai social values and the structure of the Thai government's salary scale.

From the social value perspective, Thai people tend to favour and respect individuals with better education because they are more likely to find jobs in prestigious occupations. Also, those who obtain higher education tend to work in an office or administrative setting which do not require manual work, but instead emphasise the use of mental abilities. These values reinforce the aspirations of parents to send their children for further education in colleges and universities.

The structure of the Thai Civil Service salary scale seems to encourage the acquisition of higher educational qualifications prior to seeking employment. The salary of those who completed secondary education is much lower than that of those holding a bachelor degree. Employees with a secondary education certificate need to work 10-12 years to obtain the same salary as a new bachelor degree graduate (fresh secondary education graduates earn 1,255 baht¹ per month, whereas bachelor degree graduates earn 2,765 baht). This is consistent with the view that secondary school is a stepping stone for further study towards a degree in universities and institutes. Students who take the vocational path seem to be better off than secondary school graduates (the starting salary of vocational education graduates equals to 1,950 baht per month). However, it would take a vocational education graduate approximately 6 years to obtain the

same salary as a new bachelor degree graduate. As for other levels of education, similar results are found. The Civil Service salary scale encourages students to continue their education rather than to enter the labour market. With respect to the private sector, greater emphasis is placed upon the ability to work in a position rather than upon degrees and certificates.² However, since the government sector plays a major role in absorbing graduates from schools and higher education institutions, its salary scale encourages aspirations for higher education.

On the other hand, with respect to the supply side, places in universities and institutes of higher education are quite limited. The joint entrance examination for the undergraduate programs of ten government universities conducted by the Ministry of University Affairs is extremely competitive. The number of applicants taking the joint entrance examination for the 1984 academic year was 95,786, of whom only 16,216 students or about 16.9 per cent were admitted.³

Besides the joint entrance examination, the provincial universities, Chiang Mai University in the north; Khon Kaen University in the northeast; and Prince of Songkhla University in the south also conduct their own entrance examinations to fill 50 per cent of the total number of seats available each year for all secondary school leavers in their respective regions. This use of the university's own entrance examination exemplifies the new quota system which specifies the number of secondary school graduates required from each province in the region.

The pressure of increased demand for places in higher education institutions led in 1971 to the establishment of Ramkhamhaeng University, an open admissions university. Furthermore, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University was established in May 1978 with an emphasis on self-learning using mass media, such as the postal services, radio and television.

In addition to the government universities, there are private universities and colleges, government colleges, government specialised institutions, and private specialised institutions.⁴ Private universities and colleges were established under the Private College Act of 1969. There are 11 private colleges and 4 private universities in 1984, all of which are under the supervision of the Ministry of University Affairs. With respect to the government colleges, they offer bachelor degree and lower level programmes in specific professional areas. Institutions offering training in the area of vocational and technical education including agriculture, are the Institute of Technology and Vocational Education, which has 28 campuses, and the various vocational, technical and agricultural colleges under the Department of Vocational Education. With respect to teacher training and related areas, there are teacher training colleges, physical education colleges, dramatic arts colleges, and a fine arts college. All these

colleges are under the Ministry of Education. In addition there are nursing colleges under the Ministry of Public Health. As for specialised government institutions, there are military and police academies, military and police nursing schools, other ministry schools, and a nursing college under the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. Among the private specialised institutions, there are the Asian Institute of Technology (an Asian regional institution offering graduate programs in engineering, science, and related fields), Buddhist colleges, and a nursing college of the Bangkok Seventh Day Adventist Hospital.

