Trends in International Education in a Higher Education Institution in Northern Thailand: A Descriptive Case Study

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Abstract
This qualitative case study was concerned with discovering the experiences, perspectives, perceptions and paradigms of the chosen participants, who manage and develop a higher education institution in northern Thailand. Predominantly, the rationale of this study was not to discover precise responses to internationalizing a particular program/faculty/department, but to develop an understanding, and stepping forward to internationalize the university as a whole as a step toward the ASEAN economic community (AEC). The major findings were reported and discussed with reflection to previous literature in Eastern and Western higher education institutions. These encircled the overall perspectives of the internationalization of the university, the internationalization of the university in the AEC, critical strategies, and a virtual research system.

Keywords: ASEAN, Education, International, Research, University

1. Introduction
Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna (RMUTL) is a leading university, which offers an effective education based on science and technological concepts, and it consists of six campuses in northern Thailand. It is a university of innovation that has centered on education management in the fields of industrial, commercial, technology, fine arts, and agriculture for over half a century. This study will address the development of the internationalization of RMUTL in the ASEAN economic community (AEC) with careful consideration to the capacities, limitations, and environment of the organization. A successful effort in the endeavors will likely result in a well-integrated plan for university development, which will facilitate a better understanding of the future needs of RMUTL, and estimate, with some level of accuracy, the temperament and extent of the resources that will be required. Noticeably, RMUTL is acquainted with the value of sustaining a multi-ethnic, wide-ranging approach to internationalization, and recognizes the miscellany of approaches. However, to analyze present conditions accurately and to select future goals realistically will require cooperation among many quarters, such as policymakers, administrators, professors, and students. As a frame of reference, Noll (2005) revealed that the study of education involves the acquiescence of many approaches to the analysis of “what can be and how we can get there”. Generally speaking, universities in Southeast Asia have been connected deeply to their community development and economic features.

2. Purposes of the Study
It is often argued that internationalization has obliged several educational institutions in Asia to pursue international principles and philosophies, without creating their personal
distinctive systems and admiring their countries’ culture, customs and wisdom. Therefore, the researchers intended to discover the ontology and paradigms associated with the internationalization of a higher education institution in northern Thailand with careful consideration of its culture and capacities.

3. Significance of the Study

Internationalizing a higher education institution in northern Thailand may lead to achieving a place in the top quartile of the ASEAN University Network (AUN) ranking in the future, which may consequently attract students from foreign countries to study at this university. Moreover, the students who graduate from this university will be able to work well and effectively in the ASEAN environment. From the researchers’ point of view, if we do not internationalize higher education institutions in the AEC, it risks becoming uncompetitive educational institutions in Thailand, and in the region. Another significant issue is to recognize what is required to internationalize a higher education institution to cope with international educational trends, with regard to the people’s cultures, capacities, and environment.

4. Research Methods

The researchers selected the descriptive case study as a strategy for this investigation in order to portray and illustrate the plethora of perspectives obtained from the participants of this study. Stake (1995) construed that researchers could investigate a single case and analyzes it without the need for multiple cases. Stake interpreted that researchers might develop naturalistic generalizations through scrutinizing the data, to allow readers to learn, and apply the case elsewhere. Additionally, the authors of this study used documentation and multiple strategies with interviews as supplementary tools to triangulate the findings, such as reflexive journals, field notes, and e-mail interaction with participants, resulting from the formative and rich information garnered from the participants of this study. The researchers applied a qualitative approach with a non-probability sampling method; the data were collected through the semi-structured interviews from 20 participants, 17 of whom are in the top management of a higher education institution. One participant is the former director of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) and two participants are experts in the Thai higher education institution. Further, codes, categories, and themes were developed in the analysis task, other methods were also taken into account such as trustworthiness through the triangulation of the findings to increase the dependability of the study (e.g., sharing the interpretive task with research participants, authenticity and reflexivity, and reflexive journals). Importantly, ethical considerations (e.g., privacy and confidentiality, informed consent, accuracy, and reciprocity) were rigorously taken into consideration throughout the study.

