



# The Impact of the Thailand Olympic Academy on the Olympic Movement in Thailand

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which the Thailand Olympic Academy (TOA) from 2010 to 2018 has attained its goals, to assess the outcomes of this program and to determine the short term and long-term impact of the program on the Olympic Movement in Thailand. A triangulated methodology was used, consisting of document analysis, a mail survey, and interviews. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected.

The results reveal that the goals of the TOA were met and that there was a large number of positive outcomes, both personal and social, from the TOA experience. It was concluded that the TOA has impacted on the Olympic Movement in Thailand because there are a greater number of people who are actively incorporating the Olympic ideals into their lives or promoting the Olympic ideals to others. For the most part, the TOA has had both a short term and long term impact. However, there are indications from the interviews that, for some, the effects of the program have indeed lessened over time.

In terms of priorities for future research, there are a number of suggestions that arise from this study. First of all, the applicability of the TOA Impact Model to other education programs should be assessed. Secondly, all TOA educational programs should be evaluated to determine their impact. Thirdly, this study revealed a number of first order effects of the TOA. A suggestion for future research would be to examine the second order effects of the program. This would involve communicating with the people that come into contact with the alumni and alumnae to assess differences in behaviour after they attended the TOA (e.g., do the students of a teacher who attends the TOA perceive a change in the teacher?). Lastly, as the number of NOAs around the world increases, it would be valuable to do comparative research to establish the effectiveness of the varying academy formats.

**Keywords:** Olympic Movement, Olympism, Olympic Education, Management, Olympic Values

## Introduction

At the beginning of the modern era, the Olympic Games were intended as a vehicle for the promotion of Olympism, (Suriyan, 2016) the philosophy which calls for international understanding, intercultural awareness, mass participation, fair play, greater education through sport and pursuit of excellence in all endeavours. The Games aimed to be a showcase for these ideals in action with an accompanying message that everyone should incorporate the philosophy into their own lives. However, there are perceptions that the philosophical message has become tainted by problems such as political intervention (Leiper, 1988; Ramsamy, 1984; Triesman, 1984), excessive commercialism (Gruneau, 1984), unethical behavior (Dubin, 1990), elitism (Kidd, 1988), gender inequality (Hargreaves, 1984; Spears, 1988) and obsessive media presence (Sage, 1990). Some have even suggested that the Olympic philosophy and the Olympic Games are not necessarily related (Leiper, 1976, 1980; Segrave and Chu, 1988; Seppanen, 1984), which is to say that Olympic ideals are not inherently present in the Games. While there is doubt regarding the effectiveness of the Olympic Games as a method to promote the Olympic philosophy, there are other programs within the Olympic Movement that have the promotion of Olympism as their primary goal. One such program is the TOA.



The TOA is an annual residential workshop for selected sport-minded Thais and its philosophical base is Olympism. This workshop provides an opportunity for the participants to examine their own values and beliefs concerning sport and the Olympic Movement. The participants are chosen based on their interest and experience in the Olympic Movement and are selected to provide a balance between women and men; and to furnish representation from all regions of Thailand.

Sport scholars, sport administrators, international speakers and Olympic leaders contribute to a setting in which participants learn about the Thai amateur sport system, the Olympic Movement and the issues which confront the Olympic Movement today. The TOA is a leadership development program in the sense that one of its objectives is to encourage its participations to effect change in sport. In essence, the TOA strives to develop ambassadors of the Olympic Movement in Thai communities. The week-long session revolves around the concept of critical reflection, an adult learning approach that emphasizes the examination of one's own values and beliefs leading to the ability to critically question the status quo and work toward positive social reform.

There are certain limitations regarding the three types of data collection. There may have been other documents that were not analyzed because they were not made available to the researcher. Due to the survey and interview methods being reliant on self-reports, there is a possibility that the respondents may have answered questions with what they perceive as socially acceptable. Time constraints in the lives of TOA participants may also impact on the recalling of feelings or perceptions. If participants feel rushed, responses may be short. This could reduce the data quantity and quality.

Whenever long-term impact is an assessment, respondents may not have an accurate recollection of their experiences in the program and their subsequent actions. Also, the subjects may have had difficulties distinguishing between actions which are a result of their participation at the TOA and actions resulting from other factors. In other words, in some cases, it is difficult to determine if the program outcomes are a result of people attending the TOA or if these outcomes would have materialized despite their participation in the TOA. Finally, there may have been other program outcomes that impact on the Olympic Movement that are not measureable.

