

*ASEAN Economic Community: An Analysis of Trends and Challenges For Thai  
Higher Education Institutions*

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The European Conference on Education 2017  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

This article seeks to identify key trends and challenges of the AEC for the Thai higher education system by reviewing current research in the AEC, and official reports from the Thai Government and relevant international organisations. Demographic change, energy demands and the environment, future employment, decentralization of the country and development of local administrative bodies among many other trends will influence the Thai higher education system. This article considers four trends that result from the ASEAN Economic Integration and speculates on further trends covering the increasing importance of English language, restructuring of HEIs, programs in eight professions and the research-intensive universities.

Keywords: AEC 2015, the ASEAN Community, Thai Higher Education system, challenges and reforms

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The ASEAN Economic Integration (AEC) is a step toward the convergence of ASEAN member states in terms of economic integration. The AEC integration leads to the introduction of a single market and a production base of the ASEAN member states, the free movement of goods, services, investment, capital and skilled labor, along with the establishment of the emerging CLMV economies, known as ASEAN - 4 countries: Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam (ASEAN Secretariat, 2011). This potentially makes the AEC a new emerging economy powerhouse in Asia. However, there are some concerns in the management of the influx of immigrants, erosion of culture and national identity, skill recognition and transfer, and high competition among the member states.

Higher education is often challenged by forces within and from outside the country. As the discourse on globalization and knowledge-based communities becomes more significant in the contemporary world, many universities commonly adopt and reinvent global models to suit their individual needs and capacity (Beerrens, 2008). Many higher education institutions (HEIs) are aware of the changes and the need to adapt themselves to survive. Scott (2000) concluded that in the transformation of globalization in higher education in the intense challenges of globalization and the volatility of the late-modern (or post-modern) society, they [HEIs] “have to develop a new capacity not simply to build alliances with other institutions but to reinvent, reengineer and re-enchant themselves, to compromise their own integrity in order to allow a new configuration of “knowledge” institutions to develop” (pp.9-10). Stromquist (2007) argues that HEIs interpret globalization based on their cultural and environmental processes, and thus create differences in adoption to new environments. It cannot be overlooked that universities are strongly tied to the national context as most universities are state institutions (Scott, 2000). This is true for Thailand where public universities are often governed by a state ordained bureaucratic system. Nevertheless, Thai higher education system cannot evade the external changes from neoliberalism and the AEC convergence (see for example the economic boom in the 1990s). Consequently, the “drive toward greater efficiency” is emphasized (Scott, 2003, p. 303). Universities are required to manage their resources and processes e.g. in academic and organizational areas in order to achieve the maximum cost-effectiveness. Universities are operating in an entrepreneurial mode despite being public organizations. They are even required to “sell” their academic programs to prospective students and to establish “customer care” and “aftercare” standards (Scott, 2003, p. 303).

The higher education system is susceptible to external economic forces. For instance, the financial crisis of 1997 severely affected Thai higher education through cuts in public spending expenditure. The 2008 economic crisis resulted in a slow recovery of the global economy. The recession resulted in financial difficulties for the higher education sector. Shin and Harman (2009) speculate that many private higher education institutions (HEIs) will continue to face serious financial constraints. HEIs which provide higher quality with lower costs will survive the highly competitive environment. Lower costs may therefore be the sign of competitiveness in the future, whereas higher costs have been a sign of quality previously in the same institutions. Despite the Royal Thai government providing substantial funding for education, the

outcomes are disappointing. Fry and Bi (2013) term it a “Thailand educational paradox” (p. 305). The Thai government allocated approximately 520 billion Baht which is approximately 15 billion USD to the Ministry of Education in 2016 (Thailand. Bureau of the Budget, 2016). The country also has a body of qualified and well-educated school teachers and impressive physical infrastructure for education. The results, however, are disappointing. Thai students’ score at ONET examinations (Ordinary National Educational Test) are below average. Similar results are seen in the global competitive report, Thailand was listed 33 from 144 countries (World Economic Forum, 2015). The problems mentioned is a part of a quantitative expansion of higher education especially in teacher education as well as post-graduate and doctoral courses. There are many positions that are not relevant to teaching and learning function in HEIs and government organizations. This bureaucratic system illustrates a welfare system in Thai higher education or a “patronage system.” Next, the executives and the governing board often put most of financial resources into facilities and infrastructure rather than to use them to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Lastly, reforms were often project-based and often sporadic. HEIs cannot reap the full benefits of the reforms. Only a handful of bureaucrats and politicians fully benefit from such reforms while other stakeholders were excluded from these schemes. The bureaucratic system in education contributes to a part of the under-achievement in Thailand’s educational performance.

