

General Education Model of Universities in Thailand

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe the General Education Model of Universities in Thailand using mixed methods; quantitative and qualitative approaches. The samples were undergraduate students, lecturers and committees who involved with General Education of 3 universities in Thailand. The quantitative data from questionnaire were analyzed by descriptive statistics. In the qualitative phase, lecturers and committees were interviewed by the researcher and data were analyzed by content analysis.

The results showed that the goals of General Education were to promote a broad span of knowledge; to be logically and critically thinking; the capacity to work as a part of a team to solve the problems; and lifelong learning skills.

The contents were introduced students to a variety of topics; cultures; the natural and physical world, social sciences, science and mathematics, humanities, histories, and the arts, including knowledge to become citizens. The learning process used problem-based learning with student center approach. The learning outcomes were the broad knowledge of intellectual and practical skills, including inquiry, quantitative and information literacy, teamwork and problem solving; individual and social responsibilities, as well as ethical reasoning and action.

The suggestions from this research included as following: to understanding the philosophy of General Education; to encourage interaction rather than lectures; and should emphasize the contents which related to the social change; adjust the learning method, teaching materials and learning activities accordance with the interest of the students. In addition, the course should create the evaluation methods that can be measured the expected results.

Keywords: General Education Model, University

Background

The new social has been changed in any aspects including economic, society and the environment. Higher Education is increasingly emphasizing graduates' preparation for the workplace. To preparing people to cope with changes in the social world higher education have to build the graduates with wisdom and knowledge to develop a lifestyle that they can have a pretty good solution and creative society. Higher education is a key component to the development of human potential in every aspects. Fulfillment of the University's mission is to train individuals in various disciplines and profession's so they could face the globalization of the 21st century. In the context of social change, education have to be changed to conform to the social change.

The teaching and learning in higher education can be divided into two categories including general education which aimed to development complete human morality and spirituality as well as a graduate; and occupational courses specifically aimed to created tools for graduates to solve problems and met the needs of society.

The General Education (GE) program is an important program in higher education. It is also taught in conjunction with profession education in order to develop and produce perfect graduates. In 1989, 1999 and 2005 respectively, the office of Higher Education Commission, Ministry of Education has remodeled the program standard of the Bachelors level and has designed "General Education".

Ministry of Education 's standard undergraduate courses 1995, Board of Education has determined that the degree of required general education credits at least 30 credits and a definition of the category. General education refers to courses aimed at developing students' knowledge widely to be understanding the nature of them self and others, social learning, able to think rationally, good communicate, aware of the moral value of art and culture of Thailand and the international community and can apply their knowledge to use in their lives and in society as well.

At the present, each university has set general education in undergraduate courses . The nature of teaching and learning are variety and has different characteristics. To study the model of general education of university could lead to the development of educational approaches which consistent with the general philosophy of education. This study was done to describe the concept of general education, how general education are managed in the universities in Thailand and what are the problem's facing it, so that it results in the solution for the problem's. The result of the research will be used as guidelines in the development of education to develop graduates who achieve the goals of the University.

Objective

To describe the General Education Model of Universities in Thailand.

Scope of the Study

The model in this study including the philosophy, goal, structure, learning process, learning outcome, and obstacles of general education curriculum of the Universities in Thailand.

Literature Review

In the classic text on general education, Graff (1983) reported that the content of general education consists of courses from a number of content areas such as the liberal arts and sciences, courses that emphasize skills such as writing or critical thinking, global perspectives, woman's and minority perspectives, and values.

General education means the courses that aim to develop the students' knowledge widely, understanding others and their social, able to think rationally, good communicate, aware of the moral value of art and culture of both Thai and the international community, and can apply their knowledge to use in their lives and in society as well.

The development of general education courses including (Hook, 1975) are described as following:

1. The students can develop the ability to communicate clearly and effectiveness, and can speak and write well.
2. Students have the basic knowledge about the body and mind and beliefs, the reason for the well-being of human, understanding of the principles of the scientific method, the modern world of science and technology, nature and society.
3. Students have a better understanding about the role of both social, economic and history.
4. Students can find the facts and theories about the nature of social and psychological as well as conflict-oriented values and ideals, learn valuable link in a causal impact on the value of other and the difference between a biased judgment and rational values.
5. Capabilities and accuracy of finding relevant evidence were developed the ability is to be distinguished what is real or not vague.
6. Students with an understanding of local cultural heritage, art, literature, and music have to achieve appreciation and knowledge is important to the creative experience in the future.

Abrahamson & Kimsey (2002) refer to General Education in the James Madison University 's primary goal of General Education is to prepare students to become flexible thinkers and as a lifelong learner by a strong foundation of knowledge, skills and experience. The educator belief that the essence of the knowledge, skills and experience can be linked to all the branches and are essential to the success of the award and performance and can encourage students to be self-motivated. The subjects were divided into five groups such as:

1. Thinking and communicating effectively in both speech and writing, critical thinking, the use of technology and information among people using data and evaluation.
2. An appreciation for the arts and humanities as a critical component of the human experience with education and experience in the art of literature and understanding of their cultural and intellectual history.
3. The knowledge about science and math, use of assessment evidence, the model building and testing to develop the theory.

4. The political, social, economic motivations to study the processes and structures of the human experience as it relates to society and part of the global community .
5. Understanding of both the families and members of the various groups in society. The parameters are varied . The affect of human behavior in society through the exploration and development of each individual is responsible for the emotional, physical, psychological, social and ethical dimensions .

In conclusion, the general education curriculum is focused on high quality, able to promote and develop the capacity of students to have a good basic knowledge, skills with expertise in learning various subjects. The content that is linked with the economic, social, political, culture is an important part in the development of the learners. The teaching of general education courses should focus on the concept of general education. Linking and integrating content into the teaching process which are appropriate to the learners culture and society.