## **Objective**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate how the Thailand Olympic Academy (TOA) has impacted on the Olympic Movement in Thailand. Specifically, the extent to which the TOA has attained its goals is determined. The goals are:

1. to increase the participants' knowledge of Olympism and the Olympic Movement, the structure of sport in Thailand and some of the issues confronting sport and the Olympic Movement;
2. to provide an opportunity for the participants to examine their values and beliefs about sport and the Olympic Movement;
3. to provide a network for sharing ideas, both at the TOA and after; and
4. to instill an ability, a responsibility and a desire among the participants to effect positive change at a personal, local, provincial, federal or international level. Also, the study will focus on determining the outcomes of the TOA and its short and long term impact.



## Theoretical framework

The model created for this research shows how the TOA can potentially impact on the Olympic Movement in Thailand and how goal attainment evaluation and outcome assessment contribute to measuring this impact. The model provides an explanatory preface to the research protocol used in the study.

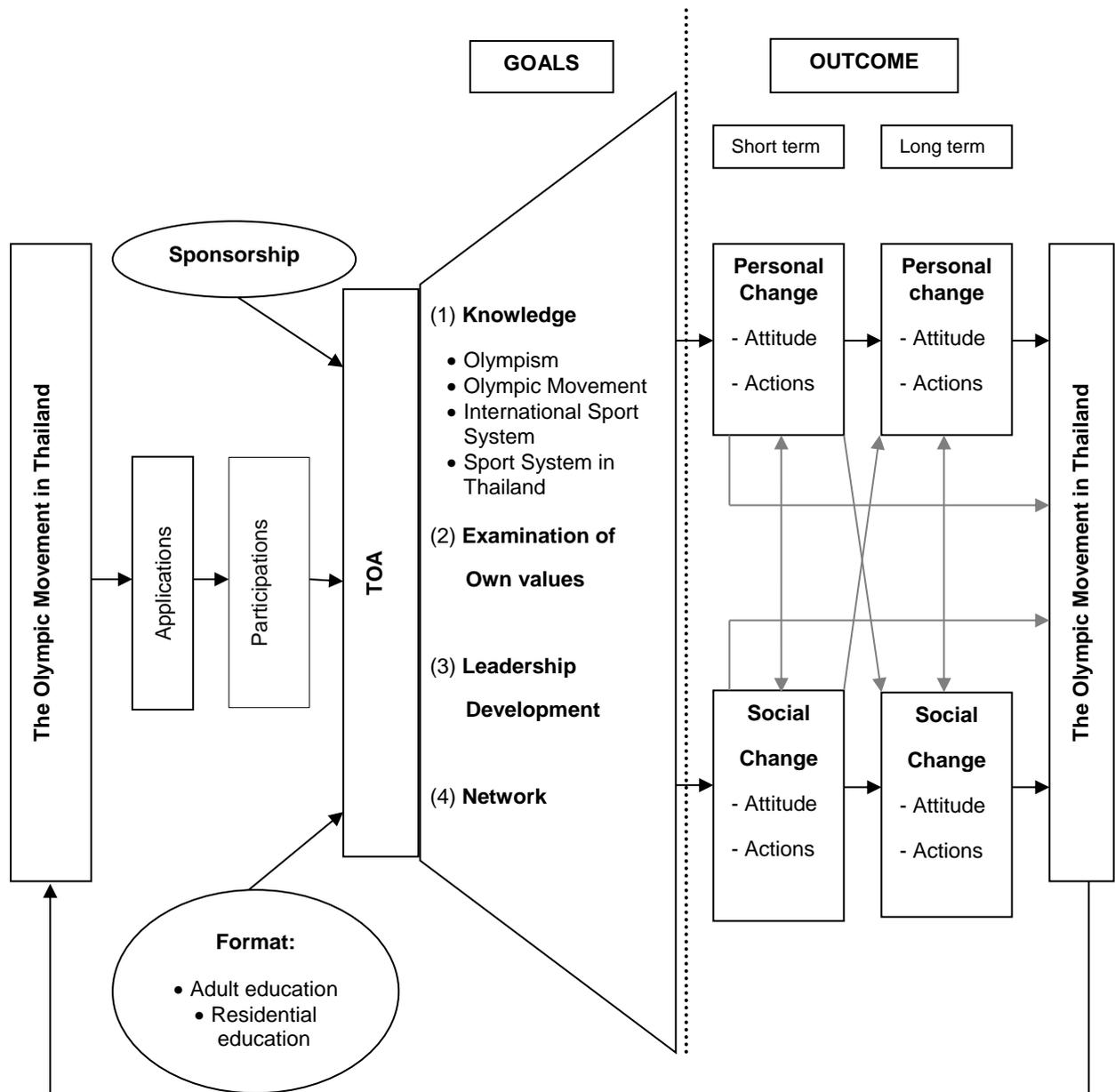
The TOA Impact Model is presented in Figure 1. This model visually clarifies the method of this research and process by which the TOA can potentially impact on the Olympic Movement in Thailand. The first box on the left represents the Olympic Movement in Thailand. Included, are all the people that have some stake or interest in the Olympic Movement. Among those people, some apply to attend the TOA (represented by the box labelled "Applicants").

