

Partnering with Private Enterprise: Model for Thailand's Basic Education

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Abstract

The aims of this study are: 1) to examine characteristics and limitations of partnership between private enterprise and basic education institutions in preparing students for a quality workforce 2) to analyze needs and develop guidelines for fruitful synergistic partnerships between private enterprise and basic education institutions in preparing students for a quality workforce 3) to construct a model for synergistic partnerships between private enterprise and basic education institutions in developing a quality workforce. A mixed-research method was employed to gather data from private enterprise, education policy makers, school administrators, teachers, and school-board members. A Tri-Action Synergistic Partnership model was developed to include three levels of partnership for workforce development; national level, regional level, and school/community level.

Keywords – Synergy, Partnership, Basic Education, Private Enterprise, Workforce

Introduction

It is generally believed that education is a key mechanism for economic prosperity (Hanushek and Woßmann, 2008; IIASA, 2008). The contribution of education to economic development, regardless of its level, is through inculcating general attitudes and developing specific skills necessary for a variety of occupations. Although there are various contributions of education to economic growth, the contributions are generally measured in terms of efficiency or labor productivity. However, the link between education and labor productivity is not entirely clear (Hanushek and Woßmann, 2008). Schools are assumed to equip general knowledge and learning skills for flexible workers capable of acquiring new skills and adapting to new working environment

As the economy continues to develop, there is an increasing demand for skilled and sophisticated labor. Many countries with export-led economies have shifted their attention to



International Journal
of Synergy and Research
Vol. 1, No. 1, 2012
p. 107–116

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skill-specific education. In addition, knowledge-intensive aspects of employment have placed more emphasis on education levels and credentials. Vocational education and higher learning are prime focuses for preparing skilled and sophisticated people. With the pyramidal structure of workplaces in an industrial society, the economic function of education is also placed in the pyramidal structure of the society. Cheng (2009) emphasizes the pyramidal structure in workplaces by stating that “education systems were designed in a manner that ranked people according to their levels of knowledge and skills, and labeled people with different occupational identities.” According to Please change the highlighted part to Cheng, workers with a basic education are placed at the bottom as operative manpower of an industrial society. The quality of an education system, therefore, lies in its ability to produce quality human resources with more specific competencies that are relevant to the structure of the labor market. More skilled people with high levels of education are required at the top of the pyramid to improve a nation’s economic competitiveness, but basic-skill learning at the bottom of the pyramid is also important.

Quality basic education is essential not only for economic growth and social stability but also for the functioning of a stable and equitable community of nations. In 1990, the World Conference on Education for All held in Jomtien, Thailand, urged all nations to adopt policies that would ensure universal basic education and promote partnership from all sectors to partake in this endeavor (UNESCO, 2000). Thailand’s National Education Act 1999 clearly affirms its commitment to provide quality universal education and encourage public and private collaboration in providing quality basic education for all children (ONEC, 1999).

Providing quality universal education requires a huge investment in education. In this paper, we focus on quality of education as measured by its ability to produce human capital. Government resources and schooling alone are not sufficient to provide the education required for the quality workforce that is essential in the industrial and knowledge-based economy of the 21st century. It is doubtful that the youth of today are prepared for the world of tomorrow, particularly if there are mismatches between job, knowledge and societal needs (Jones & Buasuwan, 2011). In this paper, we suggest that synergistic partnership between educational institutions and private enterprise can help to overcome the current limitations of education for developing a quality workforce.

Basic Education and Career Development

One of the roles of basic education has been to give children the basic skills required for present and future life. These skills include basic literacy as well as moral and ethical attitudes that are required in a modern society. Schools are expected to introduce young people to the types of skill sought by the labor market. Only the exploration of learning by doing and accumulative experiences can give students a broader perspective about their future career prospects.

The Consortium for Entrepreneurship Education has stated that basic education must prepare students for career readiness, which is often defined as “including not only the academic skills necessary for postsecondary education, but also the ability to apply those skills in real-world environments, general employability skills like time-management, and more job-or industry-specific technical skills and knowledge”. The Global Education Initiative of the World Economic Forum published a report in 2009 calling for *The Next*

Wave of Entrepreneurs by infusing entrepreneurship into curriculum as a lifelong learning process. Exposing students to core entrepreneurial concepts and preparing them with an entrepreneurial mindset will allow them to make appropriate decisions that will advance them and the economy (Consortium for Entrepreneurship Education, 2010).

