

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter of the study provides the reporting of the results that were based on the purpose of the study: (1) to explore the impacts of the AEC on BBA International Programs in Thailand prior to entering the AEC status in 2015, and (2) to investigate the future opportunities, challenges, and threats of the AEC faced by each BBA International Program. This was made possible through in-depth interviews conducted with the directors of 14 institutions with BBA IPs in Thailand that addressed the two research questions:

1. What impacts have been experienced by BBA IPs as a result of the upcoming AEC in 2015?
2. What are the future opportunities, threats, and challenges faced by BBA IPs as a result of the AEC that would be effective in 2015?

The deductive approach was the selected framework used in the exploratory data analysis of the transcribed interviews. Research questions were employed as guides in grouping the data into themes by identifying the similarities and differences, and subcategorizing them further. Four distinct themes corresponded to the two research questions and four interview questions had been used to report the findings of this study. These themes included: (1) Current Impacts of the 2015 AEC on BBA IPs; (2) Future Opportunities of the AEC on BBA IPs; (3) Future Threats of the AEC on BBA IPs; and (4) Future Challenges of the AEC on BBA IPs.

As it is with qualitative studies, the questions were broad, and more exploratory. Therefore, the researcher based her interviews on the respondents' answers rather than directing them into the same direction of the answers given by other respondents. For this reason, not all institutions would be contributing to the same sub-theme topics, but only if the interviewee had made any mention of it. This was to avoid creating any bias on the part of the researcher (interviewer) in navigating them in

the desired direction. As part of the data cleaning process, any irrelevant data not pertaining to the research questions were eliminated from the study. As it is with qualitative studies, quotations were used sparingly, and while the quotations from the IDIs had been accurately transcribed, a minimal number of quotations had been grammatically corrected without any alteration in the content.

4.2 Institutions' Profile

Participating institutions that had been listed in the Acknowledgement section of this report and the list of respondents in Table 4 (Institutions 1 – 14), are not correlated to the institutions (Institutions A – N) that are referred to in the Findings (Chapter 4) and Discussion (Chapter 5) sections of this paper. That is to say, *Institution 1* is not *Institution A*. The former list (Institutions 1-14) provided an alphabetical listing of the institutions while the latter (Institutions A – N) were based on the time of interview visits; Institution A was visited first, and Institution N was visited last. Institutions A – N had been established to maintain the anonymity of each institution.

The total sample of 14 respondents was represented by ten Thai nationals, and four foreign nationals, and an equivalent number of seven males and seven females (Table 5). Out of the 14 institutions that had participated in the study, up to 11 were private (78.6%) and only three were public universities (21.4%). The original sample of 20 universities included 15 private universities (75%) and five public universities (25%) that were offering BBA IPs.

The total enrolment of BBA IP students for 14 institutions amounted to 12,710, and this figure was largely represented by Institution K, with an enrolment of up to 8,000 (62.9%), followed by Institution A with a much lesser enrolment proportion of 1,700 students (13.4%). The majority of the institutions had much lower enrolments (less than 201 students that account up to 57.6% or 8 institutions); one institution had 201-300 students, while two institutions had 400-500 students. The student enrolment breakdown for each institution can be studied further in Table 6. Although the programs are International, the percentage of international or foreign students enrolled in the program as a whole was relatively low and very diverse (Table 7).

4.3 Theme 1: Current Impacts of the 2015 AEC on BBA IPs in 2014

One of the major objectives of this research study was to find out how BBA IPs in Thailand had been impacted by the upcoming AEC. Theme 1 therefore, addresses the first research question:

“What impacts have been experienced by BBA IPs as a result of the AEC?” Subthemes under this main theme include: (a) Impacts on enrolment; (b) Impacts on Faculty; (c) Impacts on the curriculum; and (d) Other impacts.

IDIs that had been conducted with 14 institutions of different sizes, type, and mindsets, provided interesting insights regarding the different impacts experienced by each institution. The majority of the institutions stated that there were minimal or nonexistent impacts, while a few mentioned the large impacts they had encountered. Common short replies to the size of the AEC impacts to their programs included “not much impact”, “not many impacts”, “almost zero impacts”, “small impact”, “no impact”, or “not that high”. Other uncommon replies were “a lot of impacts”, and “quite a lot actually”. Institution L mentioned that even though there were “no current impacts”, “future impacts” were anticipated. Another institution stated that there was “not much impact on education but more on the labor market” (Institution K). To further elaborate on the minimal impacts experienced, the following statements were made to support their answers:

1. “Our focus was more on achieving a higher quality of education to meet international standards” (Institution A).
2. “Our enrolment is good with or without the AEC” (Institution B).
3. “The majority of our students are foreign (non-AEC)” (Institution C).
4. “We had already prepared for it years ago” (Institution D).
5. “The institution is more international and global, and there has not been much concern from the top executives about the AEC” (Institution F).
6. “Our curriculum is quite set that matches the AEC” (Institution K).
7. “Our program is already international by nature” (Institution N).

