

Opinions of Graduate Students at King Mongkut's Institute of Technology, Ladkrabang on Asean Economy Community (AEC)

Worarat Sangmanee

Faculty of Administration and Management, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang

— *Review of* —
**Integrative
 Business &
 Economics**
 — *Research* —

ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research were 1) to study graduate students' opinions towards AEC, and 2) to investigate the relationship between students' personal characteristics and their opinions towards AEC. The studied sample consisted of 167 graduate students who had enrolled with King Mongkut's Institute of Technology, Ladkrabang, during the 2013 academic year. The research instrument data were collected from responses to questionnaires distributed to graduate students. The statistical parameters examined frequency, percentage, average (\bar{X}), and standard deviation (S.D.). Hypothesis testing was done using t-tests and one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The hypothesis testing was set at the 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance. The results were as follows:

1. Students' scores on opinions towards AEC were at a high level ($\bar{X} = 3.52$). The rankings of opinion scores for the four dimensions examined were as follows:

- (1) The business sector ($\bar{X} = 3.76$)
- (2) The cultural viewpoint ($\bar{X} = 3.64$)
- (3) The educational sector ($\bar{X} = 3.58$)
- (4) Government policy and regulations ($\bar{X} = 3.11$)

2. Students who differed in the level of self preparation to the AEC labor market indicated statistically significant differences on attitudes towards AEC. After following the examination of each dimension, the study indicated statistically significant differences with respect to government policy and regulations, the educational sector, and the acceptance and the adjustment in cultural view point.

3. Students who differed in the rest of personal characteristics under this study indicated no statistically significant differences in their opinions towards AEC. However, students who differed in their level of English fluency indicated statistically significant differences in opinion towards AEC along the educational dimension.

Keywords: opinion, AEC

1. INTRODUCTION

The studied sample consisted of all graduate students who had enrolled in KMITL during the 2013 academic year. They were all studying Industrial Business Management and had come from a variety of educational backgrounds. Some had expectations of working in an ASEAN country. So they thought that they should know more about those countries, so that they can prepare themselves when Thailand gets integrated with AEC population.

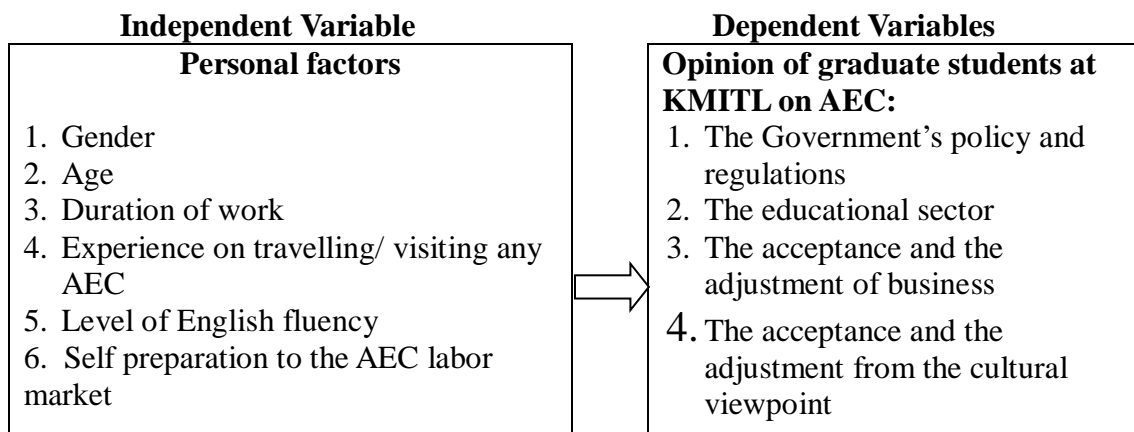
2. OBJECTIVES

1. To study the graduate student's opinions who were enrolled with King Mongkut's Institute of Technology, Ladkrabang (KMITL) during the 2013 academic year on ASEAN Economic Community (AEC).
2. To investigate the relationship between personal factors and the opinions of students on AEC.

3. THE RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The personal aspects of the graduate students at King Mongkut's Institute of Technology, Ladkrabang, influence their opinions on ASEAN Economic Community (AEC).

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



5. RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The research instrument was a questionnaire which was divided into 2 parts. Part 1 was a set of questions about the student's personal factors including gender, age, time of work, experience on travelling/ visiting an AEC country, the level of English fluency, and self preparation to be integrated with the AEC labor market. Part 2 was a set of questions exploring the opinions of the students on ASEAN Economic Community (AEC).

6. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The questionnaires were distributed to the whole population. The 167 returned questionnaires were used as the study sample.