Career guidance at schools and universities is designed to help young people make informed choices about their future educational opportunities and employment prospects. A challenge to career guidance services in the context of lifelong learning is to provide services that help people develop their career skills and make employment choices throughout their working life. In many countries, career education is emphasized in secondary education. In some countries it is taught as a separate subject, while in others it is integrated into other subjects (OECD, 2003). For example, the state of Queensland in Australia has emphasized the importance of career education by introducing policy positions for career guidance teachers across the early, middle and senior school years (Preparatory-Year 12). It defines career education as the “development of knowledge, skills and attitudes through a planned program of learning experiences in education, training and work settings which will assist students to make informed decisions about their life, study and/or work options and enable them to participate effectively in working life” (Education Queensland, www.education.qld.gov.au)

For many years career education has been dominated by a competency-based approach in which skills are “checked off” when accomplished (Finch & Crunkilton, 1999). Recently this dominance has been challenged by constructivism pedagogy, which believes that learning should take place in an authentic and real world environment, and that content and skills should be understood within a learner’s prior knowledge (Dolittle & Camp, 2009). As young people move through the phases of learning, their career awareness increases. Therefore, career education must assist these young people to make informed decisions about life (Education Queensland, www.education.qld.gov.au). Further, career and vocational education should be based on real-life experience, because through real-life working experience students can develop character and life skills as well as their career perspectives.

Synergistic Partnership

The education sector and the employment sector are very much like two sides of a coin. The education sector is expected to prepare a quality workforce, whereas the employment sector is the main user of the workforce. Despite their close linkages, there is often only a weak partnership between the two. Large corporations and government departments tend to finance their own training. However, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which often account for a significant share of employment, are less likely to invest in workforce training due to their fear of losing these workers and their inability to pay for highly-trained workers (Tendler, 2002). Private and public sector enterprises of all sizes can play an active role in developing the skills of their workforce by partnering with basic education institutions to lay down strong foundations for the whole spectrum of a nation’s human capital.

The terms “synergy” “partnership” and “collaboration” are interconnected. Rickett (2002) explains that, although participation and collaboration are essential elements of

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partnership, a successful partnership also requires sharing complementary strengths and resources based on mutual needs to reach their mutual goal. Curley (1998) defines synergy as “an evolving phenomenon that occurs when individuals work together in mutually enhancing ways toward a common goal.” Several countries, for example, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore, have tried to develop partnership between the education and employment sectors for workforce development. However, they have gained little success (Kim, 2004; Ng and Khong, 2005; Pang, 2004). In this paper, we will discuss possibilities for synergistic partnership, which we will define as “the collaboration of basic education institutions and private and public sector employers in preparing secondary school students for the workforce by sharing their complementary strengths and resources.”

Corporate Social Responsibility in Education

In many countries today, business organizations, regardless of their size or activities, are being called to practice “social responsibility” or “corporate citizenship” which holds them accountable for societal welfare. Petkoski and Twose (2003) define “Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)” as “the commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development by working with employees, their families, the local community and society at large to improve quality of life in ways that are good for business and for development.”

The notion of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) also has implications for education because it requires private enterprise to take responsibility in developing human capital (Triwadiantini, 2011). CSR, therefore, can be used as a strategy for building a synergistic partnership between private enterprise and basic education institutions in training the workforce. In the past, CSR activity by the employment sector in education has been primarily directed to financial support for infrastructure and learning resources. Further, if companies do provide training then it is usually restricted to areas that are close to their business activities and their CSR activities are relatively short-term (Tsukamoto & Twose, 2003). At the present time, unique competencies of the corporate sector, for example, in project management and marketing, are often not used in the training of a quality workforce.

Purposes of the Research

1. To examine characteristics and limitations of partnership between private enterprise and basic education institutions in preparing students for a quality workforce
2. To analyze needs and develop guidelines for fruitful synergistic partnerships between private enterprise and basic education institutions in preparing students for a quality workforce
3. To construct a model for synergistic partnerships between private enterprise and basic education institutions in developing a quality workforce.

Design/methodology/approach

This research employed a mixed-method research with following details of activities

Objectives	Methods	Target	Instrument	Analysis
1. To examine characteristics and limitations of partnership between private enterprise and basic education institutions in preparing students for a quality workforce 2. To analyze needs and develop guidelines for fruitful synergistic partnerships between private enterprise and basic education institutions in preparing students for a quality workforce.	1. In-depth interview with eighteen respondents	1. Educational Service Area Administrators 2. Policy makers of Basic Education Commission 3. School Administrators 4. School board members 5. Private enterprise managers and workers	Interview guide	Content analysis
	2. Surveys by employing cluster random sampling and stratified random sampling with a sampling size of 1500 and with 944 sets of returned questionnaires	1. School Administrators 2. Teachers 3. School board members 4. Educational Service Area Administrators 5. Private enterprise	Questionnaire	Percentage, frequency, Content analysis
3. To construct a model for synergistic partnerships between private enterprise and basic education institutions in developing a quality workforce.	3. Construct a draft model based on the findings obtained from the first phase 4. Verify the model by 5 experts via interview and 60 stakeholders via an evaluation form 5. The final draft was adjusted according to the feedbacks received	1. Experts in education, CSR, and private enterprises 2. Stakeholders comprising school administrators, teachers, school board members, and enterprises	Drafted model, Interview guide, Evaluation form	Frequency, Percentage Content analysis

