

AMRI: ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information

AMCA: ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts

AMMY: ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Youth

ASED: ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting

AMMS: ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Sports

AMRDPE: ASEAN Ministers on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication

AMMSWD: ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Social Welfare and Development

AMMW: ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women

ALMM: ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting

ACCSM: ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters

AHMM: ASEAN Health Ministers Meeting

AMMDM: ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management

COP to AADMER: Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response

AMME: ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Environment COP to AATHP-Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution

SOMCA: Senior Officials Meeting on Culture and Arts

COCI: The ASEAN Committee for Culture and Information

SOMRI: Senior Officials Meeting Responsible for Information

SOMY: Senior Officials Meeting on Youth

SOMED: Senior Officials Meeting on Education

SOMS: Senior Officials Meeting on Sports

SOMRDPE: Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication

SOMSWD: Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development

ACWC: ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children

ACW: ASEAN Committee on Women

SLOM: Senior Labour Officials Meeting

SOM-ACCSM: Senior Officials Meeting on ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters

SOMHD: Senior Officials Meeting on Health Development

ASOEN: ASEAN Senior Officials on the Environment

COM to AATHP: Committee under the Conference of Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution

* takes guidance from and reports to both AMCA and AMRI



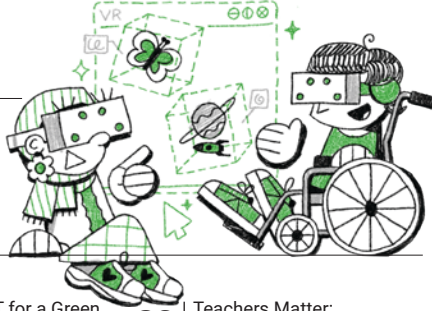
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Ekkaphab Phanthavong



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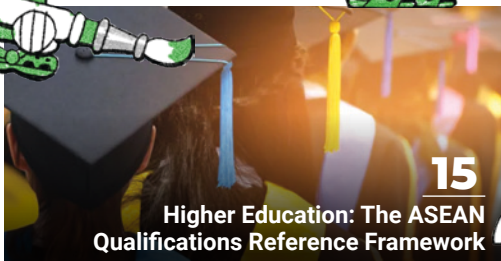
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The ASEAN

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one vision
one identity
one community

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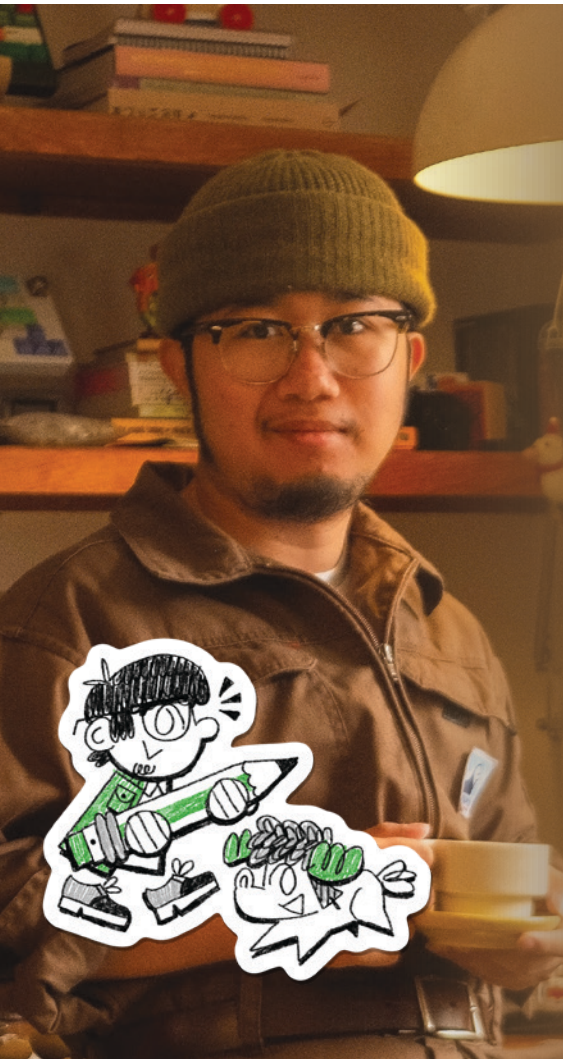
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Issue 29 | 2023

Correction:

An article printed in our May 2024 edition misspelled the ASEAN-Australian Youth Mental Health Fellowship programme's partner organisation. It is ORYGEN, not Oxygen. This has been corrected in the magazine's digital and online versions.



COVER

About the Artist

Ibrahim Bin Hj Md Yussop, known as "Ibbi," is an independent illustrator, graphic designer, and art director from Brunei Darussalam. Since becoming an illustrator in 2016 and a graphic designer in 2017, he has pursued a Bachelor's degree in graphic design at the University of Brighton, UK.

Ibbi's practice centres on playful and thoughtful design, combining traditional graphic design with illustration. His work is inspired by nostalgia, mid-century graphic design, and children's toys and illustrated books. He believes these elements evoke carefree memories of childhood. Ibbi is motivated by London-based illustrator Dan Woodger's quote, "Create fun, silly things. Fun, silly things make the world more fun and silly," and aims to spark other creatives to push for more diverse and memorable visual languages.

"When *The ASEAN* reached out to me for their latest issue's cover, it was first and foremost an honour! I was glad to work with the theme of education, and how it spans all walks and parts of life. Personally, I found it rang quite close to my creative process. During development, it was

important for me to really emphasise the act of learning and how it can exist outside of the usual classroom format. I wanted to portray it as an inclusive and engaging activity, direct interactions between the learner and their chosen subject. For the art direction, I thought placing the entire illustration on a graph paper backdrop would be interesting. In a way, it is an intersection between STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and the social studies discipline. Green was chosen originally to emulate a highlighter, but it coincidentally happened to be reminiscent of green chalkboards."

See more of Ibbi's art on his Instagram account @ibbidibbidoo.



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Message from the Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Ekkaphab Phanthavong

Transforming education is both an imperative and an opportunity. Our region's net enrolment and completion rates in primary and secondary education have markedly increased. Substantial progress has also been made towards achieving gender parity in gross enrolment in primary education. The education sector boasts significant developments in promoting higher education and lifelong learning.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has caused setbacks and learning losses, the education sector recognised that the recovery phase is crucial, demanding a comprehensive and multi-faceted policy response. It has been a time of building on the ASEAN education sector's many initiatives, recalibrating our programmes, and planning to redress lost gains and pave the way for more lasting and inclusive growth.

Even before the pandemic-induced crisis, ASEAN has been dedicated to shaping an education system that meets the demands of the 21st century. The ASEAN Declaration on the Digital Transformation of Education Systems in ASEAN was adopted by the ASEAN Leaders in 2022. Digital transformation is a critical component of the future, and it is a powerful tool that can revolutionise learning and teaching methods, making education more accessible and effective. ASEAN is also looking forward to implementing the Roadmap of the Declaration on the Digital Transformation of Education Systems in ASEAN and the improvements it will bring to learning delivery in the region.

The ASEAN Declaration on Early Childhood Care and Education in Southeast Asia reaffirms the importance of providing every young child in ASEAN with access to quality early childhood care and education (ECCE). Adopted at the 43rd ASEAN Summit in Jakarta, this document lays the foundation for their full developmental potential as adults to participate successfully in economic, social, and civic life.

This year, the Lao PDR's ASEAN Chairmanship theme is "ASEAN: Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience." It reinforces ASEAN's collective efforts to strengthen the ASEAN community, seize opportunities, and effectively address present and emerging challenges. To do so, ASEAN continues to double down on education

efforts by highlighting its cross-cutting activities such as the environment, Science and Technology (S&T), as well as entrepreneurship and innovation.

Several initiatives across the ASEAN Community have and will emerge from these efforts. The Vientiane Statement on Equity, Access and Environment: Advancing Climate Resilience in Early Childhood Settings in ASEAN acknowledges the impact of the climate crisis on children, especially those from the most vulnerable backgrounds. ASEAN strives to strengthen the capacity of all ASEAN Member States to integrate climate resilience into ECCE planning and actions.

The ASEAN Regional Guidance for the ASEAN Member States on Strengthening the Role of Social Workers and the Social Service Workforce in the Education Sector is intended to support ASEAN in ensuring an integrated child protection system. The regional guidance considers the crucial role of social workers, linking or deploying them at schools to protect children from all forms of violence, abuse, and neglect.

The Science, Technology, and Innovation Cooperation (STIC) Talent Mobility Portal/ ASEAN Online Education Platform for Industry 4.0 is a key component of the Lao PDR's Priority Economic Deliverable for 2024. The learning portal was launched earlier this year and offers access to a wide array of upskilling and reskilling courses on S&T and Entrepreneurship and Innovation designed by leading universities in the United States.

Accelerating digital transformation and innovation is crucial to ASEAN's Post-2025 vision. We are bolstering our regional efforts in early childhood care and education, enhancing the quality of our educators, upgrading infrastructure, and providing avenues for continuous learning and skills development.

Our unwavering commitment to ensuring equitable access to education for all remains at the core of these initiatives. Ultimately, our goal is to provide our people with opportunities for learning and development, empowering them to make meaningful contributions to their communities and the larger ASEAN Community.



TRANSFORMING THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION IN ASEAN



Roger Y. Chao Jr., PhD

*Assistant Director, Education, Youth, and Sports Division
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department*

ASEAN and its Member States are keenly aware of the challenges posed by accelerated digitalisation and its impact on society, including the rapidly changing world of work. Moreover, the Member States recognise the need to integrate sustainable development goals into their education systems and strengthen resilience to future trends and disruptions.

Learning loss recovery continues to be a priority after the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, the ASEAN education sector, with support from UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office (UNICEF EAPRO), developed the Reopen, Recover and Resilience in Education: Guidelines for ASEAN Countries. The guidelines include short and medium-term recommendations, interventions, and toolkits for learning recovery and building resilience in education in ASEAN Member States. In addition, the Recover Learning and Rebuild Education in ASEAN Region Ministerial Roundtable came out with a related policy brief addressing learning challenges brought about by the pandemic. The Cambridge Partnership for Education developed it, co-organised with Viet Nam's Ministry of Education and Training, the ASEAN Secretariat, British Expertise International, and the Department for International Trade of the United Kingdom. As the region continues to recover, transforming education in ASEAN requires innovative and comprehensive approaches. Several key initiatives have been developed and implemented in the ASEAN education sector in recent years to prepare for the demands of the future.

The policy documents arising from these forward-looking initiatives are framed within the strategic frameworks of the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025 and the ASEAN Declaration on Human Resources Development for the Changing World of Work, adopted in 2020 and 2021, respectively. The masterplan lays the necessary groundwork for developing ASEAN as a leading digital community and economic bloc powered by secure and transformative digital services and technology ecosystems. The declaration addresses the challenges of human resource development in the rapidly changing world of work. It specifically provides critical directions for the ASEAN technical vocational training and education sector and underscores the lifelong learning framework.

The ASEAN education sector has set a goal towards its digital transformation with the ASEAN Declaration on the Digital Transformation of Education

Systems in ASEAN, which was adopted in 2022. The declaration marks a significant step in our efforts to address key global challenges, promote lifelong learning, and support the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Initiatives, such as the Building a Greener Future: Education as a Climate Solution and the Southeast Asia Regional High-Level Policy Dialogue with the theme "Leading Effective Integration of GenAI in Higher Education," are testament to our commitment to this transformative journey.

A solid foundation for early learners

In the early childhood care and education sub-sector, the ASEAN Leaders Declaration on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in Southeast Asia was adopted in September 2023 at the 43rd ASEAN Summit. The declaration articulated global pledges from the 2022 Tashkent Declaration and Commitments to Action for Transforming Early Childhood Care and Education into the ASEAN context. This declaration was followed by the adoption of the Vientiane Statement on Equity, Access, and Environment: Advancing Climate Resilience in Early Childhood Settings in ASEAN in May 2024. This strengthened the ASEAN ECCE sub-sector's commitment to achieving the UN 2030 sustainable development agenda with a strong focus on climate resilience. The ECCE efforts demonstrate our leaders' solid support for providing early learners in ASEAN a strong foundation for their lifelong holistic development.

In the basic education sub-sector, ASEAN initiatives have focused on learning assessments, recovery and building resilience. With support from the Republic of Korea, through the ASEAN-Korea Cooperation Fund, the SEAMEO Secretariat, ASEAN Secretariat, and UNICEF EAPRO are implementing the 2024 Southeast Asian Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) Project. These assessments are being undertaken in most ASEAN Member States and Timor-Leste. The 2024 SEA-PLM aims to assess the learning achievements of Grade 5 students in

the following domains: reading, writing, mathematics, and global citizenship. The project also incorporates advocacy and policy dialogues to promote foundational learning in ASEAN and its Member States.

ASEAN continues its efforts to make basic education accessible to children and youth regardless of their background. This is embodied in the ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Education for Out of School Children and Youth adopted in 2016.

Higher education and lifelong learning

To promote life-long learning, the education sector has launched initiatives to promote private sector engagement in the technical and vocational education and training or TVET sector. It has also updated the TVET curriculum with the support of the German Government through GIZ's Regional Cooperation for Technical and Vocational Education and Training in ASEAN (RECOTVET) programme. One of the key developments in recent years is the establishment of the ASEAN TVET Council (ATC). The ATC, a critical multi-sectoral (e.g. education, labour, and industry) coordination platform for TVET in the ASEAN region, plays a pivotal role in aligning TVET policies and practices across the region. Australia and Korea have also supported TVET-related policy dialogues and capacity-building initiatives. Focused on Cambodia and Lao PDR, the ASEAN-Swiss TVET Initiative takes an innovative work-based learning approach, which enhances the TVET capacities in the focus countries and also provides the ASEAN region key pilot cases for consideration by the ASEAN Member States when developing TVET-related interventions. The ASEAN Secretariat co-organised with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF, the Breaking Barriers, Building Futures: ASEAN Regional Dialogue on Young People's Skills, Employability and Transition to Decent Work, which addressed multi-sectoral challenges relevant to education, including TVET and higher education. The dialogue was also held in collaboration with the

Ai

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Transforming the ASEAN education sector requires innovative and comprehensive approaches.

UNDP, UNESCO, and UN Women through the endorsement of the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Youth (SOMY).

Since 2021, there have been significant developments and initiatives in ASEAN higher education, including the establishment of the ASEAN Working Group on Higher Education Mobility (AWGHEM), the launch of the Roadmap on the ASEAN Higher Education Space, various higher education policy dialogues, and the various commissioned reports including the Study on Enhancing Intra-ASEAN University Student Mobility and the State of Play of Higher Education in Southeast Asia which were made possible through the EU Support for Higher Education in ASEAN (EU-SHARE) project. The ASEAN-SEAMEO Joint Declaration on a Common Higher Education Space in Southeast Asia is also expected to be adopted later this year. The ongoing Intra-ASEAN Scholarship Project Phase 1 aims to provide evidence on existing higher education scholarships and mobility in ASEAN and beyond. It can also offer recommendations for a sustainable funding model as ASEAN develops an Intra-ASEAN Scholarship that can contribute to increased awareness of ASEAN among the youth, and strengthen ASEAN community-building. Furthermore, the ASEAN

Qualifications Reference Framework is also being revisited for future revision to integrate digital transformation-related issues (e.g. Massive Open Online Courses and micro-credentials) and enhance its alignment with other regional qualifications frameworks, including from the European Union.

Innovation for a digital future

ASEAN education has been proactively undertaking initiatives that facilitate the sector's transformation. These include enhancing regional, inter-regional and global partnerships with key international organisations, including GPE, UNICEF, UNESCO, and ILO, and increasingly taking a multi-sectoral approach towards innovative approaches towards the transformation of ASEAN education. There has been more emphasis on building evidence for policy-based intervention, as seen in the various education-related reports in recent years.

The transformation of ASEAN education towards enhancing inclusion, equity, quality, and relevance is clearly in progress. However, much needs to be done, including operationalising key declarations, ensuring sustainability of initiatives, and promoting sustainable

funding and resource mobilisation of education-related initiatives in the region. There is also a need to enhance the capacity of teachers to adapt to the digital transformation of education systems, which is required to facilitate the use of innovative digital pedagogies. It is crucial to conduct effective assessments of learning outcomes in a world where Artificial Intelligence and Generative AI are quickly permeating educational settings and all aspects of work and life.

