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Scholarships in Thailand for ASEAN Integration: A Three Horizons Analysis of Evolution and Future Trajectories

Sornnate Areesophonpichet¹, Sirin Chakamanont¹, Miguel Antonio Lim², Icy Fresno Anabo³, Anh Ngoc Quynh Phan⁴, Mark Andrew Elepano⁵, Watcharapol Malaiwong¹

¹Chulalongkorn University, ²University of Manchester, ³Deusto University, ⁴University of Kent, ⁵Coventry University and Aarhus University

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Abstract

Scholarships are vital for promoting regional integration and human capital development within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This study utilizes the Three Horizons framework to assess the evolution and future of Thailand's scholarship programs in the context of ASEAN's educational cooperation. Through 27 stakeholder surveys and 18 semi-structured interviews, we explore three temporal dimensions: current challenges (Horizon 1), transitional innovations (Horizon 2), and future aspirations (Horizon 3). Our findings highlight ongoing issues, including limited outbound mobility, unequal access, weak private-sector involvement, and fragmented policies. By employing the Glonacal Agency Heuristic, we investigate how local, national, and regional actors influence scholarship governance, mapping governance and evolutionary trajectories. Strategic recommendations focus on inclusive design, efficient administration, varied funding, and alignment with ASEAN objectives. By viewing scholarships as instruments of knowledge diplomacy and regional solidarity, this research offers valuable insights for enhancing educational cooperation across ASEAN.

Keywords

ASEAN integration, Glonacal Agency Heuristic, Scholarship, Thailand, Three Horizons framework

Scholarships in Thailand for ASEAN Integration: A Three Horizons Analysis of Evolution and Future Trajectories

Introduction

As the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) advances toward deeper integration, education and student mobility have emerged as pivotal mechanisms for fostering regional cooperation and development. Scholarship programs play a crucial role in strengthening regional ties, cultivating human capital, and facilitating knowledge exchange. Given Thailand's strategic position as a founding member of ASEAN, the country has become a significant hub for scholarship initiatives targeting students from fellow member states (Acharya, 2021). These programs have evolved alongside ASEAN's shifting priorities, reflecting economic, socio-cultural, and political imperatives. However, while scholarships are widely recognized as tools for talent mobility, their role in shaping long-term regional integration remains underexplored.

Historically, Thailand's scholarship programs were designed to develop human capital in sectors essential for regional economic growth—trade, investment, and infrastructure. As ASEAN's vision expanded to encompass a socio-cultural community, scholarship offerings diversified to include education, public policy, and cultural studies, reinforcing broader regional integration commitments (Koh, 2007). Today, these scholarships are managed by government agencies, higher education institutions, private-sector entities, and multilateral organizations, spanning disciplines from science and technology to humanities and social sciences (Chirathivat & Cheewatrakoolpong, 2015). Efforts to improve accessibility and inclusivity have intensified, with targeted initiatives for underrepresented groups and streamlined application processes (Acharya, 2021).

Future transformation is anticipated, with programs aligning more strategically with ASEAN-wide initiatives such as the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint and the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (Koh, 2007). Emerging emphases include sustainable development, digital transformation, and regional governance, alongside interdisciplinary and collaborative models that are expected to enhance knowledge sharing and problem-solving (Acharya, 2021).

Within this context, scholarships function as powerful instruments to attract students from ASEAN, expand educational access, and drive socio-economic progress.

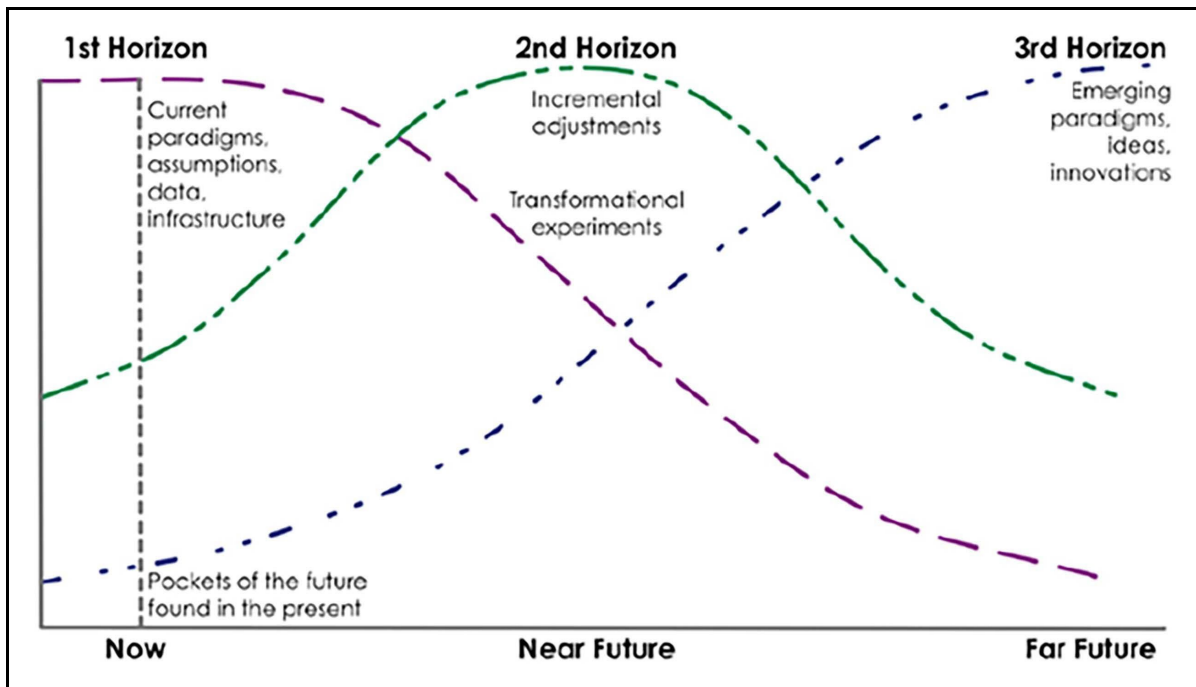


Figure 1. Schematic of the futures-oriented Three Horizons framework (Sharpe, 2013).

