Preliminary Exploratory Research on Student Initiatives at Thai Universities

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Abstract
The active learning methods are increasingly fit into curriculums of the leading educational institutions. Does the Thai educational system follow the trend? The brief literature review suggests that this topic is somehow neglected or unsought in the current scholarly research in Thailand. As so, this study aims to determine how are the things with student initiatives in the higher education system of Thailand. The observational survey research employed self-administered questionnaires to collect data from 469 students of 60 Thai universities selected with the application of non-probability convenience and voluntary response sampling techniques. The findings suggest that out of 469 respondents, 147 participated in some 'real' projects, 153 reported the presence of ideas worthy for subsequent development, whereas 270 believed to have something suitable for being published in journals. The further crosstabulation analysis revealed that all these students of the same cohort. It means that there were only 17 students out of 469 who, in one or another way involved into 'serious' projects, six of whom have some ideas worthy of further development, three got something worthy to be published, and two who could remember the names of the 'serious' periodic. The brief literature review suggests that the current topic is somehow neglected or unsought in the current scholarly research in Thailand. Therefore, the researcher has every reason to believe that this study is intended to fill this gap and thus, shed light on some problems of the higher education system of Thailand.

Keywords: Education, Initiatives, Students, Support, Universities.

1. Introduction and Research Question

The idea of conducting exploratory research on student initiatives was inspired by the life itself and, in particular, was prompted by personal experiences of the researcher from his work as a lecturer at the educational institution. It is not that teacher initiatives such as conducting research projects and implementing innovative practices are not supported at all, but to what extent and at what cost? Here are the limited budgets, rigid bureaucratic decision-making systems, shortage of qualified managerial staff members who do various evaluations, and lack of general understanding of the importance of professional growth and development. Having experienced it all by himself, the researcher was curious – "what about the students?" Do they face similar difficulties, how easy is it for them to implement their ideas, and if there are any tangible help and support from their alma maters? After all, if not the teachers, but perhaps maybe the students are the ones who benefit from the highest in the world educational spending of Thailand that equivalent to almost 20 % of The National Budget (The Nation, 2017).

On the one hand, years of studying and time of employment with Thai education institutions not only expanded author's knowledge about the educational system of Thailand but also allowed to notice some points which, in researcher's view, are not given proper attention to or even neglected. For instance, there is not much support and understanding on the part of the teaching staff to questions of cultivation student creativity and independent thinking as well as there is not much concern about the usefulness of activities and

assignments used in the teaching process. Very often, student activities have very little to do with the curriculum, the matter of study, and even lesser with the future profession. It looks like, to a large extent, the practices used by educational organizations based on the working of previous generations of educators and not considering requirements of the present days thus, disconnected from the real life. Maybe this is the reason why, according to 2017/2018 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2018), the learning outcomes of Thai students have not changed since 2003. And all of these, regardless the fact, that according to the same source, Thai pupils study up to five times more than pupils in America or Canada, whereas Thai university students study up to two times more than students abroad. The same report concludes that Thai student learning proficiency on the world scale is rather low and thus, the Thai education system needs to be improved across all age groups.

The results of these reflections led to the formation of the primary research question: "How are the things with student initiatives in Thailand?" This main question, in turn, breaks down into two sub-questions: "Are there any initiatives at all?" and "Can students count on any support?" Accordingly, because all these questions about the students, who else if not the students themselves could provide the best-unbiased answers? Besides, the official university reports and statistics may be not suitable for the current study as, pursuing entirely other goals, may draw completely different and detached from the real-life pictures of realia.

1.1 Definitions

The terms project, initiative, and activities are interchangeable and carry the same semantic load, which is similar to how The Oxford English Dictionary defines a 'project' - "an individual or collaborative enterprise that is carefully planned and designed to achieve a particular aim." What is more important for this study is what should be counted as the 'real' or 'serious' project, initiative, or activity. Since any attempt to find answers in earlier research bare no results, such classification was made on the grounds of the researcher's personal experience of teaching at the university and observing the student lives for more than two years. As such, the researcher defines as a 'real' or a 'serious' any project, initiative or activity that, directly or indirectly, contributes to the fulfillment of educational goals, closely related to the curriculum, and implies independent and responsible participation from students. Moreover, the 'serious' projects, initiatives, or activities need to be purposeful, realistic, complex, unique, assessable, different and ground-breaking. On the other hand, following advice by Ayub (2013), those which the researcher did not count as a 'serious' used:
- past activities which are repeated in the same way on a regular basis;
- activities with no clearly defined goals;
- activities which can be repeated or transplanted anywhere at any moment;
- ongoing activities.