Despite the varying rationale behind the minimal impacts experienced, new perspectives had been gained about the significance of the AEC to these institutions. On the other hand, two institutions had completely different experiences. The increased awareness of the AEC amongst the Thais students had resulted in “a lot of impacts” causing a big leap in “enrolment that doubled” in Institution E. As for Institution H, impacts were considered “a lot” since the impacts had extended to

the entire university “in terms of the future plans of the organization” thus creating a positive direct impact on the program. Prior to the upcoming AEC, the program had been “treated as a minority”, but the AEC has shed new light, and “more attention paid to little things the university thought was unimportant” but were significant to the functioning of the program.

The mean of the rating of the current impacts of the upcoming AEC on BBA IPs was 4.93 out of 10 with a standard deviation of 2.46 (Table 8). The ratings were spread out from one to ten, with one as the lowest and ten with the highest rating.

4.3.1 Impacts on Enrolment. Every respondent had something to say about enrolment. For many of them, student enrolment figures had not been impacted by the AEC. In fact, respondents frequently stated, like Institution A did, that enrolment “had been increasing with or without the AEC” and it had “statistically been increasing through the terms”, or like how Institution B worded it as “student enrolment is independent of the AEC”. The following statements were made by institutions that had experienced little or no impacts:

1. “There is currently an existing high demand for our program” (Institution A).
2. “The enrolment rate is currently favorable with up to 50% represented by Chinese students, and to a much lesser extent, just a few ASEAN students” (Institution B).
3. “Our students are not from this region. Only 5% are Thais and very few from AEC countries and the majority of our students are American or European” (Institution C).
4. “Thais are aware of the importance of going international and there is an increase of international education in general due to global awareness” (Institution F).

An institution that stands out in the large enrolment of ASEAN students was Institution D as it had been established to serve the youth of the its affiliated institutions within the Southeast Asia region for approximately a decade now. Therefore, its large ASEAN student enrolment had not resulted from the upcoming AEC. The enrolment impacts for Institution E was however, a completely different matter compared to all the other institutions as many Thai students had decided to “join the program to prepare for the AEC”, thus resulting in a 100% increase in enrolment.

Student enrolment at Institution I had been growing, and it was beginning to have one or two students from Myanmar and a growing number from Laos. The institution was unclear if the

upcoming AEC had anything to trigger this inflow of ASEAN students into its program. However, it was predicted that the growth in student enrolment had been highly attributed to the “program itself because of the change in curriculum and in working with a hotel school in Switzerland”, thus making it more attractive and appealing to students. This influx of students into the program was also experienced by Institution K as Thai students were more interested in obtaining an English education, and there was rising number of ASEAN students.

The impacts of the AEC were however strongly felt by Institution H. In response to the upcoming AEC, its top management had implemented a new policy of being more international by increasing the number of international students and lecturers. Recruitment efforts were directed at international and not within the local or ASEAN markets. This indicated that although the AEC had a direct impact on Institution H in driving itself to become more international, efforts were not directed at ASEAN but internationally instead. Another institution that felt the impact of the AEC on student enrolment was Institution J. There had been more ASEAN-related travels with the objectives of establishing university networks (student exchange or double degree program possibilities), to promote the institution, and to find student recruiting agents. The mission was to “have students representing every ASEAN country” through the employment of scholarships in attracting these students.

Although no direct impacts were experienced by Institution L on student enrolment, it was interesting to learn that its foreign partnering institution was interested in using it “as a center in recruiting Asian students for them”. So, although the upcoming AEC had not influenced its student enrolment numbers, the significance of the AEC is prevalent abroad, and Thailand has been seen as a center in ASEAN to recruit ASEAN students for its foreign partnering university.