ASEAN’s policy vision explicitly prioritizes intra-regional student mobility, reflected in its commitment to “embrace diversity and solidarity of the ASEAN Community through enhanced intra-ASEAN mobility of students and scholars” (ASEAN Secretariat, 2022). Thailand has played a leading role in developing scholarship programs that advance these objectives (ASEAN Secretariat, 2025).

Despite the growing significance of scholarship programs, limited research exists on their effectiveness and long-term impact in Thailand. This study addresses this gap by systematically mapping Thailand’s scholarship landscape and analyzing how programs interact within the “Glonacal” space (Chankseliani, 2022; Marginson & Rhoades, 2002) in the context of ASEAN integration. To examine evolution and future pathways, this study employs the Three Horizons framework (Sharpe, 2013) as an analytical tool, conceptualizing change across three overlapping timeframes: Horizon 1 reflects the present system and its constraints, Horizon 3 represents aspirational long-term futures, and Horizon 2 identifies innovations and strategies bridging the gap between them, as shown in Figure 1.

By employing this dual-framework approach, the study illuminates Thailand’s scholarship landscape across both policy space—mapping how governance authority, resources, and agency are distributed across local, national, and regional scales—and temporal space—revealing how current realities, transitional innovations, and aspirational futures coexist and interact. This comprehensive spatial mapping enables a nuanced understanding of scholarships as dynamic, multi-scalar interventions that evolve over time while being shaped by actors operating at multiple governance levels. The study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of Thailand’s scholarship landscape and its implications for ASEAN integration, offering a structured roadmap to optimize programs in alignment with long-term regional integration goals.

Literature Review

Scholarships in Regional Integration

The regionalization of higher education in Southeast Asia has emerged as a strategic imperative, aligning with ASEAN's broader sociopolitical and economic integration goals. From the early 1990s to the present, ASEAN has advanced educational cooperation as a cornerstone for cultivating regional identity and strengthening economic competitiveness (Yodpet et al., 2022). ASEAN's regional identity functions as both a driver and a product of its integration agenda, in which education—particularly scholarships—serves as a vital instrument for fostering cross-border cooperation and mutual understanding.

The harmonization of higher education systems has been central to ASEAN regionalism. According to Dang (2017), regional harmonization facilitates student mobility, which has become a critical dimension of integration. Scholars underscore mobility's role not only in shaping educational outcomes but also in laying the groundwork for labor mobility, intercultural exchange, and long-term regional cohesion (Chou & Ravinet, 2017; Khalid et al., 2019). These mobility patterns cultivate interpersonal networks and shared experiences that underpin community building and regional solidarity (Chao, 2017).

ASEAN mobility initiatives are embedded within wider transformations in international student mobility (ISM) across Asia. Traditionally, many Asian countries primarily sourced students for Western destinations, but the twenty-first century has witnessed a marked shift toward Asia becoming a major hub for incoming students from within and beyond the region (Chan, 2012; Pham, 2022). Regional education hubs—China, Japan, Korea, Singapore, and, more recently, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Malaysia—have emerged as strong attractors (Vuong et al., 2021). By 2019, Asia had hosted nearly 747,000 international students—12.3% of the global total—up from 442,938 in 2010 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, n.d.). Despite such growth, Pham (2022) notes that Asia remains underrepresented in ISM research relative to its share of student flows, calling for attention to under-studied destinations including Thailand, Indonesia, and Vietnam. This broader lens situates Thailand's scholarship programs not only as integration tools of ASEAN but also strategic components in Asia's evolving educational landscape—increasingly shaped by intra-Asian flows, competitive national scholarship schemes, and virtual mobility initiatives.

Within this context, scholarships function as powerful tools for advancing student mobility, standardizing educational quality, and promoting inclusive access to cross-border learning opportunities. ASEAN-based scholarship programs have been instrumental in realizing these objectives (Atherton et al., 2020; Chao, 2020; UNESCO, 2015). Beyond enabling individual advancement, scholarships serve systemic functions by contributing to knowledge exchange, economic development, and the shaping of ASEAN's postcolonial knowledge order (Knight, 2006; Marginson, 2014). Scholarships have also been recognized as an effective means of democratizing access to higher education, particularly for students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2009), aligning with ASEAN's equity-driven education policies. As a

key regional actor, Thailand has responded by designing scholarship schemes reflecting both regional ambitions and national development goals.

Thailand's Scholarship Landscape

Thailand's scholarship ecosystem has undergone a significant transformation, transitioning from a historically outward-facing model—focused on sending Thai students to Western countries—to a regionally integrated framework promoting intra-ASEAN academic exchange (ASEAN Secretariat, 2018; Ministry of Education Thailand, 2010). This strategic shift reflects a broader regional commitment to strengthening educational cooperation and fostering ASEAN's identity through mobility and the mutual recognition of qualifications.

Notable initiatives exemplify Thailand's commitment. The ASEAN University Network (AUN), through programs such as the AUN-Disability and Public Policy (AUN-DPPnet), supports students with disabilities in policy-oriented graduate education, highlighting Thailand's inclusive approach (ASEAN University Network Secretariat, 2023). Such initiatives foster access and equity while promoting shared regional values and cohesion.

