

The Reflection of Thai International Higher Education towards the AEC

Kantatip Sinhanet, and Wei Fu

Abstract—According to the recent data from the Ministry of Education Thailand, 1044 international programs offered by Thai public and private universities are fully taught in English to more than 20,309 international students. Higher education furthers talents to promote the national economy. In order to foster professional workforces for ASEAN Member countries, they signed on the Mutual Recognition Arrangement to offer 8 standard occupations, which are Medicine, Dentistry, Nursing, Engineering, Accounting, Architecture, Surveying and Hospitality & Tourism. This research studied all the universities' international ESP program curriculums at undergraduate level in Thailand, especially those AEC standard occupation-supporting programs. The results show that Thai public universities are more competitive in undergraduate education than private universities for meeting the challenge from the coming AEC. The discussion indicates that more AEC supporting programs, job preparation projects and international cooperation are ongoing among Thailand's universities.

Keywords—AEC (ASEAN Economic Community), Curriculum, ESP (English for Specific Purposes), Higher Education.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE internationalization of higher education institution is a natural and inevitable consequence of the continued globalization of economies. Higher education is becoming more and more an essential part of education itself, as Thailand is moving towards more cooperation beyond traditional boundaries in the globalized world. In particular, Thailand is preparing for the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015, where the ASEAN single market and the single production base certainly influences the Ministry of Education to put more effort for Thai students to communicate in English. Higher education institutions are now being called to produce professionals for an internationalized economy. 8 occupations standard for ASEAN community are Medicine, Dentistry, Nursing, Engineering, Accounting, Architecture, Surveying and Hospitality & Tourism. (ASEAN, 2008) Thailand whose workers lack English has to face this challenge.

This study focuses on undergraduate level. In the paper, the undergraduate international ESP programs both in public and private universities in Thailand are surveyed using descriptive statistics to analyze the quantitative data.

The results of the study were grouped into three categories:

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ESP Bachelor degree programs, course subjects' comparison of international ESP Bachelor degree programs and AEC 8 occupations supporting programs in Thailand from public and private universities. The following tables are the overall pictures of Thai undergraduate international education.

	Public Universities	Private Universities
Number of Universities	80	71
Number of Universities open International Programs	37	28
International Bachelor Programs	167	168
International ESP Bachelor Programs	6	13
Number of Universities open AEC supporting Programs	20	15
Number of AEC supporting Programs	37	21

Fig.1 International Bachelor Programs in Thai Higher Institutions

According to the Ministry of Education, 1044 higher education programs from 80 public and 71 private universities are fully taught in English. More than 20,309 international students participated in these programs. Thai higher institutes are definitely preparing Thais towards this ASEAN Community especially in the offering of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) international programs. There are 167 international Bachelor programs offered by 37 public universities and 168 international Bachelor programs offered by 28 private universities. For the ESP Bachelor degree programs, public universities offer only 6 programs while private universities offer 13 programs. For the AEC supporting programs, 20 public universities offer 37 programs, while 15 private universities offer 21 programs to support AEC standard occupations.

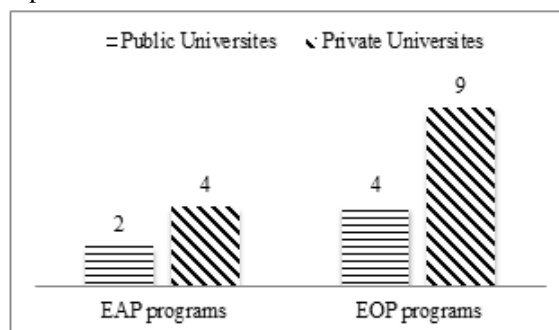


Fig. 2 Categories of International ESP Bachelor Degree Programs in

Thailand

According to R.R Jordan's (1997, 23) ESP can be broken into EAP (English for Academic Purposes) and EOP (English for Occupation Purposes). Public and private universities offer (1) Bachelor degree in English for Communication (EAP) and (2) Bachelor degree in Business English Communication (EOP) in Thailand.

For the EAP Bachelor degree programs, two public universities : Chiang Mai Rajabhat University and Mahasarakham University only offer two programs, while four private universities : Payap University, Asia-Pacific International University, Kasem Bundit University offer four programs. Also, nine private universities : Assumption University, Bangkok University, Far Eastern University, St. Theresa International College, Asia-Pacific International University, Hatyai University, Dhurakij Pundit University, Asian University, Sripatum University offer nine EOP degree programs, whereas four public universities: Dhonburi Rajabhat University, Uttaradit Rajabhat University, Chiang Mai Rajabhat University, Thammasat University offer four programs.