4.3.2 Impacts on Faculty. The upcoming AEC has not had much impact on its faculty. However, there was one distinct case where an Indonesian lecturer moved back to his country, as there was a monetary incentive for those with an Assistant Professor position (Institution D). This may not sound like a direct impact from the AEC, but could very well be interpreted as a step towards strengthening its own university in Indonesia (a member ASEAN country) in the preparation for its competitive readiness for the AEC.

One institution had been operating more globally than regionally within the AEC, thus resulting in many western instructor exchanges with partnering universities (Institution A). However, the upcoming AEC had resulted in shifting to a “focus on the countries in the region” rather than “participating in a more global market”. In another scenario, Institution N had the desire to invite ASEAN visiting professors but this was complicated as many professors in ASEAN are not proficient in English. Another complication encountered by the institution in the recent decade, was the prohibition by the top management of a particular ASEAN university in allowing its professors to be visiting professors because the two institutions were rivals in international case study competitions.

4.3.3 Impacts on Curriculum. Not many institutions needed to make any curriculum changes as they were already international programs. Normal curriculum revisions were in order; let it be yearly or according to the institution’s normal cycle. Although there were no major curriculum changes, there were new inclusions in curriculums by a couple of institutions in the form of ASEAN case studies, visits to ASEAN countries for exposure purposes, and cross-cultural studies classes. At least two institutions were more concerned about improving their curriculum to meet and/or maintain the international standard to provide a truly quality education (Institutions A and B). Institution B went on to mention that it was following a worldwide standardized curriculum that would be difficult to adjust since its program was more “global” and not “ASEAN”.

4.3.4 Other Impacts. The new ASEAN university calendar year is worth mentioning here. Although all universities would have to align their academic calendar year to August throughout the AEC, only one of the 14 institutions had been impacted. Many of these institutions had originated with the American academic calendar year that starts in August, while others that did not, simply changed it a year or two ago. Efforts have also been recently directed at signing MOUs with ASEAN universities by one institution to increase networking within the region (University H). The last impact experienced was the increased research in ASEAN-related content, thus indicating the increased interest in ASEAN by HEIs.

4.4 Theme 2: Future Opportunities of the AEC on BBA IPs

When respondents were asked about the future opportunities the AEC would bring to their programs, most of them were excited and optimistic. It was unanimously agreed amongst all 14 institutions that there were opportunities to be reaped from the AEC. These opportunities ranged from

small to large scale and there were similarities and differences from the interviews. These future opportunities come under the second theme and address the first portion of the second research question: *What are the future opportunities, threats, and challenges faced by BBA IPs as a result of the AEC that would be effective in 2015?* The subthemes under this second theme include: (a) Increased Student Enrolment; (b) Student and Faculty Exchange Programs; (c) Plans to Branch Out; (d) Faculty; (e) Joint Research Collaboration; and (f) Other Opportunities.

On the scale of one to ten, respondents had placed a numerical value on predicted future opportunities of the AEC to their programs. The range of answers was between three and eight, with Table 9 providing a breakdown of these numbers by Institution. The calculated mean was 6.5 and a standard deviation of 1.7 (Table 8).

4.4.1. Increased Student Enrolment. With open borders and the increased awareness of the AEC, opportunities to expand more in terms of increased student enrolment are prevalent. As the AEC paves a way for members of ASEAN to travel into Thailand, it would be a significant driving factor that induces pursuing international education abroad in neighboring ASEAN countries. With that in mind, many institutions see big opportunities that emerge with the AEC in terms of a larger market, and a bigger number of students. One particular institution certainly had a vision about the future prospects of the AEC:

“The AEC provides us with opportunities in the form of more students, and we can have more programs, just not the BBA. It can conduct short courses, English camps, Thai camps, for ASEAN university level students. Although it would be impossible to hope that all would decide on Thailand, the institution would have to think what advantages we have, and think what we have and what we can sell” (Institution B).

Increased student enrolment was the first thing that came to mind during interviews, with the exception of two institutions. One institution simply did not have the capacity to accommodate more students as it was not the institution’s policy to expand its student body (Institution N) while the other was attempting to increase the quality standard of its program by being more selective in student admissions through decreasing its student intake to “get the cream of the crop” (Institution A). These

two institutions are definitely headed in a different direction, when compared to the other 12 institutions that would like their student enrolment numbers to increase. In terms of capacity, it was not a problem as some institutions have not achieved their full capacity, or there was still space for new buildings.