The evolving role of scholarships in Thailand aligns with global trends, positioning educational exchange as a tool of soft power and diplomacy. Analogous to the Fulbright Program (USA), MEXT (Japan), and China's scholarships for African students, Thailand's programs increasingly serve diplomatic purposes—building strategic partnerships and extending national influence through education (Melissen, 2005). This geopolitical function is particularly salient in ASEAN, where regional unity and mutual recognition are foundational principles.

Recent studies suggest that Thailand's scholarships are strategically employed to bolster regional ties, cultivate human capital, and promote Thailand's higher education system (Cuyvers et al., 2017). However, the comprehensive analysis of how these programs function as multi-scalar tools, influenced by local realities, national policies, regional aspirations, and global dynamics, remains limited.

Theoretical Framework: Integrating Glonacal Agency and Three Horizons

This study employs the Glonacal Agency Heuristic (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002) to explore relationships between scholarship programs and regional cooperation in ASEAN. This model reconceptualizes higher education as being simultaneously influenced by global, national, and local forces, emphasizing the roles of both structural entities—ministries, universities, development agencies—and human actors operating across these levels to facilitate educational change. This approach is particularly relevant in ASEAN, where scholarship programs serve not only as regional policies but are shaped by national strategies and institutional actions.

The framework illustrates that cross-border mobility involves dynamic interactions at multiple levels. Thai university practices can influence regional initiatives, just as ASEAN-level decisions reshape local institutional goals. Marginson and Rhoades (2002) highlight how local actors may resist or adapt to global norms, while transnational programs often emerge as hybrid forms of governance and identity. This multi-directionality is crucial for understanding ASEAN's scholarships, which embody regional

values, promote intercultural competencies, and support postcolonial objectives such as knowledge pluralism and solidarity. Chankseliani and Sopromadze (2023) enhance this perspective by treating regional higher education spaces, such as ASEAN, as distinct geopolitical formations—neither mini-globals nor mere extensions of nation-states—noting that such regions develop unique funding systems and epistemic cultures. This framework reinforces the heuristic’s value in analyzing how scholarships foster both systemic change and shared futures. Ultimately, the Glonacal framework offers a robust lens for understanding policy diffusion, institutional adaptation, and the symbolic roles of scholarships in ASEAN, enabling more integrative approaches to regional education and development.

Integrating the Three Horizons framework with the Glonacal Agency Heuristic effectively addresses the multiscale and future-oriented goals of this research. Such integration is deliberate: the Glonacal Agency Heuristic maps the policy space of scholarship governance—capturing how decisions, resources, and agency are distributed across local, national, and regional scales—while the Three Horizons framework maps the temporal space of scholarship evolution—revealing how current realities, emergent innovations, and aspirational futures coexist and interact over time. Together, these frameworks enable comprehensive analysis, situating Thailand’s scholarship programs within both their governance architecture (policy space) and developmental trajectories (temporal space), while providing insight into not only where power and agency reside but also when and how transformative change occurs. The Three Horizons framework provides a structured method for analyzing temporal change by mapping: (a) the current state of scholarship programs (Horizon 1), (b) transitional innovations (Horizon 2), and (c) aspirational futures (Horizon 3). However, it does not fully capture the complexities of multi-level governance. Conversely, the Glonacal Agency Heuristic offers a comprehensive perspective for examining interactions among local, national, and regional forces, although less effective at structuring future scenarios.

Multi-framework approaches enable researchers to capture the policy dynamics that single-lens analyses cannot adequately address—specifically, how policy problems, actors, and instruments evolve over time while simultaneously operating across nested political and organizational levels (Parker et al., 2020; Yorke & Vidovich, 2016). Ultimately, this dual-lens approach follows established precedents in multi-theoretical policy research (Wu & Zheng, 2022). The Three Horizons lens reveals what changes occur over time and when transitions happen, while the Glonacal lens explains who drives these changes and how actors negotiate competing interests across various scales. Together, they provide both future-oriented strategic planning and grounding in present realities, essential for understanding ASEAN’s complex, multi-actor scholarship ecosystem.

Framework Limitations

While the integration of the Glonacal Agency Heuristic and the Three Horizons framework offers significant analytical advantages, we acknowledge important limitations inherent in each framework and their combined use. This reflexive awareness is essential for transparent and rigorous scholarship.

First, the Glonacal Agency Heuristic has been critiqued for requiring contextual adaptation when applied to non-Western settings, as the original formulation may not fully capture local knowledge-construction processes and institutional arrangements differing from Anglo-American contexts (Marginson, 2022). In ASEAN, where regional governance operates through consensus-based mechanisms and postcolonial dynamics shape knowledge flows, we recognize that the heuristic's three-level structure (global-national-local) may oversimplify complex, networked relationships among member states and ASEAN's distinctive character as a regional formation (Chankseliani & Sopromadze, 2023). We have remained attentive to how actors and institutions in Thailand's scholarship ecosystem may operate across or between these levels in ways resisting neat categorization.

Second, the Three Horizons framework has been critiqued for its potential to impose prescriptive or totalizing structures on participatory futuring processes, potentially suppressing plural perspectives and emergent insights (Koenig et al., 2022). The framework's temporal categories (present, transitional, future) risk creating artificial boundaries that may not reflect stakeholders' lived experiences of simultaneous, overlapping temporalities. Additionally, its successful application depends heavily on facilitator skill and careful design to reflect local institutional constraints and stakeholder values (López-Rodríguez et al., 2024). We mitigate these risks by using the framework as a heuristic guide rather than a rigid template, allowing the interview participants to articulate their own temporal understandings and triangulating framework-based analysis with grounded, inductive coding.

