

e- University: Bridging the Equality and Opportunity in Education for All

Wanida Sujjapunroj
Ramkhamhaeng Univesity, Thailand
Waanida5555@hotmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the practices of Ramkhamhaeng University (RU) towards e-University. Based on the principle of “equality and opportunity” in education for all. And also provides opportunities for Thais residing overseas, having been in 33 countries worldwide. RU has developed teaching and learning systems; both on-campus and distance learning, using radio; televisions; mail, internet, e-learning, e-Testing, e-Books, Mobile Phone application and Mobile University (IT coach) driving along with a satellite truck, servicing both students and the public. Since 1971 it has produced nearly 900,000 graduates in all, which has assured its status as an “academic marketplace” with admission open to all .As technology in education has been providing opportunity to remote-areas student nationwide, e-University option is becoming increasingly popular at various universities.

Key words: e-University; equality and opportunity, education for all.

Ramkhamhaeng University Background

Ramkhamhaeng University (RU), the country’s largest public university, was established in 1971 following a crisis in the quest for higher education. It was named after King Ramkhamhaeng, the great, Thailand’s first monarch who has greatly contributed to the kingdom, renowned for inventing the Thai alphabet. Based on the principle of “equality of opportunity” to all regarding higher education, Ramkhamhaeng University provides teaching and learning system both on-campus and via distance learning.



The launch of distance learning via satellite (using a two-way video-conferencing system) for the regional campuses, for both undergraduate and graduate levels at Ramkhamhaeng University, has been a great success. One of the university's objectives is to produce graduates with the requisite knowledge, skill and moral values. One with a global requisite for academic excellence, which has assured its status as an "academic marketplace" with admission open to all.

The university teaches a wide number of subjects in the social sciences and humanities and also offers courses in all the major branches of science as well, including engineering and health science, and provides international programs, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. This is a goal that Ramkhamhaeng University is continually striving to achieve without compromising academic in any way.

At present, Ramkhamhaeng University offers Bachelor's Degree Programs, Master's Degree Programs, PhD. Programs, International Programs and Pre-degree Programs in 11 Faculties and the Graduate School. In addition, the university also provides a wide range of excellent academic and administrative support facilities, total of 20 Institutes/Offices/Centers.

Provides equality of opportunity in education for all



The main campus of Ramkhamhaeng University was established in 1971 on an area of land covering approximately 120 acres, located on Ramkhamhaeng Road at Hua Mark in an eastern suburb of Bangkok Thailand.

Ramkhamhaeng University Bang Na Campus was established in 1984 on donated land covering approximately 60 acres, located on the Bang Na-Trad Highway, about 25 kilometres from the main campus of Ramkhamhaeng University at Hua Mark. Classes for freshmen are conducted at this campus, as well as for graduate students studying in certain fields, while classes for students from the second year onwards are held on the main campus. The facilities there are on par with those available at the main campus.

Ramkhamhaeng University Regional Campus in Honor of His Majesty the King is to mark the occasion of the 50th Anniversary Celebrations of H.M. the King's Accession to the Throne and 60th Anniversary celebrations of H.M. the King's Accession to the Throne. Given its long-standing commitment to providing equal opportunity in the field of education for all Thais, especially, those who have long lacked such opportunities, since 1995, guided by the vision of the Former President, Associate Professor Rangsan Saegsook.

At present there are 22 regional campuses, all of which function as part of the Ramkhamhaeng University System. All campuses, serving as both academic and cultural centers, not only provide regional and local access to academics on campuses, but also strengthen closer ties with the surrounding community through a variety of cultural activities.

All regions of Thailand, as well as 37 regional examination centers, the university provides various Special Programs at the Bachelor's and Masters Degree levels, as well as short-courses, in 44 province, as well as in Bangkok; Ramkhamhaeng University's Special Programs are well-known and constituted a role model for supporting lifelong learning for all. The overall aim is to make a wide variety of academic services available to the community and to society at large, and to foster the development of human resource, both in the public and private sectors.

The Institute of International Studies (IIS) offers various English and Chinese programs. All courses are taught by experienced visiting Professors and lecturers from leading universities overseas, who take turns to come and lecture at the IIS. Currently, about 2,200 students have enrolled, consisting of both Thais (35%) and overseas students (65%) from 74 countries worldwide. (<http://www.iis.ru.ac.th>, 14 February, 2012)

Overseas Academic Services



(RU: Thailand's Global University, 2012, p.1)

The university also provides opportunities for Thais residing overseas, having been in the process of expanding Ramkhamhaeng University worldwide since 2003; as a result, the university provides undergraduate and graduate programs of study for Thais in 33 countries worldwide, having 40 examination centers in those countries.