One of the hopes of most institutions was to increase the percentage of foreign students both international and from ASEAN, because the majority of their students were Thai. There had been continual pressures from the top for some institutions to increase the percentage of foreign students because their programs were international. Increased foreign students was a means of promoting its program as being truly international. Despite the hopes of foreign student inflow, institutions were also aware of the fact that foreign students have many other options. Popular techniques employed by some institutions in attracting ASEAN students included scholarships, traveling abroad to network with high schools, universities, and agencies to recruit students. Not all institutions fall into the category of being financially capable and supported by the top management in scholarship offerings to foreign students. In fact, one director (Institution J) expressed the need for more government support as it was a private institution that received less governmental support. He believed that scholarships would be able to attract more ASEAN students, which would be a big boost for Thailand. It was an altogether different scenario for Institution M as it was not in the position to offer scholarships due to its partnership agreement with a European partnering university.

It was interesting to note though, that institutions with higher international student enrolment were not as enthusiastic about the increase of ASEAN student enrolment. Distinctly different from other institutions, their target markets were non-ASEAN students as the majority of their students were from Europe and America. They are however, open to increased student enrolment, and welcome ASEAN students. A couple of institutions were more interested in the international arena than the regional (AEC) and have increased their MOUs with the U.S. and Europe with the hopes of having more Western foreign students; a distinct indication of their preferred international focus.

With regards to ASEAN student enrolment, not many institutions have had the opportunity as Institution D in the large enrolment of ASEAN students since the past decade. The director shared that:

“We are already accepting students from the AEC countries, and the numbers would increase. The AEC is a bigger market and thus a bigger supply for us. We just don’t look at our country, but 10 countries as a market. With the AEC comes mobility and so, with this ease of movement, it would be easier for our target students, being ASEAN students to enroll in our program. As the AEC involves mostly economics, so, there is future mobility for workers to work in many of these countries. So, it’s an opportunity for the institution to welcome students from the sub-Mekong region countries, like Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar, because they want to work in advanced countries. In order for them to work in more advanced countries, they have to study outside their countries. So, it is a good opportunity for the institution, for instance, to have Burmese students who want to get out of their country to have a good education”.

The desire for increased student enrolment had not been limited to just accepting students from other ASEAN countries. One institution in particular, had in the past two years, witnessed a huge surge in Thai students enrolling in its BBA IP (Institution E). According to the Director, increased AEC awareness amongst Thai high school students had been a huge motivating factor in their enrolment as they “feel that they needed to do something to survive with the AEC opening up. They had to learn English to prepare for the AEC”. It was also mentioned that the non-Thai students enrolled in the same exact institution “don’t really have the awareness of the AEC as they didn’t talk about it”.

Chinese students comprise a relatively large percentage in some of these institutions, and marketing efforts had been directed at this target group as China is a very large market. In fact, one institution commented that although their efforts have been made to allure ASEAN students into the program, the “main target is Southern China, not AEC countries” (Institution E). Other international student make-up in a minority number of institutions are Americans and Europeans, and to a much lower extent, Africans.

4.4.2. Student and Faculty Exchange Programs. Student exchange programs have been seen as big golden opportunities. Institutions that had been signing MOUs with non-ASEAN universities in the past are now turning the direction to establishing more networking amongst ASEAN universities by signing MOUs with them. University exchange programs are not limited to

just that of students, but also extends to faculty as well. It is worth mentioning here, that the Thai government is encouraging universities to conduct exchange programs with other AEC Universities. In fact, it seems to be the trend to do so, not only in Thailand, but in other ASEAN countries as well.

It is anticipated however, that these student exchanges would be minimal in Thailand due to the mindset of Thai students. The reasons include being students' preferences of America or Europe, or if they are not well versed in English, the phobia of stepping out of Thailand. This was supported by a respondent who had mentioned that despite the signing of numerous MOUs, "very little happens as there is little active interchange" which makes it very frustrating. He went on to mention that "theoretically, there are a lot of opportunities, but in practice, I think it's a hit and miss" (Institution J). In fact, various institutions are in agreement that there are more ASEAN students who are interested in coming to study in Thailand but just a small handful of Thai students who actually venture to study in other ASEAN countries. And for those who do study overseas, popular destinations include Australia, the U.S. or Europe.

One particular institution however, felt that exchange programs or exchange activities with other universities in ASEAN would be good opportunities, but it was not part of their future plans as yet (Institution F). This was because of the international and not regional nature of their program that happened to be the institution's selling point and its main focus was on student exchange programs with Europe, Germany, Holland, and France. Another institution also mentioned that their continued efforts to partner with universities all over the world would continue, while adding ASEAN ones on the list (Institution A). The interest of an ASEAN university partnering with other ASEAN universities does not seem to stop there. Non-ASEAN universities are becoming more alert about the growing prospects of the AEC and countries as far as Europe or as near as Taiwan and Japan were interested in establishing MOUs with some current institutions.

