**Paper for the *Educators and Planners: Symphony or Discord* Conference**
**AAIR Conference 1 – 3 December 1999**

# A SURVEY OF GRADUATE PERCEPTIONS IN THAILAND: COMPARISON WITH AUSTRALIAN SITUATION

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## ABSTRACT

The course experience questionnaire was developed for Australian Universities in response to the national review focusing on ways by which the quality of Higher Education may be assessed. This instrument has been tried and tested within the Australian environment since 1993. This study applies the CEQ instrument within a Thai Case Study University with view to drawing comparisons with the Australian national survey findings. The study considers the policy implications of the findings of the Graduate study. The comparison of perceptions of Thai and Australian graduates will assist in the internationalisation of institutional research throughout Asia Pacific region.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Thai case study university is a private University located in the capital city Bangkok, Thailand. The institution is interested in pursuing a number of quality initiatives including the assessment of graduate perception of teaching and learning.

It is the purpose of this paper to report on a survey undertaken of the Thai University graduate perceptions of teaching and learning and the like by applying the course experience questionnaire developed in Australia in the early 90s. The basic reason for applying an Australian standardised instrument was to provide an opportunity to undertake international comparisons of graduate perceptions of teaching and learning. It is hoped that such comparative international institutional research will help to promote better understanding of similarities and differences between tertiary education systems within the Asia Pacific region.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study implemented the course experience questionnaire as designed by the Australian Graduate Careers Council. This approach was adopted since it will expedite transnational comparisons

A total of 120 such instruments were administered to Business and Arts students studying at the case study Thai private university. Due to the expensive nature of implementing a random sample, the study adopted convenience sampling methodology. This approach is justified on a number of grounds. First, as previously indicated random sampling is costly to adopt in a large university environment and in practice very difficult to implement. Second, this is a pilot study which has the purpose of generating hypothesis rather than testing hypothesis. The reason for this is that to the best of our knowledge such a study has not been undertaken previously.

The 120 questionnaires were distributed to students who had either completed their program in 1999 or expect to complete the program by October 1999. Of these 109 completed instrument were received, giving a response rate of 91%; it is believed that this is high enough to draw some useful conclusions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Smith and Cranton (1992) note that student ratings of instructions are routinely used in most Higher Education settings within the United States of America. Generally they are used for individual faculty improvement, for more formalised instructional development endeavors and for academic promotion decisions. Thousands of American research studies have addressed various aspects of student ratings of instructions, beginning in the 1920s and peaking in the 1970s and 1980s (Marsh, 1987). Discussion of these studies is beyond the scope of this paper but it is noted by Smith and Cranton (1992) that generally practitioners and researchers accept student ratings as a reliable and valid approach to the evaluation of instruction, although not withstanding challenges. However, Hativa (1995) notes that within the American context, the method of using student ratings feedback to improve instructors teaching quality will produce, at most, modest changes in instructional quality. This author suggests that there is increasing research evidence that when this feedback is augmented by personal consultation

with a specialist who works with instructors on enhancing their teaching skills, greater improvement in teaching and learning can be achieved. Pike (1994) found a relationship between graduate satisfaction and work experiences and in particular that graduates who are satisfied with a job are more likely to report to being satisfied with their University experiences.

Returning to the Australian context, Johnson (1997) reports on the development of the course experience questionnaire for Australian Higher Education. He indicates that the CEQ had its origins in the 1980s when a series of discipline reviews and government enquires commented on the absence of information about course quality. Ramsden (1996) reported on the validity and usefulness of the CEQ as a performance indicator of the perceived quality of University teaching. The course experience questionnaire consists of a set of 25 items to which graduates respond on a 5 point likert scale ranking from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The first couple of dozen items relate to the five scales: good teaching practices, clear goals and standards in the course, purposes of assessment, expected workload and the development of generic skills. The last item requires graduates to rate their overall satisfaction with the quality of the recently completed course on the same scale. Weeks et al (1994) suggest that survey such as CEQ provides invaluable insights which are incorporated into the strategic planning process of an institution as well as having potential for marketing purposes. Liston (1998) acknowledges the importance of the University surveys as institutional research tools to collect data for monitoring and reviewing performance.