### **ASEAN Economic Community**

The AEC is the result from the Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (Bali Concord II) in 2003 which seeks to establish a single market and production base with aspiration to transform ASEAN into a stable, prosperous and highly-competitive region with equitable economic development, reduced poverty, and socio-economic disparities, progressing in tandem with the establishment of the ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC) and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) (ASEAN Secretariat, 2015b). The three pillars of ASEAN Community were built on different aims and road maps. Thailand has been an advocate of ASEAN integration since the forming of the concept.

Originally, the AEC and ASEAN community was intended to be launched in 2020. The AEC blueprint was initiated earlier in 2015 to be in line with the ASEAN Vision 2020 and the ASEAN Concord II. The Acceleration of the Establishment of an ASEAN Community was signed at the Cebu Declaration in 2007 with the main aim to transform ASEAN into a region with free movement of goods, services, investment, skilled labor, and freer flow of capital (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008). The main aim of the AEC is described below:

The AEC will establish ASEAN as a single market and production base making ASEAN more dynamic and competitive with new mechanisms and measures to strengthen the implementation of its existing economic initiatives; accelerating regional integration in the priority sectors; facilitating movement of business persons, skilled labor and talents; and strengthening the institutional mechanisms of ASEAN.  
(ASEAN Secretariat, 2008, p. 5)

The AEC has the objectives in developing human resources as a key to develop the nations to become knowledge-based economies within a globalized world. It aspires to develop the consortia of Southeast Asia countries in the similar approach of the European Union (EU). The AEC allows the transfer of skilled labor in eight professions, i.e. Medicine, Nursing, Engineering, Accounting, Architecture, Surveying, and Hospitality and Tourism (Sinhanet & Fu, 2015). Regional organizations such as SEAMEO RIHED and Asean University Network (AUN) promote the integration of education in Asean. The aims are to promote education networking, and enhance and support students and staff exchanges and professional development through creating research clusters among the ASEAN institutions of higher learning. The necessary missions for HEIs in the AEC encapsulate regional accreditation system, improvement in the quality of education, promotion of universal education and an increase in English language usage at every education level (Yaakub, n.d.).

The Office of Higher Education Commission (OHEC) (2010) published the broad strategic cooperation framework to prepare Thai Higher Education Institutions for the ASEAN Community. The framework addresses the challenges of the AEC that lead to a free flow of academic staff and students, free flow of trade and service and free flow of knowledge, culture and language as follows: increasing the ability and quality of the graduates to reach international standards; increasing the strength of educational institutions to develop ASEAN as a powerful economic region; and supporting the role of Thai higher education in ASEAN.

Thailand also aims to be a regional hub of higher education and attract up to 100,000 international students rising from the current number of 20,000. The international standard as well as rigorous quality assurance processes have been imposed in recent decades. The AEC would offer the opportunity for Thai HEIs to attract international students from the other ASEAN countries. ICT structure has been improved to ensure the quality of higher education and regional cooperation e.g. the Inter-University Network, Thailand Cyber University, the e-library ThaiLis and the National Education Network (Ned-Net) (Yaakub, n.d.).

Although the opportunities of the AEC do not come without challenges, ASEAN economic integration brings along complications for HEIs. While many issues on the AEC integration were also reported (Barbin & Nicholls, 2013; Vongchavalitkul, 2012; Yaakub, n.d.), most studies point out the unpreparedness of workers and students (Barbin & Nicholls, 2013; Nguyen, 2015). These issues are education-related. For instance, the majority of the workers are low-skilled with education below

lower secondary. A large percentage of skilled workers are clustered in the agriculture and fishery sectors rather than manufacturing; university graduates experience high unemployment rates, and lastly Thai economic productivity is low because of poor English proficiency among Thai workers (Nguyen, 2015). Barbin and Nicholls (2013) reported that Thai university students in a private university have a low level of knowledge of the AEC and thus are not well-prepared for its commencement. The results, however, indicate that students have high level of acceptance and willingness to embrace the AEC's changes. Thai higher education institutions will have to invest greater time and effort to increase awareness, knowledge and competencies in the AEC among their students.