Read:



<https://asean.org/book/reopen-recover-and-resilience-in-education-guidelines-for-asean-countries/>



<https://asean.org/book/asean-policy-brief-on-safe-school-reopening-learning-recovery-and-continuity/>

References may be downloaded from the following link:

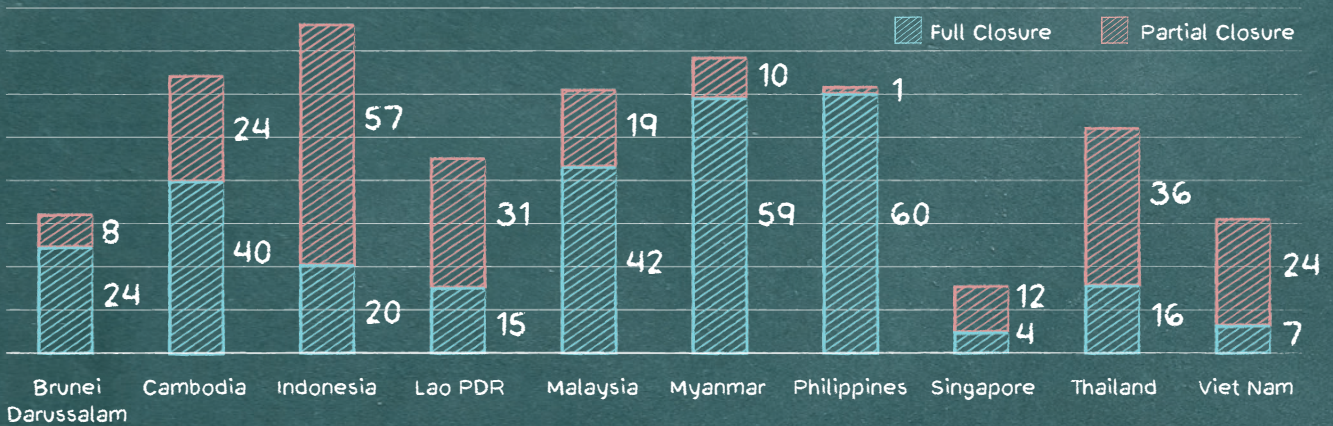


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LEARNING RECOVERY

COVID-19 IMPACT ON LEARNING

NUMBER OF WEEKS SCHOOLS PARTIALLY OR FULLY CLOSED, MARCH 2020-OCTOBER 2021 ¹



During COVID-19, technology facilitated remote learning, but millions of disadvantaged students were left behind. Students with disabilities also generally did not benefit from distance learning.²



ASEAN countries primarily used online platforms, such as Zoom and Google Meet, and television as modes for learning, according to a survey conducted by UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, and OECD.³



Radio also served as a teaching medium in the Philippines and the Lao PDR. In countries where students lack access to a television or the internet, worksheets or paper-based learning modules were also used.²



Teachers faced difficulties during the shift to online learning. For example, in disadvantaged areas of Viet Nam, 93% of teachers reported never using modern technologies before COVID-19, making online teaching difficult. In Indonesia, 160 secondary school mathematics teachers cited the following barriers to e-learning: lack of online content, inability to teach using ICT, and students' lack of knowledge and skills to engage in learning using ICT applications.²



On a positive note, ASEAN governments have adopted open and distance learning to increase education access and prepare for future emergencies; embraced the use of open educational resources; and increased teacher training initiatives, especially on ICT.²

Sources:

- UNESCO. (n.d.). COVID-19 educational disruption and response. UNESCO. Retrieved 29 July 2024, from <https://web.archive.unesco.org/web/20220625033513/https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse#schoolclosures>
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ACCESS TO EDUCATION

PRIMARY EDUCATION

Primary school net enrolment rates in most ASEAN countries remained well above **90%** from 2010 to 2022.¹

Compared to 2010 levels, more school children are now completing their primary education.² For example:

Cambodia: from **71%** in 2010 to **87%** in 2023

Myanmar: from **65%** in 2010 to **86%** in 2021

Philippines: from **87%** in 2010 to **96%** in 2023

SECONDARY EDUCATION

Since 2010, most ASEAN countries' secondary school enrolment rates have drastically improved in most ASEAN countries'. For example:

Indonesia: from **46%** in 2010 to **62%** in 2022

(upper secondary school enrolment)

Malaysia: from **68%** in 2010 to **92%** in 2022

In terms of completion rate, the trend over the past decade also indicates that more students tend to complete lower secondary education than upper secondary education². For example:

Viet Nam:

Lower secondary: from **83%** in 2010 to **93.2%** in 2021

Upper secondary: from **48%** in 2010 to **58%** in 2023

TERTIARY EDUCATION

Gross tertiary education enrolments have been on an upward trend in most countries due to the region's growing school-age population, expanding middle class, and need for higher-level skills^{2,4}. For example:

Brunei Darussalam: from **17%** in 2011 to **32%** in 2020

Indonesia: from **26%** in 2011 to **36%** in 2018

Malaysia: from **36%** in 2011 to **43%** in 2020



More than half of the total share of enrolment in tertiary education in several Southeast Asian countries, namely Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, is in private higher education institutions.⁴

There is a modest improvement in the percentage of graduates from Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics programmes in tertiary education.³ For example:

Lao PDR: from **13%** in 2011 to **23%** in 2018

Malaysia: from **38%** in 2011 to **39%** in 2020

Notes:

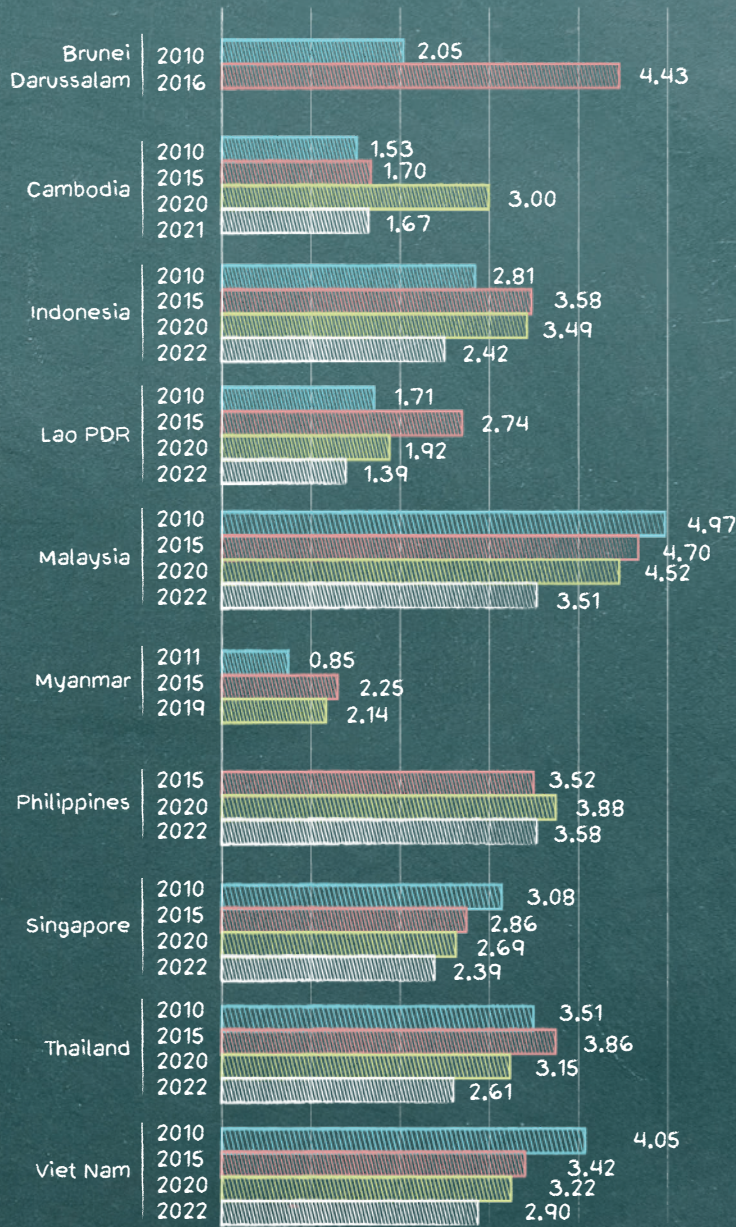
- The net enrolment ratio is the share of children of official school age that are in school
- The completion rate is the share of students of official graduation age who completed the last year of school
- The gross enrolment ratio for tertiary school measures the number of people attending college or university compared to the number of people who are at the age when they are typically expected to go to college

Sources:

- ASEANstats. (2023). ASEAN statistical yearbook 2023. <https://www.aseanstats.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/ASYB-2023-v1.pdf>
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INVESTMENTS IN EDUCATION

GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION AS A PERCENTAGE OF GDP (%)



NUMBER OF YEARS OF COMPULSORY PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION GUARANTEED IN LEGAL FRAMEWORKS



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, (n.d.), SDG4 indicators (Education for All 2030 Framework for Action). Retrieved 11 July 2024, from <https://data.uis.unesco.org/>

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, (n.d.), SDG4 indicators (4.1.7). Retrieved 29 July 2024, from <https://data.uis.unesco.org/>

INVESTING IN TOMORROW

Early Childhood Care and Education in ASEAN



Amalia M. Serrano
Senior Officer, Education, Youth, and Sports Division
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department

Research shows that the rapid pace of brain development in the first years of life makes early childhood a crucial period for intervention. This presents governments with a vital opportunity to positively impact children's lives. Investing in early childhood care and education is not only beneficial for individual children, but also supports broader national social, economic, and sustainable development goals.



The Global Report on Early Childhood Care and Education highlights the critical importance of inclusive and quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) in fostering school readiness, foundational learning, and lifelong well-being. According to 2024 figures from UNESCO and UNICEF, nearly 60 per cent of children in low-income countries lack access to early care and learning opportunities.

The report also underscores a pressing concern: the world needs to be on track to meet Sustainable Development Goal Target 4.2 which commits countries to ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education by 2030.

SDG Target 4.2.2 tracks children's participation rate in organised learning one year before the official age of entry into primary school. The most recent data, from 2022, indicates that the global net enrolment rate fell to 72 per cent, a decrease of 3 per cent from 2020. This global figure masks significant regional disparities.

In ASEAN, the participation rate in organised learning varies among Member States. On average, 78.6 per cent of children in ASEAN participated in organised pre-primary learning. However, data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2022) reveal disparities: countries such as Brunei Darussalam, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam, boast participation rates exceeding 90 per cent, while countries like Cambodia and Myanmar face challenges with rates below 50 per cent. This stark contrast underscores the need for targeted investments and policies to ensure equitable access to ECCE across the region.

ASEAN's commitment to ECCE

In recent years, ASEAN has made significant strides in improving early childhood care and education. ECCE increasingly occupies a central position in strategic policy discussions and political agendas at both regional and national levels. With a robust framework of international commitments and regional declarations, ASEAN nations are

working collectively to ensure that every child has access to ECCE.

Viet Nam and the Philippines have made pre-primary education compulsory, setting a vital precedent for the region. Additionally, Thailand and the Philippines have enshrined free primary education in their legal frameworks. The commitment of Viet Nam and Thailand to ECCE is reflected in their impressive pre-primary participation rate of 96.6 per cent and 99.9 per cent, respectively. The Philippines, by mandating pre-primary education, further highlights its recognition of the crucial importance of investing in early learning.

ASEAN Leaders have also demonstrated a solid commitment to ECCE through various declarations and frameworks. The ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Early Childhood Care and Education in Southeast Asia (2023), spearheaded by Indonesia, reaffirms the region's dedication to providing an inclusive and equitable quality education for all children.

The declaration is a strong and important document that underscores the leadership of ASEAN countries in translating key global and regional commitments into actions such as the (i) SDG-4 Education 2030 Framework, which emphasises inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, highlighting early childhood development and pre-primary education as fundamental components of the education continuum; (ii) the Kathmandu Statement of Action which outlines strategies and priority areas for improving ECCE; and the (iii) the Tashkent Declaration which calls for transformative actions in ECCE to ensure that all children can access quality early childhood care and learning opportunities.

The ASEAN Leaders have also made several critical regional commitments to support children's rights and education. The ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Education for Out-of-School Children and Youth focuses on inclusive educational opportunities. The ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Ending All Forms of Malnutrition highlights the critical link between nutrition and early childhood development. In 2019, two key declarations were made: the ASEAN Declaration on the Rights of Children in

the Context of Migration, which protects the educational rights of migrant children, and the Declaration on the Protection of Children from All Forms of Exploitation and Abuse in ASEAN which ensures safe learning environments. The ASEAN Roadmap on the Elimination of All Forms of Child Labour and the Declaration on the Elimination of Bullying in ASEAN emphasise the region's commitment to safeguarding children's rights and well-being.

Climate resilience in ECCE

A recent significant development in the region is the adoption of the Vientiane Statement on Equity, Access, and Environment: Advancing Climate Resilience in Early Childhood Settings in ASEAN by the ASEAN Ministers of Education in June 2024. Spearheaded by the Lao PDR, this statement reinforces the 2023 ASEAN Leaders Declaration on ECCE. It emphasises the necessity of integrating climate resilience into ECCE programmes, recognising that young children are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The Vientiane Statement calls for creating safe, sustainable and resilient learning conditions that can withstand environmental challenges. This initiative represents a forward-thinking approach, acknowledging the intersection of environmental sustainability and early childhood development.

Progress and initiatives in ECCE

Individually and collectively, ASEAN nations have ramped up efforts in ECCE through various initiatives and policies. Efforts are underway to increase and expand access to ECCE services, especially for children from vulnerable and marginalised communities. In the recent ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on ECCE held on 15 May 2024, Viet Nam reported that the country succeeded in achieving universal pre-primary education for 5-year-old children in 2017. Additionally, the respective national policies on ECCE of Cambodia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam promote holistic development of young children, including understanding climate change and the environment.

“

Early childhood care and education are pivotal in shaping the future of Southeast Asia. By committing to inclusive, equitable, and high-quality ECCE, ASEAN countries can ensure every child has the opportunity to thrive.



Enhancing the quality of ECCE programmes by developing child-centred, and play-based curricula is also a top priority in many countries such as Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Investing in the professional development of ECCE educators, including pre-service and in-service training programmes that equip teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to support young children’s development effectively, is another critical area of focus for the region. Moreover, promoting and strengthening cross-sectoral collaboration and partnerships with civil society, international agencies, and the private sector to create a holistic approach to ECCE is being actively pursued at the regional level.

Challenges and need for investment

Despite the significant progress and firm commitments made toward ECCE in Southeast Asia, critical challenges still need to be addressed to meet the ECCE targets. Equitable access to ECCE remains a pressing issue in the region, particularly for marginalised groups such as children from ethnic minority groups, children with disabilities, and those living in poverty. These vulnerable populations often face barriers that prevent them from accessing quality ECCE, exacerbating existing inequalities and hindering their developmental opportunities.

While advocating for a rights-based commitment to universal pre-primary education is a commendable goal, it can be financially constraining or challenging in some countries. Currently, only two out of the 10 ASEAN Member States mandate compulsory pre-primary education, highlighting a significant gap in the commitment to ensuring that all children have the foundational learning experiences necessary for their future success. Adequate funds and resources are necessary to support regional and national level initiatives in the region.

Call to action

The evidence is clear: investment in ECCE is an investment in the future.

To fully operationalise the commitments made in various regional and international declarations, countries must significantly boost their investment in ECCE. Governments should progressively allocate a higher percentage of education expenditures to ECCE, ensuring sustainable funding for early childhood programs.

ASEAN plays a crucial role as a regional organisation, providing a platform for continued discussion and collaboration among its Member States and partners. ASEAN can drive collective action towards enhancing ECCE across the region by fostering dialogues on best practices and shared challenges. Regular policy forums will facilitate knowledge sharing, allowing countries to benefit from each other’s successes and learn from setbacks.