Third, combining multiple frameworks introduces risks of theoretical incoherence and analytical complexity. Combining frameworks without explicit epistemological anchoring can leave studies "poorly anchored" and conceptually inconsistent (Okhuysen & Bonardi, 2011). The integration of a governance-oriented heuristic (Glonacal) with a futures-thinking tool (Three Horizons) requires careful attention to ensure that the two analytic purposes—one describing current power distributions, the other projecting temporal change—complement rather than contradict each other. We address this through iterative analytic cycles, explicitly mapping how findings from each framework inform and enrich the other, documenting points of convergence and tension in research memos.

We adopt several reflexive practices to enhance transparency and rigor (Probst, 2015): maintaining detailed audit trails documenting how we apply each framework's concepts to data; engaging in collaborative reflexive discussions within the research team to identify potential biases or blind spots introduced by framework choices; acknowledging in findings where the frameworks' limitations may have constrained analysis or alternative theoretical lenses might have yielded different insights; and triangulating framework-based interpretations with participant member-checking and documentary evidence. By explicitly acknowledging these limitations, we aim to model a critical, reflexive scholarship that strengthens rather than undermines the credibility of multi-framework approaches.

Methodology

Data Collection

A structured survey instrument was developed specifically for this study, drawing on established frameworks in higher education policy evaluation and scholarship program assessment (Sa & Sabzalieva, 2016). The survey consisted of 32 items combining closed-ended Likert-scale questions (5-point scales) and open-ended responses, organized across six thematic domains: (1) funding structures and financial sustainability mechanisms, (2) program objectives and strategic alignment with ASEAN integration goals, (3) eligibility criteria and selection processes, (4) accessibility and inclusivity measures targeting underrepresented groups (low-income students, rural populations, ethnic minorities, students with disabilities), (5) policy coherence across institutional, national, and regional levels, and (6) perceived effectiveness and impact of current scholarship programs. The survey examined the academic levels supported by each program (vocational, undergraduate, master's, doctoral), disciplinary coverage, program duration, funding sources (government, institutional, private, multilateral), and whether programs prioritized equity-focused recruitment. Respondents—senior representatives from their respective organizations—provided detailed institutional information regarding their organization's scholarship offerings, including annual budgets, number of beneficiaries, application-to-award ratios, and post-program outcomes such as employment rates and alumni engagement. The survey explored stakeholders' perceptions of challenges and opportunities for potential ASEAN-wide scholarship initiatives, including questions on preferred governance models, funding mechanisms, and regional coordination strategies.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling—a methodologically rigorous approach widely employed in qualitative higher education policy research when studying specialized populations (Kosmützky et al., 2020; Kabir, 2023). Selection criteria were deliberately defined: participants had to be senior executives working in international affairs within government agencies, private-sector organizations, or higher education institutions administering scholarship programs at vocational, undergraduate, master's, and/or doctoral levels for ASEAN member state students, with offices based in Thailand. This purposive strategy ensured that respondents possessed direct decision-making authority, comprehensive knowledge of scholarship governance, policy alignment mechanisms, and regional integration strategies—qualities essential for generating information-rich data (Rubin et al., 2022).

Table 1. Demographic profiles of participants ($N = 27$)

Characteristic	N	%
Position Level		
Vice-President/Deputy Vice-President	6	22.2%
Dean/Associate Dean	5	18.5%
Director/Deputy Director	7	25.9%
Chief/Head of Unit	4	14.8%
Program Officer/Adviser	5	18.5%

Organization Type		
Government Agencies	3	11.1%
Higher Education Institutions	18	66.7%
Private Sector/Multilateral Organizations	6	22.2%
Years of Experience		
5–10 years	9	33.3%
11–15 years	11	40.7%
>15 years	7	26%

While the sample size of 27 may appear modest compared to large-scale survey studies, it is methodologically defensible and appropriate for this research context. First, the target population of senior scholarship administrators in Thailand’s ASEAN-focused programs is inherently limited and specialized; the sample represents a substantial proportion of the relevant population, thereby achieving strong representativeness within this bounded domain (Kosmützky et al., 2020). Second, qualitative research with elite or senior administrators prioritizes depth of knowledge and positional insight over statistical representativeness, as these participants possess unique access to institutional memory, policy rationales, and strategic decision-making processes (Kabir, 2023). Third, the concept of “information power” (Malterud et al., 2016) supports smaller samples when the study aim is narrow, the sample is highly specific, the dialogue is theory-driven, and the analysis is focused—all conditions met in this study. Empirical precedent in higher education policy research further validates this approach: Rubin et al. (2022) conducted 23 elite interviews with state higher education finance officers, demonstrating that purposive samples of 20–30 senior administrators yield rich, credible insights when triangulated with documentary evidence. The qualitative depth achieved through this study’s targeted sampling strategy, combined with 18 follow-up semi-structured interviews and triangulation with policy documents, provides contextual insights and analytical rigor, compensating for the smaller quantitative sample.