### **Trends and challenges of the AEC for Thai Universities<sup>1</sup>**

The modern higher education sector has been profoundly affected by two main themes: massification and globalization (Shin & Harman, 2009). These themes have intensified since the 1980s when universities in Thailand offered courses to respond to the demand for a skilled workforce in many sectors. This was followed by internationalization trend in the 1990s. Internationalization of higher education in Thailand has a positive reception from students and parents as it correlated with the massive growth of the economy. On the contrary, internationalization is also met with fear of western culture dominance and lose of the local culture, changes in the internal structure of Thailand and the identity of Thai people (Lavankura, 2013). The AEC is considered an opportunity to internationalize and harmonize the higher education system to align with other ASEAN nation members. The phenomenon is slowly manifesting itself and scholars in various disciplines have predicted the forthcoming trends. OHEC (2008) defines seven scenarios which will be key challenges for Thailand's higher education including demographic change, energy and the environment, future employment, decentralization of the country and development of local administrative bodies, peaceful resolution of conflict and violence; postmodern/postindustrial world and His Majesty the King of Thailand's initiation of the sufficiency economy principles. It is speculated that these key scenarios are linked to the AEC 2015:

From among these scenarios, there are many issues that can develop into problems that affect universities in Thailand. In this article, the trends of the AEC involve the increasing significance of English language, intense restructuring and privatization of higher education, more programs in eight transferable skills and transformation of teaching universities into research universities.

#### **Increasing significance of English Language.**

English language is considered the principal language for communication in the ASEAN context. According to the Office of Higher Education Commission (2010), English has become very important in preparing the country for integration into the ASEAN community by 2015 (p. 69). Furthermore, the ability to communicate in English has repeatedly been cited as the most important instrument to compete with other ASEAN members on the AEC (Chongkittavorn, 2014, Online). Many studies

list English language skills as an important attribute for both university graduates and professionals (Jitpaisanwattana, Pathumcharoenwattana, & Tantawutho, 2015; Singisi, 2014; Yaakub, n.d.).

Many reasons account for the deficiencies of English education in Thailand. The most serious concern is the structural limitations that underlie the low English communication ability in Thai students. Firstly, the Ministry of Education Strategic Plan for the ASEAN Community in 2015 did not include English professional training courses. The second concern comes from the 2008 English curriculum of Thailand which lacks unity and proved difficult in achieving a sufficiently high quality control. Students who take English as a requirement of national curriculum for many years failed to achieve standard score on Thai ONET. In addition, Thailand was currently ranked 56 out of 72 countries in English First's English proficiency test. Apart from structural limitations, Thai teachers and students are reported having problems with English education achievement. Thai teachers themselves are not competent enough in areas such as writing, listening and speaking. They also have a minimal exposure to English language. For students, lack of motivation, passivity and little effort in studying contributes to their low achievement in English language. The curriculum needs revision to make it better aligned with the vision of the AEC, together with mathematics and science being delivered in English, English for specific purpose pedagogy and English provided in work after graduation (Sanonguthai, 2013).

Singsi (2014) analyzes the trends and interprets the data collected from the document analysis including the government documents and academic papers. These trends outline the staff/students, higher education institutions and freedom of movement in eight professions. The staff/students area states that English will gain greater significance as a medium of communication. Secondly, the graduate competencies that match the region's needs are also needed. In the preparation of higher education institutions, the trends are changes in the existing curriculum which need to be developed for the eight professions, awareness of ASEAN Community, STEM teaching focus, changes in existing curricula that reflect the free trade of education in the ASEAN Community, internationalization of the curriculum and academic strengths in subjects such as health sciences, tropical medicine, agriculture, agricultural industry and tourism. Lastly, the freedom of movement in eight professions within the AEC will be the trend which unfortunately will lead to shortage in certain profession e.g. doctors and nurses, the needs for dual language course in eight professions, and the common standards of transfer system of the eight professions. Jitpaisanwattana et al. (2015) suggested that English should be integrated into technical accounting professional classes. Learning methods should be diverse and creative in terms of delivery methods. While Thai higher education institutions mostly use classroom lectures to teach English courses, many overseas higher education institutions utilize a variety of other techniques e.g. classroom learning technique, self-study method and technologically-assisted learning methods. The critique of English teaching in public education is illustrated in Bangkok Post's article (Bangkok Post, January 10, 2012) that the "government-run language teaching is almost universally rote, unimaginative and presented with no motivation." Lacking

essential skills in work e.g. English competency impedes the employment opportunities for Thai workers. In some worse cases, university graduates cannot even read the job advertisements. This language deficiency contributes to the disadvantageous stance of Thailand in the AEC arena.