Similarly, the researcher denotes as a 'real' or a 'serious' any printed or online periodicals that accept for publication articles of good scientific quality, which undergo strict peer review, and which have been indexed in the local or foreign citation databases, such as Scopus, Web of Science, or similar. Besides, those periodicals are published at regular intervals as it suggested by various English dictionaries.

2. Research Methodology

In its essence, the current quantitative study is exploratory survey research that employs online and offline modes of a self-administered questionnaire to collect data from 469 students of 60 Thai universities selected with the application of non-probability convenience and voluntary response sampling techniques. Even though this study was quantitative, it did not set as its goal the generalization of the results on the entire population of Thai students but was devoted to finding answers to the questions posed by the researcher. Therefore, the research was not concerned about the representativeness of the population sample.

Wanting to get more information than just recounting the "yes" and "no" answers, the researcher added to the closed-ended questions an option allowing for students to comment on their answers. which, as shown by the results, turned out to be the right decision, since it allowed the researcher to take a better understanding of the essence of students' answers. Thus, ultimately, almost involuntarily, a purely quantitative study turned into what Creswell (2009) called parallel mixed methods research with a predominance of its quantitative component.

2.1 The Scope of the Study and Population Sample

Since the current study is concerned with the state of student initiatives, the research focused on the population of students at different levels as well as recent graduates from any Thai universities only — this decision predetermined the desired age scope of participants ranging from 18 to 29 years.

To determine a sufficient size of the population sample for mostly quantitative study, the researcher used an online Population Size Calculator available from under the URL: http://www.raosoft.com and the data of National Statistical Office (2018) regarding how many students could accommodate Thai universities in one single year. At 95% of confidence level, and 5% of margin error, a recommended size of population sample was 385. Allowing the possibility of filling errors, the researcher decided to collect data from 500 respondents.

Taking into account the fact that, as a university teacher, the researcher already had access to students of certain years of study, it was decided to use a mixed, non-probabilistic sampling technique that involves a combination of convenience and voluntary responses. The convenience part of respondents was first- and third-year Bachelor is students of Silpakorn University majoring in The tourism and business management whereas, the voluntary part was students of different years at Bachelor is and Master is levels as well as some graduates from other universities.

2.2 Research Instruments and Data Collection

The research instrument, the questionnaire was written in the English language and was validated with the help of a group of educators from the Faculty of Management Science

of Silpakorn University and with a few alumni of the Ph.D. cohort of the National Institute of Development Administration. The follow-up inspection for clarity and association with a given domain took place directly in the classrooms with help and involvement of 3rd-year students of English programme of Silpakorn University. Incomprehensible or 'difficult' for most of the students (using 80% acceptance threshold) questions were rewritten or removed. For better understanding and to avoid the language barrier, the final version of the questionnaire written in English was complimented with Thai translation.

The survey questionnaire contained 23 questions related to descriptive and methodology domains, meant to learn demographic characteristics of the respondents as individuals as well as students and those, designed to answer the research question by evaluating students' awareness of various initiatives and ways in which universities to support them. Considering the very exploratory objectives of the research as well as researcher's desire to make a survey as light as possible, most of the questions in the second domain used a three-point Likert measurement scale with predefined choices such as Agree, Disagree, and Not Sure. For those, who wanted to elaborate more on their answers was given an option to comment. The questionnaire also contains a few optional open-ended questions. Overall, it should take no longer than five to ten minutes to finish the survey by providing modest answers to open-ended questions or comments.