In the Thai context, the Thai Bureau of University Affairs had announced (in 1996) that the quality assurance policy needs to be adopted in tertiary education. Quality assessment is one of the process of quality assurance (the other two are quality control and quality audit). The Thai Bureau of University Affairs has in the past set examinations to ensure standard outcomes from the tertiary education institutions. They have conducted the criteria for the approval of quality improvement in tertiary education institutions. The curriculum assessment and the assessment of teaching are one of the criterias for inspection and evaluation. Moreover, hundreds of articles were printed to support this Government policy. Many articles admit that the assessment by students on the curriculum and teaching system is one of the indices for indicating the quality of education. It provides extensive guidance in both improvement and development of academic management in higher education. Viriyavetchakul (1998), noted in the academic meeting of all the university presidents of Thailand that the quality assessment of curriculum and teaching is one of the factors affecting the academic quality and providing what lecturers and the curriculum administrators need to know.

Thessavanich (1998), noted ten critical indices indicating the quality of education, including the control mechanism, the students, the lecturers, the curriculum, the library and learning resources, learning environment, educational media, learning and teaching process, research, and budget management. He suggested many methods to develop and improve these indices for The Sukothai Thammatirath University, Department of Economics, the case study for his study. Two identified areas from this study include the curriculum assessment which is ranked at the strong level of requirement to improve and develop and also assessment of teaching which is ranked at the medium level of requirement.

## THAI CASE STUDY UNIVERSITY GRADUATES PERCEPTIONS AND COMPARISON BETWEEN AUSTRALIAN CEQ AND THAI SURVEY RESULTS

Before proceeding to compare survey results in Thailand and Australia, some key findings from the latest Australian national GCCA data in respect of 1997 CEQ survey will first be presented (based on Johnson, 1998).

The Australian study findings can be summarised as follows:

a) In terms of Bachelor Degree graduates, the study found that there was a tendency for higher scores reflecting greater satisfaction among older graduates on the Good Teaching scale and the appropriate assessment scale.

b) There was little difference in the mean CEQ scores for Bachelor programs between male and female graduates on any of the CEQ scales.

c) Rating of students with postgraduate qualifications was higher than those with undergraduate qualification on the appropriate assessment scale. Graduates with higher degree had scores substantially higher than those with pass Bachelor Degrees. Johnson (1998) suggests that this may relate to the age of the graduate because older respondents tend to provide more positive CEQ opinions. He further suggests that this may reflect the assessment practices since graduates completing postgraduate awards experience forms of assessment which place less emphasis on memorisation of actual information.

d) There is evidence to support the hypothesis that fee paying students are more positive than the HECS liable counterparts on the CEQ scales

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CEQ RESULT

The first CEQ item require the graduate to indicate whether it was easy to know the standard of work expected of them. Using the scaling procedure specified by GCCA (scale is plus or minus 100). It was found that the average graduate from the Thai university had a mean score of 11 with a SD of 31. Johnson (1998) suggested that for Australia the 1997 corresponding CEQ result was a mean of 19 and SD of 48. Statistical testing indicates that this difference in mean value was not significant ($t = -1.6 P>0.05$). It is hence concluded that graduate expectation of the standard of academic work does not appear to vary between the two countries.

The second CEQ question probes the development of problem solving skills of graduates. The Thai university mean value for this question was 44 which was slightly higher than the Australian mean (38). Nevertheless the statistical testing suggest that there is no real difference between these mean values ($t = 1.28$, $P>0.05$) permitting the conclusion that there was no perceived difference in the development of problem solving skill in the two countries.

The third CEQ question considered the course motivation provided by academic staff. Again the Thai mean value (17) was lightly greater than the Australian mean (15), but again statistical testing suggest that this difference was not significant ($t = 0.3$, $P>0.05$). This indicates that academic staff in both countries motivate graduates to do the best academic work to an equal degree.

The fourth CEQ question considers the work load on the graduate. The Thai outcome (mean = 36) was found to be significantly greater than the Australian mean (mean = 7, $t = 6.1$, $p <$

0.001). It can be concluded from this that the perceived workload on Thai students was much greater than that applicable to Australian graduates. It is interesting to speculate on the course of their difference. Perhaps it might arise from cultural factors, the different expectation of student's teachers and parents in terms of academic effort or could it be due to the fact that Thai students are often required to read English texts which is not their native language. Future researchers will need to consider these hypotheses.

The fifth CEQ question considers the development of analytical skill in graduates. The Thai mean score for this question (43) was marginally greater than the Australian mean (41). However statistical testing of the difference of means suggest no real difference between the two countries ($t = .52$, $>0.05$).

