

The Roles of Community Colleges in Enhancing the Community Strength in Thailand

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Abstract

Apart from expanding the educational opportunity for occupational development, the community colleges also play an important role in enhancing the community strength. In this connection, the community colleges should clarify their roles in order to plan the policy, strategies, and management systems for enhancing the community strength effectively and to meet their objectives.

The research aims to synthesize the roles and factors of community colleges in enhancing the community strength in Thailand. It is a documentary research using the content analysis to analyze 60 items of articles, research papers, policy documents and electronic documents published in 1979-2013.

According to the research findings, the roles of community colleges in enhancing the community strength in Thailand responded to four missions: education arrangement for enhancing the community strength, conducting the research for community development, providing academic services to serve the needs of communities and preservation of community traditional arts and culture. The goals of community college comprise of lifelong education, education for all, education for occupational skills, and education for sustainable development. There are seven factors for enhancing community strength: common goals, community participation, cooperation networks, community learning, community management, social capital and community competence.

Keywords: Enhancing community strength, Strengthening community, Community capability, Community colleges

Introduction

Despite Thailand's economic progress and prosperity after the implementation of the First through Seventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (1961-1996) focusing on the economy, the imbalance of economic, social, cultural and political developments and poor ecological preservation have resulted into the unsustainable development with the emergence of social, natural resource and environmental issues. The Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001) is the important turning point because all parts of the society are welcomed to have more participation in national development. As a result, human-centered and holistic development becomes the focal point of the Eighth through Tenth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2011) for the balanced development in all dimensions. The pursuit of sufficiency economy philosophy has enhanced the immunity of Thai society (National Economic and Social Development Board, 2007) but it is still insufficient to lay the solid ground for sustainable development and strength of the country. Thus, the human development strategies for a life-long learning society are devised under the Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012-2016). Thais and Thai society are encouraged to engage in life-long learning, to recognize the value of Thainess and to strengthen local development. This is realized by creating the learning process, instilling community identity and reviving local wisdom. Also, multi-cultural society understanding for peaceful coexistence should be promoted along with the support for local people to collectively deliberate and determine their own pathways towards the community development based on self-reliance and social capital potentials available in the respective communities. The attention is paid to communities' knowledge management, decoding local knowledge and community model, self-management according to local context and dissemination of local wisdom for occupational skill development (National Economic and Social Development Board, 2012).

The lack of community strength is an impact of the globalization. People tend to behave in a Western manner, abandon good identity of Thais, focus on materials rather than mind and become attached to capitalism, materialism and commercialism. Thai society becomes weak in the sense of the wisdom and knowledge and inclines towards authoritarianism due to the lack of knowledge. For example, the bureaucracy represents an authoritarian organization focusing on rules and regulations and command and control. All these are not the solutions because many complicated problems in Thailand nowadays are difficult to solve (Wasi, 1998). Therefore, to enhance the community strength, it should begin from the foundation, which includes the education and human development in order that people could use such knowledge for self- and country development. These two factors fell into the role of educational institutes as defined in National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999), Section 29: "Educational institutions in co-operation with individuals, families, communities, community organizations, local administration organizations, private persons, private organizations, professional bodies, religious institutions, enterprises, and other social institutions shall contribute to strengthening the communities by encouraging learning in the communities themselves. Thus communities will be capable of providing education and training; searching for knowledge, data, and information; and be able to benefit from local wisdom and other sources of learning for community development in keeping with their requirements and needs; and identification of ways of promoting exchanges of development experience among communities" (Office of the National Education Commission, 2003). The scholars in educational institutes should play an

active role in strengthening the communities and enhancing their self-reliance and their adaptation to the changes for the communities' happiness and livability. Besides, the creation of community networks may facilitate nationwide development in the future, for example, decoding local wisdom into publicly-available knowledge and community data sources and doing the research in collaboration with the community taking a leading role. The enhancement of community potentials may promote the responsibility of knowledge management, create the learning process and, with the technological breakthroughs, add an economic value to local wisdom. The latter may become an income-generating source for the communities. Moreover, the technology also facilitates the dissemination of knowledge and information needed for living in the modern world e.g. foreign language skills, impacts of global warming on the ecology, occupations and income earning and cyber crimes, etc. (National Economic and Social Development Board, 2007).

