

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The intent of this research was to investigate the current and future impacts of the AEC on the BBA IPs in Thailand. This chapter provides a description of research design and procedures that had been employed in this study. The initial section discusses the research methodology that had been selected for the study, followed by the selection of participants, and the instrument that had been developed for the study in section three. Section four outlines the details of the research procedure, and this chapter ends with the ethical considerations, research bias, and limitations of the study. The timeframe for this study was 30 weeks as outlined in Table 2.

3.2 Qualitative Research Approach

The AEC is still in its early stages of development, and is therefore by nature, exploratory. With that in mind, the researcher had chosen to use a qualitative research approach to match the nature of the research project (Creswell, 2008). As it is with qualitative research, the focus of this study was to discover new insights as the qualitative methodology involves greater detail and depth (Zikmund, Babin, Carr, and Griffin, 2010).

This qualitative research design is based on the grounded theory (GT) that involves a group of multiple subjects who had responded to an action or was involved in a process with a focus on a central phenomenon; that being the AEC in this scenario. The research involved a number of subjects who all had experienced a similar action or process; the AEC.

Qualitative research designs are by nature, time consuming, and much more so in this case as the sample of 14 subjects was considerably large. The large sample size would also incur a higher cost to conduct research compared to normal qualitative studies that consist of much smaller sample sizes (one to five).

The philosophical assumption is ontological that embraces the concept of multiple realities that are reported by the qualitative researcher in the findings. These multiple realities are conveyed through the employment of “multiple quotes based on the actual words of different individuals and presenting different perspectives from individuals” (Cooper and Schindler, 2011: 18).

3.3 Participants

Qualitative research designs employ only a small handful of participants (Cooper and Schindler, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Zikmund et al. 2010) and a total of 20 BBA IPs in Thailand (Table 3) had been selected through purposive sampling (a subcategory of nonprobability sampling) to be engaged in the study. Purposive sampling is defined as the sampling used when “the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2007: 125). The criteria established for purposive sampling are: (a) the site needed to be a BBA IP; (b) the selected respondent in the BBA IP needs to be knowledgeable of the impacts of AEC on its BBA IP; (c) the respondent must be in the capacity to provide the information; and (d) all respondents are of the same or equivalent position in the BBA IP. BBA IP Directors met the criteria and had therefore, been chosen as subjects for this study. Heavy reliance was placed on the Educational handbook for *International Programs in Thailand* (“International Programs in Thailand: University”. 2012) in obtaining the following data: (a) Institutions of Higher Education that were offering BBA IPs; and (b) corresponding contact names of Directors, contact e-mails, and telephone numbers. Excel was used in recording this data and updated by visiting each institution’s website. This phase was conducted after the research proposal was submitted and while waiting for its approval by the Ethical Committee. Therefore, the subjects’ contact information was available and ready to be used when needed. Although the ideal number of participants in a GT is 20-30, and 20 participants had been contacted at the onset of the study to participate in the study, only 14 (Table 4) were willing to participate in the study. Subjects who are referred to as Directors throughout this paper, might hold other similar titles such as Associate Director, Chairperson, Dean, Director, or Head of the BBA IP.

3.4 Data Collection Tools

The structured individual depth interview (IDI) was used as the data collection technique in this qualitative research study. The IDI is defined as a “one-on-one interview between a professional researcher and a research respondent” (Zikmund et al. 2010: 150). There was only one professional researcher in this study, that being the researcher herself. This aids in eradicating any disharmony in data collection, and contributed to the increase in reliability and validity instead. Lincoln and Guba (1985) mentioned that the researcher is the best instrument “because it would be virtually impossible

to devise a priori a nonhuman instrument with sufficient adaptability to encompass and adjust to the variety of realities that will be encountered” (page 39).

