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Development of a dissertation quality value-added model for humanities and social sciences programs for private higher education institutions in Thailand

Thanyasinee Laosum ^a, Sirichai Kanjanawasee ^{a,*}, Taweewat Pitayanon ^b

^a Department of Educational Research and Psychology, Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok 10330, Thailand

^b Graduate School, Eastern Asia University, PathumThani 12110, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this study were: (1) to evaluate the quality of dissertations in the humanities and social sciences of private higher education institutions, (2) to analyze factors affecting the quality at the student, advisor, and institute levels, and (3) to develop a quality, value-added model of the dissertations. Samples consisted of: (1) 750 student dissertations in the humanities and social sciences and (2) 753 questionnaire responses consisting of 633 students, 108 dissertation advisors, and 12 senior administrators in the participating institutions. A 5-point rating dissertation evaluation scale was developed for use by the researcher and her assistants. Three sets of a dissertation attribution questionnaire used by the students, advisors, and senior administrators were also developed and administered. Descriptive statistics were used with the 5-point rating data. The 3-level HLM package was used to analyze the quality, value-added model of the dissertations. The findings of the study were: (1) the overall quality of the 750 dissertations was at the standard level; (2) there were 5 factors at 3 different levels influencing the dissertation quality with 1 student factor (favorable characteristics in conducting research), 3 advisor factors (experience in research, up-to-date knowledge in research, and the advisor-student ratio), 1 institutional factor (close monitoring and management system); and (3) the quality value-added model was able to predict the variance of the dissertation quality at 36 percent.

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Introduction

In recent statistics published by the [Office of the Higher Education Commission \(2015\)](#), 33 out of the 43 Thai private universities (77%) offered doctoral degree programs. Out of the 33 programs, 26 programs (79%) were in the social sciences and humanities. With this expansion, [Office of the](#)

[Education Council \(2011\)](#) found that the number of doctoral graduates during 2008–2010 has increased tremendously. In 2008, 2009, and 2010 the graduate figures were 1,641, 1,798, and 1,864, respectively. [Tatayakavee \(2014\)](#), the Secretary-General of OHEC, found that a number of private universities offered low quality doctorate programs. It is very likely that the number of these low quality programs will increase.

A dissertation is part of the requirement of the doctorate program. The dissertation process makes the students learn

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: sirichai.k@chula.ac.th (S. Kanjanawasee).

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how to learn and to search. The quality of the dissertation therefore, reflects how much effort the student has invested in the program as well as how much society can benefit from the higher education doctoral program. Hamilton, Johnson, and Poudrier (2010) found that in conducting a dissertation, students would have opportunities to search for new knowledge and that they needed to have analytical, problem solving, and ICT skills. Zhai, Song, Dai, Zhao, and Zhang (2012) did not see study directly relating to the examination of the dissertation quality. However, there has been study relating to the examination of the thesis quality. Office of the Education Council (2009) studied the quality of Thai research in education during 1999–2007 and found that 25.0 percent, 41.7 percent, 30.0 percent, and 3.3 percent were at the “very good,” “good,” “average,” and “need improvement” levels, respectively. Bray and Belcher (1987) claimed that value-added assessment, which has been popularly used in other fields besides education, was a powerful tool that could help a higher education institute to determine its strengths and weaknesses. With valid, reliable, and sufficient data, this simple tool can easily gain cooperation and support from administrators, faculty members, and students and thus help the institute to identify its dissertation quality's strengths and weaknesses. Bray and Belcher, therefore, recommended the value-added model. Similarly, OECD (2008) found that the value-added model was an education innovation that could help improve the quality and efficiency of education.

With the above mentioned situation and the need for improvement in the quality of education, the researcher sees the importance of and the need for a thorough investigation into this issue. The findings of the study should be beneficial for dissertation advisors, university administrators, and educators who are responsible for the improvement of Thai education quality. Therefore, the objectives of the study were: (1) to evaluate the quality of dissertations of private higher education institutions in the field of humanities and social sciences, (2) to study student, advisor, and institutional factors that affect the quality of dissertations of private higher education institutions in the humanities and social sciences, and (3) to propose a value-added model for the improvement of dissertations of private higher education institutions in the humanities and social sciences.

Scope of the Study

1. The dissertations selected for this study were being carried out during 2007–2013 in four areas: (1) education, (2) political science/public administration/development administration/human resource development, (3) business administration/management, and (4) law.
2. The researcher employed a 3-level hierarchical linear model in determining the quality of the dissertations. The levels consisted of the student as the first level, the dissertation advisor as the second level, and the institution as the third level.
3. The researcher used the residual models of Goldstein (1997) and Fitz-Gibbon (1996), which are 3-level hierarchical linear models, in the study.

Materials and Methods

Samples

The study sample was divided into two groups: (1) 750 dissertations in the humanities and social sciences carried out between 2007 and 2013 at 12 private higher education institutions; and (2) the responses from a questionnaire by 633 doctoral graduates in the humanities and social sciences who graduated from those 12 private higher education institutions between 2007 and 2013, 108 student advisors in the humanities and social sciences of those 633 doctoral graduates, and 12 senior administrators of the 12 participating private higher education institutions. The latter sample was selected through multistage random sampling. A selection of the sample at each stage was carried out. Twelve private higher education institutions offering doctoral degree programs in the humanities and social sciences (46% of the total number) and 750 dissertations produced during 2007–2013 of the 12 institutions were randomly sampled. The 750 doctoral graduates in the humanities and social sciences who wrote those 750 dissertations, all advisors of the graduates, and 12 senior administrators for academic affairs were selected as questionnaire respondents.

Materials and Tools

Dissertation Quality Evaluation Forms

A 5-point rating scale for the evaluation of the dissertations was developed and used by the researcher and her assistants. The scale covered 30 questionnaire items such as title, objectives, literature, methodology, analysis, and findings. The rubric method was used in each scored item. The item objective congruence (IOC) values of the 30 items selected for the quality evaluation of the dissertation ranged between .71 and 1.00. The concurrent validity values of the 30 items ranged between .849 and .959. The inter-rater reliability values of the items ranged between .810 and .959, and the validity values of the items through the test-retest method ranged between .944 and .966.

Questionnaire Development

Three sets of questionnaire were developed: (1) the doctoral graduate questionnaire, (2) the advisor questionnaire, and (3) the senior administrator questionnaire. The doctoral graduate questionnaire was divided into four parts: (1) personal data, (2) research competency of the respondent, (3) internal motivation, and (4) further suggestions for higher quality of the dissertation. The IOC values of the questionnaire ranged between .71 and 1.00 and the reliability values of the items ranged between .806 and .929. The advisor questionnaire was divided into three parts: (1) personal data, (2) advisor knowledge and competency, and (3) further suggestions for higher quality of the dissertation. The IOC values of this questionnaire ranged between .57 and 1.00 and the reliability values of the items ranged between .874 and .953. The senior administrator questionnaire consisted of five parts: (1) personal data, (2) general information on the

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