From these applicants, 50 participants are selected yearly, based on various criteria (represented by the box labelled "Participants"). These 50 people attend the program (represented by the box labelled "TOA") which is influenced by the financial "Sponsorship" associated with it and the "Format" it follows. The format is intentionally designed using features of residential, adult and leadership development education. The format and sponsorship are intended to enhance the TOA's ability to achieve its "Goals" which are outlined in the model. Theoretically, if the goals are met, then there should be a positive impact on the Olympic Movement in Thailand.

Further, these should be "Outcomes" from the programs that have an impact. The outcomes may be at the personal level (represented by the boxes labelled "Personal change") such as the individual experiencing a change in attitude (e.g., a change in attitude about sport or the Olympic Games; the importance of fair play, equity or increased tolerance) or individuals may change their actions as a result of the TOA experience (e.g., play by the rules consistently). The outcome may also be at the social level (represented by the boxes labelled "Social change"). Examples of these types of actions might include getting involved in or initiating a program that deals with the Olympic Movement, teaching people about the Olympic philosophy or writing a letter to protest about the coverage of women's sport in the local newspaper.

These outcomes may occur immediately after the TOA experience or they may take place over a longer period (represented by the sections labelled "Short term" and "Long term"). These outcomes would impact on the Olympic Movement in Thailand because they all involve people incorporating, implicitly and explicitly, Olympism into their behaviours. The impact on the Olympic Movement is represented by the arrows penetrating the final box in the model representing "The Olympic Movement in Thailand." Finally, if there is an impact on the Olympic Movement in Thailand, there would be greater awareness of the Olympic Movement because other people would be exposed to the attitudes and actions of the TOA alumni and consequently the process would be repeated with other people becoming interested in the Olympic Movement and perhaps applying to attend the TOA (represented in the model by the arrow at the bottom), Figure 1

Figure 1. The TOA Impact Model



### Definitions

The Olympic Movement is a global phenomenon that transcends the boundaries of sport and culture and extends to education, politics, the economy and technology. (IOC, 2018)

The term Olympism relates to a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example, social responsibility and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles. (IOC, 2018)

Adult education is whereby adults engage in a range of systematic and sustained learning activities in order to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values.



The notion of residential education is based on the idea that much of what people learn happens outside of the classroom setting. Some typical forms of residential education include youth camp, residential academies and military schools etc.

### **Methodology**

A triangulated methodology was used. It incorporated: (a) an analysis of documents pertaining to the TOA; (b) a survey of all TOA participants at the sessions held between 2010 and 2018; and (c) interviews with a purposeful sample of TOA leaders and alumni and alumnae.

Documents provided information about the TOA's inception, purpose, development and several of the program's outcomes. Content analysis was the primary method of analysis.

A survey consisting of both closed and open-ended questions was mailed to the alumni and alumnae (2010 - 2018) of the TOA. The survey was designed to gather the respondents' feelings about their experiences at the TOA and their subsequent involvement in related activities. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data from the closed-ended responses of the survey. All the qualitative results from the survey were content analyzed and grouped into appropriate categories.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposeful sample to gain a clearer understanding of the impact of the TOA on select individuals. The interviews were transcribed and content analyzed for qualitative text analysis. The transcripts were divided and grouped according to questions, themes and issues. Furthermore, several interviews were conducted with people who had been involved with the organization of the TOA throughout its history in order to obtain background information.