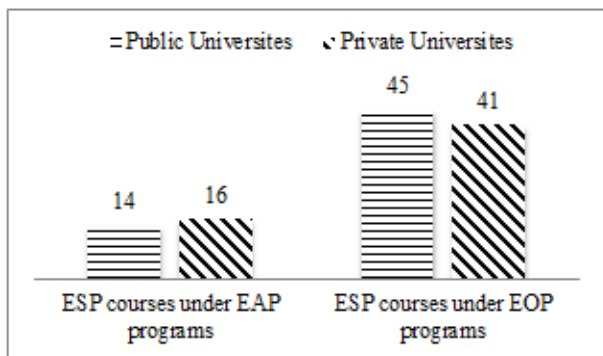


Fig.3 ESP courses under EOP and EAP programs at Thai Public and Private Universities

For the comparison of international ESP Bachelor programs in public & private universities in Thailand, both public and private universities offer ESP courses under Bachelor of Business English Communication (EOP) and English Communication (EAP) programs. Public universities offer 45 courses, while private universities offer 41 courses under Business English Communication (EOP) program (Some of universities offer program as Business English). Public universities offer 14 ESP courses, while private universities (from curriculums of Payap University and Kasem Bundit University) offer 16 ESP courses under the English Communication (EAP) program.

Four public universities: Dhonburi Rajabhat University, Uttaradit Rajabhat University, Chiang Mai Rajabhat University, and Thammasat University offer a lot of ESP courses under Bachelor of Business English Communication program (EOP). Uttaradit Rajabhat University offers 14, Chiang Mai Rajabhat University offers 13, Thammasat University offers 11, while Dhonburi Rajabhat offers only seven of those courses to enhance students various skills.

Nine Thai private universities: Asian University, Asia-

Pacific International University, Assumption University, Bangkok University, Dhurakij Pundit University, Far Eastern University, Hatyai University, Sripatum University and St. Theresa International College, offer ESP courses under the Bachelor of Business English Communication program (EOP). Bangkok University offers 17 ESP courses, covering several areas, such as “English for Business”, “English for Tourism”, “English for Hotel”, “English for Mass Communication”, “English for Entrepreneurs”, “English for Airline Business” and “English for Finance and Economics”. Assumption University offers eight; Sripatum University offers six; Asian University offers five; St. Theresa International College offers four, while Dhurakij Pundit University offers only one ESP course.

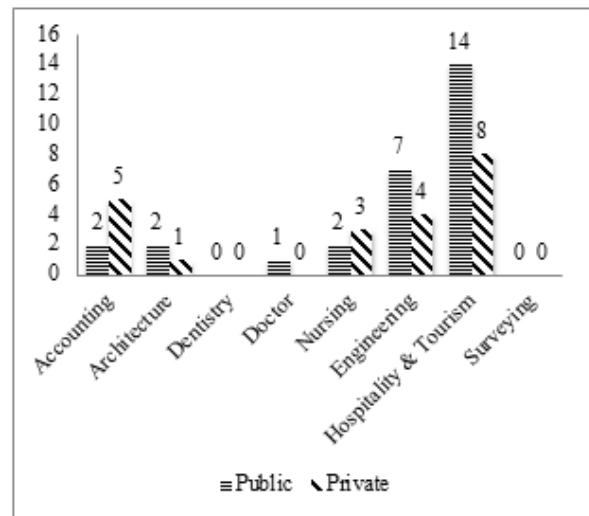


Fig.4 Number of Thai Universities offers International Bachelor Degree programs among 8 standard occupations for AEC

For international Bachelor degrees that help towards 8 occupations for AEC, none of the public or private universities offer undergraduate international programs to support “Surveying” and “Dentistry”. But fourteen public and eight private universities offer “Hospitality & Tourism” program. Three private universities offer “Nursing” while two public universities offer it. Seven public universities offer “Engineering” program while four private universities offer it. Only one public university offers “Doctor” programs while no private university offers it at all. Two public universities and one private university offer “Architecture” program. Furthermore, five private universities and two public universities offer “Accounting” program.

Among those occupations, it can be catalogued by specialization into five groups: (1) Accounting program (2) Architecture program (3) Dentistry, Doctor and Nursing program (4) Engineering and Surveying program (5) Hospitality & Tourism program.

In public universities: (1) Accounting program is offered by two universities: Chulaongkorn University and

Thammasat University. (2) Architecture program is offered by two universities: Chulaongkorn University and King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi (3) Dentistry,

Doctor and Nursing programs are offered by three universities: Srinakharinwirot University, Chiang Mai university and Mahidol University (4) Engineering and Surveying programs are offered by seven universities: Chulaongkorn University, Thammasat University, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Chiang Mai University, Kasetsart University, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang and Mahidol University (5) Hospitality & Tourism program is offered by fourteen universities: Chiangrai Rajabhat University, Phuket Rajabhat University, Mahasarakham University, Khon Kaen University, Naresuan University, Silpakorn University, Suratthani University, Kasetsart University, Mahidol University, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Burapha University, Dhonburi Rajabhat University, Prince of Songkla University and Srinakharinwirot University.

In private universities: (1) Accounting program is offered by five universities: Assumption University, Stamford International University, University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, Rangsit University and Asia-Pacific International University (2) Architecture program is offered by one university: Assumption University (3) Dentistry, Doctor and Nursing programs are offered by three universities: Assumption University, Christian University of Thailand and St. Theresa International College (4) Engineering and Surveying programs are offered by four universities: Assumption University, Mahanakorn University of Technology, Asian University and Shinawatra University (5) Hospitality & Tourism program is offered by eight universities: Assumption University, Bangkok University, Siam University, Dhurakij Pundit University, Christian University of Thailand, St. Theresa International College, Kasem Bundit University and Dusit Thani College.