The community college is an alternative higher-education institute founded in accordance with the government policy. According to its founding objective, it serves as the educational institute for working-age people and entrepreneurs and one of its important missions involves the educational arrangement for local people because the access to the educational opportunity in the remote area will strengthen the communities. The curriculums and programs are tailored according to the needs, potentials and social geology of the individual communities with the diversity of occupations, economic and social conditions and business activities. The learning process in the communities is arranged for self- and community development in conformity with local way of life, which will eventually lead to better quality of life, more happiness as well as sustainability and strength of the communities. This particular research aims thus at the exploration and analysis of the roles and factors of community colleges in enhancing the community strength in Thailand.

Research Methodology

This qualitative study uses the documentary research approach for synthesizing the roles of community colleges in enhancing the community strength in Thailand. Sixty documents published in 1979-2013 are analyzed by means of content analysis. They include books, national and international publications, research papers related to the enhancement of community strength, documents on the creation of collaboration with the community colleges for enhancing the community strength (e.g. self-assessment report of the community colleges, annual reports, external quality assessment reports and project assessment reports) and electronic documents-Internet-based data on the enhancement of community strength in both national and international context.

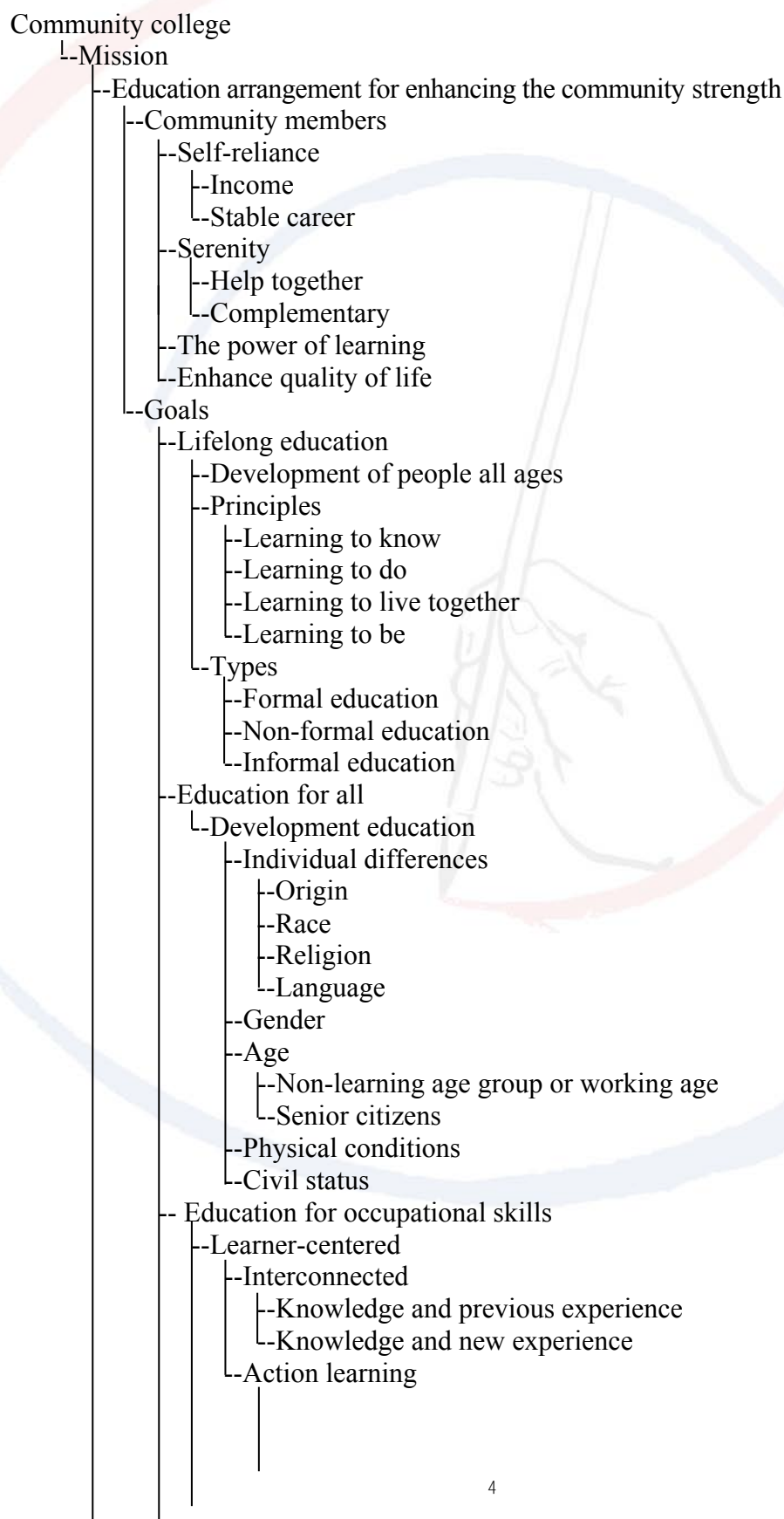
Research Tool

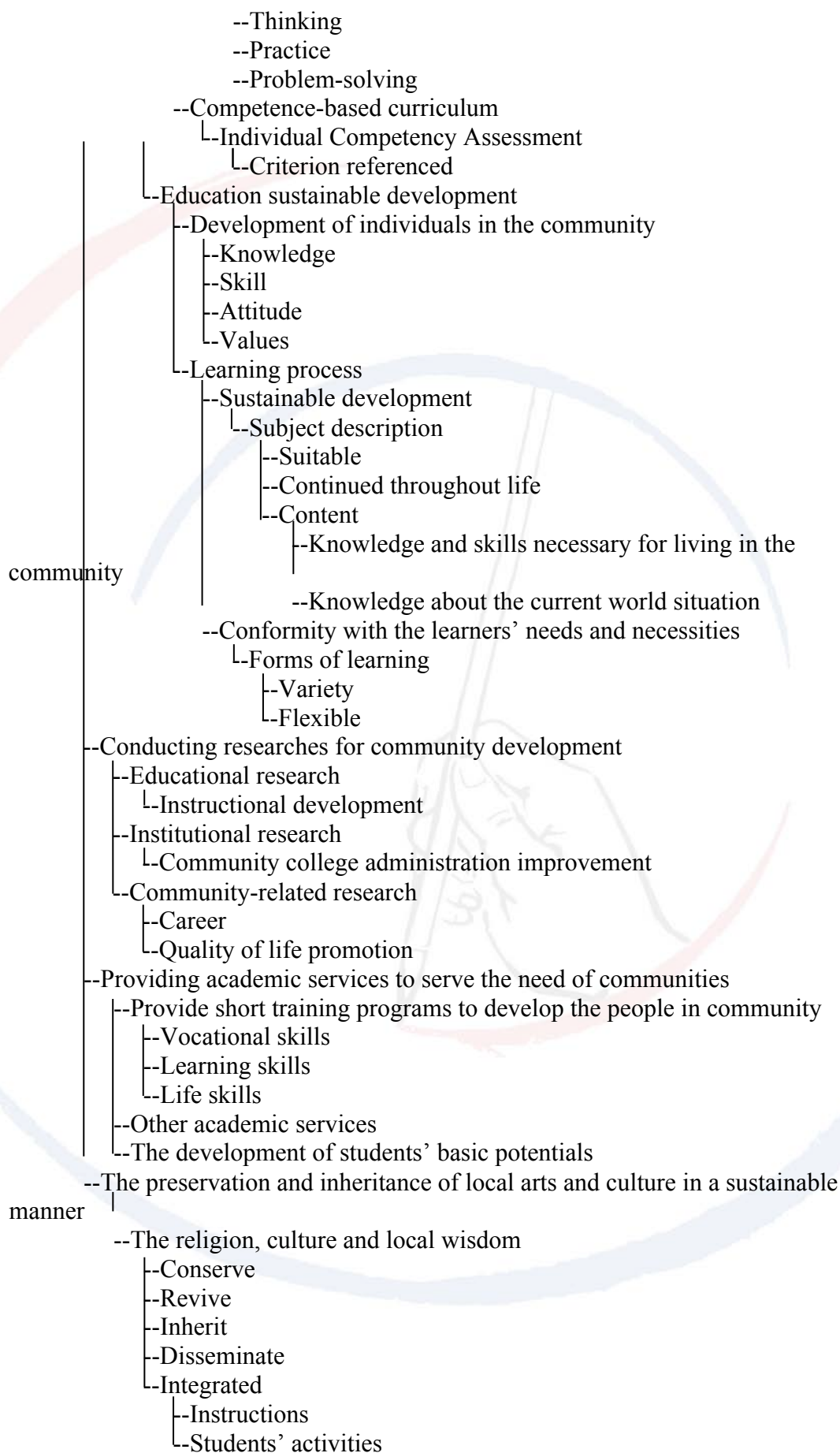
The **Content Analysis Form** is developed in conformity with the concepts of Krippendorff (1980) and Achava-Amrung (1996) with the consent of dissertation advisors and verified by five senior experts in education. It is used in data collection with respect to the roles of community colleges in enhancing the community strength in Thailand and the relevant factors. The collected data are the reference items, issues/details and texts and events. All data are examined and summarized into a dendrogram of the roles of community colleges in enhancing the community strength.