The data were analyzed using SPSS for Windows. The variables examined statistically were percentage, arithmetic mean, and standard deviation. Research hypotheses were tested using t-tests and one-way ANOVA. The scores for each student's opinion on AEC were interpreted as follows:

- Average score 4.50 to 5.00 means the degree of student's agreement on AEC is the highest.
- Average score 3.50 to 4.49 means the degree of student's agreement on AEC is high.
- Average score 2.50 to 3.49 means the degree of student's agreement on AEC is moderate.
- Average score 1.50 to 2.49 means the degree of student's agreement on AEC is lower.
- Average score 1.00 to 1.49 means the degree of student's agreement on AEC is lowest.

7. RESEARCH RESULTS

Table 1 Analysis of student characteristics

| Personal Characteristics | Number (n = 167) | Percentage (%) |
|--|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Gender | | |
| Male | 80 | 47.90 |
| Female | 87 | 52.10 |
| Total | 167 | 100.00 |
| 2. Age | | |
| ≤ 25 yrs. | 70 | 41.92 |
| > 25-30 yrs. | 50 | 29.94 |
| > 30-35 yrs. | 23 | 13.77 |
| > 35 yrs. | 24 | 14.37 |
| Total | 167 | 100.00 |
| 3. Duration of work (years) | | |
| Never worked before | 23 | 13.77 |
| Less than or equal to 5 years | 81 | 48.50 |
| More than 5-10 years | 32 | 19.16 |
| More than 10-20 years | 26 | 15.57 |
| More than 20 years | 5 | 2.99 |
| Total | 167 | 100.00 |
| 4. Experience in travelling/ visiting any AEC | | |
| No | 64 | 38.32 |
| Yes | 103 | 61.68 |
| Total | 167 | 100.00 |
| 5. Level of English fluency | | |
| Poor | 34 | 20.36 |
| Medium | 120 | 71.86 |
| Good | 13 | 7.78 |
| Total | 167 | 100.00 |

Table1 (cont.)

| Personal Characteristics | Number (n = 167) | Percentage (%) |
|---|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 6. Self preparation to the AEC labor market | | |
| Less | 68 | 40.72 |
| Medium | 91 | 54.49 |
| Much | 8 | 4.79 |
| Total | 167 | 100.00 |
| 7. Marital status | | |
| Single | 143 | 88.02 |
| Married | 20 | 11.98 |
| Total | 167 | 100.00 |
| 8. Field of study | | |
| Engineering | 57 | 34.13 |
| Science | 43 | 25.75 |
| Management | 46 | 27.54 |
| Other | 21 | 12.57 |
| Total | 167 | 100.00 |
| 9. Occupation | | |
| Student | 29 | 17.37 |
| Work in private sector | 118 | 70.66 |
| Work for government | 11 | 6.59 |
| Entrepreneur | 9 | 5.39 |
| Total | 167 | 100.00 |
| 10. Place of living | | |
| Bangkok and Metropolitan | 95 | .5689 |
| Other Provinces | 72 | 43.11 |
| Total | 167 | 100.00 |
| 11. Income per month | | |
| Less than or equal | 56 | 33.53 |
| More than 20,000-30,000 baht | 50 | 29.94 |
| More than 30,000-40,000 baht | 27 | 16.17 |
| More than 40,000-50,000 baht | 17 | 10.18 |
| More than 50,000 baht | 17 | 10.18 |
| Total | 167 | 100.00 |
| 12. Employment (years) | | |
| Never work before | 23 | 13.77 |
| Less than 5 years | 81 | 48.50 |
| More than 5-10 years | 32 | 19.16 |
| More than 10-20 years | 26 | 15.57 |
| More than 20 years | 5 | 2.99 |
| Total | 167 | 100.00 |

Table1 (cont.)

| Personal Characteristics | Number (n = 167) | Percentage (%) |
|---|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 13. Components that can improve an individual's life | | |
| Communicating languages | 126 | 75.45 |
| Advanced knowledge in one's own field | 22 | 13.17 |
| Laws and regulations | 8 | 4.79 |
| New technology and its applications | 6 | 3.59 |
| Culture | 3 | 1.80 |
| Leadership | 2 | 1.20 |
| Total | 167 | 100.00 |
| 14. AEC knowledge | | |
| Medium | 122 | 73.05 |
| High | 45 | 29.95 |
| Total | 167 | 100.00 |
| 15. Information sources about the AEC | | |
| 1. Television | 151 | 24.55 |
| 2. Media on line | 124 | 20.16 |
| 3. General newspapers | 60 | 9.76 |
| 4. Information from teaching in class by the instructor | 72 | 11.71 |
| 5. Magazines | 44 | 7.15 |
| 6. Other publications | 36 | 5.85 |
| 7. Socializing with classmates / colleagues | 51 | 8.29 |
| 8. Radio | 36 | 5.85 |
| 9. Attending training beyond the classroom / seminars | 41 | 6.67 |
| Total | 615 | 100.00 |

