

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This thesis utilises a case study methodology in order to investigate the manner in which six Rajabhat Universities in Bangkok responded to the challenges of having university status conferred upon them by the Rajabhat Universities Act (2004). Data were collected through qualitative means of interviews, observations and the study of official documents. There are four main sections in this chapter: a discussion of qualitative research methodologies, the case study approach, methods of data collection and analysis through interviewing, the analysis of documentation and observations.

Qualitative Research Methodologies

Qualitative and quantitative methods are the major research methods used in many fields. The objectives of the study and the preferences of the researchers are the major criteria in choosing between them (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 7). If researchers want to understand the ways or patterns of peoples' lives, it is more appropriate to use qualitative research than quantitative research methods (Beck, 1992; Flick, 2006). Merriam (1998) states that "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (p.6).

Patton (2002) suggests that the study of human behaviour or organisational structures must be different from the study of inanimate objects, because objects of study do not have their own purposes and emotions, they cannot make any plans or construct any cultures. This concept has been supported by Flick (2007) who explained that if the researchers want to study the perspective of participants or make participants reflect on their life, qualitative research is more appropriate than quantitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) point out that the researchers who use qualitative methods make the world more understandable and generate knowledge from the data. By conducting qualitative inquiry, researchers get close to the participant under study and develop an understanding about what is going on in their

environments. Denzin (1978, pp. 8-9) has called this “the studied commitment to actively enter the worlds of interacting individuals.”

The researcher worked in one of the six Rajabhat University for more than 11 years. The researcher is Thai and has background knowledge about Thai culture and language. This allowed her to understand each President’s thinking and response to change.

Flick (2006, p. 14) writes that there are four essential features in qualitative research; “the correct of choice of appropriate methods and theories; the recognition and analysis of different perspectives; the researchers’ reflections on their research as part of the process of knowledge production; and the variety of approaches and methods” that are important for the study. Qualitative methods present appropriate ways of accessing the rich information that comes from the experiences of administrators of the six Rajabhat Universities.

Case Study

There are two major kinds of case study. An intrinsic case study is used when the researcher wants to study the particular subject. An instrumental case study is used when the researcher has a research question and needs to find the information by studying something particularly (Stake, 1995). In order to understand how six Rajabhat Universities responded to and implemented change, the researcher had a number of research questions and wished to get an insight into the processes of responding to change and understand how change can be managed and how people react to those changes. Six Rajabhat Universities in Bangkok were selected as individual instrumental case studies to understand the process of responding to change and surviving in the new higher education environment in Thailand.

A case study is a system which has a boundary and working parts. Stake (1995, p. 2) called it “a bounded system” and the researcher pays attention to the case as an object that is representing the phenomena in which they are interested. To select cases that will be representative of other cases is difficult for the qualitative researcher (Stake, 1997). Each case study is different and the main purpose of using a case study is to understand the detail and experience associated with that case. The researcher does not expect that every case will be represent the same data. Stake

(1995) suggests that if researchers want to produce generalisations it is not appropriate to use a case study approach because the real function of case study is to highlight its particularity and uniqueness. In this study the researcher wished to understand the changes and the complex inter-relationships within each of the six Rajabhat Universities rather than focus on the causes of the new environment.

Additionally, information from a holistic perspective is important as the researcher wants to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation of how six Rajabhat Universities responded to changes. Yin (1984) suggests that ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions are suitable for case study research. Yin (2003, p.6) explains that “such questions deal with operational links needing to be traced over time, rather than frequency or incidence.”

There are three major research questions in this study:

- How did the National Education Act (1999) and the Rajabhat University Act (2004) change the new Rajabhat Universities?
- How did the senior management team of the new Rajabhat Universities respond to meet the requirements of the Acts? Why did they implement these changes?
- How will these changes impact on the Rajabhat Universities in the future?

In a case study, the researcher cannot control or manipulate the nature of the participants. The participants in these cases are the senior administrators of six Rajabhat Universities. The only thing that the researcher can do is to conduct the interview, record the information given, then interpret and reflect upon that information.

In this present study, the end product is holistic, non-experimental research. Merriam (1998) explains non-experimental research as research that is undertaken when description and explanation is required. In this kind of research, the researcher cannot manipulate the behaviour of the participants and it is difficult to determine which are the important variables or phenomena that have occurred (Merriam, 1988). The end product will provide rich description “so that anyone else interested in

transferability has a base of information appropriate to the judgment” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 124-125).

