THAILAND'S ICT READINESS FOR THE ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT
ICT development in Thailand and the other ASEAN members must be prepared for the environment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) which will start formally at the end of the year 2015. The Ministry of ICT in Thailand has established several ICT policies and programs for ICT administrative management in both public and private enterprises in order to create a strong network of relationships to deal with competitors in ASEAN. This study compares Thailand with the other ASEAN Plus 3 member nations based on their stage of economic development and three important indicators of competitiveness (the higher education system, technology readiness, and business innovation). The findings identify Thailand's position with respect to ICT development relative to the other ASEAN Plus 3 nations and point to strategies and partnerships that need to be developed in Thailand in order to maintain a competitive position within the AEC.

KEYWORDS: ASEAN members, ASEAN Economic Community, ICT Readiness, Quality of Educational System, Business Innovation, Country Competitiveness

1.   INTRODUCTION
The purpose of this study was to report on Thailand's position with respect to ICT development and then to compare that position with that of the other nine members of ASEAN (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam) and its three dialogue partners (China, Japan, and the Korea Republic) referred to collectively as ASEAN Plus 3. The Plus 3 members were included in the study because they are considered to be technologically advanced nations with strong influences on the ASEAN market.

The nation's position ranking can present the overall situation of each particular country in relative to other countries. Each of these ASEAN nations can evaluate and compare itself with the other members and the ASEAN ICT master plan. As one main focus of ASEAN is to reduce the gap within the digital divide, this comparison will help inform each nation's position in each specific area whether it is lagging behind, more advancement than, or equality to their neighbors. Thus, supports will be circulated among each ASEAN members properly.

In addition, these nations comparison should lead to the competitions and better improvement. The nation government and responsible units of each area are able to response to the situation correctly to improve their competitive strategy.

This purpose was achieved by using a theoretical framework with four components: the stage of economic development using the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI); the higher education system; technology readiness; and business innovation. The World Economic Forum (2014) reported that these four components are basic to the determination of the state of a nation's ICT development and there is a strong relationship among education and training programs, the availability and usage of ICT resources, and business innovation and competitiveness. Even though unemployment of university graduates is reported as a problem in most countries worldwide there is an expectation that knowledgeable and skillful workforces can help develop innovative capacity for organizations and ultimately will promote a country's competitiveness.