As shown in Table 1, 80% of respondents occupy senior leadership positions—including Vice-President, Dean, Director, or Chief/Head of Unit—ensuring the data reflect high-level strategic perspectives and institutional decision-making authority. The remaining 20% serve as Program Officers or Advisers with substantial operational expertise in scholarship design, implementation, and evaluation. Organizations represented include government agencies responsible for national scholarship policy, higher education institutions directly administering programs, and private sector or multilateral entities contributing funding or technical support. This multi-sectoral composition provides comprehensive coverage of the scholarship ecosystem in Thailand, ensuring the findings reflect diverse organizational perspectives and governance contexts (Lawrence & Wu, 2020). Furthermore, participants’ extensive professional experience—with more than 65% having more than 10 years in scholarship administration—enhances the credibility of their insights regarding program evolution, policy challenges, and future trajectories (Kabir, 2023).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 of the 27 survey respondents who indicated their willingness to participate in follow-up discussions. These participants

were purposively selected to ensure representation across organization types (government, higher education institutions, private/multilateral), position levels, and geographic program focus (inbound vs. outbound mobility). The interview protocol was designed around four thematic areas aligned with the study's research questions and the Three Horizons framework: (1) stakeholders' perceptions of ASEAN student mobility, including the role of benefits, barriers, and scholarships in fostering regional integration and mutual understanding; (2) challenges related to funding sustainability and administrative efficiency, including resource constraints, bureaucratic processes, and coordination difficulties across institutions and national borders; (3) alignment of institutional scholarship practices with national education strategies and ASEAN-level policy frameworks, including perceived coherence or misalignment between governance levels; and (4) prospects for ASEAN scholarship initiatives, including participants' visions for future program design, governance models, and regional cooperation mechanisms. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 min and was conducted via secure video conferencing platforms. Participants provided informed consent for audio recording, and all interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service. Transcripts were anonymized by removing identifying information (names, specific institutions) and reviewed by the research team for accuracy before coding. The interview data greatly enhanced the application of the Three Horizons framework by providing rich contextual insights into the evolution, effectiveness, and strategic direction of scholarship programs, validating the key patterns identified in survey data.

Data Analysis

The coding process, guided by open and axial coding techniques, was central to the analysis. Data were segmented into smaller units of meaning and then reorganized into broader categories reflecting underlying themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Our coding strategy deliberately integrated the conceptual vocabularies and analytic categories of both theoretical frameworks. For the Glonacal Agency Heuristic, we employed framework-specific codes to identify: governance scales (local/institutional, national, regional, global), actor types (government agencies, universities, private sector, multilateral organizations, individual students and administrators), agency mechanisms (policy-making authority, resource allocation, program implementation, resistance or adaptation), cross-scale interactions (how decisions at one level constrained or enabled actions at other levels), and hybrid governance forms (instances where programs reflected negotiated compromises across scales). For the Three Horizons framework, we employed temporal codes to distinguish: Horizon 1 indicators (current constraints, dominant practices, existing challenges, status quo descriptions), Horizon 2 indicators (transitional innovations, pilot initiatives, emerging alternatives, bridging strategies), and Horizon 3 indicators (aspirational visions, long-term goals, transformative possibilities, desired futures). During axial coding, we systematically examined how policy space (Glonacal) and temporal space (Three Horizons) dimensions intersected—for example, identifying how actors at specific governance scales articulated different temporal orientations, or how transitional innovations (Horizon 2) involved cross-scale coordination. This theory-driven coding approach ensured analysis remained anchored in the frameworks' core concepts while allowing emergent themes to surface through inductive coding processes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Our analytic approach deliberately integrated the conceptual vocabularies of both frameworks: the Glonacal heuristic oriented our attention toward policy space dimensions (identifying actors, scales, and governance mechanisms across local, national, and regional levels), while the Three Horizons framework oriented our attention toward temporal space dimensions (distinguishing present constraints, transitional innovations, and aspirational futures). This dual spatial mapping ensured our coding captured both multi-scalar governance dynamics and the temporal evolution of scholarship programs. As shown through selective coding, categories were refined into four core analytical dimensions: (1) Program Design and Implementation, (2) Mobility and Access, (3) Uniqueness and Differentiation, and (4) Sustainability and Growth.

Examples from the coding matrix are shown in Table 2. The iterative integration of thematic analysis and the Three Horizons framework strengthened analytical rigor, ensuring the findings were both empirically grounded and theoretically robust. This methodological approach offers a nuanced understanding of structural challenges and strategic opportunities for enhancing scholarship programs in Thailand, providing valuable guidance for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders involved in regional integration and educational development.

Findings

Current Scholarship Landscape (Horizon 1)

The survey and interview data reveal a diverse landscape of scholarship programs in Thailand, with 62 programs identified: 33 for Thai nationals studying in ASEAN member states and 29 for ASEAN nationals studying in Thailand. These programs are funded by various sources, including government agencies, higher education institutions, donors, and multilateral organizations, and cover disciplines and study levels from undergraduate to doctoral degrees. Programs like the Pre-Service Student Teacher Exchange (SEAMEO Secretariat, 2024) and the Asian International Mobility for Students (AIMS) Programme (SEAMEO RIHED, 2024) highlight the unique opportunities provided by these scholarships. The Pre-Service Student Teacher Exchange has provided valuable international experience to 21 students, while AIMS has significantly impacted regional higher education harmonization and cultural understanding with over 6,000 beneficiaries.

Table 2. Coding matrix of qualitative data examples

Raw Data (Excerpt)	Initial Code	Subcategory	Category	Theme
“Many students from lower-income backgrounds hesitate to apply for international scholarships due to the high cost of living abroad, even when tuition is covered. Additional financial support is	Financial hesitancy among low-income students	Cost of Living	Financial Barriers	Mobility and Access
	Limited access due to socio-	Socio-economic Disparities	Accessibility Constraints	Mobility and Access

<i>essential to increase participation."</i>	economic status			
<i>"The current funding model is fragmented, with universities, governments, and external donors all operating independently. A more coordinated regional strategy is necessary for sustainability."</i>	Fragmented governance of scholarship funding Lack of alignment among stakeholders	Fragmentation of Resources Need for Regional Strategy	Systemic Funding Challenges Policy Coordination	Sustainability and Growth Program Design and Implementation

