

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTION
TOWARDS QUALITY ASSURANCE MANAGEMENT
ACCORDING TO THEIR DEMOGRAPHICS AT A
UNIVERSITY IN BANGKOK, THAILAND**

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Abstract: The main purpose of this study was to compare the students' perception towards quality assurance management at a selected university in Bangkok, Thailand. By applying the AUN-QA assessment framework and the theory of total quality management, this study identified students' perception towards 6 categories: 1) top management commitment, 2) academic staff quality, 3) support staff quality, 4) student advice and support, 5) facility and infrastructure and 6) student focus, compared their perceptions according to 3 pieces of demographics. The results of this study indicated that, the students in the target university held a relatively positive attitude towards quality assurance management. Furthermore, students' most satisfying quality assurance management was student advice and support. The independent sample t-test showed that there was no significant difference of students' perceptions towards quality assurance management according to students' gender and nationality, and one-way ANOVA showed that there was no significant difference of students' perception according to their age. The researcher discussed on the research findings and provided corresponding suggestions to related stakeholders including students, academic staff, support staff, and the top leadership at the selected university in Bangkok, Thailand.

Keywords: Students' Perception; Internal Quality Assurance; Total Quality Management; Quality Assurance Management; University in Bangkok.

Introduction

Since the nature of higher education shifted from elite university to mass higher education between the 1950s to the 1960s, it is estimated that the global demand for higher education reach 263 million in 2025 from less than 100 million in 2000 (Karaim, 2011). Correspondingly, there is a rapidly-growing demand for quality. To maintain and ensure the quality is primarily a critical responsibility for higher education institutions (AUN,2006). Confronted with

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the intensifying globalization and competition in the market, higher education institutions are striving for internationally-recognized standards to ensure their students are receiving quality education, to meet the needs from labor market and the society while the international cooperation and exchange requires the evidence of quality. To ensure and improve the quality of higher education, quality assurance system is in need for every institution.

According to the Regional Report of Asia and the Pacific (UNESCO, 2003) quality assurance is defined as “*systematic management and assessment procedures to monitor performance of higher education institutions*”. Many countries conducted successful pilot projects to establish quality assurance system at the national level. China built education evaluation systems while accreditation or quality assurance systems are developed in many countries including Malaysia and India, consequently, many national QA agencies or institutions are established, such as India’ s National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), Thailand’ s Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA) and Australia’ s Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

It is well known that it is the university (and especially its staff, faculty and students) that is responsible assuring quality (AUN,2007a). As the consumer and product of higher education, students invest money and time for quality education. Engagement in the quality assurance process helps to improve leadership skills, communication skills, critical thinking and reasoning skills. Through the perspective of student, multifaceted opinions are gathered. Stukalina (2014) found that students’ evaluation of the program is an important assessment instrument to enhance education quality for HEIs. QA activities include:1) taking advantage of statistical process control, 2) emphasizing on prevention,3) external accreditation; 4) delegated involvement, 5) audit of quality schemes, and 6) cause-and- effect analysis (Dale & Plunkett,1990). Based on the importance of QA, it is a key concern for higher education institutions (HEIs) to pay attention to management of QA (QAM). According to Dale and Plunkett (1990), QA is one of the quality management approaches as well as the total quality management (TQM).

Despite the fact that Total Quality Management (TQM) has many definitions, it can be viewed essentially as determining and solving problems to improve quality by all groups of employees within an organization, to achieve the goal of customer satisfaction. According to Dale & Plunkett (199), TQM activities are composed of involving suppliers and customers, aims for continuous improvement, concerns products and processes, responsibility with all workers and delivered with team work.

Research Objectives

This research was conducted for the following objectives:

- 1) To identify the students' demographics including age, gender, nationality in the university in Bangkok, Thailand.
- 2) To determine the students' perceptions towards quality assurance management
- 3) (QAM) in the university in Bangkok, Thailand.
- 4) To determine the differences between the students' perceptions towards quality
- 5) Assurance management (QAM) according to their demographics including age,
- 6) Gender, nationality in the university in Bangkok, Thailand.