The advantages of a structured interview include using a detailed Interview Protocol that bears a close similarity to that of “questionnaires to guide the question order and the specific way the questions are asked, but the questions generally remain open-ended” (Cooper and Schindler. 2011: 169). The two main advantages involve better comparability of interview responses and maintaining the researcher’s neutrality (Cooper and Schindler. 2011). IDIs lasted for approximately one hour and the respondents were provided with a copy of the Interview Protocol (Appendix A) via email together with the Letter of Invitation (Appendix B) to participate. Aside from the written documentation of the interview, the session was also recorded (audio) with the permission of the director, and be used for transcribing later on (Creswell. 2007). The Interview Protocol was created by the researcher and had been tested for reliability and validity through a focus group consisting of six peer researchers. Any suggestions for changes and improvements had been noted and instruments had been revised accordingly. It answered the two research questions and contained main four questions that covered the following topics: (a) AEC’s current impacts on BBA International Programs; (b) Future Opportunities rendered by AEC to the Program; (c) Future Threats of the AEC to the Program; and (d) AEC’s Future Challenges to the Program. To further quantify the results of the study, respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest), the discussed content: (a) current upcoming AEC impacts to the program; (b) future AEC opportunities to the program; (c) future AEC threats to the program; and (d) future AEC challenges to the program.

3.5 Procedures

This section provides an outline of the procedures in conducting the research. The timeframe of the project (Table 2) spanned over a period of 30 weeks, starting from April 1, 2014 upon receiving approval from the Ethical Committee to October 15, 2014, thus marking the completion and submission of the research report.

3.5.1 Phase 1: Participation Invitation. After the research proposal was approved by the university’s ethical committee, selected participants were contacted through an e-mail invitation to participate (Appendix B). Also attached with the invitation to participate were a copy of the Certificate of Ethical Approval (Appendix C) and a copy of the Interview Protocol (Appendix A). E-

mail invitations were sent to all of the 20 selected subjects. Although it took only two days to send off the emails, the responses were slow in coming in. A deadline of 20 days was stated in the Letter of Invitation. However, only four respondents responded by the deadline, and within the first week. A reminder e-mail was sent to those who did not respond, and then followed-up by phone calls. The researcher discovered that it was easier and more effective to contact respondents by the phone, as the response rate was higher by almost thrice. Calls that were made were not always successful and some repeated phone calls had to be made on several occasions prior to an interview appointment. The lesson learnt from this experience, was to always follow-up with phone calls after emailing respondents after a week's time. The researcher was especially grateful to the first four respondents who had responded, as it was a form of support and encouragement. Despite the later appointments, they proved to be a blessing in disguise, as the appointments were spread out over a couple of months instead of being clumped together at the beginning. Based on the wrong assumption that respondents would be free and readily available during the summer vacation months, she discovered later on in the process of scheduling appointments that the respondents were in fact very busy with projects, traveling, and completing necessary documentation. Therefore, the researcher is truly thankful and grateful to all 14 respondents for taking out time from their busy schedules to meet up with her. It must be admitted that although it had been discouraging and frustrating at times to conduct repeated follow-ups, it had been worth the effort.

3.5.2 Phase 2: Interview Process. The second longest process of the project was conducting interviews. As this project had a much larger sample than most qualitative studies, the time spent spanned over a few months (10 weeks). Although the projected timeframe for interviews was five months (May to September 2014), the interviews were wrapped up in three months' time or simply said, two months ahead of schedule (May to mid- July 2014). The shortened interview period was highly attributed to the fewer number of respondents to be interviewed and partly due to the extra time allowance that the researcher had given herself, so that she would not be overly stressed out trying to complete the interviews within a shorter period of time. The advantage of this shortened timeframe was the ability to reduce the overall time span in report completion.

