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The Scenario of a Learning Society Model toward Promoting a Positive Paradigm Shift for Communities

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This study uses a prospective qualitative approach. The Ethnographic Delphi Futures Research (EDFR) technique is used to propose a learning society model. The data include a review of the peer-reviewed literature, a field study visit and observation of five best practices communities in Thailand, in-depth interviews to gain experts' perspectives, mini-Delphi techniques questionnaires, focus group discussions, and model evaluation. Qualitative data were transcribed and analyzed using content-analysis. Forty-two individuals (e.g., policy makers, practitioners from public and private agencies, educational personnel, and community leaders) were involved in the data collection effort. Results revealed essential elements for development of a learning society including components, principles, developmental processes, strategies, and key success factors to enhance a positive paradigm shift for communities. It is anticipated that the findings will (1) add meaningful information and practical guidelines for developing a learning society, (2) contribute to ensuring the quality of citizen participation and ensure balanced and sustainable development of communities and societies, as well as (3) serve as a basis for further research.

The Importance of the Research to the Practice of Adult, Continuing, Extension and Community Education

Today's world may be characterized as the dawn of the new millennium of the learning society, where knowledge is a society's most valuable asset, a country's primary source of power (Knight, 1995) and one which needs to be efficiently and effectively managed. A society thrives and survives on the foundation laid by its wealth of knowledge. Previous research (Sibmuenpiam, 2003; Sangsri, 2005; Knight, 1995; Malone & Yohe, 2002; Carrillo, 2002, 2004; Choi, 2003, Ergazakis et al., 2004; Lantz & Brage, 2006; Casey, 2006) clearly indicated that issues of knowledge play a major role in development of communities, cities, societies, and nations. As knowledge is gained through learning, the current development initiative is geared toward transforming the society into a learning society (Office of the Education Council, 2008) which is defined as one engaged in a sustainable development strategy that promotes the unending learning of individuals –the smallest unit of the society (Holden & Connelly, 2004).

The increasingly intense competition among the international community in all regards include the Constitution of the Royal Kingdom of Thailand 2007 (B.E. 2550), the Tenth National Economic and Social Development Plan 2007-2011 (B.E. 2550-2554), the National Education Act 1999 (B.E. 2542) and its amendment the National Education Act Amendment (Issue 2) 2002 (B.E. 2545), and the Non-Formal Education and Informal Education Act 2008 (B.E. 2551). All of these carry stipulations concerning lifelong learning, educational enhancement and global competitiveness with the aim of developing the society toward sustainable happiness. It also emphasizes the balance among all aspects: economy, society, natural resources and environment; and, transforming the Thai people into knowledge citizens and knowledge workers (Dulayakasem, 2005). This leads to an appropriate development of manpower and a learning society for sustainable development.

Therefore, it is the intention of the researcher to conduct an in-depth study of the learning society concept to develop a practical learning society model toward promoting a positive paradigm shift for communities. New knowledge will help reinforce positive

thinking, and action for individuals, communities and the society at large, thereby contributing to the potential of a society to become a learning society. The study aims to contribute to the shaping of the emerging field of learning societies: propose a feasible learning society model that promotes the positive paradigm shift for communities; raise local and global citizens awareness with respect to the transformation of communities, cities and regions into learning societies where knowledge is considered one of the most valued assets; promote lifelong learning in all sectors of the society; provide guidance for those who pursued lifelong learning environment and climate development; guide the establishment of learning society development strategies of the stakeholders from both public and private agencies and communities; benefit individuals interested; and, serve as a basis for conducting further research on the subject.

Research Objectives

1. to analyze and synthesize learning society concepts from both local and global literatures;
2. to explore the experts' perspectives on a learning society development and developmental strategies;
3. to develop the tentative and preliminary learning society model toward promoting a positive paradigm shift for communities; and,
4. to propose the learning society model toward promoting a positive paradigm shift for communities.

The Methodology

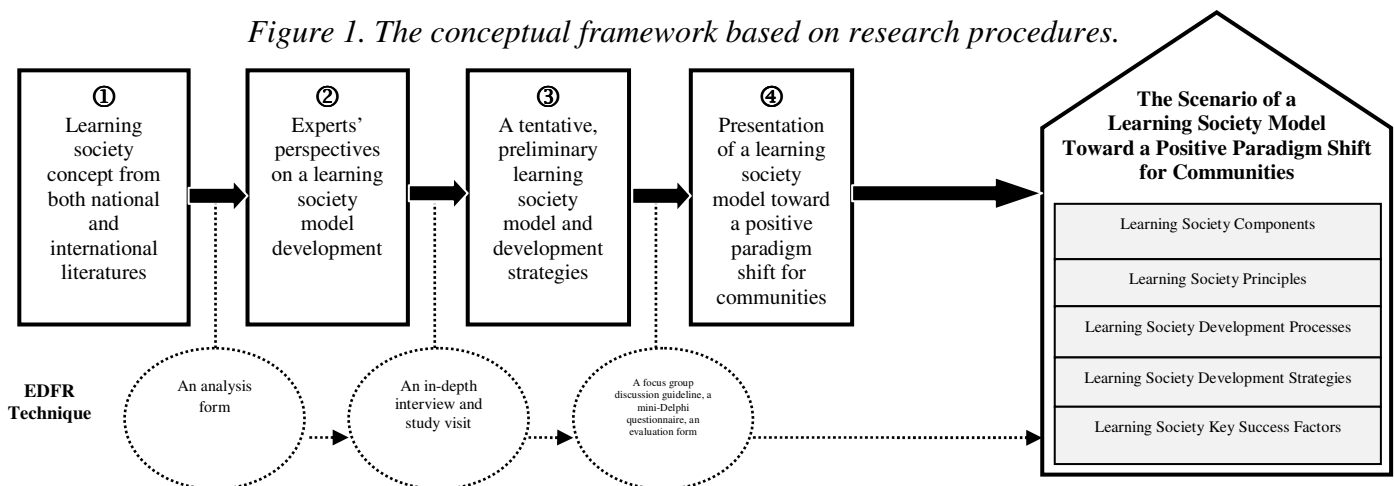
Participants: The participants are comprised of forty-two experts in the field from five communities at the administrative level and the practitioner level from both public and private agencies in Thailand.