Literature Review

Quality Assurance in Higher Education

There are many working definitions of quality assurance in higher education. From the perspective of Chinese higher education, Quality assurance may be seen as regulation of higher education (Li ,2010). Likewise, Harvey (2006a) addressed that quality assurance is working as the checking on quality of a process or outcomes and its purposes include compliance, control, accountability and improvement. Many more researchers argued that quality assurance is a systematic management and assessment procedures to ensure and improve education quality in HEIs, while with which the key stakeholders can gain confidence for the management and outcomes (Harman, 1998). And the most-mentioned definition from QA Handbook Hong Kong and the upgraded version in Hong Kong Baptist University (2016). Quality Assurance can be defined as “a collective and continuous process” to enable HEIs to ensure education being provided is of good quality and high standards.

To sum up, quality assurance (QA) refers to a process to examine the education quality and performance to comply with the prescribed expectations.

Concept of Internal Quality Assurance

According to the book Guide to AUN-QA Assessment at Program Level (2015), Internal QA (IQA) ensures that a HEI, system or program has policies and mechanisms to guarantee that it is meeting its own objectives and standards. An Internal Quality Assurance system (IQA system) is a system that institution's administrators and staff are satisfied with the control mechanisms to maintain and enhance the quality.

According to the AUN-QA Factbook 2018, within the AUN-QA Framework, internal QA includes the models for assessment at program level and the institutional level. The AUN-QA models are applicable to the ASEAN universities and they are also aligned to regional and international quality assurance frameworks. As a membership country of AUN and ASEAN Thailand, by the end of 2018, there are 5 AUN-QA assessments including IQA assessments such as Doctor of Philosophy Program in Clinical Epidemiology in Mahidol University (2017) were conducted.

Concept of Total Quality Management

TQM was seen as a concept of quality management and other techniques of quality management were quality control and quality assurance. According to Mukhopadhyay (2006) TQM is regarded as the extension of quality assurance approach. Many other researchers also define TQM as approaches but with different descriptions. Short & Rahim defined TQM as a proactive approach, to continuously assure and improve quality through product, service and design of the process. Oakland (1993) stated that TQM is an approach for improving the whole organization's competitiveness, effectiveness and flexibility. Dale (1999) agreed with Oakland that TQM was a management approach for continuous improvement, and explicitly emphasized that TQM was based on the involvement of all organizational members and targeting at long-term success in ways of customer satisfaction, and every member's benefits. Other researchers such as Deming who believes that TQM was about evaluating a process reality against a plan to judge for improvement. Shiba et al. (1993) argued that TQM was an evolving system using practices, tools, and management training methods to produce customer satisfaction.

Based on the above definitions, TQM can be summarized as a management tool or approach for continuous development of organization through quality product, service and process, represented by customer satisfaction and overall organization development, it can be seen both a soft philosophy and awareness, and a hard tool for daily application. Classical theories of total quality management showed that quality improvement involves every individual within the organization. To pursue quality, the whole process starts with the awareness of clear goal, motivate all people to determine the obstacles to the goal, keep track of the effective conducts, and communicate the results to all department and repeat the right doings. University is one of the organizations, and all stakeholders should take part in the process of total quality management.

Theories of Total Quality Management

Many researchers such as Mukhopadhyay (2005) had approved TQM's adaptation in contemporary education. He pointed out that applying TQM in education was continuous pursuit of quality for stakeholders, groups, institutions and the whole society. He also interpreted Deming's principles. Kaufman (1992) raised some important issues at different levels in relation with TQM: 1) in the societal/ mega level is about the learner's success through the educational system, 2) at the organizational/ macro level, is to care about learner's quality and competence, 3) at small group/ individual/ micro level, to care about the efficiency of the programs, activities and methods.

There were many TQM models for higher education. Bayraktar et al. (2008) developed the model for Turkish higher education, measured by: 1) leadership, 2) vision, 3) measurement and evaluation, 4) process control and evaluation, 5) program design and resources, and 6) other stakeholders focus. This model was used and conformed by Asif (2013) through the study on Pakistan's higher education. Jaideep and Ashok (1997) stated that there were 5 phases in the TQM model. Starting from the deciding phase which meant that the top management commitment of TQM, second phase was preparing through internal quality assurance, then the administrators should initiate the TQM such as training staff, acknowledging purposes, the fourth phase was expanding/ integrating and finally ends with the evaluation for continuous development.