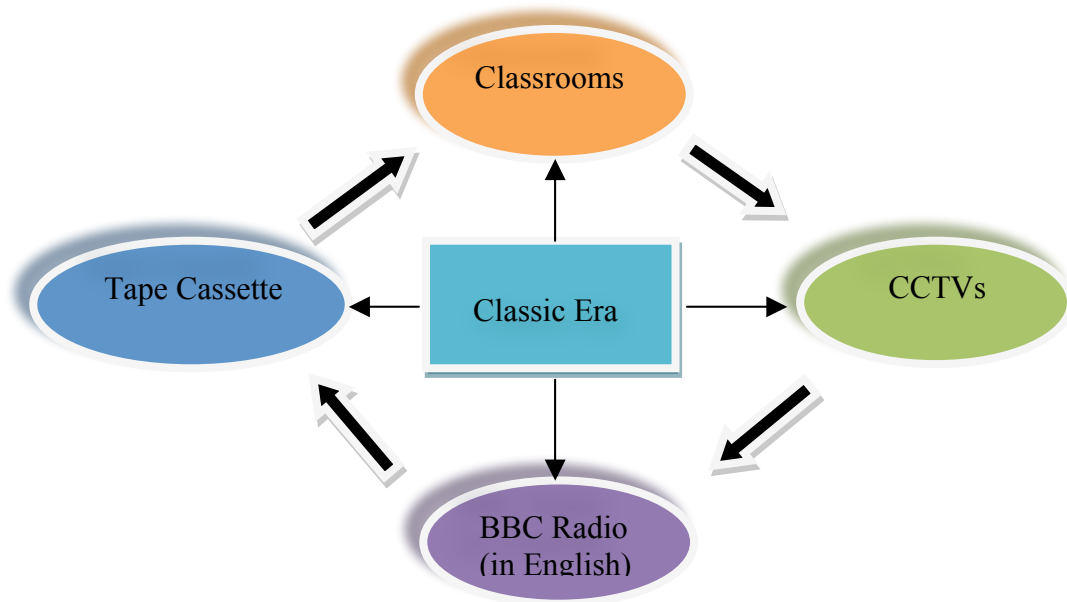
Total of 40 Overseas Examination Centers:

Canada: Ottawa, Vancouver, USA: Washington DC, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Belgium: Brussels, France: Paris, Germany: Berlin, Frankfurt, Iceland: Reykjavik, Italy: Rome, Netherlands: The Hague, Poland: Warsaw, Spain: Madrid, Switzerland: Berne, The Republic of Austria: Vienna, United Kingdom: London, Denmark: Copenhagen, Finland: Helsinki, Norway: Oslo, Sweden: Stockholm, Kingdom of Bahrain: Manama, Oman: Muscat, State of Qatar: Doha, The United Arab Emirates: Dubai, Australia: Canberra, Sydney, New Zealand: Wellington, Cambodia: Phnom Penh, India: New Delhi, Japan: Tokyo, Osaka, Malaysia: Kuala Lumpur, People's Republic of China: Beijing, Guang Zhou, Xiamen, Republic of Korea: Seoul, Singapore, Vietnam: Ho Chi Min, etc. (<http://www.ru.ac.th/oasc>)