Printed copies of the questionnaire were conveniently distributed in the classrooms amid one hundred first- and third-year Bachelor students of Silpakorn University (SU) majoring in business and hospitality management and willing to participate in the survey voluntarily. At the same time, the online version based on the Google Form engine was made available to anyone including students of SU. The very same students who took part in the offline survey were asked to populate the link to the online version of the questionnaire among their friends from other universities. The prompting for action factor was a promise on the part of the researcher to add some participation points to the students' grades for every valid response to an online questionnaire. Every response on the internet had to be accompanied by the valid respondent's email that includes the university's extension to avoid fraud. Later, the validity of emails used by respondents was checked with the help of online email validation tools.

The entire process of collecting responses took approximately three months, between September and November 2018.

2.3 Data Analysis

Before being loaded into a computer system and examined with an application of descriptive statistics such as frequencies and crosstabulation, returned questionnaires were checked for errors and completeness. At the same time, the content of the online responses received has been reviewed for content and meaningfulness. As a result of these inspections, 31 questionnaires were rejected leaving the researcher with 469 valid and accepted for further analysis with the use of SPSS statistical software.

3. Findings and Discussion

Before proceeding with the disclosure of how the respondents answered to sub-questions, it would be necessary to report some facts that may be important for judging the quality and validity of answers.

Firstly, the overwhelming number (96.0%) of responses was given by students of 2nd and higher years of study as well as graduates. This fact itself could indicate a high probability that the answers were given by those, who have quite a good understanding of university life as well as what is available/not available for students.

The promising is also that 433 (92.3%) out of all questionnaires were filled by students with cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) of 2.7 or higher. Based on the observation that the average value of GPAs among students taught by the researcher during 2018 was 2.8, GPA of 2.7 can be considered as already quite high. The conclusion suggests itself that most participants to survey were students with average or higher academic performance. Most of 282 (60.1%) students with GPA scores 3.0 and higher claimed, that study at the university was or is, neither difficult or easy.

3.1 Demography of the Respondents

Out of 469 qualified responses, 351 (74.8 %) were given by females, 109 (23.3%) by males, and 9 (1.9%) by those, who did not associate themselves with either gender. This pattern quite well corresponds with the general gender distribution of students at Silpakorn University, Cha-Am campus, where most of the students are females. Since the similar gender patterns exist amongst offline and online responses, it can be assumed, that while populating survey, students contacted exclusively with representatives of the same sex and the same age. The last one may also well explain the age distribution of respondents, 457 (97.6%) of whom were young adults aged 18-23 (same age as students who answered to the offline version of the survey), and only 12 (2.4%) were aged 24 and older.

The geographic situation of Silpakorn University, from where the survey took off, could explain that fact, that before admission to universities, 335 (71.6%) respondents to survey were lived in Central Thailand, with approximately an equal distribution of students amid other regions. That fact that for the propagation of the survey were solely responsible students of Silpakorn University, predetermined that most of surveyed were students of this, followed by students of Kasetsart, Thammasat, King Mongkut's, and Mahidol universities, whereas students of other higher education institutions gave significantly fewer answers. Altogether, the research data was collected from students of 63 universities; however, the responses of students from 3 universities were rejected at the stage of data analysis.

The answerers were students majoring in 31 subjects; with the dominant majority (93.6%) of whom are studying at the Bachelor level. Only approximately 15.0% of all respondent were students of non-applied or technical disciplines, whereas overwhelming majority were students of humanities, 173 of whom (43.2%) are learning Management Science, Liberal Arts, Business Administration, and Engineering.
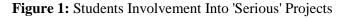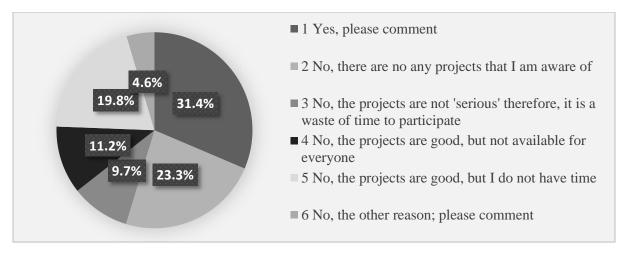
3.2 Are There Any Initiatives at All?