The setting of each interview was held at the respondent's site (institution) on dates and at times established by each respective respondent and appointments were scheduled either by email

responses or phone. In order to keep track of appointments, the researcher had printed out calendar templates for the interviewing months, so that she could keep a record of each appointment. She also made it a point to either call or email to confirm an appointment one or a few days ahead of time. Interviews were scattered across the weeks and there were times when two interviews were scheduled during the same week, while there was none the next week. Some interviews were held in the mornings, usually at 10:00 hours, while others were around 13:30 hours in the afternoon. Some sites were near and familiar to get to, while others were quite a distance away. The primary mode of transportation was by car and the researcher always traveled alone to each site to conduct interviews. The most challenging part of traveling was to plan well because of the infamous Bangkok traffic, and trying to locate universities that were in unfamiliar vicinities. Most of the sites were located around the vicinity of Bangkok, with the exception of two that were in the provinces and required more traveling. To avoid any late appointments, the researcher always made it a point to leave two hours prior to any interview, just to be punctual. The researcher is grateful that all respondents had been extremely professional by honoring their appointments, despite minimal rescheduling. While almost all the interviews were completed within an hour, there was one that last for only fifteen minutes because the Director was very busy.

Interviews were usually held at either the Director's office or in a small conference room. At the on start of each interview after introductory formalities, the respondent would be given the Letter of Consent (Appendix D) to sign. These letters were then safely kept in the researcher's bag for safe keeping, prior to proceeding with the interview. This was to make sure that the researcher would not forget and it acted as good standard procedure that was followed in every interview to avoid any future inconveniences and complications. Aside from obtaining the respondents' cooperation in signing the Letter of Consent, permission was also requested, to audio record the interview. Audio recording interviews were a necessary element in the interview process, because it provided all the recording of the entire interview. The audio equipment was always tested prior to the session, and looked at after turning it on, to ensure its proper functioning. Aside from audio recording, notes were also taken during the interview session by the researcher. There were times when the respondents deviated from answering the questions, which was perfectly fine as the researcher gained new perspectives regarding the institution or program. To keep the interview on track, the notes provided

excellent navigation in directing questions or emphasizing certain points, or to get desired answers to the questions. These notes were taken on the Interview Protocol – Researcher’s Copy (Appendix E). The first section required the researcher to fill out the basic information regarding the interview session. This included: (a) institution’s site/name; (b) date; (c) time; (d) respondent’s name; and (e) respondent’s position. The second section of the protocol was filled out later on during the interview: (a) total number of students enrolled in the program; and (b) ratio of Thai to foreign students. The third portion of the first page would be completed last, as the methodology used by the researcher to wrap up the interview. The respondents would be asked to rate on a scale of one (lowest) to ten (highest), the impacts, opportunities, threats, and challenges of the AEC to their programs. The fourth and last portion, were notes taken to answer the four questions in the interview protocol: (a) AEC’s current impacts on BBA International Programs; (b) Future Opportunities rendered by AEC to the Program; (c) Future Threats of the AEC to the Program; and (d) AEC’s Future Challenges to the Program.

Prior to interviewing, respondents were always informed that the session would last for approximately one hour. An overview of the interview was provided by informing the respondent of the title of the project, and the four areas that would be discussed (i.e., the impacts, opportunities, threats, and challenges of the AEC to the BBA IP). Respondents were allowed to freely express their thoughts, and not interrupted when the interview content deviated from the topic as it provided the researcher with greater insights into the uniqueness of each program. Questions were repeated to bring respondents back to focus, and this technique always worked. For the most part, most respondents spoke freely, and there were just a few who needed to be asked probing questions. Some respondents were well-prepared for the interview, while others answered the questions on the spot. The interview was concluded by asking the respondent to rate on a scale of one to ten (with one as the lowest and ten as the highest), the impacts, opportunities, threats, and challenges of the AEC towards their programs. By saving this to the end of the interview, the respondents had already thought through the content, and were in a better position to provide more accurate answers. The researcher found all respondents to be extremely cooperative, informative, knowledgeable, and kind, thus making the interviewing process a very enjoyable and productive one.