Developing and implementing robust policies that support ECCE at national and regional levels is essential. This entails establishing clear guidelines for curriculum development, teacher training, and programme evaluation. Effective ECCE programmes require reliable data to inform policy decisions and monitor progress. ASEAN needs investments in systems that track children’s access to and participation in comprehensive and integrated ECCE services, and the quality of those services.

Early childhood care and education are pivotal in shaping the future of Southeast Asia. By committing to inclusive, equitable, and high-quality ECCE, ASEAN countries can ensure every child has the opportunity to thrive. Collaborative efforts among governments, educators, communities, and international partners will create a brighter, more equitable future for all children in the region.

ASEAN Leaders’ Declaration on Early Childhood Care and Education



<https://asean.org/asean-leaders-declaration-on-early-childhood-care-and-education-in-southeast-asia/>

References may be downloaded from the following link:



https://bit.ly/Issue38_Ref

HIGHER EDUCATION THE ASEAN QUALIFICATIONS REFERENCE FRAMEWORK

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Vice-Chancellor, Universiti Tenaga Nasional, Malaysia

Chair, ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework Committee (2023-2024)

The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) is a regional framework that compares higher education qualifications across ASEAN Member States based on learning outcomes. It offers a neutral influence on national qualifications frameworks (NQF) or national qualifications systems (NQS) so that Member States can be responsive to national priorities. While it plays a significant role in creating transparency and enhancing the zone of trust, the AQRF is not a tool for automatic recognition, standards, and harmonisation.

Photo Credit: ©Nirat.pix / Shutterstock

The AQRF was endorsed by the ASEAN Economic Ministers Meeting (AEM) in August 2014, the ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting (ASEM) in September 2014, and the ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting (ALMM) through ad-referendum from November 2014 to May 2015.

Subsequently, the AQRF Governance and Structure document was endorsed by ALMM and ASEM in May 2016 and AEM in August 2016. It provided the basis for the establishment of the AQRF Committee to implement the AQRF.

Purposes and benefits of AQRF

The AQRF serves the following purposes and benefits:

- Support recognition of qualifications

- Develop qualifications frameworks to encourage lifelong learning
- Develop national approaches to validate learning gained outside formal education
- Promote worker's mobility
- Promote education and learner's mobility
- Improve understanding of qualifications systems
- Promote a higher quality qualifications system

Progress in referencing NQFs with AQRF

Referencing is a process that establishes the relationship between the eight-level AQRF and the NQF or qualifications system of the participating

ASEAN Member State. The number of levels in an NQF may differ. AQRF would, therefore, improve the understanding of the qualification of each level of an NQF or qualifications system of the participating Member State. AQRF also works as an information tool to facilitate the recognition of qualifications and does not replace the decision-making process of the competent authorities in each ASEAN Member State.

The referencing process from NQF to AQRF involves these parties:

- **ASEAN Economic Ministers Meeting, the ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting and the ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting**, responsible for endorsing the referencing report upon the AQRF Committee's recommendation



Photo Credit: ©Nirat.pix / Shutterstock

- **AQRF Committee**, responsible for providing transparency and building a zone of trust, assessing referencing reports against AQRF criteria, and advising National AQRF Committees on how to meet all criteria
- **National AQRF Committee**, responsible for developing and submitting the referencing report to the AQRF Committee for consideration
- **National AQRF Technical Committee**, responsible for taking up the role of member/representative, alternative member and focal point representing the country in AQRF Committee
- **International Expert**, responsible for sharing knowledge, expertise, and best practices on qualifications framework from around the region and the world
- **Stakeholders' Consultation**, responsible for providing relevant feedback on the NQF alignment to AQRF

Achievements

The referencing reports for Malaysia and the Philippines were endorsed by the 6th AQRF Committee Meeting on 22 May 2019, whilst the reports for Indonesia and Thailand were endorsed intersessionally on 9 December 2019 and 31 January 2020, respectively.

Following the endorsement and submission of the final report, participating ASEAN Member States have taken steps to communicate with their relevant stakeholders through talks and seminars, promotional materials such as brochures, and publications of executive summaries for easy understanding. There are also attempts to update, improve, and align NQFs and other quality assurance documents with

AQRF to achieve a more robust national qualifications system and update other ongoing higher education initiatives.

New Zealand and Australia commended all the Member States for their strong commitment to reference their NQFs to AQRF. They are impressed with the rapid learning and the responsiveness to suggestions for improvements.

The way forward

While post-referencing activities are being executed in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines, ongoing ones are taking place in Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam. The four latter countries are finalising their partial and full referencing reports. For the remaining two, Brunei Darussalam is currently revising the BDQF to include the skills and lifelong learning pathways and intends to work with other Member States on the process of recognising prior learnings and micro-credentials at the national level and ensuring consistency across all institutions. Singapore will be providing, in written format, updates on its education system.

At this juncture, ASEAN Member States are currently undertaking discussions under AQRF Committee Work Plan No. 4.3, which consists of three focus groups. The expected outcomes of each focus group discussion are as follows:

Focus Group 1 (FG1): Digital recognition of qualifications – Introducing digital recognition of qualifications between ASEAN Member States

FG1 strives to develop an ASEAN Guideline on Digital Recognition of Qualifications and targets to finalise

the guideline recommendations by the fourth quarter of 2024 for consideration at the 15th AQRF Committee meeting.

Focus Group 2 (FG2): Promoting QA principles – Promote quality assurance principles focused on qualifications

FG2 is working on identifying differences and similarities in the ASEAN Member States' quality assurance systems.

Focus Group 3 (FG3): Third-party comparison – Developing and applying criteria and procedures to enable third-country qualifications frameworks or other regional qualifications frameworks to be compared with the AQRF

FG3 involves a comparative study between the AQRF and individual NQFs or Regional QFs (RQFs) with recommendations focusing on recognition of qualifications, mobility, and benchmarking. This group will conduct comparative studies between AQRF against several RQFs and NQFs based on Member States' interests. A template listing the elements to be compared will also be developed to guide the Member States in conducting their study.

These focus groups under the AQRFC 2020–2025 Work Plan support and uphold AQRF's prominent initiatives. To reflect that, AQRF must be open to updates and revisions to remain relevant when widespread use of generative AI and online learning in higher education is unavoidable.

Acknowledgement from the author:

Credits are extended to the international experts from New Zealand and Australia as well as appointed consultants who have duly reviewed and provided constructive feedback for the betterment of the AQRF Referencing Reports, and all past and present national and AQRFC members, including past chairs and vice-chairs for the commitment and dedication and services. Above all, heartfelt appreciation is also given to the Services and Investment Division officers, the Market Integration Directorate, and the ASEAN Economic Community Department in the ASEAN Secretariat for their tremendous support and hard work in the AQRF drive through the years.

SHAPING TVET FOR A GREEN AND DIGITAL FUTURE



Paryono Paryono, PhD

Deputy Director for Professional Affairs; Research Manager



Nursyuhaidah Haji Ahmad

Corporate Affairs Officer



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Acting Knowledge Management Manager; Public Relations Officer

SEAMEO VOCTECH Regional Centre

SEAMEO VOCTECH is a Regional Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, established on 28 August 1990 from a Memorandum of Agreement between the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) and the Government of Brunei Darussalam. It is one of 26 centres under SEAMEO. In line with its Five Year Development Plan, SEAMEO VOCTECH continues to strengthen its services to support technical and vocational education and training (TVET) trainers, academics, and managers in SEAMEO member countries and beyond. It is an effort to enhance the skills of our workforce in the post-pandemic era. The Centre helps identify and solve common problems in TVET through training development initiatives, research consultancies, and the distribution of information and knowledge in the region.

Delivering and promoting quality technical and vocational education and training is vital. Thus, the Centre provides four categories of training services by conducting regional, in-country, customised and special training programmes in the areas of curriculum development, management, teacher education, information and communications technology, research, and skills training in collaboration with partners.

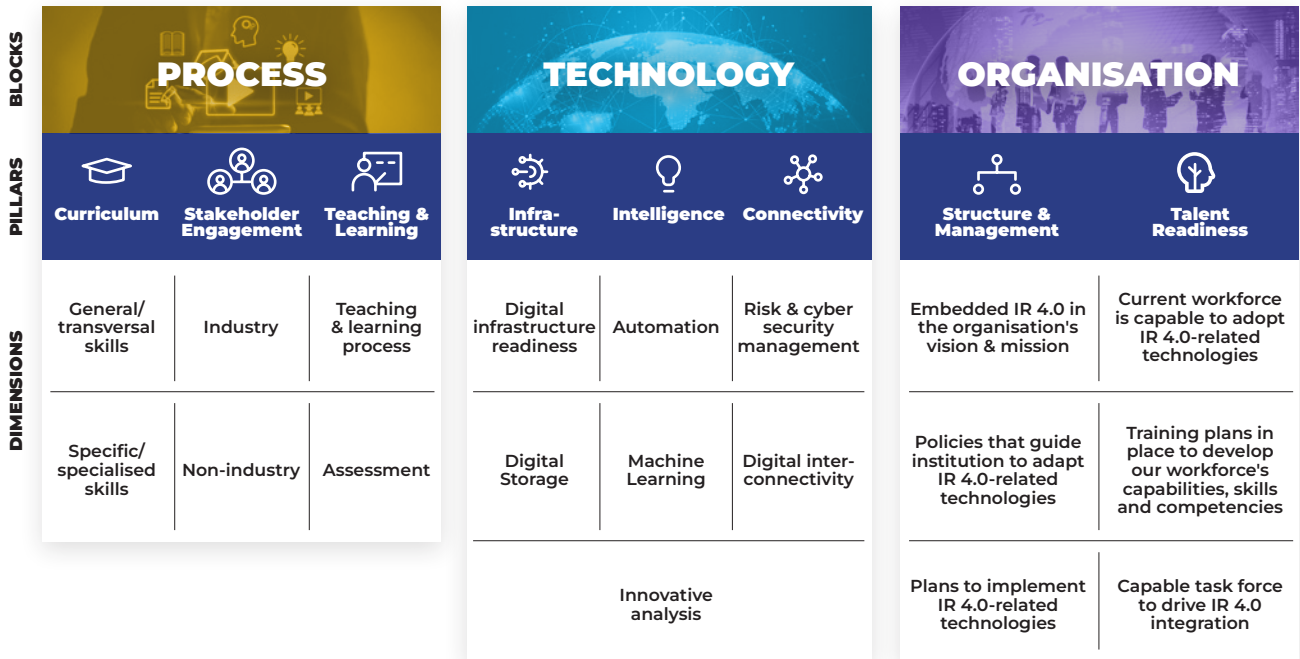
Innovative research and consultancy in TVET

Aside from training and professional development activities, SEAMEO VOCTECH also conducts research and consultancy services with the core aim of elevating the quality of TVET in the region. Research programmes are

an important component of SEAMEO VOCTECH's function as an international organisation. Among its notable national research initiatives are the Graduate Employment Study and Employer Satisfaction Surveys, both conducted nationwide for the Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam.

SEAMEO VOCTECH likewise actively participates in and leads various regional and international research projects. A significant project aligned with the theme of preparing TVET for Industry 4.0 is the "Readiness of TVET Institutions for IR 4.0 in Southeast Asia." This initiative has yielded the Smart Education Readiness Index (SERI) and a comprehensive assessment matrix (https://bit.ly/SERI_Assessment_Matrix).

SERI Framework for Assessing the Readiness of TVET Institutions for IR 4.0.



TVET institutions are encouraged to use the assessment matrix to evaluate their readiness for Industry 4.0. This matrix serves as a foundation for enhancing their readiness for the next level and for regularly monitoring their progress.

The Centre offers a wide range of consultancy services that include conducting research studies, acting as validators, and providing expert consultation to elevate TVET at both institutional and international levels.

Regional knowledge platform in TVET

In the area of information and knowledge sharing, one of the salient initiatives undertaken by SEAMEO VOCTECH is the creation of the one-stop hub, regional knowledge platform for TVET in Southeast Asia, the SEA-VET.net which can be accessed at <https://sea-vet.net>. The project received support from GIZ-RECOTVET (Regional Cooperation for Technical and Vocational Education and Training), a regional project under the German Development Agency (GIZ) on TVET, and Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam.

The regional knowledge platform offers news, events, priority topics, including private sector engagement, an IR 4.0 and digitalisation webpage, and student and teacher exchanges. Other features in the platform include the TVET in practice section with SEAMEO member country profiles, good practices, initiatives, and a community page. Valuable resources, such as publications, infographics, a newsletter, and an energy dashboard, are available on the platform.

To further expand the platform's reach, SEA-VET has launched a sub-page called SEA-VET Learning in July 2022. Initially, most learning resources for training and capacity-building programmes were offered through onsite training. Now, the resources have been made available in a blended mode, both online and onsite, for TVET curriculum developers, teachers, and managers from the 11 SEAMEO member countries. These resources are accessible and managed at SEA-VET Learning, which can be found at highlight.

Since its inception in 2019, SEA-VET.net has consistently delivered comprehensive, relevant, and up-to-date TVET developments in Southeast Asia and globally. The platform has continued to expand its reach through

the creation of sub-pages mentioned earlier to tailor the specific needs of various TVET stakeholders, effectively addressing regional knowledge gaps. This includes the addition of a private sector page to cater to the private sector and the development of the ASEAN TVET Council webpage to support its implementation.

In addition to being a member of the ASEAN TVET Council, SEAMEO VOCTECH hosts the council's official webpage through SEA-VET.net, which was successfully launched during the 2nd ATC Regional Policy Dialogue in May 2023 in Bangkok, Thailand. Following the 3rd ATC Regional Policy Dialogue in February 2024 in Bali, Indonesia, the council is documenting the discussion results and recommendations. SEA-VET assists in undertaking the editorial and safekeeping of documentation for the development of this cross-sectoral body. These documents will soon be available on the ASEAN TVET Council webpage to guide members in implementing the work plan.



Regional Knowledge Platform for TVET in Southeast Asia



Training resources of SEAMEO VOCTECH



ATC web page available through SEA-VET.net

Elevating skills: SEAMEO VOCTECH's Strategic Roadmap 2024-2029

SEAMEO VOCTECH has just completed its 6th Five-Year Development Plan (July 2019/2020 to June 2023/2024), which is centred on the theme "Preparing TVET for IR 4.0." The organisation has now unveiled its 7th Five-Year Development Plan (2024/2025 to 2028/2029), which is centred on the theme "Inclusive TVET for a Green and Digital Future."

The organisation aims to become a globally recognised leader in TVET, focusing on inclusive education, digitalisation, and sustainable development. The plan highlights seven

priority areas: policy and governance, inclusive quality TVET, greening TVET and sustainable development, industry and community collaboration, technology and digital transformation, future skills and lifelong learning, and research and innovation. These areas are designed to drive progress and ensure access to high-quality TVET for all, preparing learners for the evolving job market and promoting lifelong learning. These priority areas align with the global and regional TVET agendas of various organisations, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the UNESCO Strategy for TVET (2022-2029)–Transforming TVET for Successful and Just Transitions, the ILO Strategy on Skills and Lifelong

Learning 2030, the SEAMEO Strategic Plan 2021-2030, the ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2021-2025, and the ASEAN TVET Council Work Plan 2021-2030.

Guided by its core values, SEAMEO VOCTECH measures its success through four key result areas: training and professional development, research and innovation, knowledge management, and partnership and organisational sustainability. The slogan "Together We Excel" reflects the organisation's commitment to collaboration and achieving excellence. This strategic plan positions SEAMEO VOCTECH as a leader in TVET, fostering an inclusive, green, and digital future for all learners, the future workforce, and society as a whole.