5. Literature Review

As Hayek (1996) advocated, there is no single accepted definition of internationalization. One suggestion was that a committee from different departments should be set up to define the term. However, Srisa-an (1998) noted that internationalization refers to the amalgamation of international dimensions and strategies in all university activities, for example, in curricula offerings, faculty and student exchanges, research with foreign universities, university-industry linkages, cultural exchange, the recruitment of foreign instructors, and bilingualism. According to Kirtikara (2001), there are over 600 higher education institutions and 130 degree granting institutions in Thailand. Hence, Kirtikara interpreted that networking these institutions can deliver quality programs, diversified
education services, transfer of credits among institutes, recognition, accreditation of work experience, collaborative research, and services among institutions. Similarly, in the study of Fogelberg (1999), it is advised that global networks be considered an important method of maintaining an advanced education level and research, and of safeguarding an international presence. The Thai Ministry of Education has generated a report from a meeting to strengthen cooperation in the field of education in five dimensions (Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy, 2008). One of these dimensions related to the potential development of students and the public to have the right skills to prepare them to become members of the ASEAN community, such as knowledge of IT skills, and expertise in line with the need for industry to adapt and change. Nevertheless, Vongchavalitkul (2012) identified challenges for iThai leadership in higher education (i.e., removing barriers; restructuring and personalizing student support; emphasizing connected and lifelong learning; and investing in technologically competent faculty). Zolfaghari, Sabran, and Zolfaghari (2009) presented major aspects of internationalizing higher education institutes in two dimensions. One of the dimensions is concerned with the objectives of the internationalization that should be clearly defined, measured, and accomplished within a specific amount of time.

Further, Suttipun (2012) disclosed that all Thai universities are structured to produce graduates using the following themes: (a) ethical issues: including moral, discipline, honesty, and sacrifice; (b) knowledge issues: including theoretical, practical, and specific knowledge in order to solve problems; (c) capability issues: including analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and decision making; (d) relationship and responsibility issues: including leadership, teamwork, self-development, and knowledge responsibility; and (e) analysis, communication, and technology skills: including selection, adaptation, and evaluation. Overall, Santipitaks (2013) compiled the twenty-first century competencies required for youth in the ASEAN community, as follows: linguistic skills, knowledge about ASEAN and ASEAN member countries, vocational skills based on ASEAN and international standards, negotiation skills for the international arena, thinking beyond national interests, a positive attitude toward the ASEAN community/member states, teamwork with other countries/cross-cultural competencies in the working environment, expertise in one’s own profession, output, and results-oriented outlook, promoting better service based on international standards, the ability to work according to international standards, knowledge about the different rules and regulations within ASEAN member countries, emphasis on the development of skilled labor according to international standards, networking among educational institutions within ASEAN, establishing ASEAN studies centers in universities, activities to promote ASEAN connectivity, and applying an integrated approach to raise ASEAN awareness in the civil service through the organization of activities and use of the media.

Furthermore, A blueprint for the ASEAN socio-cultural community (2009) reported the need for (a) advancing and prioritizing education through the integration of education priorities into ASEAN’s development agenda, creating a knowledge-based society, and enhancing awareness of ASEAN through education and activities to develop an ASEAN identity based on friendship and cooperation; (b) investing in HRD through the enhancement and the improvement of the capacity of ASEAN HR; (c) ensuring environmental sustainability through promoting a clean and green environment; (d) promoting sustainable development through environmental education and public participation, and willingness to ensure the sustainable development of the region through environmental education and public participation efforts; and (e) promoting ASEAN awareness and a sense of community, consolidating unity in diversity and enhancing deeper mutual understanding among ASEAN member countries about their culture, history, religion, and civilization. Ley (2012) clarified various issues associated with human development in ASEAN, as presented: (a) education: prioritizing, awareness of ASEAN among all individuals, university network, ASEAN
languages (e.g., English language); (b) HRD: qualified, competent, and well-prepared for the ASEAN workforce, a center of excellence to address the needs of high value-added industries that enhance ASEAN global competitiveness, ASEAN standard competitiveness, and ASEAN skill competitiveness; (c) decent work: an ASEAN skills recognition framework and an ASEAN network of experts; (d) civil service capability: a high quality of public services, public HR competencies, and an ASEAN resource center; and (e) ICT: the ASEAN IT initiatives, positive use of ICT, and IT expertise. Knight, Adams, and Peace Lenn (1999) noted that the rapid growth of IT is directly influencing higher education systems. Moussa (2013) recommended the alignment of IT and organization strategies: one reason behind this proposition is that organizations can accomplish their goal from their IT investments only if management functions and activities are coordinated effectively, rather than being isolated.

