

Thai University Students' Preparations for Job Opportunities: Competitiveness and Tough Competition Ahead of the Up-Coming ASEAN/AEC Integration

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ABSTRACT

Technically, the up-coming AEC will result in the free flow of skilled labor within ASEAN member countries after it comes into full effect in 2016. As a result, skilled workers and professionals are expected to cross borders searching for jobs and investment opportunities.

Because of this, it is undeniable that jobs competition will become fiercer within ASEAN member countries and Thailand is no exception. In reality, countries with better education, more advances in technology with better governance and transparency will have more advantages than less developed ones with developed countries producing more competitive workforce rather than less developed ones. For Thai students and graduates, once AEC takes effect, they will have to compete with skilled workers from neighboring ASEAN peers such as Singapore, Malaysia, Myanmar, Vietnam and Cambodia not to mention the Philippines, Laos, Indonesia and Brunei. Apparently, the eight professions and industries which have already been agreed upon under MRAs (Mutual Recognition Arrangements) namely doctors, dentists, nurses, engineers, accountants, architects, surveyors and tourist professionals would likely be the least affected in regard to competition due mainly to the agreement signed. However, the undeniable fact is that the majority of Thai students who graduated each year whose degrees are in liberal arts, social studies, humanities, political science, mass communications, general management, physical education and other irrelevant fields, which have only a limited number of positions available for these majors, inevitably will likely to be unemployed.

The journal was written with an aim to provide useful information and to serve as a guideline for Thai university students and potential job seekers to use as a self-preparation source going forward. In addition, the provided information could be served as an aid for students in selecting the right fields of study that are suitable for the current demands within today's jobs market, instead of choosing a field based on trends which does not accurately reflect actual work opportunities. In addition, the content is also beneficial to general public to consider in order to compete in this ever increasing and intensified jobs competition.

Keywords : skills ; competitiveness ; key majors ; job opportunities and competition.

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Introduction

Technically, the upcoming Asean Economic Community (AEC) in 2015 aims to bring together all the members of Asean countries and form a single-clustered market with the goal of developing economic integration among its members; have common manufacturing and distribution bases; taking advantages of tariffs allowances and reductions, and freer flow of goods, and cross-bordered workforce corresponding with the signed MRAs which also facilitate skilled labor. (Barbin&Nichols, 2013). However, the flow of goods and labor across the borders may not be as free as expected due to non-tariff barriers (NTBs) which are widely used in the form of quotas and/or licenses in each member countries and their regulations. Domestically and regionally, the integration will inevitably result in changing Thailand's employment landscape and its relevant procedures, requirements, qualifications, and educational policies, let alone other the changes such as commercial landscape and business platforms.

From the current perception regarding employment of skilled and unskilled employees, in fact, once AEC gets started, the opportunity of finding jobs will most likely not be wide open as many anticipated. In reality, competition among jobs will become tougher and fiercer, especially for those who are not well-prepared and well-equipped.

Looking ahead, it is inescapable that jobs market situation in Thailand will be more competitive, not just from Thais within Thailand but from cross-bordering peers as well. In order to compete, Thai students will have to possess certain skills that will enable them to stay ahead of their Thais and foreign peers. In principle, the eight professions agreed

under MRAs (Mutual Recognition Agreements) framework namely: engineering, nursing, physician, dental, architectural, surveying, accounting and tourist professionals will likely be the first group to gain benefits or will likely be the least affected in regard to employment opportunities; provided each candidate passed each country's licensing test (s).

For the rest of other fields, non-scientific or non-engineering majors in particular such as social studies, liberal arts, general subjects, general education, general management studies will likely experience tough times ahead as the future trends of some of these majors will not have been suitable for jobs market demands, with may be a few exceptions for outstanding graduates who have equipped themselves with experience and essential skills i.e. English, other ASEAN languages skill, IT or other applicable skills.

Speaking of the skills needed to compete in AEC, English communicative skills are, without a doubt, a top priority. As Thailand is ranked near the bottom at number eight among ASEAN counterparts, lagging behind Myanmar and ahead of Cambodia in the area of English language competitiveness, it is obvious that Thai graduates will find it difficult to compete for jobs opportunity.