4.4.3. Plans to Branch Out. A question that was directed at all respondents was the possible future opportunity of branching out to other ASEAN countries and the majority answer received was a "no". Reasons included the hassle of meeting the many requirements in establishing a foreign campus by the Office of Higher Education, risks involved, high investment, the longer timeframe of four years in the undergraduate program, too much energy, and difficult access into other ASEAN countries. The alternative norm was to either partner with another university through

an articulation program, or to offer a graduate program at partnering ASEAN universities. An extension program was the route that Institution D is currently undertaking at the graduate level, but thoughts are directed at doing it at the undergraduate level in ASEAN countries. An extension program, as explained by the respondent, involved utilizing the currently religiously affiliated school classrooms and flying in its faculty from Thailand to run the program. Although there are no definite plans for branching yet for Institution C, future plans are underway in extending into two ASEAN countries (Vietnam and Myanmar) and India.

4.4.4. Faculty. The opportunities of a larger ASEAN faculty market for the institutions seem interesting to just a very small group of institutions as most institutions are currently fully staffed with: (a) Westerns; (b) qualified Thais; (c) guest lecturers from partnering universities; and/or (d) a pool of available faculty. Although three other institutions (Institutions A, C, and M) had mentioned problems in hiring qualified English lecturers for their programs, the others have not had a problem in doing so if there was a need because they could easily get qualified lecturers from the Thai program to help teach in the IP program.

Moreover, some institutions are closed to the idea of staffing AEC lecturers, with a preference of hiring native speakers (Westerners) instead to maintain and/or foster an international image. An optimistic interviewee, however, stated that:

“The AEC would facilitate faculty movement, making it easier to hire faculty from other countries, and have them work in Thailand. As of now, it has been a problem to hire good English speaking, research oriented lecturers. The lecturers are usually foreign (American and Europeans) with the exception of a minimal percentage of Thai, Filipinos, and Indians. The free movement of skilled professionals would create a very big opportunity to get qualified faculty with good language skills” (Institution C).

4.4.5. Joint Research Collaboration. The amount of joint research collaboration among ASEAN universities was anticipated to be on the rise, particularly so in institutions that have MOUs with other ASEAN universities. Institution B clearly spelt out this joint research collaboration:

“In terms of research, if we have collaboration with other AEC countries, it would be easier for lecturers to go, and there would be more researchers moving among countries and universities within the ASEAN countries”.

4.4.6. Other Opportunities. Marketing opportunities would be highly facilitated with the opening of the AEC to provide easier market access to the nine ASEAN countries which when combined, would become a significantly large and developing regional market. The free flow of skilled labor that comes together with the implementation of the AEC would provide increased employment opportunities for BBA IP graduates within the region. This alone, would not only widen but open new doors for future growth, and perhaps a boom in the BBA IP, particularly in the areas of accounting and tourism and hospitality majors. However, Thai graduates would probably be more interested in working in more developed countries like Singapore and Australia since the standard of living in those countries are much higher. Another opportunity that cannot be left out is that of earning Quality Assurance (QA) points for international network and with the increasing talk about ASEAN, many universities are on the go in developing networks within the ASEAN region. Interning opportunities within the ASEAN region would also be a wonderful prospect for students:

“With the AEC, it is hoped that the AEC would allow students to be able to work on a student visa and be able to intern in any AEC country so that students would not only be able to earn but reap various experiences” (Institution C).

On the other hand, another institution mentioned that although internship opportunities might open up in ASEAN countries, most of their students would probably still opt to intern in Europe and the U.S. (Institution M).

4.5 Theme 3: Future Threats of the AEC on BBA IPs

Competition is definitely the word that best describes the future threats faced by BBA IPs. Although there were other futures threats, competition; both internally and externally, were significantly most dominant. This third theme explores the second portion of the second research question: *What are the future opportunities, threats, and challenges faced by BBA IPs as a result of*

the AEC that would be effective in 2015? The subthemes under this third theme include: (a) Competing for Students; (b) Loss of Faculty; (c) Educational System; and (d) Other Threats. In the numerical evaluation of the future threats of the 2015 AEC on the scale of one to ten, the range of answers from the 14 institutions were between one and eight. The calculated mean was at 5.21 while the standard deviation was at 2.42 (Table 10).