Research Results

The roles of community colleges in enhancing the community strength and the relevant goals and factors are as follows:

Figure 1: Dendrogram of the roles of community colleges in enhancing the community strength in Thailand





The roles of community colleges in enhancing the community strength in Thailand respond to four missions, which are

- 1) **The Educational Arrangement for Enhancing the Community Strength:** this aims to promote self-reliance of the community members with income and career security. They enjoy the peaceful life, help each other and learn eagerly for the sake of quality of life improvement.
- 2) **The Research for Community Potentials Development:** it concerns the educational research for instructional development, the institutional research for community college administration improvement and the community-related research for career and quality of life promotion for community members.
- 3) **The Academic Services In Conformity With Community Needs:** they are in the form of training and short training programs for developing vocational skills, learning skills and life skills. They also include other academic services and the development of students' basic potentials.
- 4) **The Preservation and Inheritance of Local Arts and Culture in a Sustainable Manner:** this aims to conserve, revive, inherit and disseminate the religion, culture and local wisdom by integrated incorporating the art and culture preservation into the instructions and students' activities.

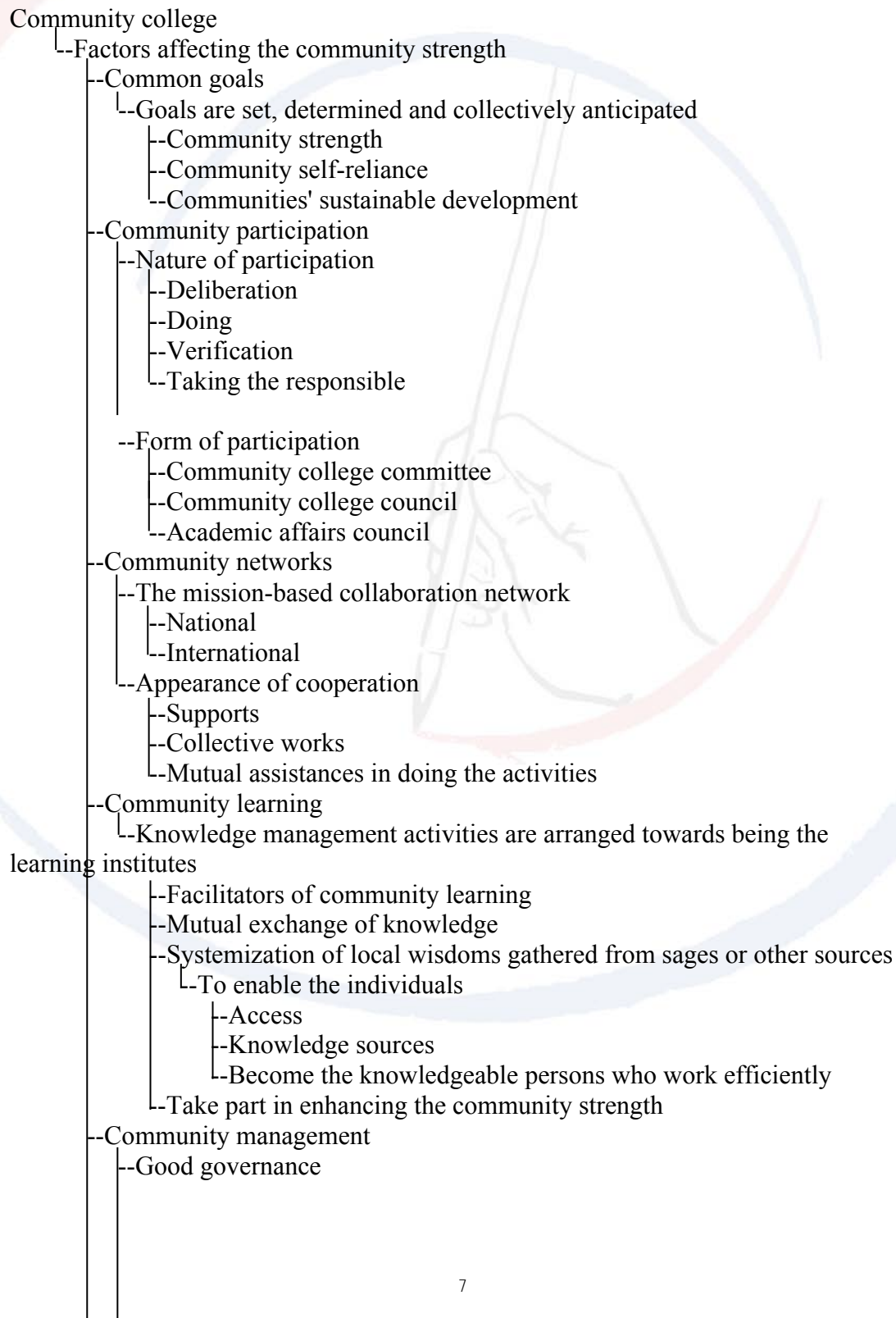
The goals of community colleges' education arrangement for enhancing the community strength can be summarized in four important issues as follows:

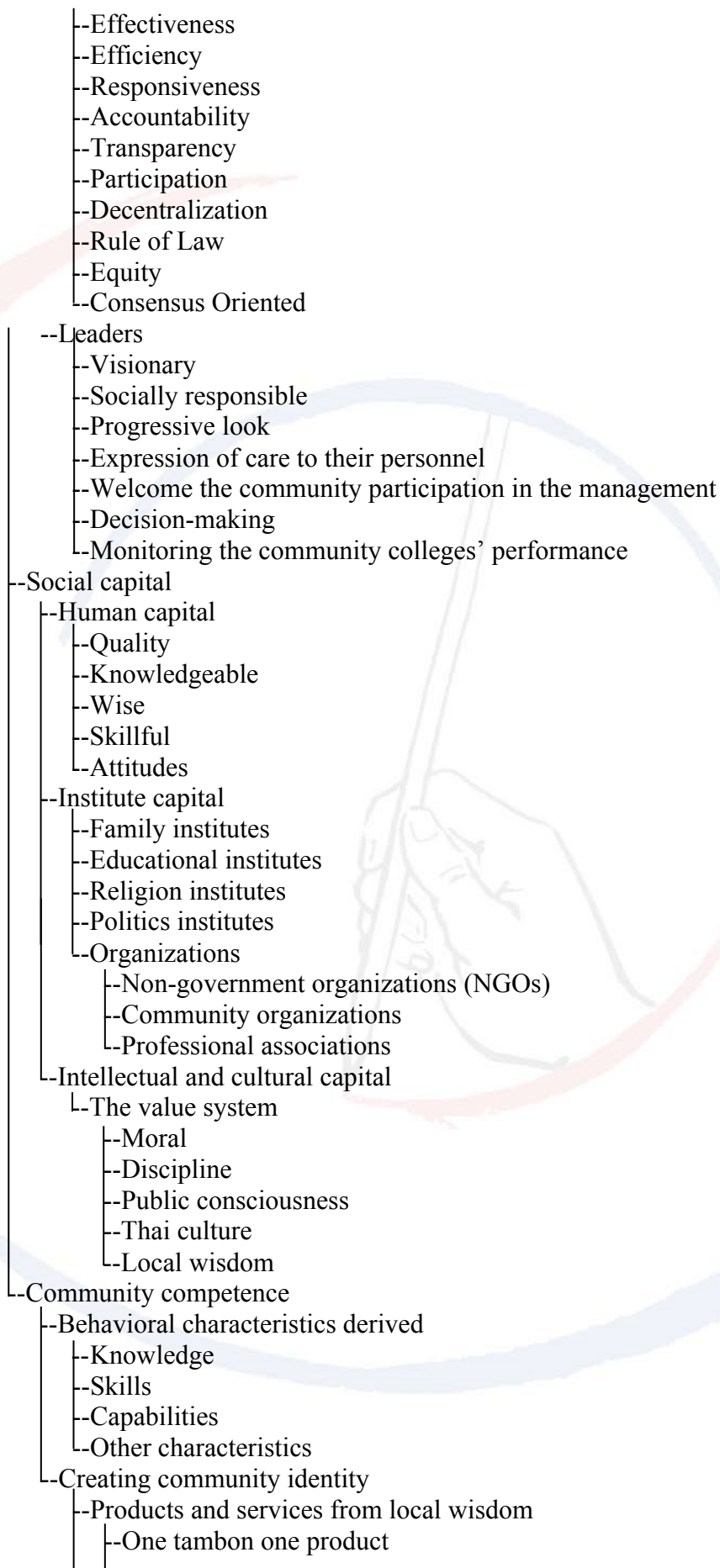
- 1) **Lifelong Education:** it focuses on continuous development of knowledge throughout the life span for the adaptation to the changes. The characteristics of life-long education are various and cover all human activities. It enables people to accept the world reality of themselves and others and to learn from childhood to old age. The important principles of live-long education are 'learn to know', 'learn to do', 'learn to be with the others' and 'learn for life'.
- 2) **Education for All:** it focuses on potentials development for non-learning age group e.g. people in working age or senior citizens. They enjoy the equal right and the access to educational opportunity without the discrimination of origin, race, religion, language, gender, age, physical conditions and civil status. The development education aims to enhance or adjust certain aspects of knowledge allowing the learners to have the equal opportunity and competency.
- 3) **Education for Occupational Skills:** it puts an emphasis on the development of knowledge, skills and required characteristics for careers in the present time and in the future. The learning is based on Competency-based curriculum with learner-centered approach. The learners' previous knowledge and experience are interconnected with the new ones, while they are also encouraged to practice the skills in the real situation. This is to develop their problem-solving skills and to integrate with the works in the other field. The competency assessment is conducted individually by means of the criterion referenced.
- 4) **Education for Sustainable Development:** it pays an attention to the development of community members' potentials in light of their knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. These factors may lead them to the pathway of sustainable development. Due to the complicated lifestyle in the present time, the knowledge and skills are indispensable for wealth creation, which enhance family wellbeing and happiness, while knowledgeable people can help the others or their communities too. Therefore, the subject contents consist of knowledge and skills required for living in the communities and concern the

current world situations. Proper contents are required for steering the communities towards the sustainable development and facilitating live-long education. In addition, the learning approach has to be diverse and flexible in conformity with the learners' needs and necessities.