Methodology

Both quantitative and qualitative methods are used in this research. In the quantitative phase, the questionnaires were used to reveal the opinion regarding general education of the undergraduates in 3 public universities. The data were analyzed by descriptive statistics. In the qualitative phase, lecturers and committees of 3 universities were in-depth interviewed to reveal the philosophy, goal, structure, process, learning outcome, and obstacles of general education, and analyzed data by content analysis.

Ethical considerations in research, this study was carried out for testimonials from the research ethics board in human Mahidol University which has been approved by the research ethics board in human (2010/074.0111). The research was conducted in accordance with ethical research in human.

Research Results

The results from the quantitative study revealed that the opinion regarding to general education teaching and learning in the overall aspects the students also commented that is appropriate at a high level. However there are still some aspects that impede student learning including: the appropriateness of the classroom with small space, student lack of awareness of the importance of this course, and the appropriate of the measurement and evaluation.

Philosophy of general education

General Education are those subjects that place an emphasis on promoting the learners to have extensive knowledge, wide vision, the nature of themselves, others and the society. The philosophy of general education is based on the idea of human development which means the development in both the absolute and the balance of human nature which are physical and mental (emotion, thought and mind).

Goal of General Education

General Education is to provide students with the capability to become not only competent professionals, but also active and engaged citizens, as well as lifelong learners.

From the lecturers interview through General Education, we seek to groom our students to be capable of critical thinking, problem solving, global and multicultural awareness, creativity, ethical decision-making, team and collaboration, and effective communication.

Curriculum structure

The general education offerings included the humanities and fine arts, the natural science, mathematics, and the social sciences. The program also included courses that focused on the interrelationship between these major fields of study. The 3 universities divided subjects into 4 groups such as Humanity, Social Sciences, Science and Mathematics, and Language and Communication.

In these categories, we divided into group of subjects according framework on standard undergraduate learning outcomes which are the broad knowledge of intellectual and practical skills as following:

1. Moral, ethical, value of life in society: social responsibility/law, civic education/human rights, philosophy/religion/logic, aesthetics/arts/music
2. Analytical and critical thinking: managing literacy/research and math and scientific literacy
3. Culture and intellects: culture/multi-culture/ history/ local wisdom/ sufficiency economy
4. Communication: foreign language /communication/IT literacy and computer
5. Adaptation to globalization: social/economics/environmental/scientific/health issues that have impact on human life.

Learning process

Integrated learning and connections across disciplinary boundaries and general skills including lecture, group discussion, case study, project base learning; oral presentation, group project and group presentation and poster presentation.

Learning outcome

The assessment process on learning outcome of general education has been used many methods for examples: exam, discussion in class, performance of group projects, participation in group work etc. The learning outcome was evaluation based on domains of learning framework of Board of Education Commission, Ministry of Education.

1. Ethical and moral: habits of acting ethically and responsibly in personal and public life in the way that are consistent with moral standards. Abilities to resolve value conflicts through application of consistent system of values.
2. Knowledge: the ability to understand, recall and present information including knowledge of specific facts, concepts, principles and theories and procedures.

3. Cognitive skills and thinking skills: apply the knowledge of concepts, principles and procedures, analyze situation and apply conceptual understanding of principles in the critical thinking and creative problem solving.
4. Interpersonal skills and responsibility: the ability to work effectively in groups and exercise leadership.
Except personal and social responsibility, plan and take responsibility for their own learning.
5. Numerical analysis, communication and information technology skills: the ability to use basic mathematical and statistical techniques, communicate effectively in oral and written form, use information and communications technology.

Obstacles of general education

In 3 universities which were studied found that there were some obstacles to manage the program including: the students do not understand the importance of the subjects, class combined students with different backgrounds are difficult to design learning activity, class size effects learning activities: the smaller the class is better than larger class. There are some misconception of general education philosophy in both instructors and students.

Conclusions and implications

This article presented the general education model of universities in Thailand. The study was conducted through questionnaire and in-depth interview with instructors and students from 3 public universities. Analysis also included descriptive statistic and content analysis. The paper also exhibited the results from both quantitative and qualitative data. The opinion regarding to general education teaching and learning in the overall aspects the students also commented that is appropriate at a high level. However there are still some aspects that impede student learning included the appropriateness of the classroom with small space, student lack of awareness of the importance of this course, and the appropriate of the measurement and evaluation.

The general education in university that were studied with requirements from difference perspectives and contexts. They should design particular education, goals, resources, and students. The development of the general educational has been developed to be consistent with the changing landscape. The tendency to be focused on teaching the students, the professional knowledge and skills are a good basis for understanding and continuing to learn throughout life. The ultimate goal is to cultivate the good people with the knowledge and ethical. The general education model of universities in Thailand is the optional format which the applications should be adapted to the context.

The implications of the finding of this study regarding the general education model of universities in Thailand are described as below.

1. Instructors related to the general education courses should be considered to understand the philosophy of general education and goals of the course which lead to design the teaching methods to meet the goals of the course.

2. Encouragement of the learning process that focus on the student-centered, interaction rather than lectures, small class, interactive learning and group discussion.
3. Creation of the evaluation methods that can be measured the expected results.
4. Integrate learning with extra-curricular activities; participant to the activities of university; university social responsibility. Operates in conjunction with the family, religious institutions, community organizations together to define folk wisdom that can lead to the students learning.
5. Adjustment of learning method to accordance with the learning style of the new era student. Instructors should use new teaching technique and instrument such as E-learning, information technologies consistent with the passion of new generation.
6. Universities should work as collaboration with general education network to share experience each other.

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