SEAMEO VOCTECH's 7th Five-Year Development Plan

Fiscal Year 2024/2025 to 2028/2029

Theme: Inclusive TVET for a Green and Digital Future

VISION

A Globally Recognised Leader in TVET

MISSION

Empowering TVET through Inclusive Education, Digitalisation, and Sustainable Development

VALUES

- Professionalism
- Respect of Diversity
- Accountability
- Innovativeness
- Synergy
- Excellence



KEY RESULT AREAS

- KRA 1** Training and Professional Development
- KRA 2** Research and Innovation
- KRA 3** Knowledge Management
- KRA 4** Partnership and Organisational Sustainability

SLOGAN

Together We Excel

LEARNING OUTCOMES

TEACHERS' QUALIFICATIONS

THE PROPORTION OF TEACHERS WITH THE MINIMUM REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS IN PRIMARY EDUCATION, BOTH SEXES (%)

	2013	2015	2020	2022
Brunei Darussalam	85.19	81.68	85.18	No data
Cambodia	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Lao PDR	97.98	98.43	98.84	89.73
Malaysia	96.71	99.93	96.63	88.14
Philippines	100.00	100.00	100.00	No data
Singapore	No data	No data	98.19	No data
Thailand	No data	100.00	100.00	100.00
Viet Nam	No data	99.48	99.68	No data

Note: No data available for Indonesia and Myanmar

THE PROPORTION OF TEACHERS WITH THE MINIMUM REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS IN SECONDARY EDUCATION, BOTH SEXES (%)

	Lower Secondary				Upper Secondary			
	2010	2015	2020	2022	2010	2015	2020	2022
Brunei Darussalam	No data	92.25	No data	No data	No data	90.10	90.53	No data
Cambodia	99.76	100.00	100.00	100.00	No data	No data	No data	No data
Indonesia	No data	No data	No data	39.74	No data	No data	No data	36.82
Lao PDR	99.35	99.5	99.46	93.67	99.35	98.97	99.46	93.67
Myanmar	98.35	No data	No data	No data	100.00	No data	No data	No data
Philippines	No data	No data	100.00	No data	No data	No data	100.00	No data
Thailand	No data	100.00	100.00	100.00	No data	100.00	100.00	100.00
Viet Nam	99.06	99.58	99.89	86.27	No data	No data	No data	99.86

Note:

No data available for Malaysia and Singapore

Both tables refer to the percentage of teachers who have received at least the minimum organised pedagogical teacher training pre-service and in-service required for teaching at the relevant level in a given country in a given academic year

Source:

UNESCO Institute for Statistics, (n.d.), SDG4 indicators, Retrieved 24 July 2024, from <https://data.uis.unesco.org/>

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN READING, WRITING, AND MATHEMATICS

The **Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM)** aims to regularly assess the proficiency levels of the region's Grade 5 students in reading, writing, and mathematics. The inaugural assessment was released in 2019 and included six countries: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, and Viet Nam. SEA-PLM was initiated by the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and was included in the ASEAN Education Work Plan 2016-2020.

READING

Most Malaysian and Vietnamese Grade 5 students had achieved the expected proficiency level (Band 6), meaning they could understand texts with familiar structures and manage competing information. Most fifth graders in Cambodia, Myanmar, and the Philippines reached Band 3 (i.e. could read everyday texts, such as simple narratives and personal opinions, and connect their meaning) and Band 4 (i.e. could understand simple texts that contain some ideas and information that are partly outside of their personal experience).

MATHEMATICS

Most Grade 5 students in Viet Nam and Malaysia had achieved the expected proficiency level in math (Band 8), i.e. they could perform more complex operations and solve problems. Meanwhile, most fifth graders from Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Myanmar, and the Philippines showed emerging and mid-level math skills, such as solving simple math problems and understanding simple bar graphs.

Source: UNICEF and SEAMEO, (2020). SEA-PLM 2019 Main Regional Report: Children's Learning in 6 Southeast Asian countries. Bangkok, Thailand: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) & Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) – SEA-PLM Secretariat

WRITING

A majority of Grade 5 students across all 6 countries did not demonstrate the writing skills expected of fifth graders. About 54% of students are in the lowest three categories as follows: 30% in Band 1 and below (i.e. limited ability to present ideas in writing), 10% in Band 2 (i.e. produced very limited writing, with fragmented ideas and inadequate vocabulary), and 14% in Band 3 (i.e. produced very limited writing, with simple, insufficient ideas and limited vocabulary).

FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENT PERFORMANCE

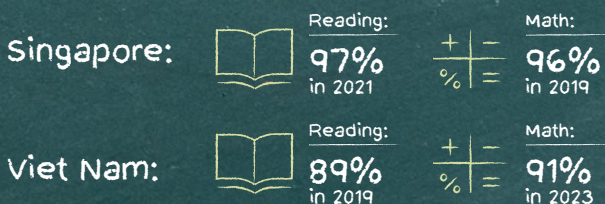
- Students from higher-income households who attended schools in more affluent neighbourhoods outperformed those from disadvantaged ones in all three learning areas.
- Students exposed to the language of instruction (and tests) at home did better in reading, writing, and math.
- Across all countries, students who received at least a year of preschool instruction generally fared better than those who did not.
- Students in bigger, well-resourced schools with a textbook for each child outperformed those in smaller, less well-resourced schools.
- In general, students who were strongly interested and felt safe in school did better than those who had less positive feelings.
- Student's reading, writing, and math scores were all shown to be higher when their parents were more involved.

The **SDG Target 4.1** aims to ensure that by 2030, all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. To track progress, the UNESCO Institute of Statistics examines the percentage of children and young people achieving at least a

minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics during primary education, at the end of primary education, and at the end of lower secondary education. Its data sources include national assessments and the SEA-PLM.

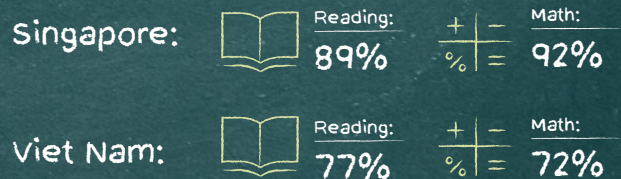
READING AND MATHEMATICS PROFICIENCY AT THE END OF PRIMARY EDUCATION

Available data from eight ASEAN countries show that two countries have a high proportion of students who attained minimum levels of proficiency in reading and math at the end of their primary education. These are:



READING AND MATHEMATICS PROFICIENCY AT THE END OF LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION

Available data from eight ASEAN countries show that as of 2022, two countries have a high percentage of students attaining minimum levels of proficiency in reading and math at the end of their secondary education. These are:



Sources: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, (n.d.). SDG4 indicators. Retrieved 11 July 2024, from <https://data.uis.unesco.org/>

UNESCO, (2020). Indicator 4.1.1 - Metadata. <https://tcg.uis.unesco.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2020/09/Metadata-4.1.1.pdf>



The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on 17 September 2014

IN PURSUIT OF QUALITY TEACHER EDUCATION IN ASEAN



Asst. Prof. John Carlo M. Ramos
Executive Director, Association of Southeast Asian Teacher Education Network (AsTEN)

Teacher education supports the development of quality teachers, education leaders, and research that influences teaching practice and policies. It directly impacts student learning outcomes, professional practices, and educational standards. Vital regional teacher education initiatives can contribute to developing evidence-based and innovative pedagogies and solutions to diverse educational challenges. In ASEAN, teacher education can be essential for

raising awareness about ASEAN and developing ASEAN identity among the youth.

A historic milestone in the region was made in 2014 when premier teacher education institutions (TEIs) formed the Association of Southeast Asian Teacher Education Network (AsTEN). The network's purpose is to respond to the demands, issues, and challenges of ASEAN integration and regionalisation. It is composed of the following institutions:

In 2021, AsTEN was recognised as an associate entity with ASEAN and has been listed in Annex 2 of the ASEAN Charter.

The network pursues various initiatives, such as international research projects, student and faculty exchanges, international conferences, seminars, forums, roundtable discussions, the AsTEN Journal of Teacher Education, and other collaborative activities. These aim to provide platforms for pre-service and in-service teachers to share their best practices and innovative ideas, discuss issues and challenges, and publish their research findings.

AsTEN also envisions assisting teacher education institutions in the region. In 2017, members held a series of expert meetings and dialogues in Bangkok, Bandar Seri Begawan, and Malaysia with TEIs to formulate harmonised teacher education standards in ASEAN. The resulting document seeks to guide TEIs in quality assurance. Following this, the AsTEN Teacher Education Quality Assurance Agency (ATQA) was created to lead the quality assurance initiatives of AsTEN in the region and ensure that the quality assurance mechanisms are responsive to the needs and contexts of TEIs.

The 10 AsTEN Founding Member Institutions



Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (Brunei Darussalam)



National Institute of Education (Cambodia)



Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (Indonesia)



National University of Laos (Lao PDR)



Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (Malaysia)



Association of Southeast Asian Teacher Education Network

an entity associated with ASEAN
www.asten1.org



Yangon University of Education (Myanmar)



Philippine Normal University (Philippines)



National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University (Singapore)



Kasetsart University (Thailand)



University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University (Viet Nam)

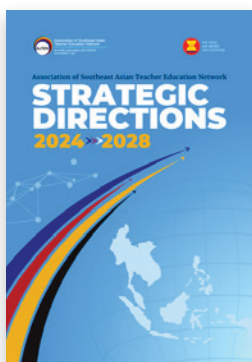
To further widen its contribution and impact in the region, the network has set its strategic directions from 2024-2028, focusing on the following areas:

- AsTEN Awareness and Visibility
- Research for Impact and Sustainability
- Teacher Quality, Performance, and Welfare
- Collaboration, Partnership, and Exchange
- Social Advocacy and Responsiveness

These five areas ensure that AsTEN will align its initiatives with the goals of ASEAN.

Moreover, AsTEN has developed its research agenda and priorities until 2028. It will focus on carrying out research projects that will inform ASEAN and the Ministries of Education about:

- Student-centered and Innovative Instructional Practices
- Quality of Teacher Education, Teacher Educators, and Continuous Professional Learning
- Teacher Professionalism and Well-being
- Environmental Factors, Communities, and Partnerships



AsTen delegation joins ASEAN initiative on addressing disinformation, media information and disinformation literacy, March 2023



AsTEN attends the Asia-Europe Foundation Conference transfer



AsTEN joins in Asia-Europe Foundation AI and Education Faculty Collaboration transfer

In the following years, AsTEN hopes to provide policy briefs and recommendations to aid in education policy-making.

Teacher education in the era of Artificial Intelligence

Discussions about artificial intelligence in education (AIED) and its significant impact on the teaching-learning process are growing. This discourse has prompted teacher education institutions to revolutionise and rethink the current educational paradigms, particularly in curriculum delivery, student assessment, and teacher preparation to handle technological advancements. The evolving roles of teachers and teacher educators in the context of AIED, focusing on strategies to mitigate risks and leverage potential benefits, is essential to examine. TEIs play a crucial role in guiding teachers and education leaders towards a human-centred approach to AI, ensuring that the educational process emphasises human agency and critical thinking, rather than being entirely driven and manipulated by technology. It is also important to explore the ethical dimensions of AIED to guide teachers and learners in becoming responsible digital citizens.

AsTEN has initiated discussions on AIED in collaboration with the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) through its ASEF

Classroom Network Conference Faculty Collaboration Program. This programme enables academic experts to build capacity and engage in critical and timely conversations, build awareness, exchange ideas around AI in Education, and form partnerships to create collaborative resources to address issues brought about by AIED.

Teacher educators from AsTEN member institutions participate in the circle of experts brainstorming innovative solutions to the challenges posed by AI. Research is currently being conducted to understand cybersecurity issues related to these emerging technologies. In 2024, AsTEN will co-host the 17th ASEF Classroom Network Conference in Manila, Philippines, focusing on the theme “Learning about AI and Learning with AI.”

Given AsTEN’s strategic directions, the network will continue to provide a platform to discuss various challenges in education and teacher education within the region, including the rapid advancement of emerging technologies such as AI. This includes capacitating teachers and teacher educators so that they can respond to the current needs of the education system and promote professional learning.

As AsTEN celebrates its 10th anniversary this year, the network will take on the challenge of acting on its commitment to contribute in building the ASEAN Community.

UNESCO GUIDANCE FOR GENERATIVE AI IN EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

In 2023, UNESCO released the Guidance for Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) in Education and Research as a response to the intensified discussions surrounding the social and ethical implications of AI. UNESCO emphasises the importance of adopting a human-centred perspective when developing policies and regulations regarding the application of GenAI in education and research. Below are some of the salient provisions of the guidelines.

Issues and Risks



Unexplainable models used to generate outputs

Generative pre-trained transformer (GPT) models like ChatGPT have parameters and weights that are not transparent and inspectable, which shrouds the way outputs are created. Biases cannot be detected or corrected, and unexpected or unwanted results cannot be explained. Researchers, teachers, and learners should be aware that GenAI systems' parameters may reflect specific values and norms that produce biased content.



Use of content without consent

GenAI models scrape vast amounts of data from the Internet, often without the owner's permission. Researchers, teachers, and learners should be aware that their generated text, sounds, and images may violate others' rights and could be exploited by other GenAI systems.



AI-generated content polluting the internet

Due to lax regulations and insufficient oversight, biased and inaccurate content produced by GenAI is spreading quickly online. Young learners without prior subject knowledge are more susceptible to accepting the "contaminated" content since it can seem authoritative and convincing.



Outpacing national regulatory adaptation

Legislation governing AI creation and use frequently falls behind rapid development. Appropriate legislation is required to ensure local governmental agencies gain control of GenAI, ensuring its governance as a public good. This is important because leading AI providers have rejected independent academic reviews, and companies that use AI have raised the issue of system security.



Generating deeper deep fakes

GenAI has made it easy to create deep fakes and fake news, enabling people to commit unethical acts such as spreading disinformation and promoting hate speech. Researchers, teachers, and learners should be aware that the images they share online may be incorporated into GenAI training data and used unethically.



Reducing the diversity of opinions and further marginalising already marginalised voices

GenAI models like ChatGPT often produce standard answers based on data creators' values, potentially undermining plural opinions and expressions. Data-poor populations, usually have limited digital presence, leading to their voices being overlooked and concerns not being represented in GPT models. Researchers, teachers, and learners should be aware that GenAI's text output represents the dominant worldview at the time, and they should critically assess this and be mindful of potential exclusion of minority voices.



Worsening digital poverty

GenAI is mainly created and controlled by companies and countries in the Global North, leaving those in the Global South in a state of "data poverty." The exclusion of data-poor regions puts them at risk of being "colonised" by the standards embedded in the GPT models. Researchers, teachers, and students should critically examine the value orientations, cultural standards, and social customs embedded in GenAI training models.



Lack of understanding of the real world

Although Text GPTs appear to "understand" the text they generate, they just repeat language patterns from training data without knowing their meaning. They are not informed by real-world observations and interactions, nor do they have intrinsic human values. Researchers, teachers, and learners should not place their trust easily and must always take a critical approach to generated outputs.

Measures for Developing a Policy Framework on GenAI Use in Education and Research



Test locally relevant application models and build a cumulative evidence-base

To make GenAI relevant to the unique context and needs of local communities, particularly those in the Global South, governments must strategically plan its design and adoption, collect evidence of its effectiveness in learning and research, and study the social and ethical impact of GenAI.



Develop AI competencies, including GenAI-related skills for learners

To ensure the safe, ethical, and meaningful use of GenAI, everyone must be AI literate. As of 2022, just 15 countries had or were developing government-endorsed AI curricula for schools. Governments are encouraged to create AI curricula for schools, TVET, and lifelong learning, and to develop special programmes on AI for older workers and citizens.



Build capacity of teachers and researchers to make proper use of GenAI

As of 2023, only seven countries have or are creating AI training programmes for teachers. Governments must take steps to protect teachers' rights while also preparing them for the responsible and effective use of GenAI. These include analysing their needs, assisting them in navigating existing GenAI tools, and even allowing them to shape the design of AI applications.



Review long-term implications in an intersectoral and interdisciplinary manner

Identifying and addressing key challenges of GenAI requires a diverse range of expertise and stakeholder collaboration to minimise long-term negative impacts and maximise benefits. AI providers, educators, researchers, parents, and learners must collaborate to plan system-wide changes in curriculum frameworks and assessment methods. At the same time, experts from different sectors and disciplines must explore the lasting effects of GenAI on learning, knowledge production, research, copyright, curriculum, assessment, human collaboration, and social dynamics.



Protect human agency

More people using GenAI for writing and other creative activities risk losing their human agency and impeding their intellectual development. The use of AI in educational settings must consider the following: ensure sufficient social interaction, expose learners to human creativity, ban the use of GenAI that prevents learners from developing their cognitive and social skills, and avoid relying on GenAI systems when making high-stakes decisions.