This study used Ahire et al (1996) framework for TQM as the major theory. Based on the study of 371 manufacturing firms, they set up a model for companies to improve product quality from 12 aspects, including top management commitment, customer focus, design quality management, product quality, internal quality information usage, employee involvement, employee empowerment, supplier management, supplier performance, benchmarking and statistical process control usage. In this study, to determine students' perception towards quality assurance management, two of the components: top management commitment and customer focus were used, the other components were not selected since the students may not have adequate information about employee and the whole organization.

Components of Quality Assurance Management (QAM)

1) Top Management Commitment: According to S.L Ahire (2006) top management should prioritize quality over cost or schedule, integrate customer's feedback into the organization's development and make sure the organization's activities are yielding quality performance.

2) **Academic Staff Quality:** Academic staff quality became more and more as a key element for higher education accreditation frameworks (Cláudia & André, 2015). Teaching staff are the single most important learning resource available to most students. It is important that teaching personnel have adequate professional and structured knowledge and understanding of the subject, have the necessary skills, expertise and experience to transmit their knowledge and understanding effectively to learners in teaching contexts, and can get feedback on their teaching performance.

A HEI's quality not only depends on the program but also the quality of the academic staff. The academic staff quality is the combination of qualification, subject and field matter expertise, experience, teaching capabilities and professional ethics. There are full-time and part-time professors, lecturers, and visiting teaching staff forming the academic staff team. So, HEIs have to look at the size of the staff and their qualifications since staff-to-student ratio and workload are measured and monitored to improve the quality of education, research and service.

3) **Support Staff Quality:** The student-staff interaction is a key element influencing the program quality. The effort of support staff is helping academic staff to produce educational outcomes. According to Guide to AUN-QA Assessment at Program level (2011&2015) support staff might be staff who support the library, laboratories, computer facilities and student services. Kunyada (2015) pointed out the services that were offered by the support staff including: admission, academic administration (such as proceeding for transcript requests), support in study and learning places and IT/ICT support.

To ensure the quality of support staff, appointment and deployment of support staff should be based on merit and relate to the following criteria but not limited to: (1) professional or occupational qualifications; (2) working experiences in relevant industry or position; (3) competency including knowledge, skills and attitude to perform the support services role; (4) continuous upgrading of competencies to meet the changing educational and research needs.

4) **Student Advice and Support:** Learning to grow and serve the world in HEIs, students are monitored and supported by all working staff. According to Guide to AUN-QA Assessment at Program level (2011&2015), HEIs are responsible to provide a good physical, social and psychological environment for quality education. systematically record and monitor student progress, giving feedback to students and taking intervention actions are helping students to achieve desired learning outcomes.

To enhance student progress, advice and support should cover the students' needs, serve the program's objectives and be maintained and upgraded as needed (Kunyada, 2015). According to Kunyada, advice and support for student may include the following issues: (1) medical care and wellness; (2) academics; (3) financial and scholarship; (4) recreation and sports; (5) career and employment; (6) internationalization affairs; (6) housing; (7) monitoring and counselling.

5) Facilities and Infrastructures: Facilities and Infrastructure should support, enable and enhance the work of all stakeholders including faculty, staff and students. According to AUN-QA criteria for Facilities and Infrastructure at program level, quality facilities and infrastructure should carry on the following characteristics: (1) to deliver the curriculum, physical resources including equipment, materials and information technology should be sufficient for use; (2) the equipment is timely updated, readily available and effectively situated; (3) the learning resources are selected, filtered, and synchronized to meet the study program's objectives and purpose; (4) the library should be digitalized to match the information and communication technology development; (5) the information technology system is established to satisfy the needs of staff and students; (6) the quality and quantity of computers and network service enables all stakeholders to are fully apply for learning and teaching, research, service and administration; (7) the infrastructure and facilities are accessible and friendly for people with special-needs.

6) Student Focus: Focusing on customers is given important attention by most authors of TQM literature. As customer-focused, improvement oriented and quality driven are the key characteristics of total quality (Kohoe, 1996), HEI as an organization is customer-focused. Since students are the customer who receiver educational services, students focus becomes an important component of quality assurance management in higher education.