In case study research it is important to identify the bounded system. Smith (1978) explains the bounded system identifies the focus of the investigation. For example in this study the bounded system is the six Rajabhat Universities. Each individual Rajabhat University is regarded as ‘a case’ and the bounded system is the individual Rajabhat University that has been studied separately. There are numerous advantages to using a case study approach. A case study provides techniques to investigate human phenomena as part of a complex system. Researchers are able to gain insights into phenomena and expand their understanding of the process of events (Sanders, 1981).

However, there are some limitations of using case studies as a major research method. It is demanding of time, and the results obtained might be “too lengthy, too detailed, or too involved for busy policymakers and educators to read and use” (Merriam, 1998, p. 33). The fact that the researchers are the primary instruments of data collection and analysis means that it is easier for them to put their opinions into the interpretations and lead readers to incorrect conclusions (Guba, 1981; Merriam, 1998; Riley, 1963). However, most researchers have special training and are aware of how their biases can affect data analysis. Typically, the focus of a case study “is not to find the ‘correct’ or ‘true’ interpretation of the facts, but rather to eliminate erroneous conclusions so that one is left with the best possible, the most compelling, interpretation” (Bromley, 1986, p. 38).

A case study approach, as was adopted in this study, allows the researcher to undertake studies in the field. Collins and Noblit (1978) explain the advantages of using field studies as allowing the researcher to have first hand experience and make direct observations regarding the phenomena under study and to speak directly with the major stakeholders. This present study investigates the impact of new policies upon the Rajabhat Universities and field study allows for a better understanding of the changes and the reasons behind them.

The researcher starts by identifying the case, the bounded system, and the unit of analysis to be investigated. Within every case, the researcher selects the events or activities that will be observed, people who will be interviewed, and documents that

will be read. The use of nonprobability sampling is more suitable in this study. As Honigmann (1982) suggests, if the research questions are not focusing on how much or how often but to find the answers in qualitative problems, nonprobability sampling methods are more reasonable for these kinds of research.

The most appropriate sampling strategy for this study is sometimes called 'purposive' (Chein, 1981) or 'purposeful' (Patton, 1980) sampling. Merriam (1988, p. 48) explains that purposeful sampling "is based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most." In this study, the researcher wants to understand and investigate the experience of how the six Rajabhat Universities in Bangkok responded to changes and new policies in order to survive in the new environment.

The most effective way to understand what is happening in relationship to leadership, change and management in each Rajabhat University is by interviewing the senior administrators, observing their activities or policies and analysing appropriate documents. Yin (2003, p. 2) suggests that "the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events." This is important to understand the complexity of change in each Rajabhat University. In this study, the focus is on actual context and the approach used can be considered as an explanatory case study.

The six Rajabhat Universities in Bangkok have been chosen because they are located in the same city and are partners in the Office of the Rajabhat Universities Council (ORUC). Although all 40 Rajabhat Universities in Thailand had to respond to the National Education Act (1999) and the Rajabhat University Act (2004); those located outside Bangkok face different local cultures and environments. For example, Rajabhat Universities that are located in Southern Thailand are different in their policies and their strategic plans to the Rajabhat Universities in Bangkok because the demand of local communities and local employees are different from Bangkok.

Methods of Data Collection

Interviews with Presidents and Vice-Presidents were the main source of data. These were supplemented by document analysis and observations. The data collected are presented as six separate case studies, one for each university.

Data gathered from interviews with Rajabhat administrators together with reports generated from the government and outsiders about management and policies were cross-matched and correlated with data from the analysis of documents. This approach allowed for the triangulation of the data.

Interview Methodology

In this research, interviewing was the major method used to find out the ways in which administrators think about their Rajabhat Universities, what they plan or prepare for the future, and how they interpret the policies they have been given by the Thai Government. Patton (2002, p.341) sees the benefits of using interviews in this way as “we cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things.” There are many advantages of using interviews to collecting data, such as obtaining high response rates, the interviewers have direct contact with the interviewees, and the interviewers can prompt the interviewees for more information. Moreover, throughout the interview process, if there are any ambiguous or unclear questions, which may be misinterpreted by interviewees, these can be clarified by the interviewers. Also interviewers can use effective interpersonal skills and can reword questions as necessary (Appleton, 1995).

Interviewing as a method in qualitative research has been used to investigate educational organisations, institutions, or processes for many years. It has been accepted that this is the primary way that a researcher should seek to understand the experience of individual people who make up the organisation or carry out various roles (Seidman, 2006). Especially, to study and understand social abstractions like education, it is helpful for a researcher to use interviews to access the experiences of the individuals who are involved, and to work within the context that is being studied (Ferrarotti, 1981).