The following are efforts made to internationalize three famous public universities in Thailand. At Chulalongkorn University (CU), the Office of International Affairs was set up to implement international relations by emphasizing cooperative activities, academic exchanges with international institutions, and academic services to international communities (Office of International Affairs CU, 2012). In addition, the office was set up to develop and prepare academic readiness among personnel and students, to enable them to keep abreast of academic developments, to communicate effectively on an international level, and to restructure work in international relations in order to accommodate activities for teaching staff and international students attending courses. Briefly, this office provides several duties and services through: (a) international liaison and special affairs service; (b) overseas students, and exchange programs; and (c) international cooperation service. At King Mongkut University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), the Office of International Affairs was set up to implement international relations by emphasizing the cooperation between KMUTT and other institutions, both in the country and overseas, through academic cooperation, staff and students exchanges, scholarships, and grants for studying and training (Office of International Affairs, KMUTT, 2012). Moreover, the Office of International Affairs provides their roles and responsibilities through the following three categories: (a) international students and exchange programs; (b) protocol and information; and (c) funding support and international links. At Mahidol University (MU), several activities for the promotion of internationalization of education are encouraged and supported. For example, MU actively collaborates with over 130 overseas academic institutions and international agencies in research, curriculum development, staff and student exchange; hosts 8 World Health Organizations (WHO) and collaborating centers, and cooperative research station (CRS) in Southeast Asia; offers 148 international degree and diploma programs, excluding short training courses; has international students from over 50 countries enrolled; hosts regular international academic conferences in many disciplines; and had over 1,450 research papers published in international academic journals in 2008 (International College, Mahidol University, 2012).

6. Findings and Discussions with Reflection to Previous Studies in Eastern and Western Higher Education Institutions

Holliday (2002) advised researchers to create categories, themes emerged during the data collection, and analysis that were used to discuss the findings. However, due to the lengthy nature of descriptive case studies, the researchers decided to carefully select a reasonable proportion of the themes that emerged in the analysis task to meet the journal’s requirements of the maximum word limit. Thus, the researchers addressed the major findings, as follows.
6.1 Internationalizing a Higher Education Institution in Northern Thailand

The researchers found in the current study that the most pertinent factors for internationalizing a university, were as follows: Thai and foreign students, and foreign instructors, recruit high quality instructors, reliable programs, personnel, and infrastructure management, an international school for all international activities, establish an autonomous office, innovative and creative ideas, budget support and services, effective coordination, a mixture of different cultures, languages, and partnership with the media, create an international environment, top academic ranking of world universities, and exchange programs. Similarly, Yang (2002) argued that the overwhelming majority of people perceive the term internationalization to include a plethora of activities, such as innovation, student and faculty exchange, curriculum development, academic rank of world universities, and cross-cultural issues. Soejatminah (2009) also acknowledged that budget and government support through various programs, and the strong aspiration to enhance the quality of education are essential. For example, the Singaporean government has regularly supported the whole education system to meet the society’s needs and to develop the skills and services required through the development of their education policies (Rondinelli & Heffron, 2007). Although issues relating to the quality of education, education policy, and international students have increasingly become the focus of enquiry into the internationalization of Australian higher education, only slight attention has been paid to the experiences of Australian teachers and their roles and responsibilities in an environment that is more culturally, linguistically, and educationally diverse and more connected to, and influenced by, the global marketplace than ever before (Sanderson, 2008).

Accordingly, Salmi (2009) indicated that the new world-class universities grow from their level of awareness of how and what governments could offer to develop their organizations, and being aware of the most critical steps to transform a workforce to become a world-class university. However, Deem, Mok, and Lucas (2008) maintained that the notion of a world-class university is not a relatively new concept. However, recently it has become a concept frequently used by both governments and universities in many countries, and it is currently a trend embedded in the higher education policies and strategies in many societies. Knight (1999) systematically categorized the motives to internationalize a higher education institution into four sets: (a) political, (b) economic, (c) academic, and (d) cultural/social. Knight clearly emphasized two extensive types of strategies for integrating the international dimension in an education setting as follows: (a) program strategies: this comprises academic programs, research activities, extracurricular activities, external relations (e.g. the media), and services domestically and abroad; and (b) organizational strategies: this involves policies, procedures, systems, and infrastructure that supports the growth of the international feature of the educational setting.

Other participants of this study expressed their views about the fundamental elements to internationalize the university, such as trust in quality, international curricula, accreditation, national and international conferences, research publications, effective policies, policy implementation, and propensity to learn. Speaking of the quality, McBurnie (1999, p. 157) concluded “if the internationalization of education is to provide real benefits for the university community, there is an ongoing need to define goals, and objectives, to implement strategies for their achievement, and to gauge the quality of the outcomes.” Carroll-Boegh and Takagi (2006) acknowledged that each country has its own paradigm; nonetheless, a large number of universities have discovered the obligation to internationalize their curricula to compete globally. For example, they recommended the Japanese universities to be involved in the kingdom of world universities, through the restructuring of their curricula. Similarly, Knight, Adams, and Peace Lenn (1999) argued:
It is recognized that the international aspects of education and research have historically been an important feature of higher education institutions. However, current issues, such as globalization, decreased government support for education, the knowledge economy, the rapid growth of information technologies are all directly influencing higher education. It is resulting in major shifts in the rationales and motivations for internationalization (p. 220).