Promote inclusion, equity, and linguistic and cultural diversity

Education stakeholders must ensure widespread internet connectivity and access to AI applications, develop criteria to ensure that GenAI systems are not biased or discriminatory, and implement measures that promote linguistic and cultural diversity.



Monitor and validate GenAI systems for education

Monitoring and validation of GenAI systems used in education must be constant to ensure that they do not pose harm to students, are free from biases and false content, do not violate informed consent, and are pedagogically effective.



Promote plural opinions and plural expressions of ideas

GenAI responses are based on probabilities of language patterns found in internet data. Thus, GenAI outputs often reflect or reinforce dominant worldviews and downplay minority opinions and ideas. Researchers, teachers, and learners must critically examine these outputs and must have space to learn from trial and error, empirical experiments, and real-world observations.

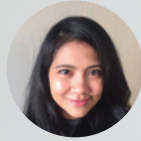
Inspired to Teach, Teaching to Inspire



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Alma Anderson

Primary School Teacher and School Nurse

Quezon City, Philippines

Alma Anderson was born into a family of educators. In her youth, she witnessed her parents' dedication to teaching and helping the young, igniting a similar passion within her. She has spent the last 30 years teaching Filipino and Araling Panlipunan (Social Studies) at a public elementary school.

"I love teaching, especially when I see my students' eagerness to learn. I like the subjects I teach because I want my students to learn about our culture, belief systems, and traditions, and I want them to speak and write properly as Filipino citizens."

Alma's interest in the medical field led her to pursue a nursing degree while teaching full-time. Shortly after passing the board exam in 2012, Alma assumed another role—as the school nurse. The dual roles have kept her doubly busy but equally fulfilled.

Alma says the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown was extremely tough for teachers, students, and their parents, especially since her school community is economically disadvantaged.

She relates that during the lockdown, the school implemented blended

learning, or a combination of online learning and learning through the use of printed modules. She notes, "There were children who were unable to keep up with the lessons because they had no gadgets to use, did not have mobile credits or internet connection."

"The distribution of modules also posed a problem for us. A lot of parents failed to collect the modules from the school. Some parents asked, 'we have to earn a living, so why should we prioritise the modules or spend so much time helping our kids with schoolwork?'"

When face-to-face classes resumed, Alma says the learning loss was palpable. "We (teachers) struggled a lot since many of our students were not able to read or write. We tried to help them as much as we could. But as you know, educating children is a partnership between the parents and teachers. Parents also have to supervise their children's learning at home."

Alma is glad that the Philippine Department of Education introduced "Catch up Friday," a programme to help children who had fallen behind in their studies and cultivate in them the habit of reading.

Alma observes that as the country returns to normalcy, it still needs to address pre-pandemic issues, such as the need for additional classrooms, improved facilities, and more teachers to accommodate the high enrolment rates in public schools. She emphasises, "To achieve quality education, we must secure adequate funding for school improvements."

Additionally, she highlights the necessity for public schools to keep pace with new technologies to remain competitive globally. "We should prioritise digital literacy skills for students. We should ensure that both teachers and students have access to digital technologies and the necessary training. And our schools should have a stable Internet connection."

At the regional level, Alma says ASEAN can help by facilitating the exchange of knowledge. "As an educator, I will benefit from the sharing of experiences, ideas, and best practices, especially in terms of innovative teaching methods, through regional conferences, workshops, and professional development programmes."

Mac Thi Thanh Binh

Junior High School Teacher

Hanoi, Viet Nam

Mac Thi Thanh Binh, who prefers to be called "Peace," is a seasoned school teacher from Hanoi, Viet Nam. She has 35 years of teaching experience and specialises in Home Economics and English. Peace has taught different grade levels during her career, with the majority of her pupils in Grades 6 and 7, as well as 8 and 9.

"I love children very much. I want to give them a way to improve their personality and skills," she tells *The ASEAN*.

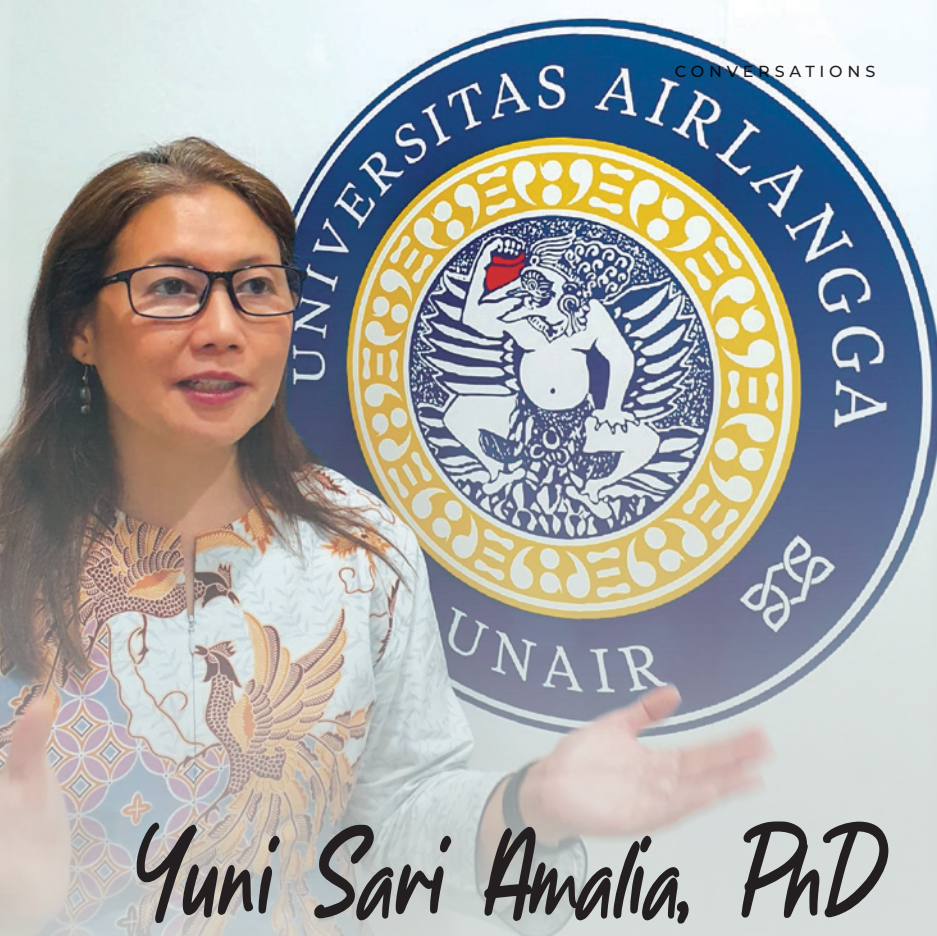
In addition to teaching skills, Peace says the school also aims to build the children's core values. "I break down the goals [that students need] to achieve for each school year. For example, they have to improve on three core values: morality, wisdom, and effort. My teaching method is all about how to help students grow in these areas."

She adds, "Along with teaching knowledge to students, one of the things I focus most on is developing students' emotional intelligence. Every day, my students and I discuss how to observe and identify emotions, how to control negative emotions, and develop positive emotions. When students have these skills, they will easily achieve success in everything."

The COVID-19 pandemic was a difficult time for Peace. "I had to teach students online through Zoom. Only half of my students opened their accounts. I needed to give them many different types of activities or assignments through email."

"[When we returned for face-to-face classes], some of the students had to be taught again because during the pandemic, they could not focus on their studies. I had to spend much more time with them."

Pham Ba Cuong, a 7th-grade student from Peace's class, echoes the difficulty of online classes. He noted, "It's very hard to hear from teachers because some teachers have low Wi-Fi connection. Sometimes I get frustrated because of the difficult exercises. And, there were so many good movies or games that took me away from the task that I needed to do. But teachers check our progress and I get reminded to do the homework on time."



Yuni Sari Amalia, PhD

University Lecturer
Surabaya, Indonesia

Growing up, Yuni Sari Amalia saw her father truly enjoy teaching in a community school. Despite the endless work and little pay, her father, who was also a government officer, seemed happy and content. After graduating with her bachelor's degree, Yuni got an opportunity to teach at a language course. She was doubtful at first, but as soon as she stepped into the classroom, she knew that it was her calling.

"Suddenly I had something I've never felt before, like this fuzzy feeling, and then all the excitement of seeing all the students when they understood what I'm trying to say. Every day, I would be learning about them, and I would be learning about myself. And it's just an incredible feeling."

Twenty-three years later, Yuni is a lecturer at the Faculty of Humanities and the Deputy Head of the Strategic Planning and Development Board at Universitas Airlangga in Surabaya, Indonesia. She also holds a doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Illinois. "The profession chose me," she says.

"I just love my students so much because regardless of the hardship that they're going through, their love for learning, their enthusiasm, and their passion for learning are actually really high. And it just sparked something in me," she adds.

With decades of experience, Yuni understands that there are countless challenges she needs to face throughout her career. These challenges include limited resources and larger classes which impact teaching strategies.

"There are a lot of standardised things which could be very good in a way because you have all the standardised materials and quality learning outcomes. But at the same time, we shouldn't forget the individual's uniqueness of each student because they don't start at the same point. They have their own needs, and this is an area that we need to pay more attention to. Strategic implementation should be data-driven, involve partnerships, and include regular monitoring to ensure effectiveness."

Yuni also called for better policy and regulation to make education more

“

AI is transformative, boosting efficiency and innovation in fields like healthcare and finance. In education, AI personalises learning, automates administrative tasks, and provides data-driven insights to improve teaching methods. However, ethical concerns about job displacement, privacy, and bias in decision-making persist. Responsible development and regulation are crucial to harness AI's benefits while addressing these ethical challenges in education.

Yuni Sari Amalia, PhD on the use of AI in education

inclusive, including for students with disabilities. "There is some support, but I feel that we really strongly need to improve this. Financial barriers can be addressed through scholarships and affordable loans, while inclusive education needs facilities and trained staff for students with disabilities. Bridging the gap between poverty and education requires universal early childhood education, community engagement, and supportive government policies."

"To address professional development challenges, it is crucial to provide regular workshops, training, and clear career paths for educators, ensuring continuous learning and motivation. Enhancing access to resources through digital libraries and international collaborations is also vital. For equality and equity, promoting distance learning and establishing satellite campuses can mitigate geographical disparities."

The views and opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the official policy or position of ASEAN.

POLICIES AND TRENDS

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Policy Brief is a publication of the ASCC Department at the ASEAN Secretariat. It identifies trends and challenges that will impact ASEAN and ASCC sectors and propose policy-relevant solutions and recommendations to uplift the quality of lives of ASEAN people.

TEACHERS MATTER: IMPROVING TEACHER EDUCATION IN ASEAN



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Teachers of the future should not only serve as preservers and promoters of values but also act as shapers of characters, creators of knowledge, facilitators of learning, architects of supportive learning environments, and leaders of educational change.

Prof. Tan Oon Seng, Professor, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, speaking at the ASEAN Regional Forum on the Future of Education, held from 24 to 26 May 2023. This significant event included key stakeholders from the education sector gathered to discuss the future of education in the region.



Why the quality of teachers matter

The quality of education hinges on the calibre of its teachers, as they are fundamental to effective learning across all levels—early childhood education and care (ECEC), schools, training, vocational education and training (TVET), and adult education. The 2024 Global Report on Teachers by UNESCO and the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 showed that teachers are the single most impactful factor within schools influencing student learning outcomes, even though factors like a student's background and motivation also play a role. Teachers are vital in delivering high-quality education and should receive adequate and relevant training and education to qualify for their teaching level and subjects. Given this crucial role, ensuring a high-quality teaching workforce is paramount for any educational system.

In today's increasingly complex world, the demands placed on teachers have grown exponentially. As societies and economies evolve, teachers are expected to seamlessly integrate new

technologies, develop innovative pedagogical approaches, and effectively manage classrooms with a broader range of student needs. This is particularly challenging amidst a growing teacher shortage, where high attrition rates and frequent staff turnover paint a concerning picture of a profession grappling with dissatisfaction, stress, and burnout (UNESCO and International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2024).

The 2005 OECD report titled "Teachers Matter" also emphasised the critical need for relevant and high-quality teacher education (OECD, 2005). The report highlights the ageing teaching workforce in many countries and underscores the importance of attracting competent candidates. These future teachers must be well-prepared to address the numerous challenges in constantly evolving educational environments. Additionally, teacher educators are expected to stay current with educational developments and actively participate in shaping educational reform.

The ASEAN context: Where are we now?

The findings of the ongoing ASCC Research and Development Platform on the Future of Education note that while many ASEAN Member States are committed to transforming their educational systems through various measures, not all teachers are truly future-ready. Establishing a regional teaching framework is recommended to achieve this transformation. It is needed to ensure consistent quality and professional development, address skills gaps, and foster critical competencies across ASEAN Member States.

Teaching standards need to be upgraded. During the ASEAN Regional Forum on the Future of Education held online on 24–26 May 2023, Dr. Maria Cynthia Rose Banzon Bautista, Advisory Council Member of the Second Congressional Commission on Education in the Philippines, emphasised the need to consider financial, organisational, technical, human resource, and socio-economic constraints when setting teaching

standards. She highlighted the importance of teachers' creativity and resourcefulness to effectively serve learners, even in resource-deprived environments (Bautista, 2023).

Teacher shortage needs to be addressed. According to the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2023), by 2030, the world will need 44 million teachers to achieve universal primary and secondary education, with 4.5 million required in Southeast Asia alone. Dr. Carlos Vargas Tames, Chief of Section of the Teacher Development Secretariat of the International Task Force on Teachers at UNESCO, warned that if this need is not met, the resulting teacher shortage will threaten the attainment of universal basic education and affect the quality of education due to overworked and overcrowded classrooms (Tamez, 2023). He also stressed the importance of satisfactory working conditions, including competitive salaries, better working hours, and professional development opportunities, to elevate teaching quality in ASEAN Member States.

Teachers need to undergo proper and sufficient training to improve the quality of their teaching. UNESCO stated that primary and secondary teachers in Southeast Asia receive organised and recognised pedagogical training more than teachers in other regions globally (UNESCO, 2023). However, the higher percentage of trained teachers in the region does not necessarily translate to quality education and training. Many available training programmes are one-size-fits-all professional development initiatives that need more relevance to current classroom realities. Teacher training must address multifaceted dimensions and varied contexts to tackle complex educational challenges, with case-by-case studies differing across regions.

Currently, teacher training institutions in the region can reference the Southeast Asia Teachers Competency Framework (SEA-TCF) 2018. This framework resulted from a regional collaboration involving SEAMEO's (Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization) 11 Ministries of Education in Southeast Asia and aims to guide teacher professional development towards realising 21st-century skills and practices within a regionally appropriate context. The SEA-TCF is



Photo Credit: ©POP-THAILAND / Shutterstock

significant because it was designed for Southeast Asian teachers by Southeast Asian educators, considering the unique national and regional contexts (SEAMEO, 2018).

The road ahead: The future of teacher education

The educational landscape of ASEAN is transforming. While the Member States have implemented various reforms, a crucial gap remains—ensuring teachers are equipped for the future. Demanding a regional solution, the findings from the ASCC R&D Platform on the Future of Work recommend establishing a regional framework that will focus on teacher growth and development. The proposed framework must recognise each ASEAN Member State's diverse realities, particularly resource constraints. It should empower teachers' creativity and resourcefulness to educate students effectively, even in under-equipped environments. Such a framework must support measures to equip teachers with essential skills, including technological proficiency, strong social skills for collaboration, and knowledge of global and regional teaching competencies.

To truly strengthen the teaching force, the framework must be paired with initiatives that address the teacher shortage. Measures like making teaching a more attractive career path, providing opportunities for inter-ASEAN teaching stints and cultural exchanges, and potentially recruiting teachers from countries with a surplus

are all crucial. Additionally, supporting Teacher Training Institutions (TEIs) with financial and technical support is essential. It entails establishing model learning environments and developing relevant teaching resources specific to the ASEAN region.

By implementing a comprehensive strategy that combines the ASEAN Teacher Growth and Development Framework with targeted initiatives, ASEAN can empower its educators and pave the way for a more dynamic and future-proof educational landscape for all students.