According to Godfrey (1999), customer focus is obviously a fundamental concept of quality management. University as education provider, should understand students' needs to achieve higher satisfaction. To ensure the quality assurance of education, universities should set up a program/system to increase students service quality, set up student feedback system to determine and measure student satisfaction towards provided education, and provide easy access and channel for students to express their opinions to the university for quality improvement.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the theoretical framework, the framework of this study was designed as:

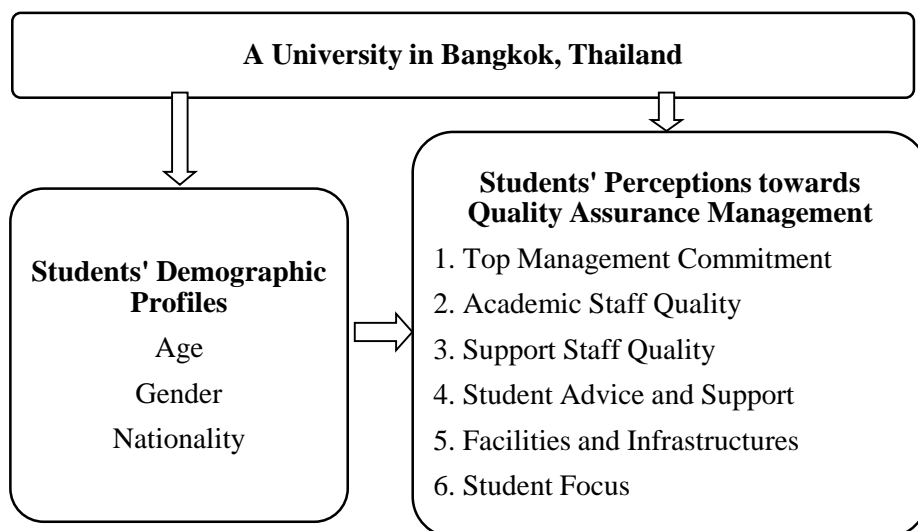


Figure 1. *Conceptual framework of this study*

Research Instrument

During the process of conducting this research, the researcher developed questionnaire based on the AUN-QA model (2011) and the TQM model from Ahire, S. L., Golhar, D. Y., & Waller, M. A. (1996). The questionnaire was composed of two part: part I was used to survey the students' demographics, including their age, gender and at the selected university in Bangkok; part II was aimed at determining the students' perceptions on Quality Assurance Management, which had 23 questions, concerning the 6 important major indicators.

Population

This study was conducted at a university in Bangkok, in the academic year of 2018. The entire population was 57 students studying degree earning programs.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The questionnaire used as the research instrument was composed of two parts. The first part was to identify the students' demographic profile from 4 aspects: age (Under 18, 18-23, 24-30, above 30), gender (male, female), nationality (Thai or Non-Thai), program (Management, Financing and Banking, Public Administration, Engineering Management, Entrepreneurship). The researcher

explained to all the respondents that their demographic profiles were not used for other purposes except this study. The second part of the questionnaire was composed of: 1) “ASEAN University Network Quality Assurance: Guide to AUN Actual Quality Assessment at program level”, the adopted items were: Academic Staff Quality, Support Staff Quality, Student Advice and Support, and Facilities and Infrastructure. Combining with two TQM components: top management commitment, and student focus. The Cronbach alpha value of the two questionnaires reported respectively were .84 and .72 from Ahire et al study in 1996.

Since the research instrument was adapted from AUN’s assessment of internal quality assurance assessment and total quality management, its reliability and validity were confirmed by the pilot test. The researcher had conducted pilot test with 30 MBA students from Assumption University to test the reliability of the instrument before the main study was conducted, the alpha values for both the pilot study and main study were .94 and .93, the alpha value for each component of the two studies were shown as follows:

Table 1: The alpha values of the pilot test and the main study

Components	alpha value of polit test	alpha value of main study
1. Top Management Commitment	.95	.93
2. Academic Staff Quality	.69	.72
3. Support Staff Quality	.84	.67
4. Student Advice and Support	.79	.85
5. Facilities and Infrastructure	.88	.81
6. Student Focus	.89	.82
Total	.94	.93

Source: from the researcher’ pilot test and main study

Findings

Research Objective One

Research objective one was to identify the students’ demographics including their age, gender and nationality at the university in Bangkok.

