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Fostering Innovation Through IP Education: Critical Implications from Business School's experiment

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Abstract

Intellectual property (IP) is increasingly recognized as the most valuable asset for technology ventures in today's knowledge-intensive economy. In Thailand, IP education is primarily offered in law schools, taught from a legal perspective. Business school students, however, have limited opportunities to learn the fundamental concepts of IP—particularly how to accumulate, protect, and commercialize a company's intellectual assets. This paper presents a pilot initiative in which the author introduced IP concepts to second-year students in a BBA program. Topics such as copyright, trademarks, patents, trade secrets, and geographical indications were integrated into a production management course using a case study approach. Employing an action research methodology, the study involved observing and interviewing students to assess their awareness and understanding of the value of different types of IP. The findings suggest that while students recognize the importance of accumulating and protecting IP, their understanding is largely confined to copyright. This indicates a limited awareness of the distinctions between various forms of IP. Moreover, students tended to focus on protection strategies without a clear understanding of how to commercialize IP. The results of this pilot highlight a critical gap in IP education within Thai business schools, particularly at the undergraduate level. Bridging this gap by incorporating IP knowledge into other social science disciplines is essential to foster greater creativity and innovation.

Keywords: intellectual property, innovation, business school

1. Introduction

Intellectual properties (IP) are increasingly regarded as the most important assets of technology ventures amidst knowledge-intensive competition. IP education is therefore central to fostering a culture of innovation and ensuring that creators, businesses, and governments can effectively protect and leverage intellectual assets. In particular, IP is vital for encouraging innovation, safeguarding creative works, and enabling economic growth. The proper understanding of IP laws empowers individuals to capitalize on their inventions, thereby contributing to national and global economies.

Despite its importance, several challenges hinder the widespread implementation and effectiveness of IP education. A common issue is the lack of awareness among students, entrepreneurs, and even educators about the relevance and complexity of IP law. Many educational institutions offer IP as a peripheral subject rather than a core component, leading to gaps in knowledge among future professionals and innovators. Specifically, there is a lack of integration between IP education and other academic disciplines such as engineering, business, and law, limiting its practical application in real-world scenarios. Such condition creates a gap between the demand of engineering students and the existing intellectual property courses with a legal focus (Liu & Yu, 2019). Compared to law schools, business schools lag behind in terms of developing new courses on intellectual property (Fishman, 2010). Though IP knowledge may be included in technology management courses, these courses were rarely offered as core courses in business schools (Sooampon, 2025).

Conceptually speaking, IP plays a crucial role in incentivizing innovation by granting temporary monopolies, thereby encouraging further investment in research and development (Scotchmer, 2004). Knowledge gap on IP, however, was seen not only at school but also at workplace. As the R&D, strategy, and legal functions are poorly integrated in many organizations, firms tend to miss opportunities to create and exploit the value of intellectual property (Fisher, 2013). One significant challenge might come from the complexity of IP law, which varies across jurisdictions. For instance, understanding the nuances of patent law in different countries or navigating copyright restrictions in the digital space can be difficult. This complexity is compounded by the fact that many IP laws are updated frequently, making it a moving target for educators to keep up with. Integrating IP strategy with corporate strategy remains challenging for both IP personnel and corporate executives (Tanaka, 2013). In particular, IP strategies become a vital set of strategic decisions in open innovation system in which firms have to both collaborate and protect themselves (Sa et al, 2025).

From these reasons, leading universities have incorporated IP education into broader entrepreneurship and innovation programs, ensuring that students from fields like business, engineering, and law can appreciate the significance of IP in their professional lives. By teaching IP in the context of entrepreneurship or creative industries, students can see how intellectual property is not just a legal issue but a business strategy.

In Thailand, lessons regarding intellectual property are mainly thought in law schools from perspectives of lawyers. In contrast, business school students have very little chances of learning fundamental concepts especially the way to accumulate, protect and commercialize company's intellectual properties. The rationale of this paper begins at this point. Thus, IP education program for BBA students has been introduced by the author. By learning from their responses from this experimental program, the objective of this paper is to explore perceptions and knowledge gaps of business students towards different kinds of intellectual property.

2. Method

This work starts from the author's pilot experiment of introducing IP knowledge to 2nd year students in BBA coursework. Concepts of copyright, trademark, patent, trade secret, and geographical indication were blended in production management class through case study approach. Along the class, students were interviewed and observed in terms of their awareness how they see value in each type of intellectual property.

Action research approach was adopted. Action research is a powerful and flexible methodology that enables practitioners to engage in continuous improvement of their practices through collaborative and reflective inquiry. Defined by Lewin (1946) as a process of inquiry leading to social action, and further refined by Carr and Kemmis (1986) and Reason and Bradbury (2001), action research is participatory, cyclical, and focused on practical solutions. Its significance lies in its ability to empower practitioners, foster professional development, and contribute to broader knowledge. Despite some challenges, action research remains a vital tool in addressing real-world problems and promoting positive change across various fields, particularly in education, healthcare, and organizational development.

Data were collected from students in productions and operations management class where is the key setting of this action research. The typical objective of this class is to introduce key factors that matter for success/failure of company's production system. Questions about Intellectual property were blended in the session regarding process know-how protection. Responses from students were analyzed to see how difference between their perceptions and legal definition seen in IP law.