The Thai government has emphasised the importance of education as a means to train manpower for the development of the country. It can be seen that in the budget year 1984, the education budget had the largest proportion of 20.2 per cent. The second largest allocation was national defence at 19.8 per cent. Economic services ranked third rank with 17.8 per cent.⁵ Since the cost on higher education per student is relatively more expensive than in primary and secondary education, thus the policies and procedures on student admissions need to be critically examined and evaluated. Such an evaluation should include careful consideration of the joint entrance examination, the quota system of regional universities, the open admissions as well as the internal examinations of colleges and institutes. With respect to admissions policy it is necessary that the pattern of screening students ensures that those selected are capable and have the attitude and aptitude consistent with their areas of study. Otherwise, inefficiency resulting from repetition and wastage will be high. Also, it is essential to provide equality of higher educational opportunity for bright and capable students regardless of their geographic, ethnic, or socioeconomic backgrounds.

General purpose and specific objectives

The purpose of this study is to describe and analyse the policies and procedures affecting access to higher education in Thailand in order to put forth recommendations to enhance student admission to higher education institutions in Thailand. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- * To review the underlying philosophy and policy on access to higher education in Thailand.
- * To determine the extent of equality of access to higher education institutions regardless of sex, race, socioeconomic background and geographical origins.

- * To study factors which contribute to the success of gaining admission to higher education institutions.
- * To make recommendations concerning student admission policies and procedures.

Institutions to be covered

This study covers higher education institutions including post-secondary education institutions and they are broadly defined as follows:

- * Government universities and institutes under the Ministry of University Affairs.
- * Private universities and colleges under the Ministry of University Affairs.
- * Institute of Technology and Vocational Education, vocational colleges, technical colleges, agricultural colleges, teacher training colleges, physical education colleges, dramatic arts colleges, and the fine arts college under the Ministry of Education.
- * Nursing colleges under the Ministry of Public Health.

Not all institutions mentioned above, however, can be treated in detail because of time and data limitations. In these particular cases, information on one or more institutions representative of that particular type of tertiary education is presented.

Methodology of data collection and analysis

Both primary and secondary data are utilised in this study. Primary data are mainly on first-year students of higher education institutions: universities outside the Bangkok metropolitan area and private universities and colleges under the Ministry of University Affairs, Institute of Technology and Vocational Education, vocational colleges, technical colleges, agricultural colleges, teacher training colleges, physical education colleges, dramatic arts colleges, the fine arts college under the Ministry of Education, and nursing colleges under the Ministry of Public Health.

Data on first-year students of the universities and institutes in the Bangkok metropolitan area under the Ministry of University Affairs are from the Ministry of University Affairs.

Both population and sample data are used. Data on background variables such as age, sex, ethnicity, grade point average at completion

of lower/upper secondary education, geographic location, socio-economic background, and area of study are also employed.

Statistics utilised are simple proportions, cross tabulations, selectivity indices and discriminant coefficients. Discriminant analysis will be particularly useful in evaluating the relative impact of various factors affecting access to higher education.

The secondary data are obtained from institutions and agencies concerned with higher education. Percentages and indices are used to show extent of access to higher education.

With respect to the qualitative dimension of the study, review of major documents and interviews with key authorities in the area of study are major source of information. The acts and regulations of universities and other higher education institutions are reviewed especially in the area of admission policies and procedures. The National Education Development Plans are also examined to note the aims and objectives of higher education as they relate to national goals.

Relevance of the study to Thai national development and RIHED member countries

The ultimate wealth of a country is the quality of its human resources. Given this view, higher education should be seen as a significant element in national development. Policy on access to higher education is, thus, important both in terms of equity and efficiency. Inequitable systems of higher education can lead to political tensions. Inefficient systems of higher education lead to economic waste and under-utilisation of human talent. It is hoped that this research may contribute to Thailand's efforts to ensure both reasonable equity and efficiency with respect to its policy on access to higher education.

For a number of reasons, the Thai experience with respect to policy on student admission to higher education should be of special interest to other countries such as those who are members of RIHED. First, Thailand has never been colonised and, thus, it has developed its own system of higher education. Second, Thailand's approach to higher education access policy is highly pluralistic and combines features of both highly open and selective systems, which should be of interest to other countries. Finally, others may profitably learn from both Thailand's successes and mistakes in this important area.