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of graduate students' opinions about AEC

| Opinion about AEC Dimension | \bar{X} | S.D. | Level | Rank |
|--|-----------|------|--------|------|
| Acceptance of and adjustment to business | 3.76 | .526 | High | 1 |
| Acceptance of and adjustment from a cultural viewpoint | 3.64 | .540 | High | 2 |
| Educational sector | 3.58 | .669 | High | 3 |
| Government policy and regulations | 3.11 | .896 | Medium | 4 |
| Total | 3.52 | .540 | High | |

Table 3 Analysis of variance: relationship between gender and student opinion about AEC

| Opinion about AEC Dimension | Gender (\bar{X}) | | P-Value |
|--|----------------------|------------------|---------|
| | Male (n=80) | Female (n=87) | |
| Acceptance of and adjustment to business | 3.13 | 3.08 | .725 |
| Acceptance of and adjustment from a cultural viewpoint | 3.53 | 3.63 | .336 |
| Educational sector | 3.78 | 3.74 | .590 |
| Government policy and regulations | 3.62 | 3.67 | .612 |
| Total | 3.52 | 3.53 | .871 |

Table 4 Analysis of variance: relationship between age and student opinion about AEC

| Opinion about AEC Dimension | Age (\bar{X}) | | | | P-Value |
|--|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|---------|
| | ≤ 25 (n=70) | 25-30 (n=50) | 30-35 (n=23) | > 35 (n=24) | |
| Acceptance of and adjustment to business | 3.20 | 3.10 | 3.00 | 2.95 | .609 |
| Acceptance of and adjustment from a cultural viewpoint | 3.67 | 3.52 | 3.50 | 3.53 | .515 |
| Educational sector | 3.86 | 3.74 | 3.53 | 3.70 | .057 |
| Government policy and regulations | 3.74 | 3.59 | 3.51 | 3.58 | .294 |
| Total | 3.62 | 3.49 | 3.39 | 3.44 | .202 |

Table 5 Analysis of variance: Relationship between work experience and student opinion about AEC

| Opinion about AEC Dimension | Time of Work (\bar{X}) | | | | P-Value |
|--|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|---------|
| | Never work before (n=23) | \leq 5years (n=81) | $> 5-10$ years (n=32) | > 10 years (n=31) | |
| Acceptance of and adjustment to business | 3.02 | 3.23 | 3.14 | 2.81 | .155 |
| Acceptance of and adjustment from a cultural viewpoint | 3.67 | 3.60 | 3.59 | 3.46 | .677 |
| Educational sector | 3.88 | 3.82 | 3.69 | 3.58 | .107 |
| Government policy and regulations | 3.73 | 3.71 | 3.53 | 3.52 | .310 |
| Total | 3.57 | 3.59 | 3.49 | 3.34 | .173 |

Table 6 Analysis of variance: Relationship between experience of travelling to / visiting an AEC country and student opinion about AEC

| Opinion about AEC Dimension | Travelling/ Visiting any AEC (\bar{X}) | | P-Value |
|--|--|------------|---------|
| | Yes (n=64) | No (n=103) | |
| Acceptance of and adjustment to business | 3.20 | 3.05 | .321 |
| Acceptance of and adjustment from a cultural viewpoint | 3.69 | 3.51 | .098 |
| Educational sector | 3.80 | 3.73 | .396 |
| Government policy and regulations | 3.74 | 3.58 | .101 |
| Total | 3.61 | 3.47 | .111 |

Table 7 Analysis of Variance: Relationship between English fluency and student opinion about AEC

| Opinion about AEC Dimension | the Level of English fluency (\bar{X}) | | | P-Value |
|--|--|----------------|-------------|---------|
| | Poor (n=34) | Medium (n=120) | Good (n=13) | |
| Acceptance of and adjustment to business | 2.99 | 3.13 | 3.17 | .690 |
| Acceptance of and adjustment from a cultural viewpoint | 3.34 | 3.62 | 3.83 | .030* |
| Educational sector | 3.60 | 3.79 | 3.84 | .130 |
| Government policy and regulations | 3.62 | 3.65 | 3.65 | .975 |
| Total | 3.39 | 3.55 | 3.62 | .232 |