Note: A comprehensive report on ASEAN's Teacher Professional Development will be published under the ASCC Research and Development Platform on the Future of Education project. This upcoming publication will feature insights from the ASEAN Regional Future of Education Forum held on 24-26 May 2023. The project and its publications are supported by the ASEAN-Korea Cooperation Fund (AKCF).

This Policy Brief is a publication of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department of the ASEAN Secretariat. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of ASEAN and ASEAN Member States, the ASEAN Secretariat, and ASEAN Dialogue Partners. For more information about the ASCC Research and Development Platforms, contact the ASCC Analysis Division at ASCCAD@asean.org.



ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Policy Brief can be downloaded from <https://asean.org/serialparent/asean-socio-cultural-community-policy-brief/>

Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities



Rubeena Singh

Senior Research Consultant, Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) and International Labour Organization (ILO)



Inclusive education for all students, including those with disabilities, is high-quality education that not only teaches students valuable skills but also fosters a sense of belonging. Inclusive education is necessary at preschool, primary, secondary, and post-secondary school; technical and vocational training; lifelong learning; and extracurricular and social activities.

Students with disabilities who are included in school are healthier, can apply their skills to other settings, look forward to going to school, and are more likely to be civically engaged and employed later in life.

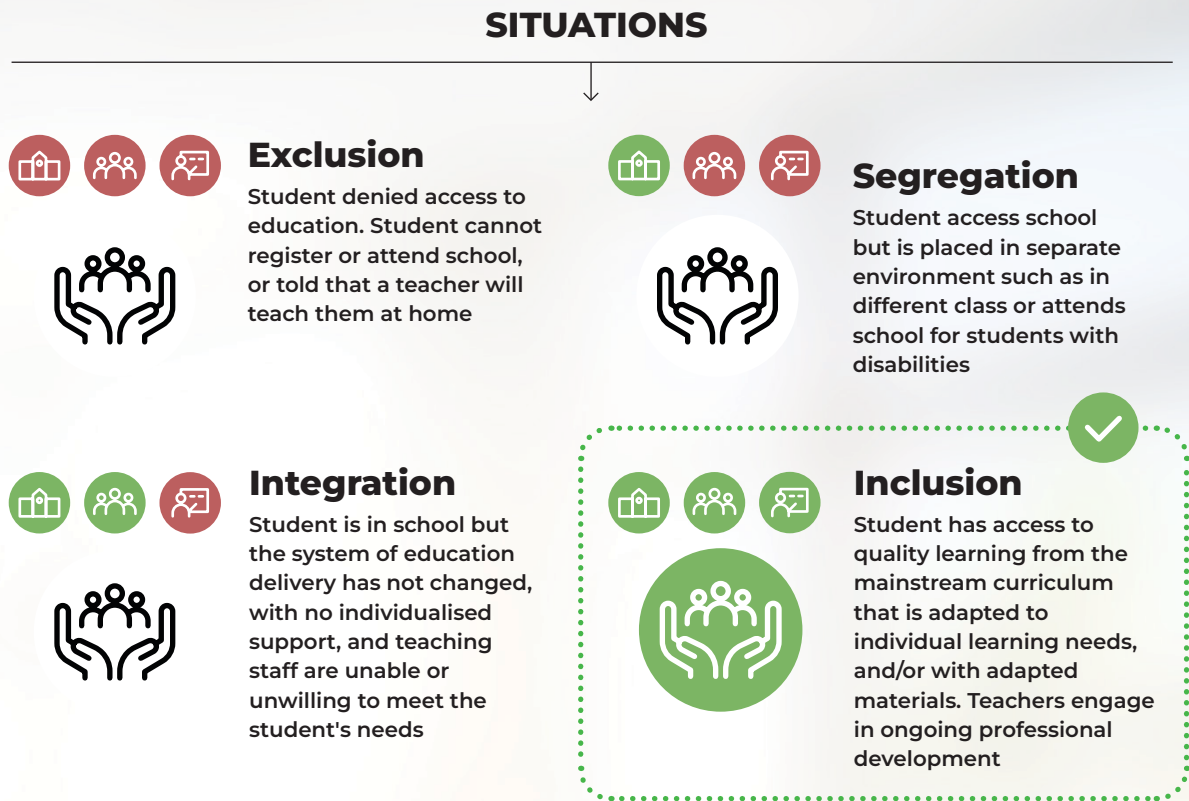
A root cause of exclusion in education is discrimination. It may be based on poor legislation, cultural stigma, or lack of training in the education system on

the methods and value of inclusion. Therefore, inclusive education requires transformation of not just policy but also culture.

Inclusive education is not just for students with disabilities, as "inclusive education is central to achieving high-quality education for all learners, including those with disabilities, and for the development of inclusive, peaceful

and fair societies" (UNCPRD Committee, 2006). Figure 1 outlines the important differences between exclusion, segregation, integration, and inclusion.

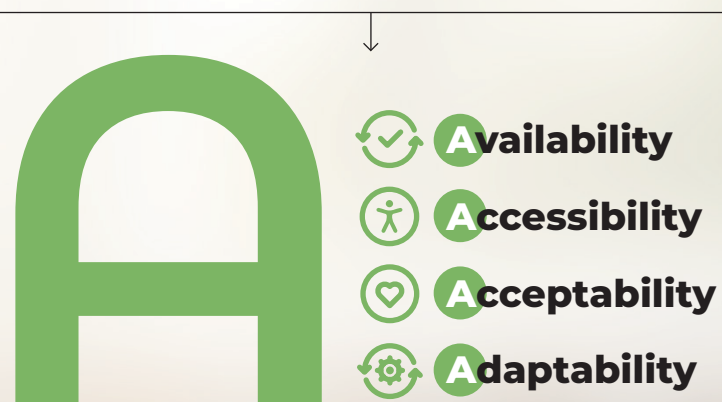
Figure 1. Different situations students with disabilities may face in education



Source: Author's summary, from Catalyst for Inclusive Education, from Inclusion International, no date.

Placing students with disabilities in the classroom without support, providing separate classrooms for them, teaching them only at home, or denying them entry to the school system is not inclusion. An inclusive education system is a long-term, national, or regional commitment to uphold the rights of students with disabilities so they do not face discrimination. Figure 2 shows the four interrelated features of inclusive education systems (UNCRPD, 2007) that can offer tangible changes in the classroom such as modifications in content and teaching methods.

Figure 2. Four A's of inclusive education
Inclusive Education System



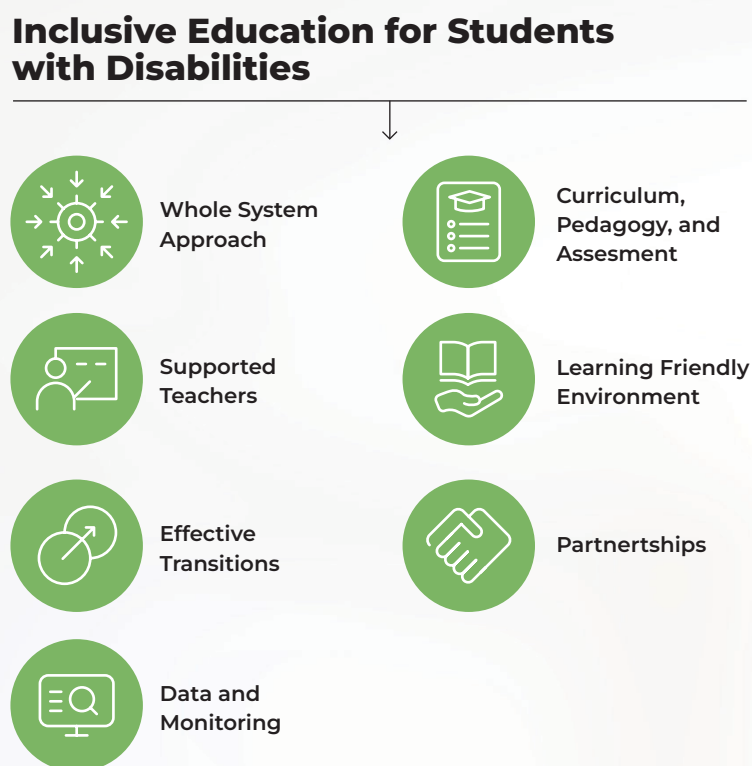
Source: Author's summary, from UNCRPD, Article 13 (2007)

Domains of inclusive education

Students with disabilities can be included in education through several entry points. Figure 3 shows interrelated domains that form a system of inclusive education. A comprehensive review of the domains and the metrics to measure a country's position and set goals for growth can be found in UNICEF's (2020) Education for Every Ability.

Equitable education involves varying degrees of factors that allow students from different learning and cognitive backgrounds to learn together. Equitable does not mean equal or the same learning methods. Therefore, some level of individualisation of teaching may be needed to teach all students effectively. Support can be used rarely, sometimes, or always for long-term intervention.

Figure 3. Domains of inclusive education in practice



Source: UNICEF (2020)

1. Whole-systems approach

Article 4 of the UNCRC calls on states to adopt a whole-systems approach to inclusive education, which refers to the responsibility and ownership of their role across stakeholders (UNICEF, 2020). The approach uses laws and policies that explicitly state that children with disabilities should receive quality education. The approach also involves inclusive leadership and culture at all levels of the education system, and a national plan that guides the implementation of goals and strategies to fully include students with disabilities. Resources should be properly allocated, and stakeholders can work together to shift attitudes, policies, and practices by tackling negative attitudes towards disability through institutional capacity-building and awareness programmes.

2. Curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment

Good progress has been made in the physical environment and in information communication and technology (ICT) such as closed captioning on television shows or accessibility of public documents. Less effort, however, has gone into making education curriculums accessible to all (UNESCAP, 2018). Flexible curriculums, teaching methods adapted to the learner's style and needs, and increased use of formative assessment based on competencies rather than benchmark achievement can open the curriculum to students with disabilities with a fundamental paradigm shift: curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment should focus on a student's capacity and aspirations and not just on content. Assistive and adaptive technology along with reasonable accommodation can help students with disabilities gain access to curricular competencies (UNICEF, 2020).

Universal design for learning (UDL) is a system of pedagogy and assessment, the curricular expectations of which apply to all students in the classroom, from the highest achieving to the one who needs the most support. UDL has been successfully modelled in various countries. It captures the why in learning through engagement, the what of learning through representation, and the how of learning through action and expression (CAST, 2018).

3. Supported teachers

Teachers are at the heart of learning in classrooms and crucial in implementing inclusive education. Their competency, motivation, and attitudes towards students with disabilities make a significant difference in learning outcomes and sense of belonging in schools. Whilst they can make a positive difference in the lives of students with disabilities, teacher training programmes do not always provide

adequate knowledge about disabilities and ongoing professional development opportunities to use evidence-based methods in the classroom, even though the UNCRPD requires governments to train pre-service and in-service teachers and other support staff in inclusive values and competencies. Such training can help make teachers agents of change, as government policies can be vague at times.

4. Learning-friendly environment

A safe and supportive learning environment can have positive effects on learning outcomes: the brain can receive and process information more productively than when it is in a state of extended stress. The government's role in ensuring a friendly environment is understated. The UNCRPD mandates governments to create environments that foster inclusive learning for students with disabilities. A school culture of inclusion can help open conversations, interactions, and collaborative problem solving (UNICEF, 2020).

5. Effective transitions

Lifelong learning is fostered through effective transitions between school environments, from preschool to primary to secondary, and from secondary to vocational and tertiary education, and eventually to the job market. In creating a plan for inclusion, educators must consider student's views, goals, and interests; their protection and safety; and their right to education and health.

6. Partnerships

Education in school systems provides foundational skills to connect with other parts of society such as recreation centres, community libraries, and local transit systems, amongst others. Wherever a student with a disability is placed, in or out of school, is a learning environment. A multi-sectoral and multi-ministerial commitment and a system that holds governments accountable can ensure that legislation and policies are inclusive. Partnerships between governments and civil society organisations can encourage OPDs that can advocate making communities more inclusive. Partnerships can

refer to home support through parent involvement in a student's learning plan and implementation.

7. Data and monitoring

Reliable data on the number, type, and severity of students' disabilities can help governments, schools, and teachers prepare for successful inclusion. A medical model of collecting data may be helpful when congenital or developmental delays are detected. However, a holistic method of collecting data on disability type, limitations, and, importantly, strengths can help guide stakeholders positively and constructively in making curriculums, pedagogy, and assessments more inclusive, whilst shifting the view of students with disabilities from "other" to "belonging". Monitoring and evaluation should be done regularly to ensure accountability of programming and government commitments.

One of the key components of data and monitoring includes asking the right question to gather data that captures metrics for reporting. Box 1 highlights the development of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, which aims to address this issue.

Note:

This piece was reprinted from a 2022 ERIA study on 'Inclusive Education in ASEAN: Fostering Belonging for Students with Disabilities' authored by Rubeena Singh. It was prepared under Giulia Ajmone Marsan's (ERIA) supervision with inputs and support from Lina Maulidina Sabrina (ERIA).



Access the study from the following link: <https://www.eria.org/publications/inclusive-education-in-asean-fostering-belonging-for-students-with-disabilities/>

Box 1

Washington Group on Disability Statistics

The Washington Group on Disability Statistics is a City Group sponsored by the United Nations and, in 2001, commissioned to improve the quality of data on disability and its international comparability. The Washington Group promoted and coordinated international cooperation in health statistics, with a focus on disability measures appropriate for census and national surveys.

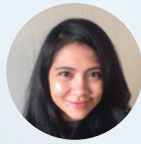
In 2016, the questions in the Washington Group/UNICEF Child Functioning Module were finalised for use in national household surveys and censuses. It assesses functional difficulties in children aged 2–17 across vision, hearing, communication and comprehension, mobility, emotions, and learning. The functionality of each is assessed by providing questions on a rating scale.

Questions are different for children 2–4 and 5–17 years of age and are in English, French, Spanish, Vietnamese, Russian, Chinese, Arabic, Portuguese standard, Portuguese Brazilian, and Khmer. The questions provide information that can be compared and analysed for factors affecting learning that are not otherwise captured in medical data.

The database can be used to understand reasons for limited participation in an unaccommodating environment and offer insights to improve opportunities for persons with disabilities, even if they have not been officially diagnosed (UNICEF, 2017). A few countries in this report use the Washington Group questions to collect data on persons with disabilities.

Source: UNICEF, 2017

Najelaa Shihab's Dreams of Transforming Education



Ixora Tri Devi

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“In education, we cannot afford a simple goal,” Najelaa Shihab told *The ASEAN* in an interview in Jakarta.



Najelaa Shihab believes the current digital divide is now more about digital literacy rather than just access to the internet and devices



Najelaa Shihab emphasises that inclusive education helps children appreciate each other's uniqueness and develop empathy

The 47-year-old educator has worked in the field for over two decades. In 1999, she founded her dream school, Cikal, but did not stop there.

Najelaa later established various foundations, such as Yayasan Guru Belajar [Learning Teachers Foundation] and Kampus Pemimpin Merdeka [Independent Leaders' Campus], to help teachers and school principals, primarily from public schools, improve their skills and teaching methods.

Najelaa's larger goal was to transform education in her country. In 2016, she launched the social movement *Semua Murid Semua Guru* [All Students, All Teachers] to celebrate good educational practices and promote stakeholder collaboration. She has worked with thousands of teachers, students, and communities to accelerate access to quality education across Indonesia.

Najelaa reminisced that when she first announced her desire to be a teacher, her family and friends questioned her decision.

"Many people feel that choosing to manage a school or be in the classroom should not be a choice for those who have other options. They said, 'But you are clever! Why do you want to be a teacher?'" Najelaa recalls.

Twenty years later, to her disappointment, this stigma persists.

"There is low interest in becoming a teacher among qualified individuals. The problem isn't just about the pay. Many want to work not just for money but for a purpose. However, highly competent people want jobs that allow them to innovate, but the education ecosystem often kills innovation."

Najelaa believes we have become our worst enemy in the effort for better education. In various occasions, she calls herself "a victim of public education."

"When I say I am a victim of public education, when I say the educational system in our schools is not functioning well, the benchmark is not just the results of national assessments or PISA measurements but all the problems we encounter. Not only in Indonesia but worldwide. In Indonesia specifically, the issues are related to the environment, waste management, corruption, character issues, and values."

