

# **Governmental Support and Promotion towards Competitiveness of Private Vocational Education and Colleges in Thailand**

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**Abstract:** To enhance industrial competitiveness and accessibility of quality vocational education, Thailand has a long-standing position to support the growth and competitiveness of public and private vocational education. Regarding the Constitution B.E. 2550 (2007), National Education Acts B.E. 2542(1999) and B.E. 2545 (2002)(Revision), National Education Plan (2009-2016), Proposal for the Second Decade of Education Reform (2009-2118), Private Education Promotion Plan (2006) and National Social and Economic Plans, private vocational colleges are to be supported and promoted to ensure that the country does not lack the quality workforce to support the growth of industries. This study, commissioned by the National Education Council, examines the effectiveness of such government's plans and policies to support and promote private vocational education and colleges during 2006-2010, through different data collection methods, namely document analysis, survey, in-dept interview and focus group. In addition, this paper also provides recommendations for the Thai government and the Ministry of Education to further support and promote the competitiveness of private vocational education and colleges.

**Keywords:** Public-Private Partnership in Education, Vocational Education, Private Vocational Colleges, Thailand

## **1. Introduction**

Private vocational colleges in Thailand have been established since 1960s and there are currently 325 vocational colleges throughout the country, accommodating 261,752 students in diploma level considered in the basic education category (vocational upper secondary education) (Office of National Education Council, 2010). Moreover, most private vocational colleges also offer higher diplomas (associate degree level) in which enrolment is recently over 150,000 students. Vocational education has been recognized as a very important mechanism to generate relevant workforce to enhance industrial competitiveness of the country. Thus national economic and social development plans, along with national education plans, have supported and expected the growth of vocational education, both at the public and the private.

According to Thailand's Constitution B.E. 2550 (2007), private education service providers are entitled to be supported and promoted by the government towards accessible quality education. In addition, the National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999) and B.E. 2545 (2002) (Revision) focuses on the autonomous management of private education providers through monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the quality standard set for public education is met. The Acts also mention that the government must set the policies that promote participation of private education providers including financial aids and other benefits, along with academic support, for the quality and self-reliance of private education providers. The statistics at the Office of National Education Council, however, shows that the number of students in vocational education including private vocational college has declined overtime. Regarding private vocational colleges across the country, the number of students has declined in recent years; 2007 declined by 1.5%, 2008 declined by 0.42% and 2009 declined by 4.3% (Office of National Education Council; 2007, 2008, 2009). Regarding quality, the Office of National Educational Quality Assurance revealed that 69.8% (227 colleges) out of 325 colleges passed the national quality assurance measure (National Education Quality Assurance Agency, 2010); this statistics shows that the overall quality of private vocational education has not met the national

education plan's goal that eighty percent of private vocational colleges passed the quality assurance measures.

Regarding the Constitution B.E. 2550 (2007), National Education Acts B.E. 2542 (1999) and B.E. 2545 (2002)(Revision), National Education Plan (2009-2016), Proposal for the Second Decade of Education Reform (2009-2118), Private Education Promotion Plan (2006) and National Social and Economic Plans that aim to support and promote private vocational education and colleges, this study is then commissioned by the National Education Council to examine the effectiveness of such plans and policies that were to support and promote private vocational colleges during 2006-2010; whilst providing recommendations for the government and the Ministry of Education to further support and promote private vocational colleges. The following sections outline this study's objectives, research design, findings, and recommendations.

## 2. Objectives

- To evaluate government's policy to support and promote private vocational education and colleges;
- To provide recommendations for the government and the Ministry of Education to further support and promote private vocational education and colleges.

## 3. Research Design

In addition to analysis of respective governmental plans/policies, statistics and data for evaluation of such policies and discover meaningful findings, this study also employs different methods of data collection, namely a survey of private vocational college presidents/license holders and educational district directors, in-depth interview and focus group to find the accuracy of statistics, reasons behind statistics, obstacles and suggestions. Informants in this study are license holders/ presidents of private vocational colleges and former/current officers in the Ministry of Education who took part in governmental plans' and policies' formation and implementation of such plans and policies.

## 4. Effectiveness of Government's Support Towards Private Vocational Education and Colleges

Through data collection and analysis methods, this study finds important elements as the followings:

### 4.1. Government has supported autonomous management and status of private vocational colleges.

The study finds that the Ministry of Education is instrumental in proceeding and passing Private School Act B.E. 2554 (2011), through the Parliament, that allows private vocational school to be titled either "vocational college" or "technological college"; this has made the status of private institutions equivalent to public vocational colleges. In addition, the Act also allows the private colleges' flexibility in managing their income and property. College-based management approach is seen through the Act, as colleges have management autonomy through their College Executive Boards, whilst still under supervision of the Ministry of Education and its Office of Private Education Commission. Moreover, the Office of Private Commission has allocated funding for colleges to borrow for colleges' infrastructure with low interest rate. However, there are only few who borrowed due to regulations and procedures.

### 4.2. Policies that are to promote private vocational colleges are not equal to those that promote public vocational colleges.

**Financial Aids:** Even though the Constitution B.E. 2550 (2007) mentions that the twelve years of basic education (including diploma level of education) for every Thai citizens must be provided by the government free of charge, the government provides only 70 % of average educational costs to students who choose to attend private colleges, which means parents/students must pay the gap out of their pocket. This situation makes many parents/students choose public colleges over private institutions because they gain more of public financial aids (100% of educational cost). These aids neither reflect the investment on property and fixed assets of private colleges. In addition, these aids are calculated on a monthly basis for private colleges, but by semester basis for public colleges. Number of dropouts during a semester then gives difficulty to

private colleges that have to return financial aids to the government even though they already invest to accommodate those dropouts since the beginning of the semester.