The research findings about students’ age, gender and nationality at the university in Bangkok were shown from Table 2 to Table 4.

Table 2: *The Number of Students at the university in Bangkok Categorized by age*

Age	Number	Percentage
18-23	3	5.3
24-30	37	64.9
Above 30	17	29.8
Total	57	100.0

Table 2 above showed that the majority students were 24-30 years old (64.9%), the second largest number of students were above 30 years old (29.8%) and the lowest percentage of students were 18-23 years old (5.3%).

Table 3: *The Numbers of Students at the university in Bangkok Categorized by Gender*

Gender	Number	Percentage
Boy	33	57.9
Girl	24	42.1
Total	57	100.0

Table 3 above presented that there were more male students than the female students, their percentage respectively are 57.9% and 42.1 %.

Table 4: *The Numbers of Students at the university in Bangkok Categorized by Nationality*

Nationality	Number	Percentage
Thai	21	36.8
Non-Thai	36	63.2
Total	86	100.0

Table 4 presented that the students at the university in Bangkok were mostly non-Thai students with the percentage at 63.2%, while Thai students took up 36.8%.

Research Objective Two

Research objective Two was to identify the students' perception towards Quality Assurance Management at the university in Bangkok.

Table 4 showed that students' overall perception towards Quality Assurance Management is high, evidenced by the total mean of 4.26, while each of the 6 main components also has a high mean score as shown with their means. Among all components, the highest mean score of students' perceptions was

for student advice and support, which could be indicated as students showed their highest satisfaction towards the university's service of advice and support. While facilities and infrastructure received the lowest mean score as 4.04, could be interpreted as students might think the university facilities and infrastructure might not be satisfying sometimes.

Table 5: *Summary of Overall Students' Perceptions Towards Quality Assurance Management at the University (n=57)*

Students' perception	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. Top Management Commitment	4.31	0.39	High
2. Academic Quality	4.25	0.42	High
3. Support Staff Services	4.29	0.44	High
4. Student Advice and Support	4.34	0.43	High
5. Facilities and Infrastructure	4.04	0.41	High
6. Student Focus	4.32	0.48	High
Total	4.26	0.32	High

Research Objective Three

Research objective three was to compare the students' perception towards quality assurance management according to their age, gender, nationality at the university in Bangkok, Thailand.

The independent samples t-test was utilized to compare students' perceptions towards quality assurance management according to their gender and nationality, One-way ANOVA is used to compare students' perceptions towards quality assurance management according to their age. The findings of students' perception towards quality assurance management and students' demographics (including age, gender, and nationality) was used for research objective 3. The scale interpretation's criteria for descriptive statistics be used the same way for research objective 3. Research findings were presented in following Table 6 to Table 8.

Table 6: *Independent Samples t-test of Students' perception towards Quality Assurance Management according to Students' Gender*

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig. (2- tailed)
Male	33	4.22	.32	1.012	.316
Female	24	4.31	.33		

As shown in Table 6, the analytical result of independent sample t-test reveals that male students' perception towards quality assurance management

($m=4.22$, $s=.32$) does not significantly differ from female students' perceptions ($m=4.31$, $s=.33$) since $t(55) = -1.012$, $p \geq .05$. Therefore, students' perceptions towards quality assurance management according to gender shows no significant statistical difference.

Table 7. *Independent Samples t-test of Students' perception towards Quality Assurance Management according to Students' Nationality*

Nationality	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig. (2- tailed)
Thai	21	3.50	.41	.687	.495
Non-Thai	34	4.23	.32		

As can be seen from Table 7, the independent sample t-test reveals that Thai students' perception towards quality assurance management ($m=4.22$, $s=.34$) does not significantly differ from Non-Thai students' perceptions ($m=4.28$, $s=.32$) since $t(55) = -.687$, $p \geq .05$. Therefore, students' perceptions towards quality assurance management according to their nationality shows no significant statistical difference.

Table 8: *One-way ANOVA of Students' perception towards Quality Assurance Management according to Students' Age*

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.270	2	.135	1.300	.281
Within Groups	5.618	54	.104		
Total	5.888	56			

According to the One-way ANOVA analytical result presented as Table 20, the sig = $.281 \geq .05$, which means that Students' perception towards quality assurance management according to students' age was not significantly difference.