Moreover, Srisa-an (1998) noted that internationalization refers to the integration of international dimensions and principles in all of the missions of the university; namely, internationalization of both undergraduate and graduate curricular offerings, promotion of faculty and student exchanges, collaborative research with foreign universities, promotion of other activities such as cooperative education, university-industry linkages, and cultural exchange, as well as hiring of foreign faculty members. Alternatively, Hayek (1996) advocated another school of thought, maintaining that there is no single accepted definition or map for internationalizing an institution. The definition may be broad or it may be specific. Koech and Opakas (1999) accepted the precept at Moi University in Kenya, that regardless of the university expansion, the international element remained insignificant, and the most noticeable issues, which have an international hub, are in research and intellectual collaboration. Koech and Opakas confirmed that Moi University creates opportunities for its personnel to increase their interactions and exchanges of ideas with local, regional, and international academics. However, it remains a prerequisite to develop a better understanding of the significance of the internationalization and the development of more dynamic structures and policies.

According to Davies (1992), the effective delivery of internally-oriented programs qualitatively depends on faculty members and administrative colleagues, in terms of attitudes, competencies, and knowledge. Importantly, Qiang (2003) demonstrated that conflict or collaboration among policy makers result in either a decline or reinforcement of the international characteristics, and the regeneration or the renewal of commitments necessitates further planning procedures.

In the participants’ opinions, other factors that were considered prominent for internationalizing a university involved: developing networks, and partnerships; value-added services; effective public relations (PR) and marketing plans; and effective communication skills. The chosen university for this study has actively pursued international connections with universities overseas for cooperative activities, including student and faculty exchanges, joint training programs, organizing academic conferences and seminars, as well as other types of academic cooperation (President’s office, 2008). Another indicator was at the University of Helsinki in Finland, where Fogelberg (1999) noticed that global contacts are a key method of preserving an advanced education level and research, and of safeguarding their international spiritedness. Likewise, Fogelberg showed that the internationalization of the University of Helsinki paid attention to marketing strategies, organizational matters, communication tools, personnel politics, a regular quality assurance process, the investigation of center/faculty/department relations to ensure effective coordination, and communication skills. Speaking of value-added services, Zolfaghari, Sabran, and Zolfaghari (2009) noted that the services offered must be accompanied with effective communication skills, creative thinking, a great deal of tolerance toward others, and being open to criticism, rationality, and initiatives. Davies (1992) recommended that universities consider and question the following in their marketing plans, propaganda, and PR issues:
What does the university choose to emphasize in its marketing and, hence, its market positioning? This may be quite different for different national markets for international students.

How does the institution determine what its status is in the eyes of potential consumers?

Its propaganda should clearly be realistic and not extravagant in claims of pedigree or achievement.

Additionally, three experts in this study advised international competencies for our leaders and management; self-awareness; diversity activities projects; curricula development; high quality academics; and networks with international agencies. Following this line of thought, the internationalization of Lithuanian higher education is considered a high tactical priority; therefore, international competencies have become crucial and mandatory (Stankeviciene & Karveliene, 2008). Moreover, they accentuated some factors linked to the internationalization of a university, as follows: the awareness of the organization’s culture, the mission, communication issues, world assumptions, cross-cultural concerns, and sensitivity among all individuals in the organization. Bartell (2003) noted “international competence in an open world of permeable borders has become a generalized necessity rather than an option for the tier of societal elites as was true in the past” (p. 49). Carroll-Boegh and Takagi (2006) examined the driving forces behind the internationalization of the curricula in Japanese and Danish universities. They found that the internationalization of the Danish knowledge system is achieved through the cooperation of and the interaction between academic institutions and business communities. As such, Danish universities are capable of offering curricula that match the society’s needs through different regulations. In the case of Japanese universities, Carroll-Boegh and Takagi asserted that the Japanese have great interest to make joint agreements with the most famous world universities. Thus, it becomes obligatory to restructure and revamp their curricula, and ensures that instructors possess teaching methods and strategies that satisfy students with different needs, experiences, and cultural backgrounds. Another indicator was the Tokyo Institute of Technology in Japan, and the efforts made to advance the faculty and students’ skills, and the gradual development of bilingual curricula, to educate international competencies, to host professional scholars from different countries, to contribute in academic management, to boost cooperative agreements through international exchanges and ventures, and to nurture the internal management and services (Jiang-Bin, 2009).