Seven factors related to the enhancement of the community strength by the community colleges in Thailand are as follows:

Figure 2: Dendrogram of the factors affecting the community strength by community colleges in Thailand





- Thai traditional massage service
- Wisdom of the wise man
 - └--Herbal treatment
 - └--Organic agriculture
- Folk culture is traditionally conservative and ritualistic
 - └--Community-based culture tourism

- 1) **Common Goals:** goals are set, determined and collectively anticipated such as the goals for enhancing the community strength, self-reliance and sustainable development.
- 2) **Community Participation:** it involves the participation in the process of deliberation, doing, verification and taking the responsible in a collective manner. The participation may be in the form of community college committee, community college council and academic affairs council.
- 3) **Community Networks:** it concerns the mission-based collaboration network in both national and international context. The collaboration networks may be in the form of collective works, supports, mutual assistances in doing the activities that maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the community colleges' missions.
- 4) **Community Learning:** the knowledge management activities are arranged towards being the learning institutes that facilitators of community learning, mutual exchange of knowledge and systemization of local wisdoms gathered from sages or other sources. This is to enable the individuals to access to knowledge sources and to become the knowledgeable persons who work efficiently. In this regard, the community colleges may take part in enhancing the community strength as well.
- 5) **Community Management:** it is the management according to the good governance principle, which includes the effectiveness, efficiency, responsiveness, accountability, transparency, participation, decentralization, Rule of Law, equity and consensus-oriented approach. The leaders are visionary and socially responsible with the progressive look and expression of care to their personnel. They welcome the community participation in the management, decision-making and monitoring the community colleges' performance in order to accelerate the community colleges' progress.
- 6) **Social Capital:** The social capitals are the sum of goodness in the society. It derives from the accumulation and broadening and from the gathering of quality persons who works for public good based on trust, relationship and culture. Meanwhile, human capital refers to the quality, knowledgeable, wise and skillful persons who possess the positive work attitudes for public good. Besides, the institute capital includes the family, educational institutes, religion, politics and organizations e.g. non-government organizations (NGOs), community organizations and professional associations. The intellectual and cultural capital is the value system such as the virtue, discipline, public consciousness, Thai culture and local wisdom.
- 7) **Community Competence:** it is the behavioral characteristics derived from the skills, knowledge, capabilities and other characteristics. It enables the communities to produce the remarkable works reflecting the uniqueness of the individual communities created by local wisdom be products and services such as One Tambon One Product (OTOP) of the sub-districts or villages and Thai traditional massage service, wisdom of the wise man such as herbal treatment

and organic agriculture, and folk culture is traditionally conservative and ritualistic such as community-based culture tourism.



Figure 3: Factors Affecting the Community Strength

Conclusion

The clear roles and goals of community colleges in enhancing the community strength towards self-reliance and sustainable development of the communities: according to the study, the roles of community colleges in enhancing the community strength in Thailand serve four missions: the educational arrangement for enhancing the community strength, the research for the development of community potentials, the academic services in conformity with the community needs and the preservation and inheritance of local arts and culture in a sustainable manner. All these conform to the missions of higher education administration, which require higher education institutes (1) to have modern and flexible curriculum and instruction that respond to the diverse needs of the institutes and societies; to put an emphasis on learner-centered approach for enhancing the quality of learners; to focus on the learning and self-development of works in real setting on the basis of relevant research; to do an assessment and to translate assessment results into learner development; to engage in curriculum administration and to properly administrate student activities in accordance with the curriculums and instructions; (2) to do the research according to the institutes' potentials for the creation and application of the new knowledge in order that the knowledge boundary and intellectual property are broadened and connected with the economic conditions, socio-culture and environment; and to build the collaboration network with national and international higher education institutes for promoting the international competitiveness of the society and country; (3) to provide modern and proper academic services based on the individual institutes' expertise in conformity with the needs of society; and to seek the collaboration between the educational institutes and industrial sectors in both national and international context; and (4) to conserve, revive, inherit and disseminate the culture and local wisdom in order to strengthen the knowledge, understanding and pride in Thainess; and to properly adapt foreign arts and cultures for

the sake of the development of society and country (Commission on Higher Education, 2006).