In this part, the researcher applied the following logic: regardless of what official university statistic says, a more valid picture of reality could be presented only by students themselves. Then, the complete picture of 'what is there' may be somewhere at the intersection of the student understanding of the issue itself, the student desire to do something more than prescribed by the curriculum, and what students do during the study in addition to the program. All this embodied in a few leading interrogations prior which the researcher provided a thorough explanation of what should be counted as a 'real' or 'serious' project or initiative. It was emphasized, that not only activities mentioned in 'Definitions' part of this paper, but also publishing in the academic journals and periodic could be considered as a 'serious' step towards fulfillment of educational goals and contribution to further mastering the profession.

The first of those leading questions meant finding out if students agreed with a statement that participation in the 'serious' projects is important and beneficial for them. In general, more than half, 297 (63.5%) respondents showed their full agreement with such an idea thus, in a way, confirmed their understanding of the importance, value, and the potential benefits provided by 'serious' projects and initiatives for their future professional lives, whereas only 18 (3.5%) individuals did not agree on it. The rest, 154 (33.0%) respondents, seemed to be taken aback by the question and could not decide whether an extra load is worth the labor. The further crosstabulation analysis revealed that almost all those 'undecideds' were also giving the similar 'safe' answers to other questions that allowed for such 'neutral' options. The similar answering patterns also exist amid those who, for the most parts, were giving positive or negative answers. For instance, almost all 153 (32.7%) who stated that they have some projects in mind (this leading question asks: - "do you have some ideas or projects suitable for further development?"), were those who gave the same positive answers to the previous leading question.

The questionnaire encouraged respondents with some ideas to share what exactly they have in mind, and many, 137 out of 153 did so. Eventually, student comments happened to be the most valuable part of the findings. In the way, it took the research away from the simple quantitative interpretation of data into a qualitative realm, or what Holliday (2002, p. 5) called "an open-ended and setup free research." Once again it proved how the renowned scholar, similarly to many other advocates of mixed method research, was right insisting, that it is insufficient to rely only on the quantitative survey and statistics. Indeed, it turned out, that saying 'Yes, I have an idea' does not necessarily mean that announced ideas were expressive. By using criteria for 'serious' project defined in part 'Definitions' of this paper, the researcher could select only six noteworthy proposals. The suggestions such as "study harder," "develop a passion for studying," "buy new IT equipment to enhance productivity," or "provide students with free courses" were rejected as they do not represent any educational value, novelty or whatsoever. Amid these six that researcher considered as worth worthy of attention are: "developing project about a selection of English literature for students of different levels," "starting a reggae band (by students if the Faculty of Art)," and similar. So, in general, it all came down to the fact that only 6 (1.3%) students out of 469 have 'serious' ideas worthy of attention and further development.

Now, knowing what students themselves are thinking about the very idea of participating in 'serious' projects and having some understanding of the content of student proposals, it was logically to ask whether the respondents participated/te or will be involved in something alike; the distribution of answers presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Students Involvement Into 'Serious' Projects

Source: Developed for this study.

As we can see from the figure, the 'yes' answer allowed to provide a short comment on any projects or activities that students were, are or will be involved during the study at the university, whereas answer 'no' had a few preset variations. The collected responses suggest that 147 (31.4%) out of 469 students were, are or will be involved in some 'serious' activities, which seems to be quite promising. However, unfortunately, qualitative 'open-ended' comments have amended the statistics allowing to see the real picture behind the pure numbers. Scrupulous analysis of given comments suggests that only 17 (11.6%) out of all positive 'yes' answers or 3.6% from the total number of respondents to survey could satisfy the criteria of a 'serious' project set by the researcher. Amid those accepted was 'the development of some promotional programmes,' 'conducting some field research or social studies,' 'pharmaceutical research,' 'organizing academic seminars and festivals,' and so on. Here it is necessary to emphasize the questionable educational value for students of non-core faculties, projects such as 'Freshy Games,' various singing and dancing contests as well as cheerleading and sports competitions mentioned in answers of the several respondents among these 17. In the researcher's view, despite being counted as valid in anticipation that the researcher's opinion may be biased, these projects have very little to do with the curriculum, the matter of study, and even lesser with the future profession. On the other hand, were rejected as not 'serious' activities such as doing homework and other assignments, which are the part or requirement of the curriculum.