Other participants in this study added to the knowledge, the need for developing a competitive advantage, and differentiation strategies. This was reflected by Bauman (1998), who stated, “one difference between those ‘high up’ and those ‘low down’ is that the first may leave the second behind, but not vice versa” (p. 86). In addition, Davies (1992) proposed a number of factors related to competitive strengths and weaknesses that need to be evaluated comparatively, regardless of the sequence:

- mission and traditions;
- experience and expertise in specific markets or sectors;
- successes, failures, and why;
- negotiation style of the organization;
- market knowledge and its power structure;
- financial issues, including costing and pricing policies;
- characteristics and quality of services provided to customers;
- brand names; and
- capability and the degree of flexibility to enter foreign markets and develop alliances or joint ventures.
Similarly, differences between universities in their history, traditions, missions, visions, resources, and networks with government, industry, and business would considerably affect their ranking in the university league table (Mok, 2007). However, Mok (2007) added that role differentiation among universities is becoming one of the most recent trends in higher education in East Asia.

### 6.2 Internationalizing a Higher Education Institution in the AEC

In the current study, the participants perceived that the use of all ASEAN languages, cultures, traditions, activities, industries, politics, and economies in our curricula, ensuring curricula compliance with international education standards of the Education Charter of the ASEAN community, and applicable in all ASEAN countries, must be taken into consideration. The role of education in structuring the ASEAN community by 2015 entails three pillars, one of which is the ASEAN political and security community (APSC). Under this pillar, the role of academia is to enhance understanding and awareness about the charter (Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy, 2008). Likewise, Santipitaks (2013) clarified the role of education in realizing the ASEAN community, and maintained that knowledge and understanding about the ASEAN charter, how to live with each other in peace, and democratic principles and human rights are all critical issues that should be incorporated into our curricula. Therefore, curricula must comply with the education charter of the ASEAN community. The participants in this study also argued that our curricula must be applicable in all ASEAN countries. The rationale behind this proposition is to meet the needs and competencies required for all industries in all ASEAN members, as it is planned to enhance the AEC (Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy, 2008).

Other participants in the current study had similar opinions about internationalizing a university in the AEC, such as boosting cooperation and collaboration with universities in the ASEAN region; developing our personnel competencies; and recruiting qualified and competent staff, students, and instructors without favoritism and discrimination. A large number of studies concluded that boosting cooperation, and collaboration with universities in the ASEAN region is not an option, but a condition to ensure unity and amity in the region. For example, ASEAN should continue efforts to promote regional mobility and reciprocal recognition of professional credentials, talents, and skills progress (ASEAN Concord II, 2003). The Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy (2008) divulged that in order to cope with China and avoid external interventions (e.g., the U.S.), Southeast Asian countries feel the need to act collectively and to learn from each other, so that they can have combined strengths, as well as better bargaining power in both economic and political issues. Nevertheless, Wimontham (2012) advised the ASEAN community to cooperate with ASEAN+3 (i.e., China, Korea, and Japan), who are among the world’s leading nations in education. Wimontham (2012) recommended that the ASEAN community council should honor these three countries and request support from them in exchanging academic staff, students, and research to equalize the education in ASEAN. Cuyvers, De Lombaerde, and Verherstraeten (2005) added, “despite the ChiangMai initiative as a collective of ASEAN+3 initiatives, it is noteworthy that current negotiations on potential free trade agreements are simultaneously conducted on a bilateral and a plurilateral basis by the countries involved” (p. 14). In terms of personnel competencies in Lithuanian higher education, international competencies have become essential and required (Stankeviciene & Karveliene, 2008). Qiang (2003) strongly recommended the development of more applied research to become aware of competencies needed for work in the local or global work environment.

Other studies showed that faculty members need to master different competencies, and be aware of the changing world so that they can integrate their competencies into their teaching materials and advance their didactic methods. One of the six outlined strategic
actions in the AEC blueprint is to develop competencies for job and professional skills (Sandar, 2012). Another issue expressed by the participants in this study is the recruitment of qualified individuals, regardless of their place of origin. One participant expressed his view by the following comment: “In my opinion, it is unnecessary to recruit native English speakers. We should accept all people, regardless of their nationalities, if they can communicate, and transfer good knowledge in English”. Hawawini (2011) elucidated that internationalization can solve the problem of the dearth of qualified academics, if we can develop and apply an effective international strategy to attract talented students, and qualified instructors, who are dedicated, and committed to be connected with the world.

At the same time, the creation of a conducive learning and teaching environment is imperative, as perceived by the participants in this study. Carroll-Boegh and Takagi (2006) recommended satisfactoriness of the learning, and teaching environment in Japanese universities, in order to be members of the kingdom of world universities. Pama (2012) proffered that new professional and related fields, and diverse student populations require academic support and innovative pedagogy. Hence, teaching and learning environments are of great concern.