Thus, one important role of the community colleges in Thailand is to accomplish these four missions: to arrange the academic and vocational instructions in conformity with the needs of society; to do the research for the academic advancement; to provide the academic services to the society; and to disseminate and instill the qualities of good citizen (Srisa-arn, 1975). These missions are common to all higher education institutes across Thailand but one important thing that differentiates the community colleges from other higher education institutes is that the former is managed by the communities and founded under the government policy announced to the National Parliament on 26 February 2002. The community colleges' roles and goals are to serve as higher education institutes offering the qualifications below Bachelor degree and to provide the educational opportunity in conformity with the community needs. They are the important mechanism for enhancing the community strength and responding to highly flexible development of economy and society through the provision of quality instructions and the participation of all concerned parties. The community colleges also play a crucial role in human resource development with a particular focus on employability and sustainable self-reliance. The educational arrangement is tailored in a diverse and flexible manner without the overlapping with other agencies. Apart from responding to the community and local needs, it aims to promote the collaboration for quality of life enhancement and meets the following demands: economic and social dimensions, building the entrepreneurship, income augmentation, community peace and tranquility.

Strong and self-reliant communities need good community management.

According to the exploration of the factors related to the enhancement of the community strength by the community colleges in Thailand, it is found that good community management will lead towards common goals, community participation, and collaboration networks for enhancing the community strength, community learning, social capital and community competence. Additionally, good community management based on good governance principle is an important factor in enhancing the community strength and self-reliance. This conforms to the study of Saengthong (2008) who finds that (1) the virtue: it should be instilled into the personnel and students of the community colleges including the eight noble paths, the seven principles for leading respectable life, the four principles for helpful integration, sufficiency economy philosophy, building the consciousness, instilment of the sense of responsibility, building the discipline and transparency in the community colleges, recognition of the loyalty, helping the others and having public consciousness; (2) the participation: it is the one of the advantages of the implementation of good governance principle in the community colleges, which are different from the other academic institutes. The establishment and performance of the community colleges conform not only to the educational reform principles but also to the communities' needs and readiness in engaging in the management according to the community colleges' philosophy and principles. The people can participate and have ownership of every process based on the maximization of locally-available resources. This will promote the recognition of their own value and potentials as well as create the sense of collective ownership; and (3) the transparency: the community colleges are required to value the transparency of management allowing the internal and external audit, while the budget spending is economical, cost-effective and transparent with the maximized benefits under the efficient internal audit.

Recommendations

According to the research on the roles of community colleges in enhancing the community strength in Thailand, the recommendations are as follows:

1) Recommendations for the Community Colleges

The community colleges should focus on the efficient management system using a participatory management approach in the form of community college council, which is responsible for steering the community colleges. Its operation must be responsible, ethical and transparent and lead the community colleges towards the organization of information and collective learning. The rules and regulations must be determined to prevent the conflict of interest in light of financial audit, rule compliance audit and risk management. With regard to the responsibilities, it is the commitment for all personnel to work in accordance with the goals and targets under the employment contracts and job descriptions and to complete their works. They are awarded for the achievement and liable for the mistakes; therefore, the performance of all positions is examined using the carrot and stick principle. Furthermore, the responsibilities of community colleges also include the follows: the overall responsibility of work towards the people's wellbeing on annual basis, the responsibility of the standards and qualities of graduates and of other missions and the liabilities for any impacts on the community and environment.

2) Recommendations for Future Research

The approaches for enhancing the community strength suitable for Thailand should be examined. The community colleges are the higher education institutes offering the qualifications below Bachelor degree and provide higher education and short training programs in both academic and vocational fields for the communities where they are located. This is to promote the occupational development, quality of life and the communities' economic and social aspects. The educational arrangement is diverse and open-ended in conformity with the community needs, while the programs are flexible according to the learner's needs; demand for problem solutions and for potentials and lifestyle development and labor market requirements. The community colleges are the mechanism of the communities to achieve sustainable community development under the management and operation based on the faith and participation of individuals, agencies and organizations in those communities. The community colleges are thus the educational institutes managed by the communities in conformity with the community needs under the philosophy of "the instruction by the community and local people on the local agenda for the community development".

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