Here are samples of questions being asked in the class

1. Give examples of intellectual properties, based on your understanding?

2. Think about case of Starbucks Company, what kinds of intellectual properties they have?

3. What is intellectual property (IP), and why is it important for businesses and individuals?

4. Can you explain the different types of intellectual property rights? (e.g., patents, copyrights, trademarks, trade secrets)

5. What is the difference between patents and copyrights?

6. How do trademarks help in building a brand identity?

7. How can a business protect its intellectual property from infringement?

8. What steps would you take if you found out that your company's IP is being infringed?

9. Can you explain the process of filing for a patent?

10. How would you manage IP in a collaborative project involving multiple stakeholders?

11. What are the common challenges in enforcing intellectual property rights?

12. Have you been involved in any IP dispute resolution? If so, what was your approach?

13. How would you prove copyright or trademark infringement in a legal case?

14. What measures can companies take to prevent employees from misusing trade secrets?

15. In addition to court, is there any other approach of dispute resolution?

3. Findings and Discussions

According to the observations and interviews, BBA students tend to acknowledge necessity of accumulating and protecting intellectual properties. The most common type of intellectual property in their eyes, however, seems to be only copyright. As a result, they tend to use the words copyright with any kinds of creative works. This is an early sign that they do not understand yet how each type of intellectual property differs from others. Next, their key interest is to protect first, without clear idea yet how to commercialize intellectual properties. In terms of dispute resolution process, Thai BBA students still have no idea regarding choice between litigation versus arbitration.

Here are sample quotes often heard in the class;

"To protect our innovation, we need to file for copyrighted song, copyrighted food, copyrighted phone, or even copyrighted car"

"My request for patent is already approved. My job is done. I can export to anywhere in this world, right?"

"It is still okay to use similar trademark with others as it is not exactly the same". What we need is minor modification from the origin".

"To get patent is the first important thing. At least, I feel safe that nobody can steal my idea. After that, I don't know what to do?

"How much we earn from licensing patent? Is there standard rate? I have no idea how to negotiate for more licensing fees?

"The only choice to fight back is going to court. I know that it takes long time to finalize the case. However, I can't imagine any other solutions"

This pilot experiment represents myth and knowledge gap in the mind of students. The empirical evidence implies that intellectual property education in Thai business schools is weak and remains a critical flaw in the field of technology management (TM) especially at the undergraduate level. Further attempts to bridge intellectual property knowledge and business strategy field should be of interest to innovation scholars especially from developing economies. This suggestion is given according to the fact that intellectual property and innovation is increasingly tied. Without clear idea regarding IP management, the students will grow up as future manager with very little bargaining power in negotiation towards technology commercialization.

4. Implications

Based on the findings, here are some policy recommendations to improve intellectual property (IP) education in Thai business schools and foster innovation:

First, business schools should incorporate IP topics into their core courses, such as management, entrepreneurship, and marketing. A specific course on IP could be introduced, covering topics like copyright, patents, trademarks, trade secrets, and commercialization strategies, to ensure students gain a well-rounded understanding of IP.

Strengthening partnerships between law and business schools could facilitate interdisciplinary learning. Law schools could offer guest lectures or co-teach courses with business faculty, allowing students to understand both the legal and commercial aspects of IP. This approach would bridge the knowledge gap and provide a more comprehensive view of IP management.

To enhance students' practical knowledge of IP, business schools should incorporate case studies and real-world examples of how companies manage, protect, and commercialize their intellectual properties. This hands-on approach would help students better understand the strategic value of IP and how to apply it in a business context.

Business students should be educated on the commercialization aspect of IP, not just protection. They should be encouraged to identify revenue-generating opportunities from IP assets. Specifically, they should understand the key ideas to be included in IP-related strategies such as licensing or transferring patent ownership for example. This would help students understand the economic value of IP in driving business growth.

In addition to strategic issues, knowledge regarding IP contract is also critical but usually left to legal staff's responsibilities. To ensure sustainable gain and fairness, further studies should be conducted to explore in-depth perception of business students towards IP-related contracts. The expected outcome is more electives and training program for business students on conditions, terminologies required for contract drafting and negotiation. This is to

close knowledge gaps and ensure that they are well-trained as negotiators and decision makers for IP commercialization.

5. Conclusion

Intellectual property (IP) is increasingly recognized as a vital asset for technology ventures in today's knowledge-driven competition. In Thailand, IP education is predominantly offered in law schools, focusing on legal perspectives. Meanwhile, business school students have limited opportunities to learn the fundamental concepts of IP, including how to accumulate, protect, and commercialize these assets effectively.

This paper discusses a pilot initiative aimed at introducing IP knowledge to second-year students in a BBA program. The concepts of copyright, trademarks, patents, trade secrets, and geographical indications were integrated into a production management course using a case study approach. Throughout the class, students were observed and interviewed to gauge their awareness and perceptions of the value of different types of intellectual property.

The findings revealed that while BBA students recognize the importance of accumulating and protecting intellectual property, their understanding is limited. Most of them primarily associate IP with copyright and lack a clear grasp of the distinctions between various IP types. Moreover, their primary focus is on protection, with little understanding of how to commercialize intellectual property effectively.

This pilot study highlights a significant gap in IP education within Thai business schools, particularly in the context of technology management at the undergraduate level. Addressing this issue requires further efforts to integrate IP knowledge into diverse academic fields, fostering creativity and innovation among students.

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