6.3 Critical Strategies
The participants of this study determined a number of important strategies and approaches necessary for internationalizing a higher education institution. These were: curriculum development; infrastructure management; HRD strategies; influential projects; seek accreditation for our curricula; corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies; foreign languages skills; international programs; public relations (PR) and marketing plans; scholarships; exchange students and staff; and a wake-up call across the university for joining the ASEAN community. At Yale University in the U.S., Jiang-Bin (2009) noted that the historic mission of the university can be accomplished through the development of relevant curricula, opportunities for students to work or study overseas, and educating the American students about how to develop networks with people from different cultural backgrounds. Bookin-Weiner (1999) recommended the internationalization of the curriculum, and faculty exchange and study abroad programs, if there were plans to develop an international center at Bentley College in the U.S. Ley (2012) recommended ASEAN standard education and enforcement mechanisms, raising awareness on ASEAN development and education, curriculum standards at primary and secondary schools, and universities, scholarship programs, education funds projects, accreditation system, and education reforms (e.g., training courses in cross-cultural skills, and training in foreign languages and professional skills).

Moreover, ASEAN Concord II (2003) reported that the development and enhancement of HR is a significant strategy for increasing employment opportunities. Additionally, the ASEAN foundation is designed to raise greater awareness of ASEAN and greater interaction among the ASEAN members through HRD, which will allow them to identify their full potentials and capacities to make progress, and become productive and responsible members of a society. In a similar vein, one of the participants of this study noted that many universities in Thailand have started to consider the issue of CSR to make the students understand that they have a responsibility to their society. Additionally, a blueprint for the ASEAN socio-cultural community (2009) showed the significance of promoting CSR to ensure that CSR is incorporated in the corporate agenda and contribute towards sustainable socio-economic development in ASEAN member countries.

Speaking of PR, and marketing plans, Sriwiboon (2013) revealed that there is a need for knowledge sharing, and cooperation with the leading universities from ASEAN member countries. Likewise, the education ministers of ASEAN have determined four issues for
cooperative education in the region: encouragement of ASEAN identity to citizens in the region, promotion of the ASEAN identity through education; creation of ASEAN HR in education; and enhancement of the ASEAN universities network (Quy, 2009). With that said, Quy stated that the ASEAN universities networks or PR are intended to enhance the cooperation among academics in the region, development of HR in researching and practicing matters in the region, maximization of information exchange among different quarters, and enhancement of an awareness of regional identity between the ASEAN state. At the University of Botswana (UB), they expanded international student and staff exchanges to: provide opportunities for the students of the UB to spend a semester or a year abroad through exchanges; facilitate academic staff to undertake study and research outside Botswana for a specific period of time, as appropriate to their professional objectives; recruit visiting scholars, who bring required research or teaching capacity on campus; promote short and long-term study opportunities at UB for international students; develop partnerships that will facilitate the expansion of staff and student exchanges; keep an updated list of memoranda of understanding (MOU) and of active exchange partnerships; and compile reports on students abroad every semester (Policy on Internationalization, 2006). At one of Australia’s largest universities, Monash University in Melbourne, McBurnie (1999) pointed to three approaches and strategies for the internationalization of the university: “one of which is to internationalize the opus of the student body; the second is to internationalize the educational understanding of students and faculty; and to launch and develop the Monash existence in foreign countries” (p. 157). McBurnie considered that studying abroad is necessary for internationalizing the educational experience; consequently, Monash University has embarked on three major steps:

- positioning an assessable objective;
- cooperation among all individuals in the university; and
- subsidizing of international education projects, and activities.

In conclusion, Zolfaghari, Sabran, and Zolfaghari (2009) compiled indispensable strategies for internationalizing a higher education institution, as discussed also by the participants of this study, regardless of the significance of the appropriate sequence. These strategies involve:

- exchanging programs for both students and instructors;
- developing research partnerships;
- complying with academic standards and producing high quality students;
- developmental issues in various aspects;
- better understanding and awareness of the international society;
- enhancing the reputation of the institution, through effective marketing plans and PR tactics;
- diversity and its enormous advantages and influences on students and programs; and
- international recruitment.

Similarly, the study of Ayoubi and Al-Habaibeh (2006) also showed that the international strategic objective of a university can be achieved through: (a) the development and promotion of research collaboration; (b) the exchange of academic resources; (c) the development and promotion of curriculum and course design; (d) the exchange of staff; (e) the development of meetings, workshops, and seminars on issues of equal interest; and (f) the exchange of students
6.4 Virtual Research System

The participants of this study, gave special importance to a research and development (R&D) management framework; support and promote the culture of ongoing research and development; provide R&D required facilities; sources of research funds; facilitate research grants policies, and procedures; develop a brand, mutual gains bargaining (MGB) and generate an income for the university; develop research groups; establish joint research projects/programs; an internal academic journal; research center of excellence; a support unit for the application of research findings; and an autonomous research department. Furthermore, some participants recognized the importance of increasing international research publications and developing skills for effective academic presentations.