Apart from possessing good command of English, they must possess sound IT skills, analytical and strategic thinking skills as well as problem solving skills. Realistically, AEC represents both a huge challenge and opportunities for Thai students, job seekers, business people, entrepreneurs and the likes to reach their economic goals. However, those goals can only be realized if the stakeholders seriously make a commitment to improve their own overall performance indicators and strengthen their

capacity.

Serving as a guideline for Thai students and job seekers, the journal contains key topics such as educational and work competencies plus useful information that could serve as a lead for the aforementioned non-engineering, non-scientific majors as well as other people who are in search for a job to base their judgment on, perhaps broaden their perception and mindset; enabling them to think more independently and globally, and more importantly, choosing the field of study that could potentially serve their purposes or selecting a career field which can bear future fruit. In addition, the study also provides resourceful information on employment trends, situational and cultural influences that may have a bearing on working; pros and cons of AEC related to employment going forward.

In writing this journal, key credible and traceable sources from websites, journals, printed media, SME Smart TV Channel and radio broadcast (Good Morning ASEAN on MCOT's morning radio news) were used, analyzed and compiled. Additionally, interviews were conducted throughout with academics, business professionals from leading institutions and organizations.

Key content

With the implementation of AEC, Thais will encounter a much greater number of individuals from neighboring countries whether be it for educational purposes or career opportunities. These skilled professionals could be tour guides, entrepreneurs, artists, teachers, cultural performers, and laborers and so on. Albeit individuals must pass each ASEAN member country's certified exam(s) in order to qualify for the post (for engineers, a minimum of 7 years of

working experience is also required: Department of Trade Negotiations: Questions/Answers on AEC., May 2012., p. 66). And since only a few of these individuals will know Thai language, it is imperative for Thais to be able to effectively communicate in English with foreigners. Moreover, it is recommended that Thai students learn Chinese Mandarin or Chinese Cantonese, French, German, plus another language of one of ASEAN countries in order to be more marketable and stay ahead of their peers. (Fry G, www.nationmultimedia.com, May 14th, 2012).

Additional related information on preparation for AEC was hinted by Dr. Sujit Wongthet on the Nation newspaper/Opinion, May 14th 2012, he stressed the importance of learning other ASEAN's language(s) like Vietnamese for those who live in areas, such as Mukdaharn, Sakon Nakorn and Nakorn Phanom provinces. This would enable newly graduates, workers and professionals gaining a competitive advantage. He also pointed out that Thai curriculum should include cross-cultural communications and intercultural competency courses in its academic programs because such programs provide smoother understanding, transition, and raised awareness with regard to cultural sensitivity.

Educational Competency Rankings and Relevancy/ Attributes/Factors of Consideration With Regard to Competitiveness

Dr. Kreingsak Chareonwongsak, a renowned technocrat/ educator and president of the Institute Future Studies for Development made this interesting comment[†] "many Thai students like to obtain their degrees just to take part in photoshootings, but in actual fact they have no knowledge of the world and



when they get jobs many of them get them through connections as a result, many are not by all means competitive". (Bangkok Post/Economics, March 8th, 2012). He also mentioned that a reason for poor education system was due to weak and unqualified teachers teaching : because of low entrance requirements in which most Education Faculties had maintained.

Another comment on Thai students was made by NoppawanChulakanista, general manager of JobsDB Recruitment (Thailand), she said the attitudes of students need to change as Thai students are perceived as not as proactive as their foreign counterparts and they generally tend to stick to their comfort zone. She also added that they wanted a higher education without fully understanding what the current market is looking for. Her comment corresponded with Dr. Orphan Weerawong, vice president of International Relations at Srinakharinwirot University, who said "Thai students are kind of passive learners. Because they respect teachers, they have to be quiet, listening and jotting down which is expected from teachers". In doing so, creativity and self-initiation are being obstructed.

According to the World Economic Forum's "Global Competitiveness Report- 2013-2014", Thailand ranked at a dismal 8th place of the 10-member countries regarding educational system's suitability toward meeting the needs of a competitive economy. Ironically, it finished below Laos and just above Cambodia. Additionally, the overall ranking of Thailand's educational system also places it at 78th spot out of 148 countries surveyed.