### **Restructuring and Privatization of higher education institutions**

Thai HEIs will face immense challenges from the AEC. As stated earlier, Scott (2000) argues that while many universities are generally bound to the state, the AEC and globalization bring opportunities for HEIs to expand their student body. With these forces comes the trend that encompasses the transition from a state bureaucratic system to independent and autonomous universities. The path of restructuring public higher education has never been an easy one. The public universities feared that they may not receive adequate funding from the government and that the faculty members were suspicious that their resources will be depleted after de-linking from the civil-service (Kirtikara, 2006 as cited in Mok, 2007, p. 280).

Fry (2013) comments that too much of the Thai educational budget is spent on this highly-centralized bureaucracy. The bureaucracy prevails at every level of Thai education from basic to higher education. This has created a “state-centered perspective by promoting a highly structured, rigid, higher education model” (as cited in Sae-Lao, 2013, p. 139). While it yields low outcomes, this phenomenon is creating more problems for Thai HEIs for its lack of efficiency in management as the budget is spent on the bureaucratic system rather than in other areas where there is greater need.

The transformation of public Thai universities into autonomous institutions officially stemmed from the 1997 ASEAN Economic Crisis and was enacted in the 1999 Education Act. The Thai Government received a contingency loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to reform the public organization. The details of the Act encompass the change of universities into autonomous ones together with mobilization of resources and investment in education (Upping & Oliver, 2012). Technically, autonomous HEIs will be provided an annual block grant from the government. These universities are required to look for external funding e.g. through industrial collaboration and research funding. The earliest case of autonomous university can be traced back to 1980s at King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT). The benefits of autonomous universities include the autonomy in management of personnel, finances and resources with potential for cost reduction, higher productivity and increased efficiency. The incentive of being an autonomous institution is increasing incomes and revenues. Suranaree University of Technology, Walailak University and Mae Fah Luang were each established as an autonomous university and have flexibility in management of their resources and administration. Not all state universities are willing to become autonomous, and the Thai government made the transformation to autonomous university a voluntary choice rather than mandatory (Sangnapaboworn, 2003).

The risks for autonomous universities include the pressure of leadership and withdrawal of resources from the state. Universities which receive regular funding

from the government are considered to be in a better position than those which do not. Another issue that follows the autonomy process of higher education is accountability. It is imperative for autonomous HEIs to have good governance in practice as well as a clear vision shared by its staff. Thirdly, university ranking is considered a problem for an autonomous university. The executives of the university will put pressure on staff to publish their research and undertake other tasks which can be measured in quantitative terms to gain a better rank in the international ranking system. Quality assurance can be problematic in managing a university. These can result in an inconsistency of research output and irrelevant policies of a university (Lao, 2015).

### **Programs in Eight Transferrable Professions**

Thailand is planning to move away from being an industrialized country to a knowledge economy where highly-skilled workers and information become a mechanism for driving the economy forward. The vision of the AEC also stresses the transfer of skilled professions in eight areas. Following this, it is anticipated that universities will offer more programs in eight areas that can be transferred to other countries within ASEAN i.e. medicine, nursing, engineering, accounting, architecture, surveying, and hospitality and tourism. It is possible that more Thai and ASEAN countries' students will choose to enroll in the courses in eight transferable occupations to widen their career opportunities and mobility.

As the number of younger people in Thailand is shrinking, HEIs have to expand their sources of prospective students. Offering courses in the transferable skills will attract not only local students but also international students from ASEAN countries to enroll in such courses. By contrast, only 22.16% of public universities offer courses to support the eight AEC occupations and 12.50% of private universities offer the courses (Sinhanet & Fu, 2015). None of the public and private universities offered the supporting international courses in "surveying" and "dentistry." The courses that are most popular among Thai HEIs are clustered in hospitality and tourism.