4.5.1. Competing for Students. Competition can be summarized as being ferocious and the biggest threat to all institutions. This was not surprisingly so because the arena would be much broader encompassing not only mushrooming local BBA IPs but also with future IPs in other non-business faculties within the local university in which the institution is affiliated with. It is anticipated that Thai faculties would be expanding their programs to include IPs in fields such as social sciences, and the sciences. With additional IPs to choose from, the market share would be greatly dwindled. This fear was shared amongst institutions that currently have a small student body. This case is on the contrary, a little different for two institutions (Institutions A and N) where there are strong assurances of continual big interests in their highly demanded programs. With reference to Thai faculties offering future IPs, Institution D provided a very realistic insight:

“It would not impact the institution in the short term but in the long term. Other Thai universities would be spending time adapting and adjusting themselves to welcome the AEC and many of the public universities would be for the next few years, be introducing the BBA program, and then, it would impact us.”

Going back to mushrooming BBA IPs, there is a big anticipation that many other Thai universities would be offering them in the near future. In fact, one respondent indicated that “increasing international programs, has resulted in increasing competitors, with have an impact on our enrolment” (Institution K) while another mentioned that it “was a leader, and now with more international programs, it is no longer a leader, and has to be competitive” (Institution K). This competition is bound to grow in leaps and bounds when the ten ASEAN countries come together. In order to combat this intensive and fierce competition, improvements in quality and facilities are compulsory for survival and maintaining its competitiveness would not be an easy task. According to

a respondent (Institution I), there are high levels of competition in the field of hospitality as there are so many universities that offer them, both in Thai or the BBA IP programs. Despite the intense competition, Thailand is reputed as a hub for tourism and hospitality, and it was predicted that students would still be attracted to these programs. The threat however, lies in the fact that Thai students, even those enrolled in BBA IPs, would be at a disadvantage with weaker English skills compared to other foreign students enrolled in the program.

Aside from domestic rivals in the form of emerging IPs in Thai universities, and that of new BBA IPs, another strong opponent comes in the form of Australian, UK, and U.S. universities that might open their campuses in Thailand. Foreign universities that undertake joint ventures with local partners represent another methodology in competing for the market share of students. In fact, as part of the AEC impact, there has been a growing shift from the West to the East with growing opportunities in the ASEAN market that has been seen as the momentum for investment. Take Malaysia for example. It has a university town with Australian and UK universities that have opened campuses there. That is a good example of what could in fact be Thailand's future in higher education. Therefore, universities that branch out into Thailand pose as a big threat for the current institutions.

Looking outside of Thailand, and into the region, the AEC provides Thai students with a diverse range of options in continuing their study, with Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines, as the more attractive countries that have good universities offering an international education. Although Thai students may not currently find other ASEAN countries as appealing, it would only be a matter of time when the interest would be diverted to these countries as they develop and become attractive. But then, there is also another group of students who are interested in international education outside the AEC region, with their eyes either on Europe or the U.S. It can therefore be concluded that "it would be more difficult to attract students if there are more universities and players in the market" (Institution C).

4.5.2 Loss of Faculty

Together with the AEC, is the free mobility of professionals, and so, losing lecturers is a foreseeable threat. This labor market liberalization would open up labor markets both at home and abroad, making it more competitive (Saraihong and Chanchaenchai. 2012). In fact, an institution

had already experienced this first-hand recently when “one of our Indonesian professors had moved back to Indonesia, as the Indonesian government pays USD 100 extra for an Assistant Professor status” (Institution D). So, the threat in the above scenario is just one of the many examples of what would be happening in the future. And to think of ten countries in ASEAN scrambling to recruit lecturers within the region is a frightening thought for current institutions. One institution that had been thinking ahead mentioned that “we would have to offer more attractive packages in order to keep the good faculty” (Institution C). She went on to mention that “lecturers would have the option of working and traveling around ASEAN countries, and so, as the pool widens, the packages have to be even more attractive to keep the faculty”. The loss of faculty would not be limited to those across the borders, but also within the country as universities that open future BBA IPs may mean losing “lecturers to other universities” and it is “difficult to recruit and retain foreign lecturers” who may “receive more attractive compensation remunerations” (Institution M).