Teaching and Learning Systems

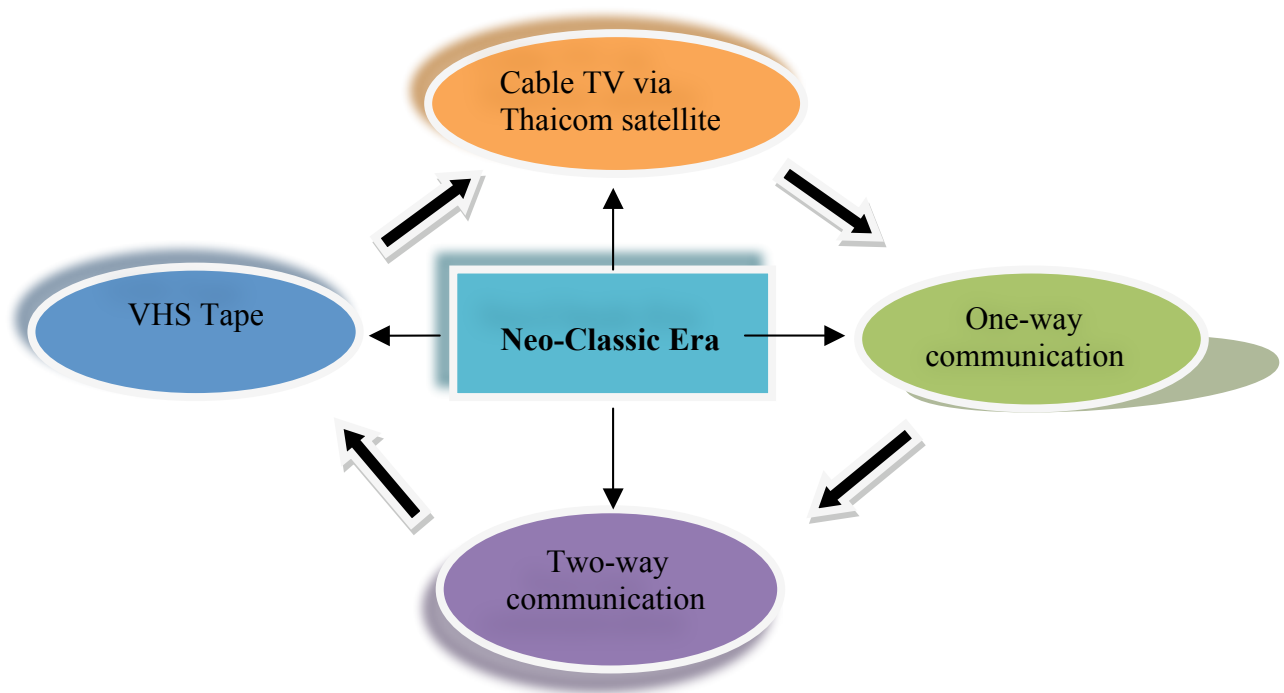
Ramkhamhaeng University has for a long time offered its students two systems of instruction, in the form of both on-campus and distance learning, a field in which it has had extensive experience – long before it became fashionable among the educational community. Various modes of instruction have been adopted at Ramkhamhaeng University; the main system of instruction being a combination of on-campus instruction and distance learning via satellite, internet, mail, radio, television, e-Learning, e-Books, Mobile Phone and other forms of modern information technology. Students may choose the mode of instruction that best suits their individual needs.

To more effectively illustrate how teaching and learning have evolved under the umbrella of Ramkhamhaeng, here are different sets of models to describe different eras and their respective academic practices;



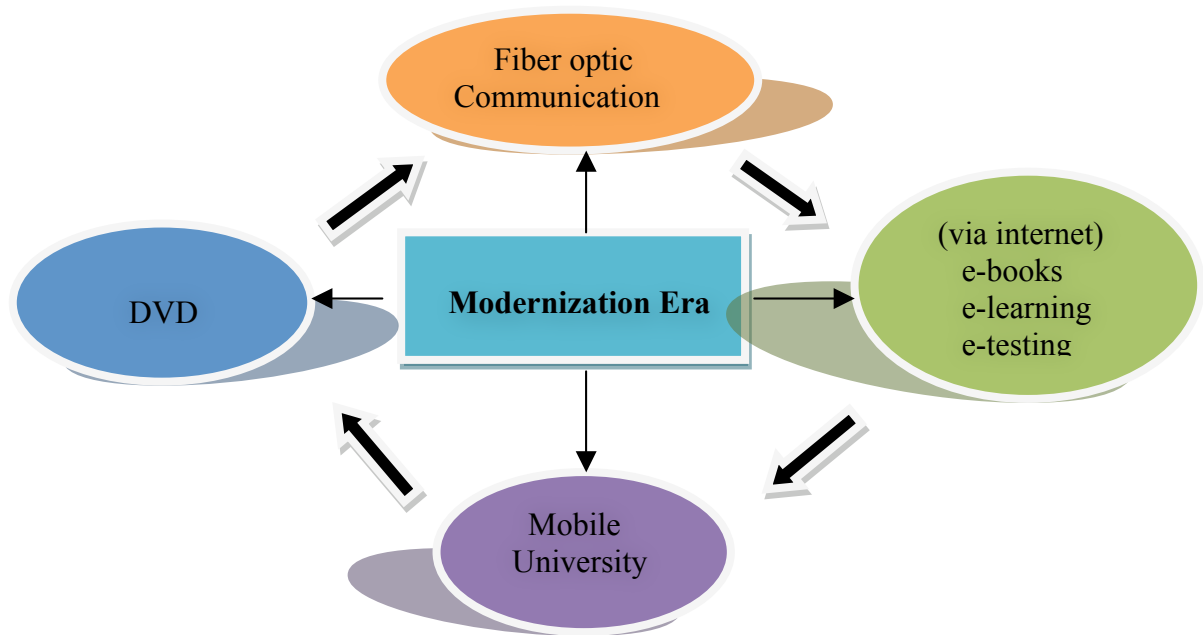
Back in time, Thailand's educational system was straightforward just like a diagram shown above. There were on-campus classrooms; and some universities with large number of students often had to employ the use of CCTVs (Close Circuit Television) to accommodate everyone sitting in such large-sized room, which sometimes fits up to 1000 people. The students who couldn't make it to the classrooms had an option to turn on a radio to listen in real-time and were then able to keep up with other classmates. There was also a tape cassette option which was used to record materials in audio format made available for people to borrow and catch up on what they had missed in class. Clear advantages of the "Classic Era" model were; 1. it was cheap and affordable to everyone. One credit hour in college cost only 18 Baht (50 cents), 2. Even poor students could borrow a tape cassette and always could stay informed of what went on in class, 3. It worked well with such large classes. The disadvantages were also very obvious; 1. The students had to be on time to be able to follow the materials being taught on CCTVs or Live Radio, 2. In bad weather, radio couldn't transmit clear and understandable quality of sound, and 3. There wasn't a two-way communication between teachers and students.