If the stories and experiences of other people are of interest to the study, an interview is a good way to access this information (Seidman, 2006). When people use their words to tell stories, they show their consciousness of and experience through their stories at the same time (Vygotsky, 1987). Seidman (2006) suggests that the opinions and attitudes of people give access to their complex social systems, especially the topics that relate to education, because the questions about social system or

educational problems are abstractions based on the concrete experience of individual participant.

There are many factors that have to be considered before using interviewing as a way to access other people's experiences. Firstly, "interviewing research takes a great deal of time and sometimes, money" (Seidman, 2006, p. 12). Secondly, "the more rapport the interviewer can establish with the participant, the better" (Seidman, 2006, p. 96). It is necessary to develop an appropriate rapport with every participant because it will support the interviewer and the interviewee to overcoming shyness and will assist in setting up a good relationship. In this study it was noticed that Thai culture and Thai etiquette were very important elements for the interviewer to take into account.

There is much advice on how to build good rapport and inappropriate rapport can lead to distortion of what the participant reconstructs in the interview (Hyman, Cobb, Fledman, Hart, & Stember, 1954). "The interviewing relationship must be marked by respect, interest, attention, and good manners on the part of the interviewer" (Seidman, 2006, p. 97). Generally, to conduct interviews with the Presidents and the Vice-Presidents of six Rajabhat Universities, there were many factors to be prepared including building up a good rapport suitable for Thai culture and Thai values. Also it was necessary to know a gate-keeper who would organise and manage the appointments to meet with the Presidents and the Vice-Presidents. These people are extremely busy and do not usually grant interviews.

The informal conversational interview and the interview guide approach were adopted in the course of the interviews. This involves an open-ended interview (Patton, 2002). Some researchers call this unstructured or semi-structured interviewing (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Indicative questions were used as an interview guide. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face between researcher and the administrators of the six Rajabhat Universities. Each interview was an individual interview not a group interview. While the researcher has more flexibility to interview and the set of questions have not been predetermined "an interview guide is prepared to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed" (Patton, 2002, p.343).

The importance of language and culture have been accepted as the most critical issues and there are many ways to respond to these situations. During the interview it is important for “the interviewer to maintain a delicate balance between respecting what the participant is saying and taking advantage of opportunities to ask difficult questions, to go more deeply into controversial subjects” (Seidman, 2006, p. 97). This technique means it is that an equitable relationship should be created and neither the interviewer nor the interviewee should control the direction of the interview.

In this case study, it was impossible to understand Presidents’ and the Vice-Presidents’ perspectives without talking to them. Little information has been written in the policies or strategic plans of the universities despite the fact that these policies and plans have been implemented. Each President has a different background and experience. They have developed their own style of management and many of them have not spoken to anybody before about their thoughts and reasons for decisions. There are many reasons behind their behaviour and the only way to understand them is by listening to their perspectives. (See Appendix D for indicative questions.)

Before getting started to collect data with the six Rajabhat Universities in Bangkok, the researcher had to establish access to and make contact with them. To get an appointment to meet with each President was time consuming, and most of the Presidents were not comfortable with the scheduling. From six Rajabhat Universities, there was only one President did not have a problem with the scheduling and gave an interview following his appointment.

Although every appointment had been made by a gate-keeper before the researcher met with the Presidents and the Vice-Presidents, the researcher still had to wait for many days before the interview was conducted. Every interview was conducted at the Rajabhat Universities. There were only two people, the interviewer and the interviewee, in the interviewee’s room for each interview. Understanding Thai culture, Thai language, Thai values and general etiquette and the many common courtesies before each to interview (such as introducing yourself and making sure that the participants recognise to whom they are talking, holding a door open, not sitting until the person is seated, dressing appropriately, expressing respect for the participants) were important steps to make a good relationship with the interviewees.

After many phone calls and contact with the potential participants, the Presidents and the Vice-Presidents agreed in advance to a 30-minute interview in the Thai language. Thus, all the interviews were conducted in Thai using open-ended questions. All the participants were people who sit in positions of power. They always have very busy schedules and some could only give a short amount of time. Overall 30 people were interviewed including all six of the Presidents and all 24 of their Vice-Presidents. This means that all top officials from each of the six Rajabhat Universities were interviewed.

The relationship between the University of Sydney and all six of the Rajabhat Universities was important. Mentioning the name of the University of Sydney made it easier to get permission to interview the Presidents and the Vice-Presidents. Moreover, it was recognised that the status of the interviewer (who had worked in one the six Rajabhat Universities as a lecturer) assisted in gaining trust from all the administrators in every Rajabhat University invited to participate.