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Findings

Characteristics of partnership: More than eighty percent of government schools in Thailand had received support from private enterprises, mostly in the forms of financial support, training opportunity for students, and experts. Collaboration for long term workforce planning and development between private enterprises and basic education institutions did not exist at any level of administration. Policy makers and educational service area administrators revealed that there were representatives of private enterprises on national basic education committee and also on regional basic educational area committees. However, this partnership was usually on an ad hoc basis for particular projects and there was no formal relationship between private enterprises and basic education institutions for long-term workforce planning and development.

Limitations of partnership: Although most schools in major cities were able to obtain financial support and resources from private enterprises, schools in other areas found it difficult to obtain such support. Furthermore, schools in all areas, and especially outside the major cities, found it difficult to arrange collaboration in areas of knowledge and expertise, training and working opportunities. Thirty percent of Thai government schools revealed that they had difficulties in obtaining support from private enterprises. This appeared to be largely due to the lack of coordination from local basic educational service offices and a lack of understanding by school staff on the methods for obtaining support from private enterprises. Small schools in provincial areas stated that many of their students were from low-income families and that these students required part-time jobs to earn extra income. However, these schools lacked information on part-time job opportunities available in the private sector. A major reason for the private sector restricting their assistance to schools to financial support appeared to be that government tax incentives were restricted to financial donations.

Desirable characteristics of students for the workforce: School sectors and private enterprises shared similar views on desirable characteristics of students. Over ninety percent of both sectors gave a high ranking to student character than to academic ability. The characteristics that were most valued were responsibility, hard-work, honesty, and perseverance. However, the school and private enterprise sectors had slightly different views on student ability. While schools focused on literacy, computer skills, and English proficiency, the private enterprises, especially in the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector gave more attention to motorcycle riding, literacy, English, and general vocational skills, for example, carpentry, tailoring, and electronics. Ninety-eight percent of private enterprises stated that approximately twenty percent of their workforce did not require specific skills. Therefore, they insisted that general skills and good character were more important in the workforce that they employed.

Needs for partnership: Most basic education institutions and private enterprises agreed that partnership between the two in preparing students for the workforce should be established. In Thailand, approximately forty percent of students who completed compulsory education (grade 9) did not continue to higher levels (ONEC, 2009). These students usually had very limited job opportunities, especially if they had had no previous work experience. Partnership projects between schools and private enterprises that gave these students work experience while at school would be of benefit to them when they joined the workforce.

Students who continued to further education after grade 9 could also benefit from part-time work experience while at school because this would broaden their perspective of suitable work for them and give them knowledge of character traits required by employers.

As stated above, a large percentage of SME required employees with general skills. Some of the SME respondents stated that most students who had obtained educational qualifications did not want to work in SME's. These students often looked for employment in larger enterprises and this meant that SME's had difficulty meeting their workforce requirements.

The questionnaire responses from schools revealed that appropriately-planned partnership with private enterprises would better prepare students for their future careers.

Student character, in areas such as time management, perseverance, and work ethics would be developed through real-life working experience. However, the schools and private sector held slightly different views on areas for partnership. While schools requested partnership in the order of preference of developing learning sites, working opportunities, and financial resources, private enterprises offered support in order of preference of financial resources, learning materials, working opportunities, and learning sites.

Guidelines for partnership: Both basic education institutions and private enterprises agreed that development of a fruitful partnership required agreement on common goals and that a clear policy for implementation should be developed. This agreement should be in line with national policy on education and workforce preparation. The needs for formation of work group and communication channels were highlighted. Partnership should be established based on contextual needs, equity consideration, and combined strengths. Area-based planning was highly recommended for workforce planning and development. A work-based approach, entrepreneurship, and character building were emphasized as required for long-term planning for career education. Corporate Social Responsibility was suggested as a strategy to encourage private enterprises of all sizes and activities to partake in the partnership process. The characteristics of partnership and level of involvement would depend on the nature, size, and readiness of the business. Big corporations with extensive financial resources and expertise could provide technical knowledge and expertise, learning resources, and skills training for educators and students. Small and medium size businesses in the community would be able to provide work opportunity for students to apply knowledge and skills to real-life settings in their local communities.