Significantly, the chosen institution for this study is a university with history, innovative research, and vision in a country proud of its multicultural background and environment (Human Resource Department of RMUTL, 2012). According to the university’s vision, the objective is to strive to internationalize its educational mission, and advance teaching and research efforts to meet global standards of excellence (President’s office in RMUTL, 2008). The Office of International Affairs at KMUTT is responsible for coordinating with external organizations for the scholarships and research grants, and disseminates the information to staff and students within the university (Office of International Affairs, KMUTT, 2012). Mahidol University has developed into one of the most prestigious universities in Thailand, internationally known and recognized for the high caliber of research and teaching by its faculty, and its outstanding achievement in teaching, research, international academic collaboration, and professional services (International Relations Division, President’s Office in Mahidol University, 2012). Alternatively, one participant of this study assertively mentioned, “I have a strong belief that in our university, we do not have enough publications in international venues, the same as other research universities. We have to accept this fact.” Geldner and Wachter (1999) noted that at the Warsaw School of Economics in Poland, the lack of an academic journal to represent the school’s research findings is considered one of the weaknesses of the school. Similarly, one participant of the current study conveyed, “I think we need to have our own journal in our university to support our staff, students, and outsiders in publishing their research.” Another participant of this study claimed: “actually, we have lots of research in the university, but we do not try to apply the research findings to improve our processes. We need to have a support unit or division to help us in doing this to get benefits from our research.” In a previous study, Malo, Valle, and Wriedt (1999) identified that international activities at the National University of Mexico are centered on research networks, publications, and international associations.

Likewise, Fogelberg (1999) concluded that international contacts are fundamental to conserve an advanced education level and research. Most importantly, Kirkpatrick (2011) urged:

Asian universities need to work together to establish and promote internationally recognized journals with bilingual publication policies. Academics in Asian universities need local and regional publication outlets that are recognized as equal to the current Science Citation Index (SCI) and Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) journals. It is surely not beyond the wit of Asian universities to take the lead in creating new ‘centre’ of publication excellence, which will allow, if not demand, bilingual publications. (p. 14)

Carroll-Boegh and Takagi (2006) outlined that the Danish internationalized curricula are reflected through joint research projects and research exchange programs. One significant
motive for internationalizing higher education institutes is research partnerships (Zolfaghari, Sabran, & Zolfaghari, 2009). According to Kirtikara (2001), networking can deliver collaborative research and services among institutes. Thus, several studies emphasized the establishment of research universities through the enhancement of international research, the increase of research publications in international journals, and the opportunities to search for sources of research funds. However, Pama (2012) cautioned that research universities are expensive to build and, costly to maintain at world-class standards, but extremely necessary to national development agendas. Pama also predicted that research universities will see significant constraints on their budgets; nonetheless, one participant in this study expressed the following, in order to find sources of research funds for our university:

In my opinion, we have to go through three steps to develop effective research. First, we should build our brand, and let people know us by exhibiting, conferences, road shows, advertisements, etc. Second, when people know us, and we know what they want, we can make a deal to pay 50% for the research processes, and let them pay the other 50%, which is a win-win situation, or mutual benefits. The last stage is to seek profits from developing research, and this can only happen when we become well-known in our society, and overseas.

In a previous study, Mok (2007) had the same vision, and reported that when competing for external grants and financial sources, universities must demonstrate their strengths in attracting funds. As a caveat, Vongchavalitkul (2012) maintained that without academic staff selected for particular tasks with specific responsibilities, a university may be unable to increase their funding. However, Davies (1992) compiled sources of income accruing to the university from a plethora of international sources, such as overseas student fees, student-related grants, project grants, consultancy overseas, continuing education programs overseas, research projects, technology transfer, franchising courses to colleges in other countries, and agency arrangements. Consistently, Mok and Chan (2008) ascertained that the sustainable growth of education can be achieved through the diversification of financial channels, as one of the possible ways to accomplish such a goal. Despite all this, Deem, Mok, and Lucas (2008) found:

Concentration of research funding (as a means of ensuring “world-class status” for the few) has implications for the development of national higher education systems in many ways. The national role of universities may be ignored in favor of the international role (as in East Asia where publication in English language journals has taken precedence over publication in other languages). (p. 21)

Prominently, autonomous and responsive institutions can simultaneously promote and develop internationalization of research (Henard, Diamond, & Roseveare, 2012). One participant in this study articulated a similar opinion: “We should also have an autonomous unit, or division for research to be completely independent, operate effectively, and efficiently without having to wait for permissions or orders from the upper-level of management.” In the ASEAN socio-cultural community (ASCC), the role of academia is to promote research cooperation, research and development (R&D) in the region, having a forum for researchers from member states to exchange views on regional issues, and enhance understanding and awareness about a variety of issues (Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy, 2008). On the issue of R&D, one participant in the current study illustrated the following:
I would like to say that research is one aspect that Thailand cannot be a leader on it or compete with others because investors never desire to finish their products one hundred percent in Thailand. They always have their research units in different countries and then they send their prototypes to us to make it and send it back to them.