The sixth question on the CEQ scale seeks the graduate perception of what was expected in the program. In this case the Thai mean value (44) was found to be greater than the Australian mean (24). The differences between the mean values was highly significant ($t = 4.2$, $P<0.001$) suggesting that the Thai graduates have a clearer idea of where they are academically going and what expected of them in their program. One can conjecture as to the reason for the observed result. Could it be the case that the Thai curriculum is more clearly defined and communicated to the students? Further the Thai case study private university is essentially a teaching and learning organisation with minimal research output, in comparison to an Australian university. Accordingly, the latter might give greater attention to research than teaching and learning. Again this hypothesis will need to be considered by future researchers.

Question 7 on the CEQ scale required graduates to consider the staff efforts required in commenting on their work. The Thai mean (14) was significantly greater than the Australian mean (mean = -4, $t = 3.4$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that the average Thai academic was putting greater effort in commenting on the student academic output than Australian teachers. This might be due to a number of factors. Again since the Thai case study university is primarily a teaching institution perhaps greater efforts are required from the academic in teaching students. The average Australian academic would be required to expend greater effort on research and thus having less time to interact with the students. Further, there might be important differences in assessment procedures between the two countries. Our hypothesis is that there is much more continuous assessment in Thai university than university than in Australian universities. Again this hypothesis are subject to further study by future researchers.

Question 8 on the CEQ scale probe the degree to which a good memory is required in the program. The average Thai graduate (mean = -13) had a significant lower mean value than an average Australian graduate (mean = 32, $t = -7.7$, $p < 0.001$). This is contrary to the standard stereotype of rote learning Asian students.

Question 9 considered the development of team work in university. The result indicates that the Thai mean value (37) was significant greater than that observed for Australian graduates (mean = 12, $t = 4.4$, $p < 0.001$) . This might be due to the modernized higher education in Thailand which has promoted a system of learning networks since 1992 when the National Scheme of Education has been promulgated as guidelines to direct the nation's educational provision so as to render the education system efficient in its response to emerging needs and rapid changes in Thai society (Office of the National Education Commission;1998). The enhancing of team work spirit is one of the factors considered here.

Question 10 considers the confidence of graduates in tackling unfamiliar problems.

The Thai result (mean = 34) was greater than the Australian mean (26), however, the difference was not statistically significant ($t = 1.7$, $p > 0.05$), indicating about the same graduate perception on the ability of tackling unfamiliar problems in the two countries.

Question 11 addressed the graduate perception regarding the improvement in the written communication. In this case the Australian mean (40) was greater than the Thai mean (33) but the difference was not statistically significant ($t = -1.4$, $p > 0.05$). This finding appears to confirm the Thai lecturers' complaint on writing skills of the Thai new generation. Even regarding master degree students, they found that some of them have poor writing skill in their dissertations.

Question 12 considered the relative staff emphasis on memorization versus understanding. The Thai mean value (-5) was significantly lower than the Australian mean (mean = 26, $t = -5.6$, $p < 0.001$). The outcome appears to contradict the result of question 8 which indicates greater emphasis on memory work in Australian universities. Once again this hypothesis sould be subject to further examination.

Question 13 considers the difficulty in the student's expectation of the program. The Thai mean value (0) was significantly below the Australian mean (mean = 18, $t = -3.7$, $p < 0.001$). This might be due to the Thai curriculum being so concentrated in enhancing every talent and skill that the students could not crystallize program expectation.

Question 14 enquire as to whether the student was given enough time to understand the things that they learn. The Thai mean value (1) was significantly lower than the Australian mean (mean = 16, $t = -3.2$, $p < 0.001$). This might be due to the reason that mostof the Thai respondents are part time students with all day job accountability in their workplace. Again could it be due to the fact that Thai students are required to read more English texts in higher education. Moreover, the Thai student grading is provided on the basis of style of participations including class attendance, heavy load in many assignments and homeworks and examination.

Question 15 consider, the academic staff understanding of the difficulty faced by the student in their academic work. The Thai mean value (11) was slightly greater than the Australian mean (7), but the difference was not statistically significantly ($t = 0.8$, $p > 0.05$), indicating about the same emphasis on placing effort in understanding the difficulties faced by the students in the two countries.

Question 16 consider whether the assessment methods employed in the course required an in-depth understanding of the course content. The Thai mean value
was 27. The Australian mean value was -11 which was significantly lower than the Thai mean ($t = 6.4$, $p < 0.001$).