Universities now recognize the shortage of these courses. The development and offering of these courses are now in progress. In the past, attempts in offering international programs in medicine were made by Rangsit University and Srinakharinwirot University, but it was met with opposition from the Ministry of Public Health (Thaipost, 2010, Online). Although at present universities are not convinced that international courses in these occupations are beneficial, it is anticipated that they will offer these programs in the future.

The mobility of skilled professionals is, however, limited due to a number of reasons. These problems include restrictions in terms of labour migration policy, the lack of standardized labour market tests in the same language, and the lack of information regarding the job markets in each country and in the Asean as a whole (Draper & Kamnuansilpa, 2016, Online). Moreover, cultural, language and socio-economic differences are a barrier to professional mobility (Papademetriou, Sugiyarto, Mendoza, Salant, & Asian Development Bank, 2015). Although the ASEAN member states agree on the Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) in accountancy, architecture, surveying, medicine and dentistry, these nations find it difficult to adapt



domestic policies and regulations to meet the provision of the MRAs (Sugiyarto & Agunias, 2014). Each professional practice is composed of several stakeholders that share responsibility for various aspect of the recognition process, especially where regulatory decisions are delegated to subnational actors (Bernard, 2015, Online). Thus, the changes in policy framework cannot be facilitated easily. So far, only two fields, architecture and engineering have shown some progress in selecting professionals to be appointed in a council and a committee. For other professions, such as medicine and dentistry, each member state has the authority to uphold their own regulation in managing who can practice in their countries. In Thailand, to be eligible for practicing medicine, one must hold a degree of certificate of medicine recognized by the Medical Council of Thailand and must pass the Licensing Examination (The Medical Council of Thailand, n.d.). Due to a highly technical nature of each field, the governments have to cautiously negotiate the agreements with the stakeholders and other member states in order to simplify and reduce barriers in professional practice.

The needs to develop MRAs in eight professions is necessitated. As the population age, the needs for medical and health science professionals increase progressively. Thailand will experience a massive decline in the growth of its labour force. It is best for the governments in ASEAN nations to cooperate in order to develop the ASEAN Qualification Reference Framework and benchmark skills recognition frameworks. One of the ways is to use a mediator e.g. international organizations. The governments and policy-makers are strongly advised to share best practices that can help address skill gaps problem in the region (ILO & ADB, 2014). There is also a tendency that the universities in ASEAN and overseas will collaborate in designing the programs in eight professions. This form of collaboration is often seen in dual-degrees or sandwich programs. However, there is a concern in this development due to lack of an international regulatory body that oversees the quality audit of the programs. This drawback will hinder the development of the agency that is responsible for skill transfer within ASEAN.

### **Research Intensive Universities**

Research has been one of the core missions of universities. It is woven into staff's workload<sup>1</sup>. Research intensive universities are important for the development of the economy and the knowledge transfer between universities and industry. Thai universities are forced to shift the focus from the passive traditional role as "knowledge transfer" (Suwanwela, 2006) to an active mode of research intensive. Originally, the first university of Thailand, Chulalongkorn University was established to train the civil servants to serve the needs of modernized bureaucracy and infrastructures. Thus, the original role of Thai higher education was to prepare the elite for the public sectors. After 1950s, the roles for Thai HEIs changed to knowledge dissemination to the masses. Nonetheless, today's globalized world

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<sup>1</sup> Teaching, research and community services

dictates the role of universities as a research-led knowledge creators. The National Research Universities (NRUs) project was adopted in the 2009. The original objective was to boost research activities and the linkages between universities and industries (UILs) (Siripitakchai & Miyazaki, 2015).

Currently, Thailand has nine research intensive universities, namely Chulalongkorn University, Chiang Mai University, Kasetsart University, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Khon Kaen University, Mahidol University, Prince of Songkla University, Suranaree University of Technology and Thammasat University, (MOE, 2010). These nine universities are officially the National Research Universities and were selected by the OHEC based on their good reputations and outstanding research achievements. The criteria of selection that OHEC used are based on those of the Time Higher Education-Quacquarelli Symonds (THE-QS) and the impact factor of their publications published on Scopus Database (Siripitakchai & Miyazaki, 2015, p. 190).