4.5.3 Educational System

Thailand had been ranked very poorly in its educational system both within the ASEAN region and internationally. This poor reputation and image are definitely not in favor of the BBA IPs in Thailand as students would probably opt to study elsewhere where the standard of education is more renowned. In fact, with the gradual development of other developing countries, their stronger currencies would open new doors for them to study in other ASEAN countries. Thai universities may not be perceived as not as well-reputed and foreign students would probably have a much greater preference of pursuing education in better reputed countries.

Another threat at the door step is that of the complying to the requirements of the Thai Ministry of Education in order to align Thailand’s higher education with the other ASEAN universities. This would mean “adaptation in the curriculum, and the merging of the educational system in the region of the AEC” (Institution K).

4.5.4 Other Threats

A well-established institution (Institution N) expressed that although there were no serious threats to its program because of its attractive brand name and excessive demand for its program, the only fear was e-learning. Once the MOE opens the markets for e-learning in Thailand, it would be counted as a huge competition for not only the institution, but for others as well.

Turning to Thailand's turbulent political situation in the past decade, and the military junta's current control of the Thailand (Coia, 2014), they have jointly worsened Thailand's prospects as an educational hub for foreigners. A respondent mentioned this in her own words:

"The constant crisis, let it be political, or floods, has made Thailand, and particularly the institution, an unattractive place to students, thus causing students to go to other ASEAN countries like Singapore, or the Philippines instead. Moreover, it will be more competitive with increased establishments of higher institutions of learning in Thailand, thus reducing the institution's market share of students (Institution G)."

Interestingly, one director (Institution J) stated that ensuring that BBA IPs live up to its quality as an international program was a threat. According to his observation:

"A lot of international programs around the country are in name only. They are still teaching in Thai for example, and if they impact that perception that they are only international in name, and we are lumped in with them, then, we lose out again".

A couple of respondents expressed the bright side of threats as they saw them from a different angle – opportunities. Comments included:

1. "The AEC should not be seen as a threat but as an opportunity, and preparations need to be made. Questions should be asked as to what could be done with those "opportunities" as there are a lot of things to do (Institution B)".
2. "Encourage competition ... it is good for Thailand ... not as a threat but as an opportunity for Thailand in international education (Institution E)".
3. "I don't see any threats; I see them more as opportunities (Institution F)".

4.6 Theme 4: Future Challenges of the AEC on BBA IPs

Future challenges set forth by each of the 14 institutions were truly diverse and is the final theme that addresses the last portion of the second research question: *What are the future*

opportunities, threats, and challenges faced by BBA IPs as a result of the AEC that would be effective in 2015? The content of the interviews were categorized under five main subthemes: (a) Student Enrolment; (b) Curriculum; (c) English Proficiency; (d) Imminent AEC; and (e) Bringing About Change. The numerical mean for these future challenges was at 6.86 with the standard deviation of 1.92.

4.6.1 Student Enrolment

As mentioned earlier on, competition in the form of growing numbers of BBA IPs in Thailand was a tremendous challenge to deal with. Dwindling market share is also expected with demographic changes in the region as lower birth rates have been reported. The fierce competition in the BBA IPs both within and outside the country would mean more heavily marketing efforts directed at attracting students and a distinguished reputation to be earned in the ASEAN region. However, plenty of difficulties lie ahead in marketing Thailand as an educational hub since it is more of a tourist attraction.

While maintaining or increasing student enrolment was a concern for some institutions, managing increased student enrolment was a challenge for others. There was a concern about increased enrolment as a result of the AEC in ensuring in maintaining a balance in “quality and quantity”. If the number of enrolment were to increase drastically, institutions would have to make sure that they would be able to accommodate the increased quantity of students with the same quality program and have enough physical facilities and lecturers. With regards to quality, maintaining its image was of equal importance, particularly so with an influx of incoming foreign students. That is, the higher enrolment of foreign students, the greater the pressure in delivering a quality program, and providing quality facilities. Another respondent had a different experience altogether, as the institution had capacity constraints as it could not offer any additional spaces in its prestigious program. This was a result of its top management’s policy to be a “research based university” while diminishing its teaching role (Institution N).

4.6.2 Curriculum

Curriculum wise, the Commission of Higher Education of Thailand posed as another growing massive challenge to most institutions, as it plans to introduce strategies for Thailand to enter into the AEC. By doing so, it had introduced many regulations to control the University's Quality Assurance (QA) to raise standards to compete with these countries. Fulfilling the yearly QA requirements had been a time consuming, and frustrating process, as time could have been focused on teaching preparations and research instead. Institution K mentioned that it would be beneficial to improve Thailand's QA educational system by studying the QA educational system in other countries.