Furthermore, a 2013 report produced by the Education First Institute (EF) English- Proficiency Index stated that Thailand was placed at 55th position

out of 60 countries and was at 48th spot among of 63 countries surveyed in the area of English proficiency in 2014. Meanwhile, according to the scores of the Program for International Student-Assessment (PISA) test in 2012, Thailand scored 427 in mathematics - ranked 50th out of 65 participating countries while Singapore ranked 2nd and Vietnam ranked 17th, for science the score was 444, ranked 48th, and 441 in reading, tied for 48th. With numerical literacy as one of the three key elements of 21st Century Teaching and Learning framework; facing competition with other ASEAN counterparts in terms of job opportunities is expected.

From another related perspective, Thailand ranked 116th out of 163 countries in regard to the global spectrum for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) in 2010, placing it among the bottom five countries in Asia with Vietnam, Tajikistan and Timor-Leste. Speaking of testing criteria, Thai students did equally poorly on all key aspects[†] speaking, listening, writing and reading.

Another interesting comment on Thailand's educational system was quoted by assistant professor Somphong Jitratab of Chulalongkorn University who said that Thailand had one of the worst educational systems in ASEAN. In his views, the country needs a major reform in all facets of education for instances: curriculum must be upgraded to suit job markets; focus on teaching techniques that motivate students and encourage them to be assertive, think rationally and systematically. Teachers should teach in ways that promote creativity, open-mindedness and enables students to express their opinions without bias. More importantly, they must get away from being too status



quo and focus on teach-less and learn- more concept of the 21st century of learning and teaching in which teachers act more as a coach and a facilitator instead of as a sole lecturer.

On a matter related to competencies, a recent survey by Cambridge University in regard to Thai English teachers' competencies, it found that a mind-boggling 60 % of Thai primary school teachers barely spoke English adequately, and overall only a mere 3 % of them obtained passable levels of English fluency. Additional data provided by the National Institute of Educational Testing-Service (www.monitor.icef.com), it showed- Thai students scored an average of 28.43 out of 100 in English.

In an article related to English for work's exam hosted by the JobStreet.com English Language Assessment (JELA), which the test takers were from different business sectors and hold positions ranging of executives, managers and entry levels in companies (the scores corresponded to the job levels meaning: those who hold high posts had higher scores). The assessment results show that Singaporean obtained the highest average of 81 percent, followed by the Philippines at 73 percent, Malaysia at 72 percent, Indonesia at 59 percent, and Thailand at 55 percent.

Concerning participants from Thailand, entry level staff that had three or less years of experience got the lowest scores on average of 53 percent: indicated the absolute need of English communications' improvement. (<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/business>, June 12th, 2013).

In today's jobs market, a skilled worker who is well-equipped with a solid educational background together with adequate soft and hard skills (soft skills

are mentioned later in this journal) e.g. English or other key foreign languages would undoubtedly become more viable and sought-after; have competitive advantages over others, and arguably would likely enjoy far greater career growth and advancement in an organization than those without.

A recent report on Thailand's human resources competencies in the aviation industry reveals that failure in engaging in efficient English communications among Thai employees has caused unnecessary idle time and delays relating to customer services, specifically when handling incoming calls and proceeding with the calls, thus adding to organization's overhead expenditure.

Other comments concerning incompetency made by Mrs. Busadee-Santipitak, deputy director-general of the ASEAN Affairs Department on Bangkok Post, December 18th, 2557, she expressed her concern that Thais' weak language competence could harm trade and investment of Thailand due to the fact that foreign investors would opt or prefer to invest in other ASEAN countries with better English capabilities. Henceforth, without FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) the country could perhaps, experience a decline in gross domestic product (GDP), potentially affecting the decline of the overall economy and hampering employment opportunities.