Instruments: Five different research instruments used include: (1) an analysis form, (2) an in-depth interview question guide, (3) a mini-Delphi Techniques questionnaire, (4) a focus group discussion guide, and (5) a model evaluation form. By these means this study employed a qualitative method using the EDFR (Ethnographic Delphi Futures Research) technique.

Research Procedures

The research procedures comprised of four stages. Figure 1 was developed by the researcher and it depicts all of the research procedure stages.

Figure 1. The conceptual framework based on research procedures.



Data Analysis

In each research procedure stage, the data were analyzed using content analysis by the researcher.

A Summary of the Findings

Results revealed essential elements for development of a learning society. A learning society model comprised of the learning society components, learning society principles, learning society development processes, learning society development strategies, and learning society key success factors. The essential elements for development of a learning society include **1) Learning Society Components:** (1) Learners, (2) Learning Providers, (3) Learning Resources/ Institutions, (4) Knowledge/Wisdom, (5) Lifelong Learning Activities, (6) Learning Climate, (7) Learning Network, (8) Knowledge Management, and (9) Learning Groups/Organizations; **2) Learning Society Development Processes:** (1) Partnership, (2) Participation and Collaboration, (3) Monitoring and Evaluation Process, (4) Lifelong Learning Needs, (5) Community-Based Development, (6) Knowledge-Based Community Development, (7) Variety of Lifelong Learning Activities/ Knowledge-Related Activities, (8) Learning Related to Life and Lifelong Learning, (9) Equity Process, and (10) Proactive and Continuous Process; **3) Learning Society Development Principles:** (1) Embracing Learning Society, (2) Setting Up 'Learning Society Development Committee', (3) Diagnosing of Current Community's Status, (4) Developing Learning Society Vision and Strategies, (5) Designing of Detailed Action Plan, (6) Integrating of Partnerships Collaboration, (7) Implementation the Developed Programs and Activities, (8) Carrying Out Monitoring and Evaluation System, (9) Sharing Knowledge/Lesson Learned, and (10) Promoting and Publishing of Communities; **4) Learning Society Development Strategies:**(1) Development of Lifelong Learners, (2) Development of Learning Resources, (3) Development of Knowledge and Wisdom, (4) Development of Appropriate Community/City Design, (5) Development of Learning Community and Organization, (6) Development of Knowledge Management, (7) Development of Learning Climate and Knowledge Sharing Culture, (8) Development of Process Improvement, (9) Development of Infrastructure and Learning Facilities, and (10) Development of Network Competencies; **and 5) Key Success Factors:** (1) Community Leaders, (2) Active Funds Support, (3) Various Learning Networks and Partnerships, (4) Appropriate Community Size, (5) Definite Policy, Structure, and Direction, (6) Construction of Strategies and the Implementation, (7) Appropriate Community Design, (8) Community Members/ Volunteer Groups, (9) Knowledge Sharing Culture, (10) Close Relationship among Community Members, (11) a Variety of Learning Activities, (12) Infrastructure System, (13) Appropriate IT Networks System, and (14) Learning Insurance System. The structure of essential elements of a learning society model toward promoting a positive paradigm shift for communities was developed by the researcher in a capsule form as illustrated in Figure 2, which depicts the findings of the study.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Further Development: Building the Learning Society means assembling a new coalition that can draw innovations from all sectors of the society for the benefit of all. All groups in the society: government, local agencies, private organizations, NGOs, and communities should be involved in the learning society development.

Recommendations for Future Research: 1) the implementation of the learning society developmental processes in various communities; 2) more investigation on the responsibility and involvement of the networks in developing the learning society and lifelong learning activities development; 3) In-depth study on the comparative research and development of the learning society from different countries around the world; and, 4) Employing mixed methods and various strategies to look for more fundamental and true data.

Conclusion

As yet the challenges of globalization do not have the same influence on all countries, and the countermeasures for them differ respectively as well. Thus the focus for learning society development will differ according to the challenges faced by the nation and local communities. Therefore, it is needed for communities to examine their contexts and develop the appropriate planning and implementation of the learning society based on the above mentioned knowledge at various levels from communities, organizations, cities, regions, and the world society. People and systems must be fully prepared to adapt to future changes and reap future benefits by keeping up with globalization, building resilience, and developing learning societies to enhance the wellness of individuals and society. It is hoped that the knowledge obtained through this study can effectively and valuably propose the guideline for the countries to start moving national development towards learning society status, sound equilibrium, fairness and sustainability, and to pave the way toward *a Learning Society: Society of Happy Coexistence* that may enhance the wellness of all people.

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