*0.05

Table 8 Analysis of variance: relationship between self-preparation for integration into AEC and student opinion about AEC

| Opinion about AEC Dimension | Self Preparation (\bar{X}) | | | | P-Value |
|--|--------------------------------|---------------|-------------|------------|---------|
| | High (n=8) | Medium (n=91) | Less (n=62) | None (n=6) | |
| Acceptance of and adjustment to business | 3.65 | 3.23 | 2.89 | 2.72 | .024* |
| Acceptance of and adjustment from a cultural viewpoint | 4.12 | 3.66 | 3.45 | 3.10 | .006** |
| Educational sector | 3.86 | 3.84 | 3.64 | 3.52 | .074 |
| Government policy and regulations | 4.14 | 3.73 | 3.48 | 3.35 | .003** |
| Total | 3.94 | 3.62 | 3.36 | 3.17 | .001** |

*0.01

**0.05

8. DISCUSSION

The results of this research indicated that the overall strength of opinions of the graduate students in question on AEC was at high. It could be interpreted that these students are ready to welcome AEC or they are going towards it.

The analysis found that students' opinion on AEC was at a high level along each skill dimension: Most students feel that their English was not yet good enough for fluent communication with other ASEAN populations. This suggests that the government and related agencies should pay more attention to the preparation of Thai citizens, along all dimensions including English skill, to fit well with AEC.

The information of Table 1 showed that most of respondents were female (52.10%), single (88.02%), were aged less than or equal to 25 years (41.92%), were studying in an engineering program (34.13%), were working in a private business (70.66%), living in the Bangkok and metropolitan area (56.89%), had income per month were less than \$20,000, and had work experience for 5 years.

The study indicated that the respondents had strong opinion about AEC on each dimension with an average total score of 3.52. This meant that the respondents had a positive attitude on AEC in general and believed that Thailand will gain a variety of advantages by joining AEC.

The respondents were more confident about the business sector than with other sectors. However, they are concerned that Thailand's business sector would have to accept whatever the consequences of joining AEC could be, favorable or unfavorable. However, they were still confident that Thai business sectors are flexible enough to adjust themselves in order that they can manage to gain satisfactory advantages.

However, it was apparent that Thai people do not have such a high interest to actively devote some of their time in learning about other AEC countries. This suggests that Thai aren't fully adjusted to getting integrated into AEC yet.

As for the educational dimension, the study showed that the respondents viewed lecturers as academic persons who knew and understood AEC countries well enough and were passing on this knowledge to their students. However, it looked that the respondents felt that the academic potential of Thailand was still questionable in terms of its strength when compared to other AEC countries. They perceived that Thailand's academic system was still weak and needed to be raised in various aspects such as English skill, advance technology, cultural studies as well as the effectiveness of teaching approaches. Besides improving English proficiency, Thailand needs to improve and develop educational curriculum in general, especially highlighting professional standard of working.

As for the last dimension, government policy and regulations, it was found that this was the only dimension that had a moderately average score. This suggests that government agencies need to better communicate to people giving useful information and distribute the information through modern potential media such as television, online, website, internet, and others more intensively. It seems that Thai people continue to lag in terms of knowing what would be happening to Thailand once it fully joins AEC.

9. RECOMMENDATION

1. The government and related agencies should pay more attention to preparing Thai citizens along all dimensions including English skills, to fit well with AEC and

then benefit fully from its imminent integration. Thailand needs to improve and develop an educational curriculum in general that especially emphasizes professional skills.

2. Thai should devote some of their time to learn about other AEC countries.
3. Government agencies need to communicate to people useful information and spread this knowledge through modern potential media such as television, online, website and the Internet.
4. Finally, Thai people need to learn more about the following:
 - 4.1 The knowledge and the way to communicate with others who come from a different culture.
 - 4.2 Working in teams involving others from the AEC countries
 - 4.3 The professional expertise and skills to work with others if they work in the AEC countries.
 - 4.4 Improving English proficiency in both speaking and writing
 - 4.5 The knowledge and understanding about laws and professional rules of other AEC countries.
 - 4.6 The knowledge and perception of every AEC country, culture and norm, and explore in order that academic institutions properly adjust their roles to align with the expectations of students and the public in general.

REFERENCES

- [1] ASEAN Economy Community (AEC).(2012) [Online].www.thai-acc.com.
- [2] The Nation. (2014). ASEAN Economic Community is coming in 2015.
- [3] The Nation.(2015). Is Thailand Really ready for the AEC?
<http://academic.bu.ac.th/2012/images/article-img/asian-aec.gif>
- [4] Thailand's Readiness for the ASEAN Economic Community: Strengths and weaknesses for Integration