Speaking of education systems in other Asian countries, taking Singapore, Malaysia and China as examples, these countries' educational systems are structurally set in preparing and equipping their students with necessary tools to readily compete in the modern days straight away after graduation. For Thailand, it is advisable and beneficial that courses on ASEAN/AEC be incorporated into schools/universities' curriculum in order to impress on future



graduates the significance of the transitions, and the implications which could affect the ways of working & living of Thai people ahead of the integration. Last but not least, more Thai higher institutions should seize opportunities to connect and build networks with foreign institutions in other countries in developing and exchanging students/teachers' Knowledge-Management (KM) programs and conducting intellectually related workshops/seminars.

On other educational related matter, SantRathaviboon, lecturer, School of Engineering, Dhurakij Pundit University (information provided via email on January 7th, 2015), he viewed that the influx of intra-regional cultures, cross borders trades, and SMEs would play a prominent role in shaping the economy, pointing out that students should take into consideration enrolling in accredited universities which offer integrated (Interdisciplinary) majors, for examples: general/business management or IT major with incorporation of entrepreneurship studies, marketing/ engineering major or at the very least, choosing major which offers interdisciplinary-related discipline in the curriculum. He personally believes that selecting a sole or specific major will become less and less popular.

In order to enhance graduates and future graduates' job finding opportunities and strengthening their competitiveness, the government should put an emphasis on educational reform with an objective of helping to improve English and other ASEAN languages capabilities for both teachers and students; improving curriculum and customizing them to suit jobs market. As well, qualified and competent teachers should be put in place (Office of Basic Education Commission recently set up an

internal level English proficiency test for all government's primary and secondary school teachers as a measurement to improve English standards should help) especially in rural areas, at the same time teachers must also be willing to change their mindset, be prepared to adapt to new ways and methods of teaching whereby the emphasis would be focused on student-centered, and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) based on performance must be strictly enforced to ensure of accountability. All these combined, will have been contributed to Thailand's overall competitiveness, and subsequently lead to competitive workforce; perhaps pulling Thailand out of being a middle-income trap nation.

Work related competencies and supportive information on job opportunities

Apart from possessing good command of English, students must also know perceptions and cultures of other ASEAN countries as well as norms of the company, especially his/her prospective country, for example, touching someone's head may not be offensive in other countries, but it is offensive in Thailand; pointing someone with an index finger is considered very impolite in Brunei. In Korea, shaking hand with others while putting your left hand in trousers' pocket is considered rude and disrespectful. Therefore, recognizing cultural sensitivity is necessary in adapting to locals and workplace.

Other supporting skills that are considered indispensable for Thai students and job seekers' competitiveness and productivity are

• Problem-solving skills or the capacity to think critically and strategically. Job candidates need to

be able to recognize and analyze key information and/or problematic issues, data/figures, such as: profit/loss trend, overhead expenses, inventory, and so on in order to be in the forefront and progress in their careers. In short, one must have some financial knowledge largely to the nature of work as the majority of companies require more than just routine attention. The ability to analyze problems and being able to present valuable solutions in a timely manner based on facts and figures is needed, even during a job interview.

•Communication skills: be able to effectively communicate with colleagues, customers as well as other stakeholders. This also implies the ability to be a good listener and a prompt action taker.

•IT skills: at minimum, one must be able to work with Microsoft Office and know how to use common tools/applications to search for information.

•Human skills and traits: This implies to having a pleasant personality; possessing a team unity attitude & working well with others; having integrity and demonstrating accountability; being proactive rather than passive, taking initiatives and being self-motivated ; be assertive and willing to speak up/ providing constructive opinions/suggestions as employers view these characteristics as a key criterion when making a hiring decision; being honest, decisive and straight forward; adaptable and willing to take on challenges, last but not least, willing to be diligent and persevere.

According to assistant professor Dr.ChatkaewBhaowisesof- SuanDusitRajabhat University's recent opinion at a workshop in Kanchanaburi province on January 12th, 2015 on 21st century's basic/applied essential skills and knowledge whereby students and job seekers

needed to know and possessed in order to compete in jobs market are listed as follows: English communication (listening, speaking, reading and writing); mathematics ; science,government/economies; humanities,arts and foreign languages.

For applied skills, critical thinking comes first, followed by ability to communicate well and clearly with others, being a good team member, being open to diversity, IT sounded and creative, having a strong work ethics, having professional attitude, and be socially and environmentally responsive.