Thailand's scholarship landscape aligns with broader ASEAN goals, such as people-to-people connectivity and increased student and labor mobility, which are fundamental to the region's integration process. Scholarships facilitate cross-border educational exchanges that foster mutual understanding and collaboration among member states (ASEAN Secretariat, 2018). However, Thailand's approach and broader ASEAN objectives have notable differences. While Thailand's scholarships align with ASEAN's aim of enhancing regional integration (Chao, 2017; Sirat, 2017), lower interest among Thai students in pursuing education within ASEAN poses challenges. Across interviews, stakeholders—including government agencies, higher education institutions, private companies, and multilateral organizations—consistently observed that Thai students often perceive Western countries as more prestigious destinations for higher education, cited as a key factor influencing relatively low interest in regional scholarship programs. In contrast, students from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam exhibit considerable interest in studying in Thailand. This finding has significant implications for ASEAN regionalization, highlighting potential imbalances in mobility and engagement, underscoring the urgent need for more targeted efforts to encourage Thai students to participate in regional mobility programs.

Although most scholarships (43 out of 62) are open to all applicants, nine prioritize individuals from underprivileged groups, including low-income, disability, and refugee backgrounds. Examples include the Living Allowance scholarship funded by universities to support students with financial needs, and the Odyssey Scholarship funded by multilateral and non-governmental organizations and private companies. However, students from these groups still face challenges in accessing scholarship opportunities due to issues such as academic qualifications, financial constraints, information access, administrative support, self-efficacy, confidence building, and exchange program alignment with inclusive goals. As one interviewee commented, "Despite available scholarships, students from disadvantaged backgrounds often lack the necessary resources and information to apply effectively."

Desired Future State (Horizon 3)

Informants emphasized that structural and procedural enablers were as critical as financial support in realizing the full potential of scholarship programs. Stakeholders

from government agencies, higher education institutions, private-sector partners, and multilateral organizations consistently highlighted the need for more efficient systems. “Streamlined administrative processes are vital for maximizing the impact of scholarship programs and ensuring they meet regional objectives,” one respondent noted.

Others stressed the importance of simplifying application procedures, improving information dissemination, and reducing bureaucratic delays, which disproportionately affect underrepresented applicants. Building on this foundation, informants also agreed that increased financial assistance is necessary to attract talented students from diverse backgrounds—particularly those from marginalized or economically disadvantaged communities. As one interviewee remarked, “Even when tuition is covered, many capable students are deterred by living costs and the absence of comprehensive financial support.” These insights collectively point to a desired future scenario in which both administrative efficiency and financial inclusivity are seen as mutually reinforcing strategies for expanding access and advancing ASEAN’s regional integration goals.

Scholarships are essential tools for fostering economic growth and addressing workforce needs across the region, contributing to a more integrated ASEAN community (Marginson, 2014; Sirat, 2017). However, there is less emphasis on developing a common ASEAN identity. The focus on socio-economic development as the primary scholarship outcome may stem from stakeholders’ perspectives that tangible economic benefits are more immediately impactful (Chao, 2017). This focus underscores the need for further exploration of how scholarships can contribute to fostering shared ASEAN identity, crucial for long-term regional cohesion and presenting a significant opportunity for future research (Chou & Ravinet, 2017; Knight, 2014).

Table 3. Comparison of current state vs. desired future Scenarios for ASEAN scholarships in Thailand, and key strategies developed

Focus Area	Current State of ASEAN Scholarships in Thailand	Desired Future Scenarios	Key Strategies
Program Design and Implementation	• 62 programs (33 for Thai nationals, 29 for ASEAN nationals); funded by governments, HEIs, donors, collaborations.	• Catalyst for regional socio-economic development. • Anticipated benefits: stronger regional ties, increased enrollment, enriched learning, enhanced institutional reputation, aligned education systems, skilled graduates for home countries, economic development, and research collaboration. • Robust administrative capacity, comprehensive student support.	• Clear Objectives: Clearly define the objectives of scholarship programs, ensuring alignment with national and regional development goals. • Flexible Learning Pathways: Provide diverse learning pathways and mobility options to cater to students' varying needs and interests. • Streamlined Processes: Simplify application and administrative procedures to enhance accessibility and efficiency. • Full Scholarship Coverage: Provide comprehensive financial support, including tuition fees, living expenses, and travel costs, to attract talented students from diverse backgrounds.

(continued)

Table 3. Continued

Focus Area	Current State of ASEAN Scholarships in Thailand	Desired Future Scenarios	Key Strategies
Mobility and Access	- Scholarships contribute to higher education standards, human resource development, and international cooperation. - Disparity in interest: Thai students are less inclined toward ASEAN education compared to students from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam. - Private companies are not actively involved.	Increased financial assistance, networking opportunities, administrative training, effective marketing, and alumni engagement to raise awareness and attract suitable candidates.	Policy Challenges and Opportunities: Advocate for policy changes that facilitate scholarship access and mobility, such as relaxed visa regulations and streamlined credit transfer mechanisms. Longer Exchange Programs or Full Degrees: Encourage longer-term mobility programs, including full-degree scholarships, to foster more profound cultural exchange and academic collaboration. Empowering Alumni: Establish alumni networks to facilitate knowledge sharing, mentorship, and career development opportunities for scholarship recipients. Engagement and Outreach: Increase engagement with Thai students and private companies to promote scholarship opportunities and encourage participation. Accessible Information and Effective PR: Ensure that information about scholarships is readily available and accessible to all potential applicants through various channels. Relaxed Visa Policies: Advocate for relaxed visa regulations to facilitate easier movement of students across ASEAN borders and enhance academic mobility and regional integration.