It was also curious to have a closer look at the distribution of negative responses, whereas one should not be too enticed by the formulation of the predefined answer: "No, the projects are good…" The indicator of a 'good' here (all together 31.0% of responses from the total) does not necessarily mean that a large number of 'serious' projects left uncounted. Going by an analogy on how many really 'serious' projects (17) were selected amid those

that in which students stated to be involved in (147 responses) the number of 'real' uncounted projects probably will be very similar or even much smaller considering not very convincing excuse "do not have time" given by students.

In the end, realizing that among students may be not only practitioners but also some theorists, the researcher asked students whether they have any ideas worthy to be published in scientific journals or periodicals to which, 270 (57.6%) respondents answered 'yes.' This figure is almost twice higher than the number of students who claimed to have some interesting ideas worth of implementation. However, the further analysis of open-ended comments to those positive answers revealed, that only 3 answers (0.6% from the total number of the responses) could satisfy the criterion of 'serious' defined by the research, these are: a passage about community study, an introduction to the theory of social alienation, and an article about clean energy. Individuals who gave these three answers were also amongst those 41 (8.8%) who claimed to know some 'serious' journals for publishing. Unfortunately, only two of these 41 could properly recall the name of journals. What about the rest? The rest of respondents either do not know anything about 'serious' journals/magazines (119 or 25.2%) or were 'not sure' (309 or 66.0%) of the existence of such. Whereas, 'not sure' could mean only that students never heard or thought of an idea to publish before.

Summing up the facts reported here above, there were:
• 17 students who participated, participate or will participate in 'serious' projects;
• Six students have 'serious' ideas worthy of further development;
• Three students have ideas worthy of publishing in the journals, whereas only two students out of all could name the journals.

The further crosstabulation analysis on this data revealed that all these students of the same cohort, which means, that there are only 17 (3.6%) out of 469 who, in one or another way were involved into 'serious' projects; six of whom have some ideas worthy of further development, three got something suitable to be published, and two who could remember the names of the 'serious' journals or periodic.

3.3 Can Students Count on Any Support?"

It is necessary to mention, that in the preface to leading questions meant to find out if there is any tangible support available to students, it was explicitly explained that 'support' here means not only financial means but also one or another form of tangible assistance that goes beyond the one prescribed by the university programs. It was made understood that supporting body could be anything or anyone including teachers, faculty, universities, or outsiders to the educational system such as businesses, organizations, and private individuals. Firstly, by posing the question: "Is it a good to have a supporting system" was tested the general attitudes towards the idea of supporting interesting student initiatives, to what, 303 (64.6%) students answered 'yes,' 18 (3.1%) said 'no,' and 148 (31.6%) could not decide whether it is good or bad idea. Finding these answers rather unexpected (who would not want to have some extra support?), the researcher run crosstabulation analysis just to find out that, the most of those 166 who said either 'no' or 'not sure' were the students with GPA scores lower than 3.0 (91.2%) as well as those who were not involved in any 'serious' project

(86.7%) or have any 'serious' ideas (100%). The conclusion suggests itself - very likely, those respondents very well understand that in the presence of such a supporting system, most certainly they would not be able to take advantage of the benefits that it implies.

Then, the researcher directly asked if participants to survey were aware of any organizations, people, or others that provide any form of support to students and their initiatives; the results presented in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Are There Any Organizations that Support Students?

Source: Developed for this study.

The statistical results are self-explanatory: 'yes, there are some...' – 73.4% and 'no' – 26.6%. The first reaction to the fact that 344 (73.4%) respondents claimed that 'support' and supporting bodies are there could be unconditionally perceived as a great success of the study and indeed, good news. Unfortunately, the bright statistical picture was spoiled by comments left by 173 out of those 344. And even worse - at the closer inspection the researcher could select only eight meaningful out of 173; notably, the students mentioned: Thai Government, Mahartthai organization, Language center of Nakon Prathom Rajabhat University, Students Exchange Association, and three businesses: Lactasoy, SCG, and Panyapiwat institute by 7/11. What does it indicate? Many 'yes' and just a few valid comments to students' responses point out that, in their answers, students tried to pass the desired for reality. Why? Because, prompted by the simple logic, it is just impossible to forget someone who provided you with some support or, at least once in history, has offered a such. In this regard, the only one conclusion begs for itself - there are only a very few organizations that do really support students in Thailand. Another possibility is that students did not possess the information about the matter. Although, for the researcher, the second conclusion is not very convincing because, with the current involvement of students into the social networks, any information would distribute almost instantly.