Channels of Interaction with prospective employers

For those who are going to graduate; have recently graduated or are currently seeking employment, there are various social media channels/websites/employment agencies for jobs opportunities namely: Linkedin, Nazionejobs, JobDb, JobTopGun, Facebook, Jobstreet, Twitter, Adecco etc. where applicants can send their resume and cover letter to or post them on line so that prospect employers can view them and be reached.

It is advisable to start approaching the prospective employers early, even before graduation. This though must be done in a professional manner, highlighting what you had achieved while in the university and what you are competent at or having expertise in, for instance: being computer literate, being bi or trilingual or able to conduct market survey, do research or perform a feasibility study; won a recognizable academic or special skill/talent award and/or graduated with honor as these abilities and accomplishment are tangibles, and are an integral part of hiring consideration apart from having a qualified G.P.A.



A related online jobs application was shared by TidaratKanchanawat, country manager of Adecco Group Thailand (a global recruitment agency) in www.nationmultimedia.com on April 30th, 2012. According to her, digital platform has played a major role in recruitment. The shared ratio between online and offline channels was around 85:15 per cent compared to only 15 per cent of company's overall recruitment using online in 2008. In addition, more and more companies are using online platform/social media to recruit employees of both management and operational levels.

Job prospects, potential opportunities, and companies' viewpoints concerning Thai liberal arts students and other non-science/non-engineering majors to take into consideration upon the arrival of AEC integration

Based on the writer's thoroughly and extensive research from credible media sources, the jobs that offer potential growth, and/or are in the process of expansion or planning to expand in ASEAN involved service-related functions including: spas and its wellness/beauty-related products, translations and call-centered services, linguistics and logistics/supply chains, especially border-trade areas and government's promoted Special Economic Zones (SEZs) such as Mukdaharn, Tak, Trat, NongKhai, Sa Keow, Songkla and Betong, Yala etc. For Kanchanaburi, the province and its people in the borderline districts close to Myanmar could benefit from the re-emerging of the Dawei Special Economic Zone (SEZ) - regarding the construction of the 138-kilometre road funded by Japan linking Dawei and the province, the project and its concerned businesses activities should spur- up opportunities

for English and/or Burmese, Japanese spoken job seekers. (<http://www.bangkokpost.com/business/new>), January 31st, 2015.

Other promising industry includes food franchising e.g. Halal food (in order to serve Muslims population which represented the majority of ASEAN population (<http://Thailand.prd.go.th>), in 2013) indicated that Indonesia alone had approximately 204 million Muslims out of approximately 244 million people which equaled to about 34 percent of ASEAN population. Information worth noting, Muslims in general do not believe in birth controls as they regard children as a gift from God.

(www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religious/islamethic/contraception.shtml). Based on this traditional belief, the number of global Islamic population should continue to grow, and could bring about increasing demand in Halal food consumption as well as its related food and services industry.

On other food and beverages news, Fuji Restaurant Group plans to open at least 15 restaurants in major Southeast Asian countries such as Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia and Laos during the next three years with the total investment of around 20 million USD. Additionally, Oishi Group PCL has set a target to build at least 10 branches in ASEAN within five years at a cost of 7 million USD. Both companies projected the growth in food businesses in ASEAN to be 10-13%; hence should bode well for food services/technology/science/manufacturing fields.

On a separated matter, Noppawan Julakanista, managing director of JobsDB Recruitment (Thailand) Co., Ltd. provided her opinion in an interview by the Nation group (www.nationmultimedia.com) on October 13th, 2014, she opined that once the free-flow

of workers begins, Thailand's border-trade provinces and major provinces/cities could benefit from the investment expansion of retail and wholesale trades from Thai and ASEAN investors. As a result, it should lead to more demand for both skilled and unskilled staff; possibility leading up to demands in the fields such as retailing/wholesaling, marketing, accounting, banking & finance, linguistics, R & D, international business and international laws.