A common challenge among some institutions was the need to revise the curriculum to become more ASEAN. This includes the search for case studies or class discussion topics about neighboring AEC countries, aside from the usual ones found in U.S. textbooks. To make their programs more attractive for potential students, they would also have to offer a more rounded-ASEAN related program. Institutions with a large percentage of Western lecturers are looking for "more ASEAN professors for ASEAN case studies". This involves the challenges of "having more ASEAN partners, MOUs with ASEAN universities, and inviting more ASEAN lecturers" (Institution L). Ensuring that graduates are equipped with the competencies in the competitive AEC job market has also become an enormous challenge, and adjustments are anticipated in future curriculum revisions.

Aside from the ASEAN exposure, there is also a need to make the international dimension as the heart of the program to prepare students to work and compete in the international workplace. Although the calendar alignment to start in August had not been problematic for most institutions, there was one respondent who expressed this new academic calendar change as a big challenge (Institution I). Internships are a crucial element in the field of hospitality, and the compulsory calendar change, made it necessary for the institution (N) to make adjustments to its curriculum to accommodate those internship needs. Internships that had been conducted in two separate sessions for two and a half months each; once during the winter break, and once in summer, have now been changed because of the change in climatic conditions during the new breaks; the rainy season to be specific. Instead of the normal internship that runs for a total of five months in two separate sessions,

it had been changed to only one long session that lasts for six months instead; January to June and July to December. The hotels definitely gain from this new internship arrangement because they get interns to help out the entire year. However, it has been a little hard on the lecturers because of the more intense and demanding teaching load.

4.6.3 English Proficiency

The pride that the Thais have in never been colonized resulted in losing out on a competitive advantage that other colonized countries have; better English skills (Saraithong and Chancharoenchai, 2012). According to Rooth and Sarela (2007), “English proficiency is one of the most important skills as language is a fundamental part of workers’ human capital” and Kapur and Chakraborty (2008) suggested that “English is increasingly valued in the labor market in this era of globalization” (as cited in Saraithong and Chancharoenchai, 2012: 352). As English is not Thailand’s mother tongue, and not widely used, one of the biggest challenge for many institutions is helping its students to be English proficient so that they would be marketed more competitively in the labor market upon graduation. Another English-related challenge is to “change the attitude and mindset of non-English speaking Thai staff so that they would be equipped in providing supporting services with students, and non-Thai speaking lecturers” (Institution H). With English as the official AEC language, it is of utmost importance to be English proficient in all aspects let it be verbal and written.

4.6.4 Imminent AEC

Despite the awareness of the impending AEC, a comment made by a respondent demonstrated its perspective:

“As far as challenges of the AEC to the BBA IP goes, the AEC is not something that the institution is very concerned about, well, maybe just a little bit even though the university has been thinking more about the AEC recently” (Institution A).

Another institution seemed to be thinking along the same line, as its focus had been and would continue to be on international education (Institution F):

“The AEC is not a big deal. The challenge however, lies in getting a larger market here in Thailand, rather than attracting students from the Philippines or Laos. In terms of the AEC, nothing is seen as urgent or serious because we are already international in our ways.”

Having embraced the international curriculum as its program, a respondent (Institution M) stated that its program had not really been affected by the AEC. Its focus is global, and not on regional Asia. With its current collaborations with European institutions, it is already internationalized, and that is a step much higher than the regional AEC.

With the nature of Thai students' disinterest in ASEAN countries, compared to those of developed countries, there is a challenge of “injecting more knowledge and experience about ASEAN into the mindset of students as they need to know more about neighboring countries more than Europe and the U.S.” (Institution N).

4.6.5 Bringing About Change

Change is never an easy thing. In fact, it is a challenge for any organization because of the resistance to change from within. Although education is one of the key sectors that can help Thailand to move forward, efforts to turn its educational system around from being poorly rated to a higher ranking would not be an easy task. The traditional Thai mindset in so many different areas from its culture, management style, and educators, are so difficult to uproot and be transformed. This tremendous challenge applies to all institutions of learning in Thailand, and not just to BBA IPs. Efforts to bring up Thailand's education up to par within this region while bearing its infamous current educational rank in ASEAN would not be an easy thing to accomplish, and definitely a real challenge to undertake but not entirely impossible to accomplish.