According to the results of independent sample t-test shown in Table 6 and Table 7, and the one-way ANOVA in Table 20, null hypothesis should be accepted, which meant that there was no significant statistical difference of students' perceptions towards quality assurance management according to students' age, gender and nationality at the university in Bangkok, Thailand.

Discussion

This research studied students' perceptions towards quality assurance management at the university in Bangkok, Thailand, which was about to

which extend the current education performance of the university has met students' expectation.

The results of the research showed that students were holding positive attitude towards top management commitment of the selected university. Its important role of providing leadership was the core determinant for organization's successful quality management, which was confirmed by Ahire, et al (1996). Through top management commitment, the vision and goals were set up, by strategically prioritizing quality over cost, or the production schedule. When the vision is clearly addressed through all ways such as bulletin, official website, and pamphlet to reach all stakeholders, then the message from the top leadership is delivered (Guzman & Josefine, 2004). The target university articulated its vision as "*strive to become a leading and a unique regional multicultural institution of higher learning*" which was conveyed to all the visitors, especially the students, faculty and staff. The top management should not only prioritize quality, but also support quality management activities such as benchmarking, providing human and financial resources to gather students' requirements and performance.

In higher education institutions, the top management commitment of prioritizing quality is implemented by faculty members, instructor, research assistant, etc. who are the academic staffs. The quality of academic staff can be seen in terms of qualification, professional expertise, teaching and instructing experience, and professional ethics. Through the study of Cardoso, et al (2014), offering appraisal and motivation to academic staff could be improved teaching quality, and the accountability is important for appraisal. The results of this study showed that, students had most positive attitude towards the academic staff's teaching while the number of academic staffs was not enough at some time, thus the university should determine the right quantity of academic staff for better quality of teaching and education.

Among all the factors, the teachers' teaching and instruction quality had the highest mean, the reason can be: the university keep the tradition from its foundation to recruit teachers and staff globally, in order to take in the suitable talents from more than 24 countries. For the number of curriculum instructors, the respondents are satisfied because the university normally admits maximum 15 students per curriculum, in correspondence with the top management commitment for quality education. Since academic staff take responsibility for research projects, the accountability for staff members received high recognition by the respondents.

In the other hand, without the quality of the support staff, academic staff cannot perform well to yield good quality education (AUN, 2011). From the research finding, it was assumed that students at the selected university was most satisfied with the quality of service provided by the support staff working in the university library, while least satisfied with computer staff service. At this era of information, computer can be seen as the window into the world, the university should be aware of the importance of computer service. Combining with the results of the research survey that the computer facility was out-of- day and inadequate in number, the university should provide more financial support to update the computer technology facility and increase the computer service quality.

According to the results of the research, there is no significant difference in students' perceptions towards quality assurance management according to their demographics including age, nationality, and gender at the university in Bangkok, Thailand. There are many reasons for the results. As shown by the results of research objective one, it could be referred that they may finished their bachelor degree and chose this university as the destination for master education, within the studying years, they may be instructed by the academic staff, received service provided by the same support staff, while the leadership team is leading in the same direction from in the aspect of top design, and the students study the same course and get evaluated by the same management mechanism. All the mentioned reasons may lead to the same understanding of the university's quality assurance management, which it presented as no significance in the students' perceptions. Even though there were more non-Thai respondents than Thai respondents, their perception towards quality assurance management shows no significant difference. The researcher found out that the international students coming from countries out of Thailand while the domestic Thai students are receiving same teaching and instruction, such as using English as the medium language for teaching and learning at campus, finishing the same program plan which means they may be instructed by the same teachers. The factor Gender did not influence the students' perception towards quality assurance management, which can be interpreted as students of both genders perceive the university's quality assurance management the same way. The reasons behind can be the male and female respondents have been educated in this university for 1-2 years, which is not long enough for the freshmen to give their perceptions towards the quality assurance management undergoing in the university. Besides, since the nationality of most of the respondents were non-Thai, these international students' decision making to study in this university already evidenced that they recognized the performance of the university before forming the perceptions towards quality

assurance management, which can be another reason for the insignificant difference in their perceptions towards quality assurance management.

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