She also affirms that education has become a self-validating system where quality is only measured by GPA or acceptance into good universities. The key to this issue, says Najelaa, lies with the actors within the education ecosystem. Schooling should aim to

develop real-life competencies, not just progress through stages.

"This requires behavioural changes from everyone in the education ecosystem. As seen in many countries, this cannot happen with just one policy or by solely relying on the government. Everyone must work together. Even if teachers were perfect, there would be no change without active parental involvement. Parents are the primary and foremost teachers; without their engagement, there will be no change."

Digital innovation for inclusive education

On the topic of digitalisation, Najelaa says she appreciates the government's efforts to improve connectivity. She believes the current digital divide is now more about digital literacy—recognising quality content, English proficiency, and critical thinking to identify reliable sources—rather than just access to the internet and devices.

To leverage technological advancements, Najelaa and her colleagues established *Sekolah Murid Merdeka—SMM* [Independent Students School] in October 2019. It was the first in Indonesia to introduce "blended learning," combining in-class and online education. Within a few years, SMM

“

If inclusive schools accommodate children with disabilities, the ones who truly benefit are not just the children with disabilities, but their peers as well. Inclusive education helps children appreciate each other's uniqueness, see people as whole individuals, develop empathy, and communicate according to their peers' needs. It's an incredible experience.



"Schooling should aim to develop real-life competencies, not just progress through stages." - Najelaa Shihab

expanded to more than 40 branches nationwide.

"SMM aims to provide affordable, high-quality education with a focus on quality, flexibility, and personalisation tailored to each child's needs. This is achieved through the optimal use of technology, which enhances teachers' abilities to manage, analyse, and address student needs efficiently."

Before COVID-19, Najelaa admits, many parents were sceptical about blended learning. Parents doubted whether their children could concentrate and how it would affect their social skills. "However, when we were forced to move online due to COVID-19, our student numbers reached thousands in such a short time."

"We noticed that parents who questioned online learning had previously experienced poor-quality online education. I cannot blame them for being traumatised by it due to poor learning design. Meanwhile, at SMM, many students continued not just

because they were forced to during COVID-19, but because they received a quality education."

At the heart of digitalisation, Najelaa adds, is inclusion. She stresses that education should be for life, fostering empathy, understanding, and effective communication among diverse individuals.

"If inclusive schools accommodate children with disabilities, the ones who truly benefit are not just the children with disabilities, but their peers as well. Inclusive education helps children appreciate each other's uniqueness, see people as whole individuals, develop empathy, and communicate according to their peers' needs. It's an incredible experience."

She regards the issue as not just a lack of capacity but a lack of commitment. Najelaa often expresses frustration when fellow administrators claim they can't accommodate students with disabilities.

"Make it happen," she urges. "As educators, we must set an example. Inclusivity must be taught during children's developmental years; mere advice later won't work. Without direct experience, they carry stigmas and labels into adulthood, affecting their workplace and societal interactions. It's not the people's fault, but the bridge they were provided with."

As the conversation ended, Najelaa called for more collaboration between ASEAN countries. "We know there are many good examples from Singapore, Viet Nam, Malaysia, and other countries, specifically in areas such as bilingual education and entrepreneurship. Let's create communities that share best practices and spread good initiatives across ASEAN countries, including examples from Indonesia."

The views and opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the interviewee and do not reflect the official policy or position of ASEAN.

The Promise of Multigrade Education in Southeast Asia



Joanne B. Agbisit

Associate Editor, *The ASEAN Analysis Division*, ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department

Every day, Jenilyn de la Cruz gets up at 3:30 a.m. to make her 7:30 a.m. class at the Lopero Elementary School, in a remote village in Zamboanga del Norte, Southern Philippines. It is a gruelling 65-kilometre motorcycle ride to the school, one of over 7,000 multigrade schools in the country. Teacher Jen is one of only four full-time teachers handling multigrade classes and multiple subjects in the school. She handles a combined class of 5th and 6th graders, and teaches all eight subjects required in the national curriculum.

The multigrade system is not a new concept. Early schools placed pupils of different ages in one classroom under the guidance of one teacher. It was only sometime in the mid-19th century that single or monograde classes were introduced, with students in the same age range grouped into one class and subject to the same curriculum.

Although the monograde structure is now the standard worldwide, multigrade schools or classes still persist in Southeast Asia. A 2012 study by the Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organization Regional Center for Educational Innovation (SEAMEO INNOTECH) noted that eight ASEAN Member States operate multigrade education programmes as part of their national education policy.

Multigrade education programmes are commonly implemented in rural or sparsely populated areas. They are set up when regular schools are too costly to build and maintain, and when teachers are scarce. ASEAN governments deem the multigrade system an effective strategy for delivering education services to children from the farthest and most inaccessible communities.

Multigrade education: Some approaches

Countries have different approaches to multigrade education. In a 2018 study of multigrade teaching practices in Thailand, Buaraphan et al. found that some schools offer all multigrade classes from Kindergarten to sixth grade, in two-grade or three-grade combinations. However, some schools have a “hybrid” arrangement that includes both blended and single-grade classes.

Buaraphan et al. observed that teachers typically began by introducing the topic to the whole class, then divided the students by grade to work on specific tasks, and later, reassembled them to wrap up the lesson. The approach gave older students an opportunity to interact with and assist the younger ones.

In terms of outcomes, multigrade teaching was effective in enhancing Thai students’ reading and writing skills and their ordinary national education test (O-Net) scores. This was attributed to the smaller number of students, which allowed teachers to have more time to attend to their students’ learning needs.

In the Philippines, meanwhile, the hybrid or mixed multi- and single-grade set-up is more common based on a 2021 study done by the Department of Education (DepEd) and SEAMEO INNOTECH. Grades I and II, Grades III and IV, and Grades V and VI are the most frequently combined grades. The average teacher-pupil ratio is 1:19.

Multigrade teachers follow the national curriculum for each grade, but their teaching strategies vary. Some implement the quasi-monograde method of alternating between different grades, i.e., instructing students in one grade while another grade works on individual

or group activities. Other teachers gather all students to discuss the topic before dividing them into groups for grade-appropriate tasks or activities.

The DepEd-SEAMEO INNOTECH study found that multigrade students outperformed monograde students in some areas of the Philippines’ national achievement test (i.e., Math and Social Studies). They also demonstrated better social skills and higher self-esteem. However, high repetition and dropout rates remain a problem in multigrade classes.

Prospects and challenges

Education officials recognise the promise of multigrade education to contribute to universal and inclusive basic education. However, the quality of multigrade education programmes in the region is difficult to determine because of insufficient up-to-date data. Experts recommend enhancing monitoring and evaluation to optimise the potential of multigrade education initiatives. How do teachers adapt the curriculum and manage different grade levels? What strategies are effective in improving learning outcomes? Do multigrade learners measure up to expected levels of competency? What factors contribute to student attendance, engagement, and completion? These are just some of the data that need to be collected to understand current challenges. They will help decision-makers design better training for multigrade teachers, tailor curricula and learning materials for multigrade classes, and allocate resources to where they are most needed and create the greatest impact.

Additional information on multigrade was provided by the Educational Innovation Unit of SEAMEO INNOTECH.

Jennilyn de la Cruz

Going the Distance as a Multigrade Teacher



Joanne B. Agbisit

Associate Editor, *The ASEAN Analysis Division*, ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department

Jennilyn de la Cruz—Teacher Jen—is in her ninth year as a multigrade teacher at Lopero Elementary School. The job is demanding and requires multi-tasking skills, flexibility, and improvisation.

“Becoming a teacher was never my dream; it was my mother’s dream for me,” says Teacher Jen. “But I eventually fell in love with the course and later, with my students.”

She explains, “I’ve been given permission to create my own class schedule, so what I usually do is schedule only four subjects per day. For example, I would teach English, Math, Science, and Filipino every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and the rest are scheduled on Tuesday and Thursday.

“We have one classroom for the combined grades and it has two blackboards, one in front and one at the back. The students from one grade face the front board while students from the other grade face the rear board, so they are seated back to back.

“My strategy is to give students in one grade a set of exercises that they can work on while I give a lecture to students in the other grade. Then after the lecture, I would assign the students their own activities while I turn my attention to the other grade.

“I’ve learned to multi-task since the lesson plans for 5th and 6th grades are totally different from one another. We also use learning materials developed for single-grade classes.”

Although Teacher Jen had experienced handling multigrade classes with special needs students during her internship, becoming a multigrade teacher right out of college was overwhelming and took some adjustment. But she now appreciates the challenge. “I’m happy that I got exposed to multigrade teaching. It presents a different kind of challenge and gives me an advantage if I do decide to switch to single-grade classes later on,” she says.

Teacher Jen says pre-service and in-service training on multigrade teaching is sorely needed. “Training is a must for teachers with no exposure to this type of set-up,” she notes. “In my nine years, we rarely had training that focused on multigrade teaching. I mostly joined training for single-grade teachers.”

She suggests revisiting the curriculum to consider the requirements and constraints of multigrade teaching. “Right now, we have a curriculum and teaching and learning materials that are designed for single-grade classes but are used in a multigrade setting. The number one problem is time allocation. We have to cover all lessons for both grades at a limited time,” she explains. “It

would be easier for me as a multigrade teacher if we match most, if not all, of the lessons for both grades, and just tailor the activities, exercises, and learning goals according to grade.”

Teacher Jen also calls for more support for multigrade teachers. “We have a modest hardship allowance given yearly, but maybe our government can look into providing more benefits for multigrade teachers,” she says. “I commute four hours a day to and from school, but this is nothing compared to other teachers who have to cross rivers and mountains and risk their lives daily to teach children.”

Despite tremendous challenges, teachers like Jen remain dedicated to their profession, reaching many who might not have access to education.

Teacher Jen says that seeing her students excelling and graduating has been very rewarding. “My students integrated well when they transferred to a regular school and many of them maintained their academic standing. I even have a student who now has a nursing degree,” she says proudly.

The conversation has been translated and condensed for clarity. The views and opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the interviewee and do not reflect the official policy or position of ASEAN.

Butet Manurung

Championing Education for All



Ixora Tri Devi

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Analysis Division, ASEAN
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Department

Fifty-two-year-old Saur Marlina Manurung, better known as Butet Manurung, is the woman behind Sokola Institute. The organisation implement literacy programmes targeting various underserved and marginalised communities in Indonesia, including ethnic groups, disaster-prone areas, and regions with high illiteracy rates.

Photo Credit: ©Sokola Institute



In Sokola Rimba, Butet adapted the teaching methods to honour and integrate the cultural traditions of the Orang Rimba



Sokola Institute focuses on integrating education with local customs while addressing social challenges such as human rights, poverty, poor infrastructure, and environmental degradation.

Butet and her colleagues began their work with a class they called Sokola Rimba [the Jungle School] for a nomadic community in Sumatra's Bukit Duabelas. They have since taken their efforts nationwide, setting up Sokola Pesisir and Sokola Kajang in South Sulawesi, Sokola Pulau in Waialago, East Nusa Tenggara, Sokola Tayawi in Maluku, Sokola Asmat in Papua, and several other locations.

The Sokola Institute has implemented 17 programmes benefiting thousands in ethnic communities. Many local communities also take over and run these programmes independently. Speaking with *The ASEAN*, Butet reflects on her milestones.

"As teachers, we initially aimed to solve all problems the communities face. These include fighting illegal loggers and poachers. In 2016, we changed our strategy. Our goal became more specific: to help indigenous communities achieve self-determination through literacy and

advocacy training as outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007."

Decades of dedication have earned Butet various prestigious awards, including the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2014. However, Butet and her colleagues' proudest moment is seeing their students capable of advocating for their needs. One such story happened just a few years ago.

In 2004, the Indonesian government designated Bukit Duabelas as a protected area, a national park. This area held a special place for Butet, as she had taught there. Following the designation, her students and their families, the Orang Rimba [Jungle People], were at risk of being evicted from the forest they called home. "They were considered a threat to the park's ecosystem," Butet recalled.

The park's zoning system, modelled after Yellowstone in the U.S., included core, production, recreation, research, and wilderness zones. However, this system did not accommodate the traditional ways of the Orang Rimba.

In the wake of this, Butet witnessed how her students fought tirelessly for 14 years to reclaim their land. They

used strategies and skills they acquired from Sokola. They diligently made films, wrote articles, and filed complaints with various government bodies.

When everything was disregarded, the Orang Rimba made a final effort in 2018. Using the skills they had learned, such as using GPS, they built a counter-map and presented it to the authorities and got reciprocal response.

"This customary forest map includes detailed zones unique to their cultural and practical needs. They have birthing zones, burial zones, and even spirits zones. This map was created meticulously using GPS and coordinates. They also collaborated with dozens of NGOs, and even the Presidential Staff Office gave their support."

The Orang Rimba presented their customary forest map to the national park authorities that same year. The officials were impressed by its conservation-oriented approach, which led to the map's recognition and the community's co-managing of the area.

"Why should we use an American model? In the U.S., national parks don't have people living in them, but here they do. The people here have their own



Former students of Sokola Rimba initiated *Kelompok Makekal Bersatu*. The group actively advocates for the rights of ethnic communities in Bukit Dua Belas, Jambi, Indonesia



Butet Manurung at Mijak's commencement in 2023. Mijak is the first *Orang Rimba* to earn a law degree

conservation system, and we should be proud of that," said Butet.

Kelompok Makekal Bersatu, the United Makekal Group or KMB, was the group behind the success of the customary forest map. Former and current students of Sokola Rimba initiated KMB. One of its founding members, Mijak, recently graduated with a law degree. Butet taught him twenty-four years ago, and in 2023, she attended his graduation ceremony.

Butet is proud of Mijak and other students who pursue formal education, but Sokola Institute believes the goal is not merely about obtaining a degree.

"The question is not whether we want to help them preserve their culture or become modern. It is about them living the life they choose."

According to Butet, the right education is not always formal education.

"Why? Because the language is not their own, the location is outside the forest—sometimes taking up to two days to reach, and the subjects are not about their lives. What's the point of learning about planets when they can't even stop illegal logging?" Butet asked.

Aside from being irrelevant to the ethnic communities, formal school hours often conflict with their traditional activities. These traditions, passed down through generations, are just as important as school.

"Hunting is school too, praying to their gods is school, traditional medicine is also school. They have their own schedule. In Papua, for example, collecting sago must be done between 6 a.m. and 11 a.m., so it's impossible to attend school first and then go harvesting."

Butet also highlights the need to modify learning methods. "In my experience, the *Orang Rimba* had never seen chairs and desks. If you make them sit, they get uncomfortable. It's like asking city people to attend a class while hanging from a tree—can they do that?"

"In school, we are used to listening to the teacher and sitting neatly. Meanwhile, the *Orang Rimba* run around and climb trees. We need to be culturally sensitive and respect their ways," she added.

When it comes to technology, Butet realises that the ethnic community cannot be sheltered away from it. Thus, Butet assessed that more effort is needed.

"We need to also introduce them to the methodology of learning from the technology itself. It's about understanding the risks of the internet and how to avoid or minimise them."

Butet said that, like people living outside the forest, when it comes to new trends and technology, the aim is always to navigate these changes to better benefit ourselves.

"It's about self-determination, the ability to make informed choices and know how to minimise the risks."

At the end of the day, Butet wants to underscore that every stakeholder needs to have the same perspective: to put ethnic communities' needs at heart.

"With this contextual and just education, we hope they make the right decisions—right according to them, not us. We might think, 'Why don't they just stay in the forest? Why did they stop using their traditional clothes?' That's our perspective. Are we solving our problems or theirs?" she concluded.

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ASEAN-India Educational Linkages

India's education system, rooted in rich traditions and values, is a testament to the nation's commitment to nurturing intellectual growth and innovation. It is known for its rigorous curriculum, which emphasises discipline and hard work. India's education system accommodates a diverse range of learners from various cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This inclusivity fosters a rich learning environment where students can interact with peers from different walks of life, promoting cultural understanding and tolerance.

India is home to prestigious higher education institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), and top-tier universities. These institutions provide world-class education and research opportunities. Graduates from these institutions are highly sought after in the global job market for their strong academic background, technical and managerial skills, and adaptability.