Analysis of Interview Data

The researcher used open coding and categorised interviews in Thai first and translated into English later. There are four basic guidelines when conducting open coding. Firstly, every interviewee has been asked a specific and consistent set of questions. Secondly, the information from the interviews have been analysed in a detailed, careful and thorough manner. After that the interviewer wrote a theoretical note about the category involved for each part of the interview. The process was slow, and involved frequent stopping and starting of the interview tape to take note of all relevant information including remembering the context of the actual interview. Finally, all the information derived from the interviews does not assume analytic relevance of any demographic variable such as age, sex, social class, and so forth until the data show it to be relevant (Strauss, 1987).

The final stage of analysis was reported in English but during the process of writing up these was continual comparison with the Thai version. Both English and Thai versions have been categorised into higher order headings (themes) and identified the important themes which had been generated from the interviews. The stages of the analysis can be describes as follows:

Stage 1. During and after the interview the researcher made written field notes of important topics and events (Field & Morse, 1985).

Stage 2. Each interview was transcribed into the Thai language and general themes within the transcripts were noted. Two main themes were identified: responding to the changed environment, and leaders' response to change.

Stage 3. Thai transcripts were read through again and as many concepts as possible were written down to describe all aspects of the content, excluding extraneous material. The concepts accounted for almost all of the interview data (Burnard, 1991). This process is known as open coding (Berg, 1989). All categories were freely generated at this stage. An example of this sort of coding is found in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 An example of open coding in this study.

Interview transcript	Open coding
Before thinking about what will happen after Rajabhats become universities you should understand what are objective of Rajabhats.	After Rajabhats become universities... The objective of Rajabhats...
The objective of every Rajabhat is developing local communities.	Developing local communities
We have to think that 40 Rajabhats became universities in 2004, thus more than 400,000 students will graduate from universities in Thailand and more than 100,000 students will graduate from Rajabhat Universities.	There are 40 Rajabhats became universities in 2004... There are more students graduated from universities... 25 percent graduate from Rajabhat Universities
It is a huge number of students that graduate from Rajabhat Universities and they will have an impact on Thai society.	A huge number of students that graduate from Rajabhat Universities They will impact on Thai society
Most of the students who graduated from Rajabhats are living in rural areas and still live in those areas after they graduate.	Most of students are living in rural areas... Still live in those areas after they graduate

Stage 4. The list of concepts, both in Thai and English, were surveyed by the researcher and grouped together under higher-order headings, in order to reduce the number of categories by 'collapsing' some into broader categories (Burnard, 1991). For example, it was decided that the following concepts could all be collapsed into one category entitled 'Rajabhat and local communities':

“Every Rajabhat University has to think about local communities”

“Students who study in Rajabhat Universities came from their local communities”

“Local communities need to be developed by Rajabhat Universities”

Stage 5. The new list of categories was worked through and repetitious or very similar headings are removed to produce a final list. The researcher reviewed all this process both in Thai and English versions. Four concepts were identified under the first theme: a) human resource management and development, b) introducing new degree programmes, c) developing international relationships and, d) financial considerations. Two concepts were identified under the second theme: a) leadership dimensions and b) underpinning philosophy.

Stage 6. The researcher read through the Thai and English lists separately. The difference between the Thai list and the English list were discussed with supervisors and adjustments made as necessary. The objective of this stage was to attempt to enhance the validity of the categories and to guard against research bias (Burnard, 1991).

Stage 7. Thai transcripts were re-read alongside the final agreed list both in the Thai version and the English version of categories and sub-headings, to establish the degree to which the categories covered all aspects of the interviews. Adjustments were made as necessary on the advice of supervisors.

Stage 8. Each transcript was worked through with the list of categories and sub-headings and coded according to the list of category headings. Coloured highlighting pens were used to distinguish between each piece of the transcript allocated to a category and sub-heading. Examples of the way such colours could be used are as follows:

- Definitions of local communities: blue
- Rajabhats’ objectives: red
- Change management programmes: green

Stage 9. Each coded section of the interviews was cut out of the transcript and all items of each code collected together. Multiple photocopies of the transcripts were used to ensure that the context of the coded sections was maintained. A crude example of this might be as follows. Here, the bracketed words have been cut out to leave a phrase which, on its own, clearly means something different than it does when read with the words in brackets.

[I'm sure that] lecturers in Thai universities do not care about anything that happened around their universities, [of course] they believe that they are very clever people and do not want to become involved with local people. [I would think that a lot of] lecturers are happy with their status and limit their relationships with people that came from the same background or their friends.