### **Results**

The Olympic philosophy embodies the ideals of international understanding, intercultural awareness, mass participation, fair-play, greater education through sport and the pursuit of excellence in all endeavours. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and National Olympic Committees (NOCs) are mandated to educate people about this philosophy. For this reason, there are a number of programs designed specifically to educate people about Olympism. One such program in Thailand is the Thailand Olympic Academy (TOA); an annual, week-long workshop for youths, sport administrators and P.E. teachers they have an interest and are involved with the Olympic Movement. The goals of the TOA are: to increase the participants' awareness and knowledge of the Olympic Movement, of the structure of sport in Thailand and some of the issues confronting sport and the Olympic Movement; to provide the participants with an opportunity to examine their beliefs and values relating to sport and the Olympic Movement; to provide a network for the participant to share their ideas both at the TOA after they have returned home; and to help the participants improve their leadership skills and to encourage them to take a leadership role in promoting the Olympic Movement in their communities.

The purpose of this study was to determine if the goals of the TOA had been met and to assess the outcomes of the program on both a short term and long term basis. This information was used to assess the impact of the TOA on the Olympic Movement in Thailand.

The first aspect of this study was to determine if the goals of the TOA had been attained. Both the quantitative and qualitative data revealed that they were attained. For the most part, the participants felt that they increased their knowledge about Olympism, the Olympic Movement, the amateur sport system in Thailand and some of the issues confronting the Olympic Movement. They also felt that they had a valuable opportunity to examine their values and beliefs about sport and the Olympic Movement. They felt that the TOA gave them an



opportunity to improve their leadership skills and they were in turn motivated to take action. Lastly, they also believed that the TOA provided them with an opportunity to share their ideas with others.

The second aspect of this study was to assess the outcomes of the TOA. Outcomes occurred on two levels; personal and social. The overwhelming majority of participants indicated that they experienced personal change as a result of their TOA experience. Of those that did experience change, once again, the overwhelming majority described the change as positive. Most felt that the change involved a greater awareness. Concerning social outcomes, the respondents reported that after they attended the TOA, they were more involved with speaking to others, both formally and informally, about sport and the Olympic Movement. They also participated in or were involved with the administration of other programs and activities dealing with the Olympic Movement as well as activities that promoted social change.

There were only a small number of significant differences between the responses of the earlier alumni and alumnae compared with the more recent alumni and alumnae. This suggests that, for the most part, the TOA has had both a short and long term impact. However, there were indications from the interviews that for some the effects of the program did lessen over time. Therefore, the need to follow-up after the session as a way to maintain enthusiasm and involvement became apparent.

### **Conclusion and future work**

In conclusion, the model for assessing the impact of the TOA on the Olympic Movement in Thailand was presented. It maintained that some people with an interest in the Olympic Movement would apply to attend the TOA and from those applications 50 people would be selected based on their interest and involvement in the Olympic Movement, their gender, language and area of residence. The results revealed that the varying backgrounds and experiences of the participants was an important aspect of the success of the program. The model also suggested that the residential, adult education and leadership development focus influenced the program of the TOA and enhanced its ability to attain its goals. These three elements proved to be valued aspects of the program according to the participants. In addition, the sponsorship of the TOA by the National Olympic Committee of Thailand was remembered and rated as appropriate by the majority of the survey respondents. These three aspects (i.e., the participants selected, the format and the sponsorship) all theoretically influenced the TOA program itself and its potential for goal attainment.