In connection with all said here above, the researcher is inclined to believe that, with high probability, there is no any clearly expressed and reliable support system for student initiatives in Thailand.

3.4 Discussion

Looking at the findings reported above in sections 3.2 it is difficult to judge if those 17 out of 469 (3.6%) who, either have some exciting ideas worthy of further development or to be published or, in one or another way was/are or will be involved in 'real' projects is a satisfactory number. After all, we are dealing with the system of mass-education which main educational goal according to William Little (2010) is 'universal participation,' and one of the main socializing tasks is 'homogenization.' As we can see, neither goal or task aim at the development of individuality or different ways of thinking although it is at odds with those innovative educational practices promoted in works of Amin Umar, Dauda, and Mutah (2016); Holubova (2008); Huber and Maciejowska (2017); Isaac Diise, Afishata Mohammed, and Zakaria (2018); or used in educational processes of some universities such as Boston University (2018) and Stanford University (2017) for example. The final assessment of this indicator will probably depend on what priorities the country as a whole set before itself, and in particular, before its educational system - to be a leader or to go in the fairway. Although, taking into account the significant expenditures on Thai education system, most likely, there is a desire that it should not be amid the laggards as it currently is according to the 2017/2018 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2018).

One of the questions posed to students in the course of the study was the question of what professional and life goals and objectives students set for themselves and how does the studying at university contributes to achieving these goals. It would seem a simple question to which, unfortunately, most of the respondents did not have the answer. Only 142 (30.2%) of all students could, more or less, clearly identify whom they wanted to be and even less (about 56.0% out of those 142), could see the connection between what they are studying and how it contributes to their future. It surprises as according to survey data, 395 (84.4%) respondents will be looking for a job after finished university. Such uncertainty in the vision of the future, clearly indicates that for the majority of students, studying at the university is nothing more than a routine that is desirable to follow, but the choice of which is not something conscious or purposeful. Perhaps, in the absence of a clear vision of the future is just a hiding precondition for the lack of student initiatives and a willingness to do something more for this very future. For the researcher, this fact can be explained by the lack of proper consulting services in universities that aim not to qualitatively but quantitatively select applicants. In turn, this is fraught with an excessive set of applicants (future graduates) unpromising specialties that are not any use for the national economy of Thailand. The last one seemed to be no any news for the students themselves who, in their answers, pointed out that it makes no sense of setting any goals for the future because, most likely, it will be not easy to find a job in a specialty. The further analysis of contingency tables showed that 122 out of those 142 who know their life goals were also amongst those who had reported the presence of useful for self-development hobbies such as reading, self-studying, and similar. It looks like, those who have a clear vision of the future not only more purposeful in their studying effort but also more pro-active in matters of self-development. The further investigation against GPA scores revealed, that 135 out of those 142 were also better learners, with reported GPA scores > 3.0. Moreover, amongst those 142 were also 13, out of those 17 students reported in Section 3.2, with clear life-goas. As so, at first glance not related to the topic of this study questions about life-goals and hobbies, allowed to look at the problem from a different angle. There is some connection between what life-goals were set,

how students use available for them tools such as studying and hobbies to reach those goals, student academic performance, and the willingness for further self-development. So, the lack of student initiatives, which could be undoubtedly regarded as another means of self-realization, can be explained either by the lack of awareness on the part of students about such alternatives to the tedious beaten-up and outdated educational practices used in the Thai universities or by the absence of such initiatives at all. Otherwise, the number of students with clear life-goals who participate in the beneficial external to curriculum activities would be much higher.