Synergistic Partnership: Tri-Action Model

The Tri-Action Synergistic Partnership Model was developed based on the idea of achieving common goals by combining strengths to overcome limitations. The goals of partnership in basic education are to develop students with general working skills and characters that enable them to be part of a future quality workforce that can serve both their own and the community's needs. Students should also be able to explore their future career choices through real-life working experiences.

The model is designed in three complementary levels; national, regional, and school levels with partnership with private enterprises at each level.

1. National Policy level : Private enterprises and government agencies delineate policy, regulation, and implementation; categorize enterprises into groups based on their size, strengths, nature of activities, and proposals for partnership; establish national committee, including all stakeholders, for partnership in workforce planning and development, and communication channels; endorse policy and regulations; provide incentive, and monitor work processes and give recognition to and disseminate good practices of partnership for workforce development
2. Regional Education Service Areas: regional or provincial offices, provincial industry council, and education service areas apply national partnership framework and area-based partnership as guidelines for regional workforce planning and development; establish regional committee to accommodate enterprises and schools for partnership;

develop school and enterprise database, needs for workforce, proposition for partnership; inform schools about possible employment opportunities for students; accommodate or arrange activities for school and private enterprises to establish partnerships.

3. School/community enterprise: schools and enterprises in the communities identify their needs for workforce development and propositions for partnership; provide information to regional or educational service areas, and request for assistance or accommodation for building partnerships.

Areas for partnership

1. Academic: Private enterprises and educational institutions can together develop competency framework, co-operative curriculum, training modules, or expertise (Prompilai, 2011).
2. Finance and resources: Support for teaching or management staff, learning materials, infrastructure, share resources, contract school facilities for private uses, co-business development (Patrinos, Osorio, & Guaqueta, 2009).
3. Management: School-board members, work-group, human-resource management.
4. Student employment: Part-time employment, vacation employment, after graduation employment.

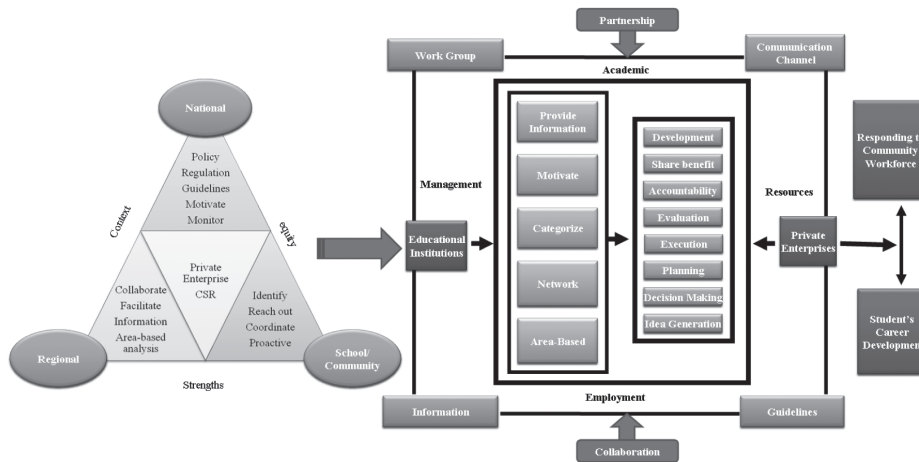
Originality/Value

The National Education Act 1999 urges all sectors to participate in national education development. Although there are representatives of private sectors in national basic education committee and educational service area committees, synergistic partnerships between private enterprises and basic education institutions have not been developed. This research has developed a Tri-Action Synergistic Partnership Model for Thai Basic Education which can be used to bridge the partnership gap between the two sectors for quality workforce development in Thailand.

Conclusion

In a developing economy like Thailand where both new technologies applied to production and traditional agriculture and commerce coexist, various types of labor are needed. While highly-skilled and sophisticated labor with qualifications is required for economic competitiveness, basic skills are still needed for the agricultural sectors and local community commerce. Basic education is required to lay down strong foundations for general work skills and character building, and to broaden career outlook of students. Government resources and schooling alone are not sufficient to provide quality education for all that is required in the industrial and knowledge-based economy of the 21st century. Synergistic partnership between educational institutions and private enterprises can help to overcome these limitations and by combining strengths with mutual understanding, the common goals of a quality workforce should be achievable.

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Tri-Action Synergistic Partnership Model

Suggestions for Future Research

1. Research on implementation guidelines of the model
2. Research on the development of co-operative curriculum between basic education and private enterprises
3. Research on area-based workforce analysis and partnerships

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