Speaking of other ASEAN countries hiring schemes or policies, she stated that in Indonesia the hiring trends seems to lean toward those who are able to speak the local language(s) due mainly to entrepreneurs' preference as they tend to cater to local consumers, therefore, this could potentially hinder foreign workers' jobs opportunity; while Filipinos would prefer to choose working abroad resulting from stiff employment situation domestically (7.3% unemployment rate as of August 2014) while taking advantage of their English fluency. This being said, Thais should not overlook and underestimate the expatriate teachers such as Filipinos, Indians, Burmese and Malaysians etc. of whom generally display higher English capacity; given Thais' English inefficiencies, expats clearly have an advantage, plus they have tendency to accept lower pay than Thais which makes it even more attractive and tempting to employers to factor in terms of cost saving.

According to a recent survey by JobsDB's recruitment office of Asia Pacific, the top six required functions with high potential were said to be logistics/supply chains, sales/marketing/public relations, energy, engineering, IT, accounting, tourism, food science/manufacturing, food-related industry, and HR.

Another field which has generally been overlooked, but worth considering because of its plans of expansion is Thailand's postal services (Thailand Post Co., Ltd.), recently it signed a memorandum of understanding (M. o. U) with Laos' state enterprise to expand its networks and services. In 2012, it made a net profit of 1.34 billion baht from the sales of 18.2 billion baht. Being one of the more profitable and efficiently operated state enterprises as well as having strong networks, it provides job security. (www.manager.co.th), August 8th, 2014.

Opportunities in banking industry : commercial banks and their strategies toward AEC.

According to an article in the website (<http://www.bangkokpost/business/>) written by Somruedi Banchongduang on December 27th, 2014, Kasikorn Bank PCL (KBank) is expected to open its first branch in Phnom Penh in second quarter of 2015. For other banks, Siam Commercial Bank is also expanding its presence in CLMV countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam). It now has a representative office in Cambodia. Krungthai Bank (KTB) also has a branch in Vientiane, a branch in Panom Penh, and has a plan to partner with a bank in Vietnam. With this, a job candidate who possesses a solid educational background, having good command of English plus knowledge of local language and culture of the said countries, plus adequate applied skills would likely find themselves having competitive advantages and would be well-positioned when applying for a job with the bank.

It is also worth noting that many leading banks now are less choosy, more flexible when recruiting employees, and are willing to take on more liberal arts, social science, humanities and other non-business related majors.



An insight was shared by Kallaya Ngowsiramee, assistant training & recruitment director of KBank PCL said during a private interview on January 16th, 2015 that the bank had hired some graduates from renowned Rajabhat Universities and College of Dramatic Arts in which graduates received their degrees in liberal arts, social studies and humanities because of the shortage of qualified applicants when compared to overall total of unqualified ones.

Jobs opportunities in services industry

According to the data provided by the Japanese Chamber of Commerce (Bangkok office) in November, 2014, there were about 7,000 Japanese companies in Thailand, among these nearly half of them were SMEs and according to Dr. Jessada Salatong (a MCOT radio's talk show host said on MCOT's "Good Morning ASEAN" on August 23rd, 2014) mentioned that Japanese were the highest investor in ASEAN, accounted for about 10,000 million USD of investment. Based on this figure alone, graduates with Japanese or English's capacity would have been able to find more options in choosing a career, possibility in translations, tourism, hospitality or working in manufacturing environment with a Japanese company.

For those who are able to speak and write Mandarin Chinese, there is still plenty of demand for jobs with Chinese companies such as translators or interpreters, and call-center service staff. On the tourism front, Chinese visitors to Thailand stood at about 4.7 million in 2013; was 4.62 million in 2014, and projected to be about 5.25 million in 2015 nearly 20 per cent of the total in-bound forecast of 28 million visitors. These figures coincided with the need of qualified tour operators and other related functions

in the hospitality industry.

Speaking further of services industry, Julian Barrans, managing director of Interbrand, a Singapore-based global brands building company said in Bangkok Post on November 22nd, 2014: "Thailand has high credibility in dining and catering, followed by food and beverages, hospitality and health-related services". He further elaborated that Thai hospitality and Thais' friendly nature served as a competitive strength within the industry.