(continued)

Table 3. Continued

Focus Area	Current State of ASEAN Scholarships in Thailand	Desired Future Scenarios	Key Strategies
Uniqueness and Differentiation	- Unique programs like Pre-Service Student Teacher Exchange and AIMS Programme show impact. - CBIM enhances institutional capacity.	- Challenges such as financial constraints, administrative hurdles, language barriers, and regulatory issues are addressed. - Fully funded support for private universities is emphasized. - Innovative and inclusive strategies are key.	Unique Opportunities: Create unique and differentiated scholarship programs that offer specialized training, research opportunities, or internships in areas of regional importance. Innovative and inclusive strategies: Implement innovative approaches to address challenges such as language barriers, cultural adjustment, and inclusivity for disadvantaged groups.
Sustainability and Growth	43 scholarships are open to all, 9 prioritize disadvantaged groups. - Challenges remain for these groups: academic qualifications, financial constraints, information access, administrative support, confidence building, program alignment with inclusive goals.	- Financial sustainability is crucial. - Primary funding from governments and HEIs, additional support from private companies and multilateral organizations. - Funding models include full funding, collaborative approaches, and external sources. Aligning industry needs with graduate skills to attract funding and innovation.	Sustainable Funding: Develop sustainable funding models that combine government, institutional, private sector, and multilateral resources.

(continued)

Table 3. Continued

Focus Area	Current State of ASEAN Scholarships in Thailand	Desired Future Scenarios	Key Strategies
Additional Recommendations		• Comprehensive approach: financial support, streamlined applications, effective marketing, inclusive design, private-sector involvement. • Sustainability is ensured through funding and collaboration, student dropout risks addressed, operational intricacies clarified, such as credit transfer, international collaboration emphasized, and inclusive approaches promoted.	• Comprehensive Support Systems for international students: Provide comprehensive support services to scholarship recipients, including academic advice, language training, cultural orientation, and career counseling. • Alignment with Workforce Needs: Scholarship programs should align with the evolving needs of the workforce to ensure that graduates possess relevant skills and knowledge. • Standardized Credit Transfer: Develop standardized credit transfer mechanisms to facilitate seamless academic mobility within the ASEAN region. • Regional and International Collaboration: Foster collaboration among ASEAN member states, higher education institutions, and international partners to share best practices, resources, and expertise in scholarship management.

Scholarship Strategies to Navigate Transition (Horizon 2)

As summarized in Table 3, the findings of this study provide a structured comparison between present conditions and aspirational goals, emphasizing strategies informed by stakeholder engagement. These strategies aim to address current implementation challenges while fostering stronger alignment with ASEAN's regional integration objectives.

Key strategies, including program design, accessibility, distinctiveness, and sustainability, were identified by respondents as important for promoting regional integration, academic mobility, and human capital development within ASEAN. These include enhancing program design and implementation by moving beyond traditional semester-long exchanges, aligning program objectives with the educational policies of ASEAN, leveraging alumni expertise for program management and outreach, and establishing fair and transparent selection processes. Enhancing mobility and access involves addressing political barriers to student mobility, extending program duration for longer exchanges or full degrees, and increasing program visibility and accessibility through various platforms. An essential aspect is advocating for streamlined visa procedures within the region.

To ensure uniqueness and differentiation, distinctive program features such as thematic focuses for universities or specialized skill development initiatives should be developed. Additionally, the unique value proposition of programs should be actively promoted through targeted marketing and public relations efforts. Securing diverse funding sources, including public and private partnerships, is essential for sustainability and growth. Increasing Thai student participation through targeted campaigns and advocating for continued government support are also important considerations. Cultivating a regional network of experts across ASEAN can provide valuable expertise for program development and success. Comprehensive financial support is pivotal in removing financial barriers.

Additional recommendations emphasize establishing comprehensive student support services, streamlining administrative processes, harmonizing credit transfer and qualifications across ASEAN, aligning scholarship objectives with workforce needs, and promoting stakeholder collaboration through unified scholarship offerings, coordinated mobility strategies, and partnerships with external organizations. These recommendations stem from insights gained through participant interviews.

Discussion

Strategic Pathways for ASEAN Integration

The analysis of Thailand's scholarship programs, synthesized in Table 3, reveals critical tensions between current realities and the aspirational futures essential for advancing ASEAN regionalization. Presently, 62 programs operate across fragmented governance structures, exhibiting notable asymmetries. While Thailand attracts substantial inbound mobility from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam, Thai students demonstrate markedly lower interest in regional study opportunities, preferring Western destinations.

This unidirectional flow undermines the reciprocity principles fundamental to regional integration (Chao, 2017).

Table 3 identifies four strategic imperatives for transformation. First, program design must transition from ad hoc initiatives to thematically coherent offerings aligned with ASEAN priorities—digital innovation, sustainability, and inclusive growth—addressing regional skill gaps (Kent, 2018). Second, accessibility requires comprehensive financial coverage and streamlined administrative processes to dismantle the barriers facing underrepresented groups (Espiritu et al., 2024; Sa & Sabzalieva, 2016). Third, differentiation through unique value propositions—exemplified by CBIM and AIMS—demonstrates institutional capacity for innovation when policy flexibility exists. Fourth, sustainability demands diversified funding mechanisms, integrating government, private sector, and multilateral resources, coupled with strengthened alumni networks for knowledge diplomacy (Wilson, 2015).

Collectively, these strategies reconceptualize scholarships as Glonacal interventions (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002), navigating multi-scalar governance complexities while advancing regional solidarity beyond market-oriented human capital logic.