Stage 10. The cut out sections were pasted onto sheets, and labelled with the appropriate headings and sub-headings.

Stage 11. All of the sections were filed together for direct reference when writing up the findings (Burnard, 1991). Copies of the complete interviews and original tape recordings were kept on hand during the writing up stage. If anything appeared unclear during the writing up stage of the research, the researcher referred back to the original transcript and recording.

Stage 12. After all the sections had been completed, the writing up process began. The researcher started with the first section and selected various examples of data that have had filed under that section and offered a commentary that linked the examples together. (See Appendix E for more detail of the stages of interview analysis.)

The Analysis of Documents

During the same period that the researcher conducted the interviews with the Presidents and the Vice-Presidents, analysis of appropriate documents was undertaken. The major document analysed was the Rajabhat University Act (2004). This Act has taken the major relevant educational reforms from the National Education Act (1999) and related them specifically to the former Rajabhat Institutes. Other documents consulted were the strategic plans of each of the six Rajabhat

Universities. These reflected the requirements of the Rajabhat University Act (2004). These documents were analysed to identify how the universities responded to the changes and how they prepared for their future. As Merriam (1988) points out documents “are usually produced for reasons other than research and therefore are not subject to the same limitations. They are, in fact, a ready-made source of data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator” (p.104).

The analysis of documents can be recognised as independent methodological research methods that the researcher can use to verify information derived from other sources. There are many limitations and strengths of analysing documents as a research method and this depends on the judgement of the researcher. There are benefits in using official documents “which means that they may legitimately be used to draw conclusions about the activities, intentions and ideas of their creators or the organizations they represented” (Wolff, 2004, p. 284).

Observations

Observations made in the field can be used to check and triangulate the information that derived from interviews and document analysis. In this study, observations were made in each university to check whether what the Presidents or the Vice-Presidents say they do, and the policies which were written in the strategic plans were the same as what they actually do. The information from the interviews had been compared with the information from observation in order to check the consistency of statements made by senior administrators and the policies of each Rajabhat University. For example, many administrators of Rajabhat Universities informed the researcher that they provide: videoconferencing on campus to students who are in distant learning programmes, many lecture theatres for big classes (200 students or more) with advanced information communication technology, a number of laboratories for undergraduate students use, many items in the university’s library that are e-journals and e-books. All of these facilities and services could be observed in every faculty or in every building on campus. The results from observations supported the understanding of the policies and strategies that have been implemented in the six Rajabhat Universities.

Additional Considerations

Questions of validity, reliability, and ethics are major concerns for all research. In this study the research addressed the issue of validity and reliability by using triangulation techniques. Firstly, individual interviews with the Presidents and the Vice-Presidents from each Rajabhat University allowed the researcher to check the consistency of the statements made by each person. Secondly, the statements made in the interviews were checked for authenticity against the statements contained in the Rajabhat University Act (2004), the strategic plans of each Rajabhat University, and then compared with the observations. Finally, the Presidents of each Rajabhat University was asked to comment on the findings and explanations made by the researcher.

This study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Sydney. The researcher obtained permission from the Presidents of six Rajabhat Universities to observe and collect all the documents that have been used in this study. The findings in this study will be provided to those universities. All participants in this study gave their informed consent, and were aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time. All names and identities of the universities and the participants have been protected through the use of pseudonyms.

Conclusion

This Chapter discussed the importance of qualitative research methods in data collection and analysis used in this study. Data collected to answer the three major questions raised in this thesis was provided through the stories and information obtained from the Presidents' and the Vice-Presidents' perspectives. A case study approach was used to describe in detail how the senior executive of each Rajabhat University responded to the changes. Interviewing and the document analysis were the main means of data collection. Observations were made to ensure a better understanding of what each Rajabhat University wanted for the future (e.g., the provision of an e-library shows a desire to keep up with new technology).

The next chapter will discuss findings from interviews, document analysis and observations. Chapter Four is organised as a series of case studies, each representing one Rajabhat University. The name of the universities and the name of the

participants have been protected. Each case study is identified by the name of the Queens and the Princesses as follows: case study Rajabhat Antoinette (RA), case study Rajabhat Beatrice (RB), case study Rajabhat Christabel (RC), case study Rajabhat Danielle (RD), case study Rajabhat Elizabeth (RE) and case study Rajabhat Fran (RF). Every case study was reported in two major themes which were derived from the coding of the interviews which were composed of (1) responding to the changed environment, and (2) leaders' response to change. Four concepts were identified under the first theme and two concepts identified under the second theme.