Other service field that should not be ignored is life/health insurance as changing of demographics in rising proportion of elderly and retirees could help spurring demand for its products e.g. annuities, health/life insurances. An article written by Sucheera Pinuparakarn in the Nation newspaper, October 2nd, 2014 pinpointed that demand for life insurance is predicted to grow during the next 3-5 years, and based on a recent Fitch Rating's view, life insurance premiums here amounted to less than 4 per cent of GDP indicated that there would still be room for growth; however, some computing skills are required.

An interesting comment provided by Somyos Lertlumyong, Betong, Yala's municipality chief in an interview with "Good Morning ASEAN" on MCOT morning news in August 2014, he stressed the importance of learning Mandarin Chinese as it is widely spoken in the bordered area of Yala, Hatyai, Songkla by business people and locals. In his view, there would be strong demand for Mandarin Chinese speaking persons.

Conclusion & Recommendations

On average, there are approximately 300,000 bachelor's degrees graduates annually; though

overall only 140,000 to 150,000 jobs are available. Moreover, bachelor's degrees graduates also have to compete with master's degrees ones, who perhaps have competitive advantages in terms of experience, and the fact is that more and more graduated students are willing to take on the jobs that required only a bachelor's degree due mainly to the imbalance of jobs demand vs. supply.

Nonetheless, without a competent English or other useful second language skill together with the 21st Century skills factoring in the inescapable competition from science, engineering or technical related fields ; a non-science/non-engineering major would likely encounter difficulty in finding a job, given limited jobs availability.

Without a doubt, ASEAN/AEC integration poses challenges to Thai people and students. Based on various underachieved standardized tests results, it appears that a true and holistic educational reform is needed more than ever in order to improve students and teachers' efficiency. A change of attitudes towards teaching & learning is necessary for both teachers and learners. This coincides with the adoption of curricular improvement that is designed to suit job markets demand, new teaching techniques, transparency and selective and stringent teachers' recruitment process must be strictly adhered to and complied with to ensure of qualified personnel. More importantly, teachers/educators' work performance must be chiefly based on merit and achievement, and the set standards and measurements must seriously and continually enforced. According to a 2011 records of UNESCO, the amount of state funds allocated for education in Thailand was the second-highest in the world at about 24 per cent when compared to the world average of 20 per cent,

contradicted to the low educational and competitiveness rankings.

On employment opportunities for non-science, non-technical related students, the key fields and functions which offer potential for growth moving forward, can be summed as : logistics/supply chains, retailing & wholesaling, linguistics, food services/science/technology/production, home economics, healthcare/herbal cosmetics & beauty related/health related products, tourism & hospitality, spa & wellness, entrepreneurship, research/development, tutoring services, human resources, creative products design e.g. lifestyle products, international business, international laws, banking & finance, health & life insurance, and interdisciplinary related fields for instances: intercultural studies and languages, IT/ entrepreneurship, marketing engineering, product designs/entrepreneurship.

To increase one's own capacities and be internationally recognized and accepted whether it be an academic professional, a civil servant or a business professional, it is highly recommended that students and job seekers take, and do well on TOEFL, IELTS or TOEIC exams as these are required by higher educational institutions and/or leading companies/organizations worldwide. For those who choose to venture in a business, opening up a languages tutoring center is a viable option, particularly in the border trade/Special Economic Zones areas.

As the world becomes increasingly connected and has created a border-less and paper-less society, the employment opportunity has never become more challenging, demanding and intense. As a result, it is necessary that Thai students and graduates prepare and equip themselves with all-important soft



and hard skills. For soft skills, they must be able work as a team, having awareness of cultural sensitivity to avoid misinterpretations, being able to adapt, being disciplined, pro-active and be willing to work extra hard.

For hard skills, of course, English and/or second language proficiency such as Chinese or Cantonese, Japanese, Korean, Malayu, Vietnamese, Bahasa, Burmese etc. is a must in addition to having sound IT skills, numeric analytical capability and/or technical skills.

For students who are undecided about what field to enroll in undergraduate study, they should seriously think about going into vocational or technical field and disregard the notion that these fields are blue-collared or laborious. The fact of the matter is these fields are, by and large still in demand and will likely remained to be, meaning that there is a strong possibility of getting hired.

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Great Opportunities for Thailand to Attract Muslim

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