Positioning Findings in Policy and Temporal Space

This discussion interprets the study findings through the integrated lens of the Glonacal Agency Heuristic and Three Horizons framework, demonstrating how Thailand's scholarship programs operate simultaneously within policy and temporal space. The Glonacal perspective reveals a multi-scalar governance architecture: how local institutional practices, national policy frameworks, regional ASEAN initiatives, and global mobility trends intersect to shape scholarship design and implementation. Concurrently, the Three Horizons perspective reveals temporal dynamics: how current constraints (Horizon 1) coexist with emerging innovations (Horizon 2) and aspirational futures (Horizon 3), creating opportunities for transformative change. By analyzing scholarships through both spatial dimensions, we uncover not only where power and agency reside within the governance ecosystem but also when and how strategic interventions can catalyze shifts toward more equitable, integrated, and impactful regional cooperation.

The findings reveal several critical themes. First, limited outbound mobility among Thai students represents a significant challenge. Despite the availability of scholarships for Thai nationals to study in ASEAN member states, uptake remains low compared to interest in Western destinations. This asymmetry reflects both perceived prestige hierarchies in global higher education and insufficient promotion of study opportunities in ASEAN. Second, inequitable access persists despite targeted initiatives for underrepresented groups. Financial constraints, information gaps, and administrative complexities continue to disadvantage students from low-income, rural, and minority backgrounds. Third, weak private-sector involvement limits diversification of funding sources and the sustainability of scholarship programs. Fourth, fragmented policy alignment across institutional, national, and regional levels creates coordination challenges and reduces program effectiveness.

Collectively, these approaches position scholarships as more than mere educational mechanisms; they serve as Glonacal interventions (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002) that

navigate between national agendas and regional integration goals. The intersection of policy and temporal space is particularly evident in Thailand's scholarship ecosystem. Actors at different governance scales (local universities, national ministries, regional ASEAN bodies) articulate divergent temporal orientations: local institutions often focus on Horizon 1 operational challenges (funding constraints, administrative capacity), while regional policymakers emphasize Horizon 3 aspirational visions (seamless ASEAN mobility, shared regional identity). These scalar-temporal misalignments create both tensions and opportunities. For instance, national-level transitional innovations (Horizon 2)—such as streamlined visa procedures or credit transfer agreements—require coordination across multiple governance scales to succeed, illustrating how temporal change depends on policy space navigation. Our dual-framework analysis thus reveals that effective scholarship transformation requires not only temporal foresight (envisioning futures) but also scalar coordination (aligning actors across governance levels). This insight has practical implications: interventions designed to accelerate transitions from Horizon 1 to Horizon 3 must explicitly address cross-scale governance challenges identified through the Glonacal lens.

Key Themes

Glonacal Governance and Actor Agency: Thailand's scholarships illustrate the non-linear and multi-directional flows of influence across local, national, and regional levels.

While universities often have autonomy in program delivery, they remain constrained by funding limitations and overarching policy frameworks. Alumni engagement and long-term mobility outcomes show how human agency can foster informal regionalism that transcends top-down policy initiatives.

In this context, scholarships can be reconceptualized not merely as funding mechanisms but strategic Glonacal tools capable of advancing epistemic justice, strengthening integration, and supporting sustainable regional development.

Conclusion

This study examines the evolution, challenges, and future direction of scholarship programs in Thailand through two analytical frameworks: the Three Horizons framework (Sharpe, 2013) and the Glonacal Agency Heuristic (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002). By systematically assessing the current landscape and exploring potential future scenarios along with strategic recommendations, the study enhances understanding of how scholarship programs function as multi-scalar tools, influenced by local realities, national policies, regional aspirations, and global dynamics.

According to the findings, scholarships in Thailand serve not only as mechanisms for financing education but are embedded within broader processes of regional integration, knowledge diplomacy, and developmental cooperation. Integration of the Three Horizons framework and Glonacal Agency Heuristic allows for a nuanced interpretation of these programs as complex, layered interventions shaped by both structural factors and individual actors.

This study contributes to scholarship in two significant ways. First, it demonstrates the value of combining future-oriented scenario analysis (Three Horizons framework) with multi-scalar governance analysis (Glonacal Agency Heuristic) to create a comprehensive analytical approach, mapping educational phenomena across both policy and temporal space. This dual spatial mapping captures not only multi-level governance dynamics (where power resides, how actors coordinate across scales) but also temporal evolution (how current constraints, transitional innovations, and aspirational futures interact over time). By situating Thailand’s scholarship programs within these intersecting spatial dimensions, we reveal complexities that single-framework analyses would miss—particularly ways that scalar governance challenges shape temporal transitions, and how temporal visions must be translated into cross-scale coordination mechanisms. This methodological integration provides a template for examining other cross-border education initiatives requiring both strategic foresight and governance sensitivity. Second, by conceptualizing scholarships as “Glonacal tools,” research advances the theoretical understanding of how educational programs operate across and between different levels of governance, thereby contributing to discussions on regionalism, postcolonial knowledge exchange, and the hybridization of policy rationales.

Ultimately, this study illustrates the analytical power of examining complex educational policies through multiple, complementary spatial lenses. The Glonacal Agency Heuristic’s mapping of policy space—revealing governance architectures, actor agency, and cross-scale dynamics—combined with the Three Horizons framework’s mapping of temporal space—distinguishing present constraints, emergent innovations, and aspirational futures—provides a rich, multidimensional understanding of Thailand’s scholarship ecosystem. This dual spatial approach not only deepens the theoretical understanding of scholarships as “Glonacal tools” operating across governance levels and temporal horizons but also offers practical guidance for policymakers and practitioners. Effective scholarship transformation requires simultaneous attention to where interventions occur within governance structures (policy space) and when interventions can catalyze temporal shifts (temporal space). By integrating these spatial dimensions, this study advances both conceptual vocabulary and the methodological toolkit available to scholars and practitioners working to strengthen regional integration through higher education.

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