4. Delimitations and Limitations

The evident delimitation of the current study is a choice of the population used by the researcher – a non-probability convenience and voluntary responses sample. Considering, that for the most part, it was a quantitative study, it would be more appropriate to use suggested by Babbie (2007, p. 192) a "probability sampling technique as a primary method of selecting large, representative samples." However, as life has shown, the decision to use open-ended comments with some of the questions revealed some weaknesses of numerical methods which could not be eliminated even if the researcher followed all recommendations prescribed by quantitative research techniques. Moreover, the comments made findings even more meaningful. On the positive side, the sampling technique used in the current study allowed to significantly reduce the researcher's job and speed up the research.

he delimitation described above, in turn, produced kind of homogeneous population sample with respondents who were somehow connected and grouped around the core consisting of students from Silpakorn University. Another factor that supported this homogeneity was the absence of reasonable initiatives (due to lack of financing for the research) to encourage more proactive participation in the research students from other universities.

The fact, that the study began with students of non-applied or technical disciplines most likely predetermined the final composition of the survey participants, approximately 85.0% of whom were humanities which, in turn, became one of the limitations of this research.

Another obvious limitation, which became especially visual only after analyzing the research results was initially the qualitative focus of the research. As shown by findings, even straightforward 'yes' and 'no' answers have many different nuances that could be discovered only throughout an in-depth, qualitative approach — fortunately, the qualitative elements in form of open-ended comments, the product of the researcher's intuition, allowed to eliminate some of shortcomings and make the results more revealing.

5. Recommendation for Future Research

Delimitations and limitations of the current study suggest driving direction for future research. The findings indicate that it would be beneficial to use mixed or even qualitative techniques on more diverse or even more targeted (with regards to the year of study, faculty or university) population samples. For instance, a future study could draw attention to a group of students in the field of technical and applied disciplines that was unaccounted for in

the current study. Then, considering that most respondents were undergraduate students at the Bachelor level (93.6%), it would be interesting to see what results may produce magistracy. After all, in theory, the master's degree implies greater student engagement and more proactive participation.

In-depth, insight information on student initiatives collected from students of different universities, could be analysed against a respectful university ranking and after all, used for identification of the most resultative educational practices. The further investigation of those findings, particularly a comparative analysis on the situation with student initiatives across multiple universities could aim at the development of the specific index that can be used to measure and compare opportunities for self-development and self-realization provided by educational institutions.

Lastly, despite having a Thai translation, the questionnaire used in the research aimed at the English-speaking respondents. In many respects it was dictated by the fact, that the English-speaking researcher did not want to depend on anyone while interpreting the results as well as wished to conduct the study within a short time frame, within the limited budget, and all alone. However, realizing possible benefits from the use of Thai language as a mean of communication with Thai-speaking population to the value of findings, the researcher advises, in further studies, to use only a student native language for development of questionnaires and interview questions.

6. Conclusions

The study can be considered as successful in that it provided the answers to questions asked. At the same time, the conclusions reported in the "Discussion" section can hardly be called satisfactory. The most depressing is not the fact that there is no system for supporting student initiatives in Thailand, but the fact that students themselves mostly do not have any. Moreover, it looks like the educational system also does not see it as a necessity. In the author's view, these findings indicate severe problems with the designation of goals and objectives of the educational process, aimed primarily at the mechanical following and routine execution of tasks prescribed by a curriculum, and not allowing for any creativity or independent thinking. In turn, this indicates a possible lag of the Thai education system from advanced educational practices that are increasingly used and implemented in the world.

This study was not intended to produce a recipe for fixing the problems accumulated in the education system but to explore the state of things. Therefore, in this section, the researcher confined only to what was suggested by findings. Mainly, it would be more meaningful selection of applicants to universities; development of proper counseling services aimed at improving student awareness of what is available and how to use it; refocusing educational programs on the 'real' and meaningful activities; development of the supporting system for student initiatives with the involvement of all concerning parties.

That fact that despite one of the largest in the world budgets Thai educational system could not get any better and since 2003 Thai student learning proficiency on the world scale is rather low (UNESCO, 2018) indicates that the system has a protracted problem. Either it cannot or does not want to improve. In this regard, in the researcher's view, it would be

beneficial broader involvement into the educational processes of external, independent from the system players such as NGOs as it already done in some countries of the region. In particular, the author suggests establishing of an inter-institutional Student Initiative Support Center, that could support student initiatives all around Thailand and regardless of specific goals pursued by participated institutions.

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