3.5.3 Phase 3: Data Analysis. This phase involved the development of the description and themes for the study (Creswell, 2008) and it was greatly facilitated by the use of the computer. Microsoft Word was used in transcribing and analysis, while excel was used in the creation of tables and figures. After each IDI, the researcher transcribed the audio recorded interview by typing it into the Word document established for the Interview Protocol for the researcher (Appendix E). Each transcribed interview was saved and labeled as the number of the institution, followed by its name (e.g. Institution_A_Beverley University) for easy referencing. By conducting the IDI and transcribing herself, the percentage of errors were minimal and bias, almost equivalent to zero.

Transcribing was a very time-consuming and stressful process as the researcher had to be very focused, in listening and typing at the same time, the exact recorded words. She was also selective in choosing to include only content relevant to answering research questions. Whenever respondents had expressed the confidentiality attached to any interview content, this was completely left out in the transcription process. Transcriptions were usually done within a few days after the interview session, and were used in the next data analysis process in analytic files. Analytic files were established as data was collected into such categories like places, and interview questions. As data is being sorted into analytic files, a rudimentary coding scheme was developed, and categories were divided, and subdivided into themes and subthemes respectively (Glesne, 2006). The themes were created based on the IDI questions, thus resulting into four major themes of: (a) Impacts; (b) Opportunities; (c) Threats; and (d) Challenges of the AEC towards BBA IPs. As the interviews were transcribed and categorized, the researcher developed subthemes along the way, and these gradually increased with the IDI transcriptions. In categorizing the transcribed material, the material was coded according to each theme and subtheme, and then, the transcribed material, was conveniently copied from one document to the analytical files. For the most part, the transcribed material included direct quotations from the audio recording, and would be more convenient for quotation purposes in the reported findings. As data analysis was an extremely tedious task, it took the researcher close to seven weeks complete (mid-July to August, 2014).

3.5.4 Phase 4: Discussion and Results. Information obtained from the qualitative data analysis was used in writing up the discussion and results of the research project. This was the most

enjoyable phase as the researcher was able to discuss and interpret the findings. The period taken to complete this phase was three weeks.

3.5.5 Phase 5: Conclusion and Implications for Further Study. This phase involved providing a conclusion for the study and recommendations made for further study. Connections were also made to describe, analyze, interpret, and a visual model was generated as a result of the study (Figure 3). Five weeks were needed to provide the reporting the last part of this project and edited thrice prior to the project completion and submission.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Letters were sent to prospective participants via e-mail inviting them to participate in the research study at a time and date at their convenience within the research timeframe. The researcher understood that the potentially contacted participants had the right to refuse to participate in the study. Participants also had the right to withdraw from the study at any time and would sign the Letter of Informed Consent prior the start of the interview session as a written agreement of their participation. Participating respondents were kept as anonymous in the study and all documentation kept under lock and key. As for participants who did not want certain or entire parts of the interview to be disclosed in the research report, the content was kept confidential and well-disclosed in every way possible.

3.7 Research Bias

As the researcher plays a significant role in the analysis and interpretation of data, it is of utmost importance that there is no bias involved in the research study. Whatever preconceptions the researcher had about the topic of the study were placed aside, and the focus, directed solely on the information that were provided by respondents.

3.8 Limitations

The main limitation of this study was achieving the target of 20 respondents for the study. Only 14 respondents had participated, and even though this was a relatively good number, a higher number would have been ideal. As a little over 20 Thai Universities offer BBA IPs that had been established over 10 years, it was difficult to expand the sample of respondents. The position of

respondents was another limitation as the Directors were difficult to reach, unresponsive at times, and were too busy to participate in the study, thus resulting in only a smaller than anticipated sample.

Although the interview protocol had been sent to respondents ahead of time, a few respondents did not have time to think about the answers to the questions prior the interview. The responses were therefore, not as complete and thorough as they might have been but this was understandable as they were hectic with their own schedules and work. Other limitations would include the restrictions in the ability to full information disclosure as the participants would have to maintain the confidentiality of their plans to prepare to cope with the AEC and their strategies to compete both domestically and internationally. The last limitation included scarce literature availability and outdated information on certain website in the compilation of the literature review.