Footnotes

1. Approximately, 27 baht equal to US\$1.
2. Varaporn Bovornsiri and Gerald W. Fry, *Vocational Education and the Thai Labor Market*. Bangkok: Office of the National Education Commission, 1980, p. 113.
3. Data obtained from the Division of Planning, Ministry of University Affairs.
4. The categories of higher education institutions are based on the classification made in the research work conducted by Sippanondha Ketudat, Wichit Srisa-an, and others, *Systems of Higher Education: Thailand*. New York: Interbook, Inc., 1978, p. 8.
5. Bureau of the Budget, *Thailand's Budget in Brief — Fiscal Year 1984*. Bangkok: Bopit Press, 1984, p. 63.

2

Access to Higher Education in Historical Perspective

EVOLUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Establishment of universities and institutes

The evolution of higher education institutions in Thailand, especially the government universities, can be classified into five periods. The *first period* was between 1917-31 during which the first university, **Chulalongkorn University**, was established in 1917 under the Ministry of Education. The establishment of this university was to train graduates to work for government agencies. It was also the result of the influence of Western ideas on university education, coupled with the purpose of providing advanced academic knowledge to university students. At the beginning, Chulalongkorn University offered programmes of study in four faculties: Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Public Administration, Faculty of Engineering, and Faculty of Arts and Science. Given the small number of grade 12 graduates, students with a grade 10 certificate could be accepted without entrance examination for certificate programmes of one year. It was not until 1925 that a grade 12 certificate was required for admission. In the beginning, only male students could obtain a higher education in preparation for employment in government organisations. Chulalongkorn University first admitted seven female students in 1927 for study in the Faculty of Medicine. In 1932, three of them graduated with a bachelor degree in medicine. From then on, university-level education began to attract greater numbers of female students.¹ Prior to 1930 this university required no entrance examination, since there were more available places than applicants.

The *second period* covered the years 1932 to 1942. One year after the revolution of 1932, when a constitutional monarchy was instituted,

the University of Moral and Political Sciences was founded (renamed **Thammasat University** in 1952). This university served the purpose of providing the public with advanced knowledge and understanding in politics and administration which was in accordance with a democratic system of government. Also, this was an open university providing an opportunity to reach more people.² The qualifications for admittance was a secondary school certificate or its equivalent. There was no entrance examination and class attendance was not compulsory. Not until 1960 did this university adopt the closed university system of admission by entrance examination.

The *third period*, 1943-57, saw the establishment of three more universities: **Kasetsart University** under the Ministry of Agriculture, **Silpakorn University** under the Ministry of Education and **Mahidol University** under the Ministry of Public Health. Higher education institutions were founded to train graduates to serve the needs of government agencies in required professional areas.

Kasetsart University was established to promote and expand agricultural education. Originally, there were four faculties: Faculty of Agriculture, Faculty of Cooperatives, Faculty of Forestry, and Faculty of Fisheries. In 1954, two more faculties were added: Faculty of Veterinary Science, and Faculty of Irrigation Engineering. Silpakorn university, as the institution promoting arts and culture, offered programmes in the areas of printing, sculpture, music, dramatic arts, archaeology, and fine arts. The Faculty of Medicine, Chulalongkorn University became Mahidol University. This university served the needs of the country in training professionals in the areas of medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, nursing and midwifery. These universities recruited their own students, in which examinations were used to evaluate background knowledge for further study in a specific area. Silpakorn University required subjects in the arts, general knowledge, and English. Kasetsart University required subjects in a science and English and an interview. For Mahidol University, the required subject was science (for study in the health science area). Qualifying for entrance were second year student graduates from the Faculty of Science, Chulalongkorn University, or the equivalent.³ In 1954, the **College of Education** was chartered under the Department of Teacher Training of the Ministry of Education. It served the purpose of producing teachers at the diploma and degree levels. This College of Education later became a university.

The *fourth period*, 1958-70, was one with an emphasis on accelerated national development. The **Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board** was established in 1958 and