**Tax and Incentive:** Tax (Income Tax and Value Added Tax-VAT) Incentives and Exempts are to be considered by project and proposal. The study shows that only a few have gained benefits through this policy scheme due to long procedure, limited number of officers and ineffective communication. Regarding property tax, there is no laws allowing private colleges to gain property tax breaks/incentives.

### **4.3. Structural challenges persist that do not allow adequate academic support.**

Unlike the Ministry of Education's Office of the Higher Education Commission that oversees both public and private universities/higher education institutions, the Office of Vocational Education Commission oversees only public vocational colleges, while the Office of Private Education Commission oversees private schools (formal and non-formal) in every level, including private vocational colleges. Due to the Office of Private Education Commission's inadequacy of expertise on vocational education, human resource, provincial office and academic supporting units, private vocational colleges find difficulties in many aspects. Since the Office of Private Education Commission does not have either regional or provincial offices, Provincial Education Offices on Elementary Education are to oversee private vocational colleges in provinces other than Bangkok and vicinity on behalf of the Office of Private Education Commission. In addition, the supports on academics including research support, teaching monitoring and curriculum development are not available through the Office of Private Education Commission. Private vocational colleges are to make their own efforts to seek supports through personal contacts including those from the Office of Vocational Education Commission that has provincial office and tens of academic supporting units. The Vocational Education Acts and Office of Vocational Educational Commission are not obligated to serve private vocational colleges.

### **4.4. National plans and policies without effective monitoring, implementation and evaluation.**

The study finds that although there are national plans and policies, educational agencies within the Ministry of Education do not effectively implement agency's/unit's plan, monitor and evaluate outcomes accordingly. Even though Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for a period of time were set, annual KPIs for each relevant agency were not identified, while performance evaluation of agencies and their executives did not proceed and did not deliver reward/punishment according to those KPIs. Collective effort across different relevant agencies under the Ministry of Education to reach national goals is not evident.

### **4.5. Curriculum does not reflect the demands of place and time.**

The mechanism for private colleges' curriculum development is not clear due to limited academic expertise of the Office of Private Education Commission. Thus, almost all private vocational colleges have employed central curriculums developed by the Office of Vocational Education. This situation limits private vocational colleges from designing and implementing their own curriculum that reflects the demands of place and time.

## **5. Recommendations**

According to the findings on monitoring and evaluation of governmental plans and policies to support and promote private vocational education and colleges, the study provides recommendations for the government and the Ministry of Education to further support and promote private vocational education and colleges as the followings:

### **5.1. Clear policies with effective monitoring, implementation and evaluation of relevant agencies**

Central educational policies and plans must be clarified and communicated through public and relevant agencies to work on with long-term, medium-term and annual KPIs. Policies and plans of relevant agencies/units must be aligned with national education policies and plans. Working committee on each of the

major policy consisting of executives in relevant agencies must be formed with effective monitoring, evaluation and reward/punishment mechanisms.

### **5.2. Improve capacity of governmental agency that oversee private vocational education to overcome challenges and ensure quality education**

The Office of Private Education Commission must improve its capacity to better support private vocational colleges. This can be done through development of human resources in expertise on vocational education and formal cooperation with the Office of Vocational Commission to academically support private vocational colleges through its different supporting units and provincial offices. An alternative is to switch private vocational colleges' supervising agency from the Office of Private Education Commission to the Office of Vocational Education Commission that makes private vocational colleges under the same umbrella as public vocational colleges with similar benefits and policies. This can be learned from the Office of Higher Education Commission that oversee both public and private universities/higher education institutions.

### **5.3. Development of management system according to different subject area specialty.**

Management system with supporting mechanism according to subject area specialty is to be developed under the overseeing office to support academic excellence and overcome challenges of private vocational colleges. This is to improve competitiveness of private vocational colleges through their academic excellence in different subject areas.

### **5.4. Development of Chartered School System**

With private vocational colleges' autonomy, productivity and efficiency, selected private vocational college should have the opportunity to be chartered and funded by the government and the Ministry of Education to develop and administer vocational colleges under the agreed proposal and goals.

### **5.5. Development of higher education in vocational/technical track provided by private vocational colleges**

The Vocational Education Act B.E. 2551 (2008) allows public vocational colleges to provide higher education or college degree in vocational/technical tracks. Majority of vocational education graduates now moves on to college degree at some point in life. Higher education degree in vocational/technical tracks will help vocational education graduates develop and advance their careers. Opportunity for private vocational colleges to provide higher education in vocational/ technical tracks will not only attract more students to be developed, but also attract effective faculty members and external experts who are interested to contribute and earn academic rankings.

### **5.6. Promotion of public positive attitudes and images towards vocational education.**

Positive public attitudes and images towards vocational education must be improved. This can be done through active communication on the benefits of vocational education and industrial demands, development of assessment and program for elementary/secondary school students to realize their career interests and understand vocational education, and development of counsellors' understanding of both the benefits and the demands of vocational education.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study on governmental support and promotion towards the competitiveness of private vocational education and colleges in Thailand shows that the Thai government has failed to support and promote private vocational colleges to reach the national education goals in different aspects. The study also recommends that the government, through the Ministry of Education and its relevant agencies, collectively work in different areas to achieve the goals stated in the national education policies/plans regarding private vocational education and colleges in order to generate relevant workforce and improve the industrial competitiveness of Thailand.

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