As time passed, Ramkhamhaeng University focused on the use of more advanced technologies to improve its teaching and learning experience; and that can be illustrated in the "Neo-Classic era" diagram shown below;



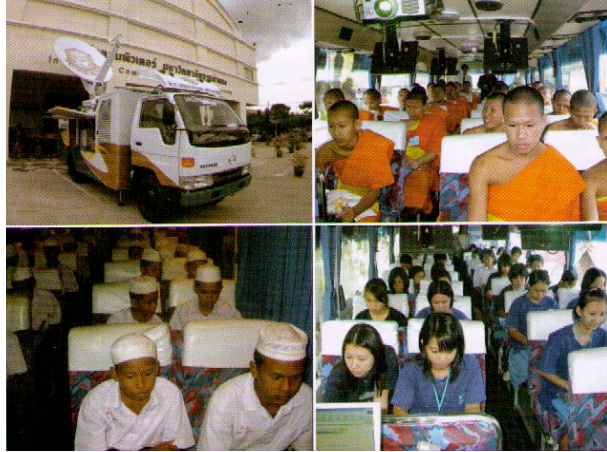
Looking at this model, we see that instructors taught in class while being broadcasted to a few other classrooms in other provinces. With the help of Thaicom satellite, there effectively were some form of two-way communication between instructors and students in remote areas. The lessons taught this time could be recorded by Video Home System (VHS), and provided another level of comfort for students who were now able to see and listened to what they had missed in class. Problems remained that when weather wasn't so great, satellite signal transmission didn't work so well resulting in unclear images and delay in audio output for up to 3-5 seconds, creating difficulty in the learning process.

Realizing the problems and with more exposure to and thorough understanding of technology, we took another step towards quality learning; E-university. Shown below indicates a more sophisticated and advanced form of learning offered by Ramkhamhaeng university, and it's being categorized as "Modernization era".