In percentage terms, 46.25% public universities and 39.43% private universities offer international programs. Only 3.59% ESP degree programs and 59 ESP courses (under EAP & EOP degree programs) offered by public universities, while private universities offer 7.73% programs and 57 ESP courses (under EAP & EOP degree programs). Also, 25% public universities and 21.12% private universities offer AEC supporting programs. In addition, public universities only offer 22.16% programs while private universities only offer 12.50% programs to support 8 AEC standard occupations. From these statistics, it is obvious that the internationalization of Thai public universities is better than private universities. But both public and private institutions are at a standstill and the quantitative growth in programs and not all-inclusive curriculums design of Thai international education may not be ready to face those challenges. They need to offer more effective English programs. An article "Improving English skills is vital" on AEC Tourism Thailand (19 June, 2014) shared the idea that "Rapid development of the internationalization of Thai higher education plays a significant role on national education. Last year, among 54 countries surveyed for English proficiency, Thailand ranked

53, only ahead of Libya." Pad Lavankura (2013) stated that the Thai higher education system might not provide a significant contribution to internationalization. Kantatip Sinhaneti (2012) also pointed that with the booming economies, Thailand will face a tough challenge in preparing for "quality" in human resource, especially in higher education level.

The findings show that Thai higher institutions also need to offer more AEC supporting programs. 86.49% and 76.19% international programs offered by public and private universities are "Engineering" and "Hospitality & Tourism" programs. Thai higher undergraduate international education curriculums only cover six AEC standard occupations: Accounting, Architecture, Doctor, Engineering, Hospitality & Tourism, Nursing, and focus only on "Hospitality & Tourism" and "Engineering". Thai higher institutions offer very few AEC standard occupations supporting programs and may not maximize AEC opportunity to provide specialist workforce. The article "Education Key to AEC Success" from Bangkok Post (27 April, 2012) reported that "Without education reform, the country cannot maximize AEC opportunity, any AEC benefit will be concentrated in the hands of the privileged few who are already well-equipped for change." Moreover, among the miniscule of AEC supporting programs, none of the higher institutions offer "Surveying" and "Dentistry" international programs. This means that Thai higher institutions are not ready for the coming ASEAN Free Labor Markets. ASEAN has plans to move to a free regional labor market much like the European Union starting in 2015. Bangkok Post (13 October, 2010) pointed that "Under the new ASEAN Free Labor Markets so-called "white-collar" work in professions such as medicine, dentistry, nursing, engineering, architecture and accounting will be the first areas of the labor market to be freed up." Thais do not have much competitiveness in medicine, dentistry, nursing, accounting and architecture, because Thai high institutions offer few of these programs at undergraduate level. With no support on "Dentistry", Thais will lose lots of opportunities to succeed in this field. According to the article "Strong push for tourism gains"(Bangkok Post 8 January, 2015) "the government has assigned the Tourism and Sports Ministry to push for a serious recovery in tourism and to develop tourism quality in the future." As quoted in the Bangkok Post articles entitled "Long road still ahead for AEC services liberalisation"(Bangkok Post 5 January, 2015) "With less than a year to go before the official deadline for forming the Asean Economic Community, a huge amount of work still needs to be done." As for the curriculum development, those AEC supporting programs should be expanded to cover various fields, such as "English for Entrepreneurs". The idea shared in the Bangkok Post's article "Leader needed for AEC" (17 January, 2015) that Thailand companies should develop leadership in particularly ASEAN Economic Community market, otherwise the competitiveness of companies will stay far behind other neighboring countries.

In sum up, the ability to communicate in English has

repeatedly been cited as the most important instrument to compete with other ASEAN members on the AEC. The Ministry of Education of Thailand allocated over 500 million baht to improve English proficiency among the students, especially those attending vocational schools. (The Nation, 13 January, 2014) Those students are the focus groups because of the importance of SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprise) in promoting business activities in ASEAN. (The Nation, 2014) Also, ASEAN governments should pay more attention to internationalism education, especially on improving students' English proficiency and international communication skills. Thai universities changed their academic calendar to better align with other ASEAN countries in order to increase and expand international cooperation and offer more scholarships for Thai students to study in foreign countries. (Juan.Miguel Luz, 2014) The information from ASEAN Secretariat News (24 January, 2013) shares the similar idea that "Secretary-General of ASEAN emphasised the importance of education; science, technology and innovation; and youth programme as ways to learn, practice and improve ASEAN students' English competency." As for Thai higher education, the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report 2014-2015 states the major concern in mediocre quality of education at all levels. The quotation from an article "Chula lecturer rejects WEF education report" shares a good reflection of Thai higher education "we have had several problems regarding our education that need to be addressed quickly. If we are to improve educational standards to catch up with other countries, the curriculum as well as teacher quality must be improved." (Bangkok Post, September 5, 2013).

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