Ponds (2009) advocated a different doctrine, and noted that because of the constant internationalization of science and technology, more and more corporations will be able to appropriate knowledge stemming from scholarly literature in other countries.

Other participants of the current study expressed different opinions by interpreting that we should emphasize research quality over quantity, promote a culture of innovation rather than ordinary research, and create an innovation system.

I believe that our university will be the first university in Thailand in innovation, and will be well recognized by foreign countries. However, to create an innovation system, we have to have enough opportunities for our students, and encourage them to think creatively. We want our students to innovate things that can help our community, society, and the world. For example, at present we have a lot of earthquakes in many countries around the world. So, we should think of how to develop or create censors in our buildings to alert people when this occurs. I think we can teach our students the concepts, motivate them to innovate some ideas, and then reward the best ideas.

Suttipun (2012) briefly mentioned the role of Thai universities in producing graduates with theoretical, practical, and specific knowledge in order to know how to solve problems creatively, as well as developing their analysis, synthesis, evaluation, innovation, and decision-making competencies. Other vital tactics presented by the participants in this study involved: enhancing awareness of research significance; developing a positive and optimistic vision; and our researchers should play a significant role in promoting and representing the university in Thailand, and overseas. They expounded their optimistic visions with these words: “In my opinion, in the next few years, we will have research publications in innovation, and have copyrights in at least one hundred issues. However, we need to plan for this carefully.” Another comment made by another participant was: “Our researchers play an important role in promoting our university in foreign countries. Our researchers are the ambassadors and representatives of the university.” Thus, the intensification of international research collaboration has increased the interest of scholars and policymakers (Ponds, 2009).

7. Recommendations for Further Studies

Future studies may explore the varying levels of autonomy in higher education institutions. To find out whether internal types of planning in a higher education institution in ASEAN are effective or ineffective would require a more complex theory with a larger sample and more complex measures or analyses. Moreover, the generalizability of research findings in the area of internationalizing a higher education institution needs to be investigated. Another area of research could be related to the objectives of developing international partnership agreements or MOUs for universities in ASEAN. In the current study, the academic staff and students’ perspectives were not included. Hence, researchers in this field may conduct interviews with students, academic staff, and other members of the university who are involved or even concerned with the internationalization process of the university, which can add another dimension to a similar study. Future studies may focus on the economic and political aspects associated with international student exchange programs.
Another obvious gap in the literature is the apparent critical success factors necessary for the successful management of international activities to internationalize a particular university.

### 7.1 Suggested Activities and its Purposes for ASEAN Universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Purposes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Organize courses for various target groups (e.g., students, faculty members, or village leaders)</td>
<td>To stimulate participants’ awareness of the significance of the ASEAN community in the AEC era</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Invite government officials and pose questions at the end of each session</td>
<td>To directly convey government messages to the targeted groups and free exchange of ideas on specific government policies/treaties</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Develop a mechanism for dialogues with the media, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and religious heads to discuss the ASEAN countries’ problems, suggestions, and solutions to problems, and involve faculty members in these discussions</td>
<td>To obtain feedback from various quarters on community quandaries and solutions, wishes, and needs, and to enhance faculty members’ knowledge of the ASEAN community</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Arrange for some visits to several government development projects in their location</td>
<td>To acquire field experience, and knowledge of government projects and programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Arrange for luncheon/dinner with other universities’ administrators</td>
<td>To foster peace, unity and integration among different groups, and strengthen ties among ASEAN universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Design and implement small development projects and provide services for other universities</td>
<td>To confront particular issues/problems, and reach consensus on integrated solutions from all participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Invite specialists/professionals/experts depending on the issue to be tackled</td>
<td>To obtain professional feedback and practical solutions to specific topics</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Develop some forums for knowledge/skills transfer on possible projects/activities/plans</td>
<td>To transfer valuable knowledge/skills to other groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Invite human rights organizations</td>
<td>To ensure that individuals possess similar basic goals and values regardless of their ethnic groupings or other differences</td>
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<td>10. Promote the development of an effective Management Information System (MIS) for all ASEAN activities/ projects/seminars/workshops, etc.</td>
<td>To continually assess/update information gathered from such projects and recognize what is missed or needs improvement in future plans/strategies/performance, etc.</td>
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### 8. Conclusion

The researchers believe that this study is a startup phase towards the internationalization of a higher education institution in northern Thailand. The findings delivered particular notions that emerged during the data collection process, which are likely to increase the university’s opportunities in the development of various aspects.
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