This study indicated that the desired goals were attained. This impacts on the Olympic Movement in Thailand because the participants felt that they have a greater knowledge of Olympism, the Olympic Movement, the sport structure and relevant issues as such. They all felt that they had an opportunity to examine their values and beliefs and to share these with others as well as an opportunity to create new ideas about how Olympism can be conveyed to a larger number of people. Also, there were numerous outcomes from the program that were both individual and social and both occurred over a short and long term basis. The outcomes of the TOA impact on the Olympic Movement because they multiply the number of people that are aware of Olympism and the Olympic Movement (e.g., through public speaking or the organization of a regional academy). Subsequently there will be more people with an interest in the Olympic Movement and in turn more interest in the TOA. The urgency of Olympic Movement is more intensified to set up examples for business corporations and the successful role out of PPP is anchored on the clarification of the role to be played by the PPP arrangements and agreements which are crafted. The success of PPP depends on trust between the host community and the stakeholders. (Thobile , 2018)



In the beginning it was stated that an impact had been made if the alumni and alumnae experienced personal change and/or were motivated to initiate or take part in activities that promoted the Olympic Movement and its ideals as a result of their participation at the TOA. The results indicate that the TOA has made an impact on the Olympic Movement in Thailand.

## **Recommendations**

Several recommendations for future sessions of the TOA as well as for the present state of the TOA alumni and alumnae are now proposed based on the results of this study.

1. It was evident that the critical reflection methodology used in the design of the TOA was an important component of the program. Therefore, this approach should be maintained (and improved upon) for future sessions of the TOA. The organizers of the TOA should continue to strive for an active, learner-centred environment.

2. Numerous participants suggested that there should be a more practical component to the TOA session where concrete ideas for promoting Olympism are discussed. TOA organizers should take this into account for future sessions.

3. A newsletter should be sent to all alumni and alumnae on a regular basis. Until now the newsletter has been written and distributed very sporadically. It should be distributed on a regular and predictable schedule. This newsletter would provide a vital link to the alumni and alumnae. All the alumni and alumnae should be invited and actively encouraged to contribute to it. It should contain information about recent and upcoming academies (TOA, IOA and NOAs of other countries) as well as information about activities that alumni and alumnae have been involved in, reports from provincial academies and practical suggestions for promoting Olympism. These suggestions should include small independent projects that people could do on their own in a relatively short amount of time (i.e., writing a letter to a local sports department to include more coverage of amateur sport or approaching a local school to speak about Olympism and the Olympic Movement) as well as larger projects requiring more time and perhaps involvement with other alumni and alumnae (i.e., get involved with a regional academy or set up a local speaker's bureau of alumni and alumnae).

4. Some alumni and alumnae indicated a substantial willingness to be involved in various activities and projects but were unable to commit the time or energy required to initiate new projects. The committee of the TOA should acknowledge and address that in order for greater involvement to occur there should be a greater amount of follow-up and support for the alumni and alumnae. The TOA should act as a facilitator (or arrange for a coordinator) for the activities of the alumni and alumnae. Perhaps if the groundwork were laid out for various projects and effectively communicated to the alumni (e.g., through the aforementioned newsletter) there would be greater involvement.

5. In order to facilitate communication between the alumni and alumnae, a roster of alumni and alumnae listed by province should be distributed according to province of residence to any interested participants at the TOA session. Also the entire list of alumni and alumnae should continue to be available to those that request it from the TOA.

6. It was suggested that reuniting with other alumni and alumnae was an effective way of rekindling people's enthusiasm about Olympism and the desire to promote it. It is recommended that reunions (on a national or regional level) of TOA alumni and alumnae be held. Perhaps the TOA organizing committee could arrange these or provide support for alumni and alumnae to organize them.



To conclude, the results of this study allow us to say that the TOA, in its first 18 sessions (2010-2018), was able to foster critical thought and a desire for social change among its participants. This is an excellent example of a program in sport that has shown an ability to make a positive impact on society by training present and future leaders as ambassadors of Olympism. With the number of hypocrisies and inequalities that are often seen in sport, it is encouraging to see evidence that an educational sport program can make a valuable contribution to society.

In terms of priorities for future research, there are a number of suggestions that arise from this study. First of all, the applicability of the TOA Impact Model to other education programs should be assessed. Secondly, all TOA educational programs should be evaluated to determine their impact. Thirdly, this study revealed a number of first order effects of the TOA. A suggestion for future research would be to examine the second order effects of the program. This would involve communicating with the people that come into contact with the alumni and alumnae to assess differences in behavior after they attended the TOA (e.g., do the students of a teacher who attends the TOA perceive a change in the teacher?). Lastly, as the number of NOAs around the world increases, it would be valuable to do comparative research to establish the effectiveness of the varying academy formats.

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