Driving universities toward being a research-intensive institution is beneficial for HEIs for many reasons. First, it increases the funding from the government in form of research grants and other added benefits such as intellectual property. Public and policy makers regard the research reputation more highly as research excellence is often linked with national economic competitiveness (Marginson, 2006). The university's ranking will be higher if the research publication output is high as research excellence increases the ranking, not the quality of teaching and learning (Stromquist, 2007). Research activity strengthens the support from the private sectors. These linkages are manifest in many forms of collaboration, for example, science park, technology park and incubators; contract research; joint venture of R&D<sup>2</sup>; Cooperative R&D agreement; licensing and consultancy and technical services provision (Keerati-angkoon, 2015). These activities promote the national economic growth. In addition, quality research can be incorporated into teaching and learning of the HEI to improve its quality. The research encourages student engagement and in turn HEIs can produce more researchers for the country.

The concept of UILs has been discussed by Schiller (2006) and Schiller and Liefner (2007). The higher education system is encouraged to pursue its research mission and the linkages with industries. In the long run, universities will introduce the market element in research activities with their industrial partners. It is to keep in mind that risks exist. If HEIs do not receive enough support for resources, they will opt for less challenging consultation services and undergraduate teaching (Schiller & Liefner, 2007, p. 554). Other important factors that contribute to successful technology transfer include the strong network of the University Technology Transfer Office and private sector, rewards and an incentives policy for the research (Keerati-angkoon, 2015).

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<sup>2</sup> Research and Development

The World Bank and the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (2007) suggested five sets of action being implemented to support the transformation of universities into research intensive ones:

- (1) Government should give greater autonomy to universities especially public HEIs. They should be more flexible and be disciplined by competition.
  - (2) The government should increase funding such as block grants, grants for specific programs, as well as scholarships for science, math and engineering studies for Thai and for foreign student for research facilities and basic research at universities. However, it is advised that rather giving all HEIs funding, the government should select a few universities that have better competitive edge and build quality critical mass and interdisciplinary research.
  - (3) Creating science parks and incubator facilities adjacent to the selected university to maximize the likelihood of spillovers and start-ups as well as support such measure with generous incentives.
  - (4) Making university-industry linkages (UILs) more attractive for universities and firms.
  - (5) Increasing program funding for post-doctoral internship positions in participating firms.
- (pp. 117-118)

A large number of universities are embarking on the path to become research intensive institutes though, not many will be able to transform themselves from “knowledge transfer” to “knowledge creator.” Certain kinds of universities have a higher success in being research driven. For instance, public universities which have a large pool of talent and the top students, supporting policies along with adequate research grants and infrastructure tend to do better. In practice, it is difficult for most Thai private universities and Rajabhat universities to become research intensive universities since they are community-service universities (Sinlarat, 2009).

## **Conclusion**

The changes resulting from the inception of the AEC are slowly penetrating HEIs in the ASEAN countries. Thai HEIs cannot escape the changes from the convergence of the ASEAN nations’ economy introducing a single market valued at 2.6 trillion US Dollar in 2014 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2015a). This makes ASEAN an emerging economy of Asia with a massive market of 622 million people. Demographic change, energy and the environment, future employment, decentralization of the country and development of local administrative bodies among many other trends will influence the Thai higher education system. This article has speculated further on trends covering the importance of English language, restructuring of HEIs, programs in eight professions and the research-intensive universities.

Institutions can adopt models of innovation and reinvent themselves to fit the local situations and thus make it easy to institutionalize such models of innovation. The institutions need to be aware that the expected outcomes of the reinvented model may change from the original. This is particularly true for Thai higher education as it seeks

to borrow innovation and knowledge from overseas and eclectically select what is best suited their context. As Fry (2002) put it, Thailand has a “remarkable capability of being eclectic and selective in its attempt to balance the global with the local (p. 3).

There are many issues that HEIs have to consider. Although more and more Thai HEIs are becoming autonomous from the state, they are not entirely free from its latent bureaucratic power. Universities must gain political support from the government and the parliament as well as public understanding so that the reform can be successfully achieved (Sangnapaboworn, 2003, Conclusion, para. 3). Many problems regarding the transferring of skilled workers in eight professions include work permit and employment visa, constitutional and legal restrictions, and sectoral and occupational restrictions. These also take stakeholders into account as they play a pivotal part in designing the MRAs. The AEC will strongly need MRAs that function for skilled worker mobility. The lack of awareness of the AEC is an impediment to the public support to drive the process of the AEC forward.

### **Author Note**

This project received funding support from Srinakharinwirot University. The writer would like to thank Professor Tony Moon for his contribution to this article

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