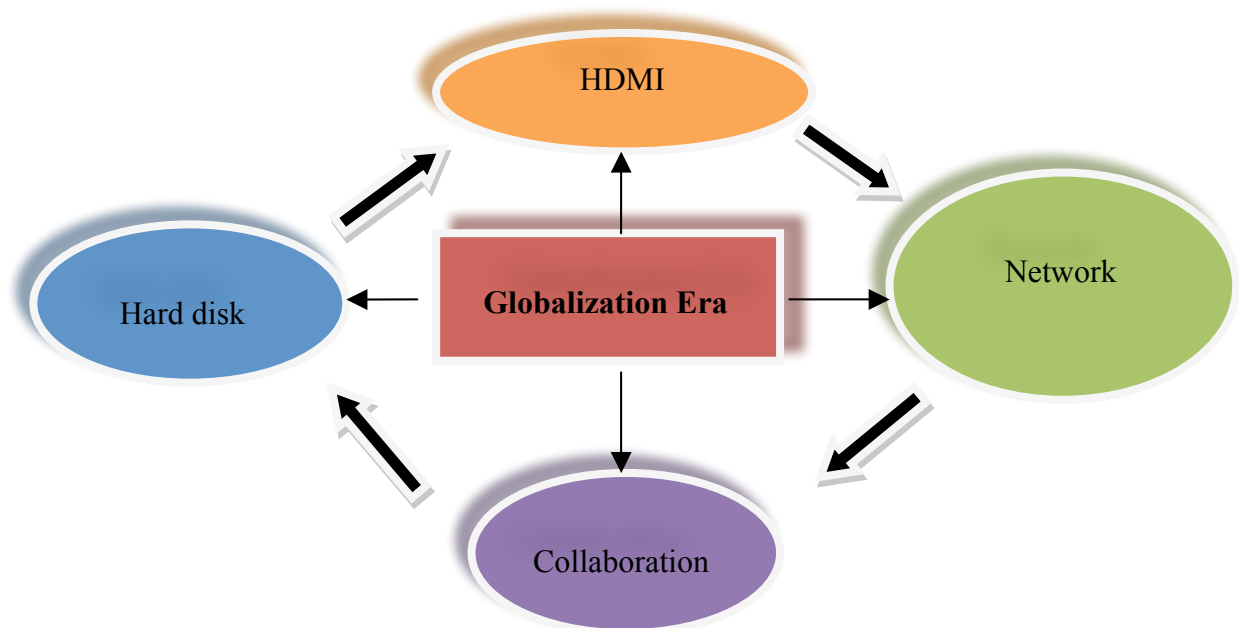
The “Modernization era” is something every one of us can relate to in today’s world. With fiber optic communication which can be considered reliable and very stable, coupled with internet system; students can practically get information from anywhere they are. Concepts of e-books, e-learning, e-testing thus emerged. The world has been made so much smaller by the power of the internet. Real-time broadcasting is now possible, people are now able to participate in any online sessions as well as being able to raise questions and have them answered immediately. DVD, a new form of media storage device, was introduced. Ramkhamhaeng University then went outside the box and achieved another solid milestone by creating “mobile university”. With its clear objective to be able to reach out to people in the suburban/rural areas of Thailand who wish to receive quality education, a luxury coach is equipped with satellite signal receiving capabilities, 39 computers fully loaded with knowledge, and driven all over the country to give needy people a chance to learn. In return, we effectively started a program KM (Knowledge Management). KM offers rural people a chance to learn from our Mobile University service as well as giving them an opportunity to share their local wisdom, know-how about certain things they maybe accustomed to. This ultimately opens up a platform for interactions between rural

people, academics, and students; which also promotes understanding among different groups of people, learning from each other, and mutual benefits for all.



Since 2002, the “Mobile University” has succeeded in reaching out to nearly 70 provinces throughout the length and breadth of the country, with a total of more than 90,000 learners joining the project.

Ramkhamhaeng University is well versed and determined to stay ahead when it comes to distributing knowledge to where the need may be, therefore another bold step was taken to put us right where we should be, “Globalization era”.



In the Globalization era, state-of-the-art technology is utilized to maximize the gain for both teachers and students. HDMI, (High Definition Multimedia Interface) connector produces clear digital audio, video, and data display; and in addition, it costs less than Fiber optics. With this model, everything is interconnected in a “network”. Systems from various universities all over the world are integrated into one network. Information is no longer needed to be put on a cassette, VHS, or a DVD, but instead will be stored and readily available on the main server’s hard disk. Students and teachers from anywhere can upload and download class materials as well as any information they wish at any time they’d like. With this setup, easy and effective collaboration between people here in Thailand and those from overseas will result in the most comprehensive way for interaction between people worldwide, true understanding of the world situation, the most effective platform for information exchange, and last but not least equality of opportunity to quality education for all.

Conclusion

Since 1971, Ramkhamhaeng University has employed all the strategies to achieve the founded mission of the University in providing the education for all. Starting from the Classic Era, in order to fit the large size classroom and the available technology during the time period, CCTVs and audio cassette are used. Following with the Neo Classic Era, the VHS tape and satellite broadcasting network are used to expand the covering area of learning and educational opportunity to remote area students. In the Modernization Era, Ramkhamhaeng University has employed the education program along with the modern information technology to set place in the modern world with the e-learning, e-testing, and mobile learning program. At last, Ramkhamhaeng University in the Globalization Era has improving the learning content along with the growth and fast changing of modern day technology, committed to the first and found mission of the university, providing the equal educational opportunity for all.

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