Question 17 sought the graduate perception of helpfulness of the feedback given by academis to students. The Thai mean value (6) was lightly greater than the Australian average (5), but the difference was not statistically significantly indicating about the same graduate perception on helpfulness of the feedback by academic staff in the two countries.

Question 18 consider the capacity of the academic to provide good explanation to the student. The Thai mean (11) was only slightly greater than the Australian mean (10). However statistical testing indicates that the observed difference was not statistically significantly ($t = 0.3$, $p > 0.05$).

Question 19 considers the student perception regarding staff emphasis on factual knowledge. The mean Thai value (-13) was significantly lower than the Australian average (mean = 31, $t = -10$, $p < 0.01$). Again this finding appears to corroborate the result from question 8 emphasis on memory work which need to be considered by future researchers..

Question 20 considers the effort made by academic staff to make the subject more interesting. The Thai mean value (19) was slightly greater than the Australian average (16), but the difference was not statistically significantly ($t = 0.6$, $p > 0.05$).

Question 21 considers the pressure on students to perform well in their program. The Thai result (25) was significantly greater than the Australian average (mean = -10, $t = 6.5$, $p < 0.001$). It appears that the Asian students are under much greater pressure to perform academically than their Australian counterpart.

Question 22 examined the ability of students to plan their own work. The result indicates that the Thai mean (37) was not significantly different to the Australian mean (mean = 39, $t = -0.5$, $p > 0.05$). This indicates that both Thai and Australian graduates received the benefit from learning process and apply it to their study and their real life.

Question 23 considers the relative volume of work and the time for comprehension of study. The result indicate that Thai mean (16) was significantly greater than the Australian mean (mean = -.3, $t = 3.4$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests greater focus on keeping the Asian student busy while the Australian counterpart had greater opportunity to understand what they were learning.

Question 24 sought the perception of the student regarding the clarity of staff expectation. The mean Thai value (7) was slightly below that of Australian graduate (11) but the difference was not statistically significant ($t = -0.9$, $p > 0.05$).

Question 25 consider the overall assumption of the quality of the program on student satisfaction. The Thai mean (24) was significantly below that of the Australian average (mean = 35, $t = -2.3$, $p < 0.05$). Could it be that since the Thai students have to pay full fees at the case study university, they are more likely to seek “value for money”.

## CONCLUSION

Establishment of a national system of quality assurance for higher education, allowing each institution to set its own unique quality assurance mechanisms suitable for its specific mission and goals is an important national goal. However, it seems that education institutions have the curriculum assessment and assessment for lecturers as one of the indices to indicate curriculum quality. The comparison between perceptions of Australia and Thai graduates on quality of Higher Education can be assessed through the CEQ instrument. Some interesting comparisons can be concluded as following:

1. The graduate expectation of the standard of academic work, motivating graduate to do the best academic work by academic staff, analytical skill development in graduate, the graduate perception on the ability of tackling unfamiliar problems, emphasis of academic staff on playing effort in understanding the difficulties faceD by the students, the graduate perception on helpfulness of the feedback by academic staff, the capacity of the academic to provide good explanation to the student, the efforts made by academic staff to make the subject more interesting, the ability of students to plan their own work, and the perception of the student regarding the clarity of staff expectation all of them do not appear to vary between the two countries.

2. The perceived workload on Thai students was much greater than that applicable to Australian graduate; the Thai graduate has a clearer idea than Australian graduate of where they are academically going and what is expected of them in their program; the Thai academic was putting greater effort in commenting on the student academic output than did Australian teachers; Thai students are under much more pressure to perform academically, and considering the relative volume of work and the time for comprehension of study. It appears that the Thai mean value was greater than the Australian mean in these areas.

3. In the following areas, emphasis on rote learning, improving skills in written communication, emphasis of the staff on memorization versus understanding, being given enough time to understand the things that the students learn, and the student perception regarding staff emphasis on fact' it appears that the Australian mean value was greater than the Thai mean.

We believe that the undertaking of CEQ analysis is important both for the planner or institutional researcher and for the academic staff. From the planners perspective such instruments provide the necessary feedback to guide the development of future plans, particularly as they relate to academic programs. It is, however, far more important to the academic staff for purposes of refining the curriculum and how the subject is actually delivered to the student. It can hence be concluded that this might be an area of harmony between the educational planner and the educator. Nevertheless the Symphony might suffer some discord were the planner to apply CEQ type results to take money of academic units not performing well on the various scales!

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