India's historical ties with Southeast Asia date back for centuries, and are characterised by maritime trade, cultural exchanges, and intellectual dialogue. Today, this historical connection is a foundation for strengthening educational cooperation between India and ASEAN Member States. Under the ASEAN-India Framework, India offers a number of scholarships to students from ASEAN Member States in the Nalanda University for pursuing Masters, PhD and PG Diploma programmes.

New Nalanda University: Bridging the past and future

In the heart of the historical town of Rajgir-Bihar, India, stands a modern marvel of education and cultural confluence: the New Nalanda University. This institution is more than just a university; it is a reincarnation of the ancient Nalanda University, once a global epicentre of learning and intellectual exchange. Ancient Nalanda, founded in the 5th century CE, was an illustrious centre of learning, attracting scholars from across Asia, including South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia. It was not merely an educational institution but a thriving hub of intellectual and cultural exchange. Subjects ranged from Buddhist studies, fine arts, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, and politics to the study of scriptures and philosophies.

Today, the reincarnated Nalanda University aims to create a new knowledge ecosystem that embodies these ancient ideals, offering universal solutions for a sustainable future. This vision gained significant momentum with the endorsement of leaders at the East Asia Summit in 2007, reaffirming Nalanda's role in revitalising knowledge networks and promoting peace within the ASEAN region.

On 19 June 2024, the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, inaugurated the new Campus of Nalanda University. This large, carbon-footprint-free, net-zero campus, sprawling over acres of greens and 100 acres of water bodies, is truly an abode for learning.

The academic framework at Nalanda University is distinctively ASEAN-oriented, with courses that emphasise regional culture, history, and sustainability. The curriculum includes

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Students from ASEAN Member States are offered scholarships at Nalanda University per year for Master's, PhD and PG Diploma programmes.



Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN, at Nalanda University during his working visit to India from 12-15 February 2024. The Secretary-General's lecture was on "The Future of ASEAN: ASEAN's Relevance and Resilience in the Evolving Strategic Environment"



Photo Credit: ©/Indian Mission to ASEAN

unique offerings such as Maritime Interconnections in the Indian Ocean, Ramayana Traditions in Southeast Asia, Sustainable Asian Cities, Writings from Southeast Asia Culture, Philosophy, Aesthetics and Management, Energy in Asia, Sustainable Asian Cities, Environment in Asia. The presence of students from diverse backgrounds fosters an environment of cross-cultural exchange, preparing them to become future thought leaders and global citizens.

Students from ASEAN Member States are offered scholarships at Nalanda University per year for Master's, PhD and PG Diploma programmes. Currently, 80 slots are offered for the Master's Programme and 10 slots for PhD per year. These scholarships are funded by the Ministry of External Affairs of India through the ASEAN-India Fund.

Other Scholarships

In addition to scholarships offered at Nalanda University, the Government of India offers a number of scholarships to ASEAN Member States, both bilaterally and in the ASEAN-India Framework.

Here is a comprehensive list of scholarships offered to ASEAN Member States:

- Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme
- The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) Scholarships
- ASEAN-India Scholarship for Pursuing PhD /Masters /PG Diploma in Nalanda University
- ASEAN-India Network of Universities (AINU): 2022-2026
- ASEAN-India Collaborative R&D Programme (AICRD)
- ASEAN-India Research and Training Fellowships (AIRTF)
- Quad STEM Fellowship
- Quad Infrastructure Fellowship
- Mekong Ganga Cooperation Scholarship Scheme
- BIMSTEC Scholarship
- ASEAN-India Fellowship for Higher Education in Agriculture and Allied Sciences

Educational linkages between India and ASEAN offer several advantages and opportunities. First, they promote academic excellence by providing

students and faculty with access to diverse learning environments, resources, and perspectives. Second, they foster cultural understanding and appreciation, contributing to the promotion of regional harmony and unity in diversity. Third, they enhance research and innovation by facilitating collaboration on cutting-edge projects and interdisciplinary studies. Lastly, they promote economic cooperation by preparing a skilled workforce capable of meeting the demands of a globalised world.

In conclusion, India's scholarship programmes in the ASEAN region represent not only a commitment to fostering educational exchange and cooperation but also a strategic investment in the future of the region. As India strengthens its ties with ASEAN nations, these scholarship programmes serve as a bridge for collaboration, innovation, and mutual growth. With continued support and participation, these endeavours will undoubtedly contribute to advancing education and deepening bonds between India and its ASEAN partners for years to come.

Note: Information for this article was provided by the Indian Mission to ASEAN.

THE FUTURE IS SKILLED

Bridging the Gap in ASEAN with TVET Mobility



PYO Dae-bum

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HYUN Ji-ye

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The ASEAN-ROK Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Mobility Programme, supported by the ASEAN-Korea Cooperation Fund (AKCF), is a strategic investment in the region's human capital. Optimising TVET programmes and fostering collaboration contribute to building a skilled workforce that is crucial for ASEAN's economic development and community-building efforts.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is rapidly transforming the world of work, demanding new skillsets from workers as automation and technological advancements reshape industries. While economic transformation hinges on a skilled workforce, a growing mismatch exists between graduates' skills and industry demands. This skills gap hinders economic growth and leaves individuals unprepared for the jobs of tomorrow. Here is where the ASEAN-ROK TVET Mobility Programme steps in. Our initiative takes a proactive approach to bridge the skills gap and equip ASEAN Member States with the tools to thrive in the era of Industry 4.0.

As a flagship project of the Korea-ASEAN partnership in employment and labour, this programme fulfils a fundamental commitment from the 2019 ASEAN-Korea Commemorative Summit in Busan. It directly aligns with the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025 and complements existing regional and global TVET initiatives. Leveraging Korea's successful economic transformation experience, the programme funded by the ASEAN-Korea Cooperation Fund benefits all stakeholders—from ASEAN Member States and TVET institutions to trainers, trainees, industry partners, and communities alike. The programme, implemented by the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) with a 5.8 million US dollar budget, commenced in 2020.

Journey to establish a new model for ASEAN TVET mobility

The project began with a clear objective: establishing a groundbreaking ASEAN TVET mobility model that transcends previous limitations. Unlike past initiatives that relied on agreements between individual institutions for student and faculty exchanges, this programme aimed to mobilise and implement multilateral-scale exchanges across all ASEAN Member States. This innovative model was expected to provide a more inclusive and collaborative environment for knowledge sharing and skills development.

Recognising the critical need to address the industrial skills gap in the region, the project team conducted thorough labour market research to identify five common priority TVET sectors: Automotive, Building Construction, Computer and Information Service, Electrical and Electronics, and Hospitality and Tourism. Each Member State proposed candidate TVET programmes in each sector. Following evaluations and consultations, nine programmes were selected in 2022 to be the model for developing a special three-month course combining up-to-date TVET curricula and internships in the local industries.

While the project faced difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic, with limitations on physical travel across ASEAN, it capitalised on this initial phase to enhance the quality of the TVET programmes. KCCI experts meticulously evaluated proposed programmes, providing feedback on training duration, curriculum development, instructor qualifications, facilities, and budget planning. Notably, KCCI experts also collaborated with host institutions to integrate content fostering intercultural competence, a key aspect of ASEAN people's connectivity and mobility programmes. Additionally, considering most host institutions needed more experience with foreign trainees, the project team meticulously assessed their overall readiness to ensure a safe and supportive learning environment.

Additionally, to ensure quality and consistency, KCCI played a crucial role in establishing comprehensive guidelines: Mobility Tool 1 and Mobility Tool 2. Mobility Tool 1 serves as the standardised curriculum framework for the mobility programmes, ensuring consistency in the delivery of high-quality vocational training across ASEAN. Mobility Tool 2, on the other hand, provides a comprehensive operational manual for managing mobility programmes effectively, including budget execution, monitoring, and evaluation procedures. These tools have become indispensable guides for the successful implementation of the ASEAN-ROK TVET Mobility Programmes and future TVET mobility initiatives.

The first batch of mobility programmes ran from June to September 2023 in six countries: the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Cambodia, and Brunei. A total of 139 trainees

and trainers from eight countries participated. The second batch, which began in April 2024, expanded to include Viet Nam and the Lao PDR, bringing the total number of participating countries to eight. A total of 189 trainees and trainers are expected to complete the programmes by July. The third and final batch is scheduled to commence in August, and the project is expected to be successfully concluded by the end of 2024.

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The professors not only shared with us the theory of the lessons but also imparted great experience in the hospitality industry and how to be effective in the workplace.

Ms. Oak Leakkhean from Cambodia who participated in Hospitality Management Programme in Thailand

Impact of the project

The ASEAN-ROK TVET Mobility Programme has left a profound and lasting impact on individuals and communities across the region. With 95 per cent of the student participants having no prior international experience, the project offered new cultural exposure, new knowledge, practical industry experience, and communication skills. Notably, 83 per cent of the first batch participants reported experiencing behavioural changes, with a satisfaction rate of 4.37 out of 5. Additionally, 73 per cent of the first batch participants reported improved learning and understanding.

Cultural exchange activities integrated into the TVET Mobility Programmes

have played a vital role in fostering cross-cultural understanding among participants. Individuals have gained valuable insights into diverse cultures, languages, and traditions. These experiences enrich personal growth and contribute to building inclusive and cohesive societies. Collaborative projects and activities foster cultural diversity within the TVET community, creating a more connected ASEAN.

The TVET Mobility Programme has facilitated robust public-private partnerships, driving innovation and industry relevance within TVET institutions. Collaboration between educational institutions, industry stakeholders, and government agencies has led to the development of industry-relevant curricula, work-integrated learning opportunities, and skills training programmes. Participating companies have benefited from access to a global skilled workforce and have provided valuable feedback to enhance the quality and relevance of the programme. These partnerships play a crucial role in addressing skills gaps and promoting economic growth and innovation.

In conclusion, the ASEAN-ROK TVET Mobility Programme has demonstrably improved skills, fostered intercultural understanding, and driven innovation within ASEAN's TVET landscape, empowering individuals and equipping the region with a workforce prepared to navigate the demands of the future.

Future forward

Marking the 35th anniversary of the Republic of Korea-ASEAN partnership this year- the establishment of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP), which has ASEAN's full support, is highly anticipated. This partnership presents a timely opportunity for Korea and ASEAN to reaffirm their heartfelt wish for a more robust and deeper collaboration. The success of the ASEAN-ROK TVET Mobility Programmes underscores the potential for even more collaborative initiatives in the future. Building on this momentum, we look forward to charting a new chapter in Korea-ASEAN cooperation in the Employment and Labour Sector.

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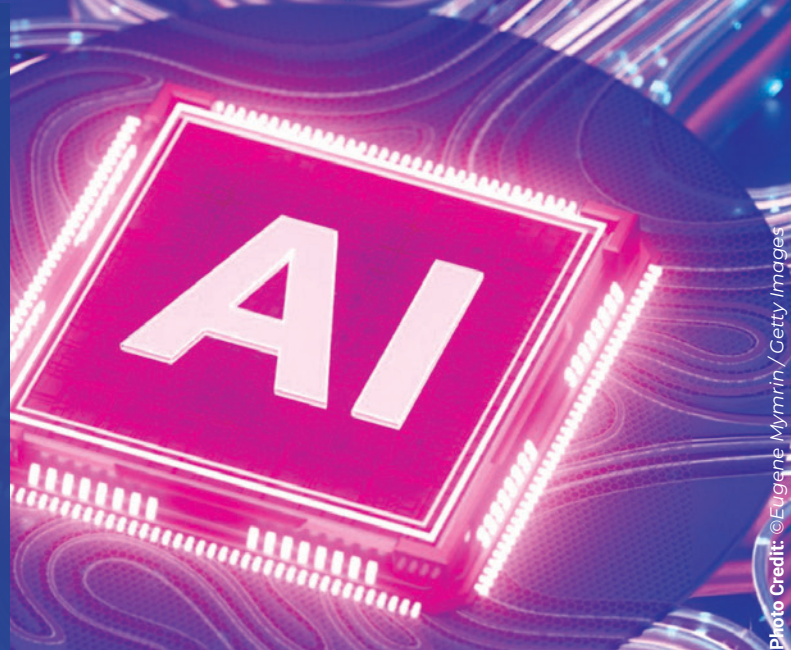
SHIFTING CURRENTS

ASEAN moves towards a
principled and inclusive
AI governance

THE QUEST TOWARD DEVELOPING AN AI GOVERNANCE IN ASEAN

Insights from the 11th ASEAN Economic Community Dialogue

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the discipline of creating intelligent machines capable of analytical reasoning, enabling organisations to operate effectively and with foresight. The current estimated value of the global AI market is 197 billion US dollars, and projections indicate that it will reach 1.8 trillion US dollars by 2030, expanding at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 37.3 per cent from 2023 to 2030.



The advancement of AI technology has also significantly transformed industries and societies in ASEAN. A report by Kearney mentioned that AI can potentially uplift ASEAN GDP by 10-18 per cent, with a value of up to 1 trillion US dollars, by 2030.

In the quest to unlock the full potential of AI while mitigating the accompanying risks, ASEAN endorsed the business-friendly ASEAN Guide for AI Governance and Ethics in February 2024. The ASEAN Secretariat also held the 11th ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Dialogue with the theme “Governing and Unlocking the AI Opportunity in ASEAN” on 4 June 2024. With the support of the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) and with Microsoft as a knowledge partner, the dialogue promoted the use of this Guide to the business community and discussed the desirable governance of AI from public and private sector perspectives.

The dialogue was participated in by more than 650 participants from

across the region. A survey of the participants revealed that 85 per cent had utilised AI in their organisation (Figure 1). However, despite the high adoption rate of AI, 47 per cent of the surveyed participants expressed that they were more concerned than excited about generative AI (Figure 2). Many factors could have contributed to their concerns, such as security risks, privacy issues, quality concerns, cost implications, compliance challenges, and responsible AI use. These highlight the need for effective AI governance to address these concerns and still allow the region to reap the full benefits of AI.

Exploring the existing governance landscape on Artificial Intelligence

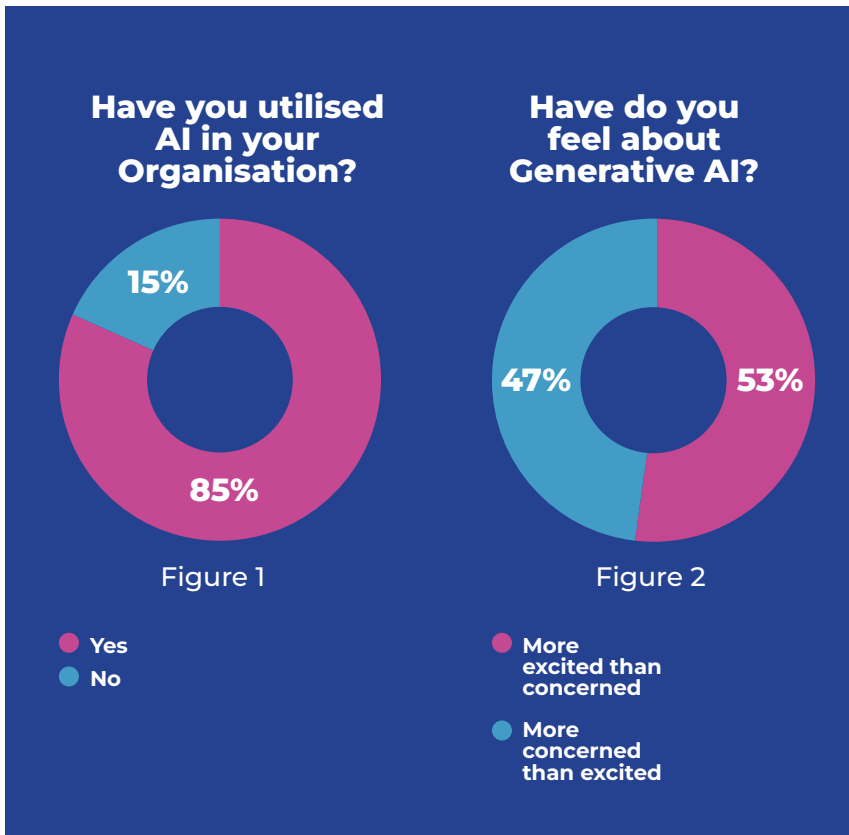
AI governance is critical to building public trust. Meeting regulatory requirements and mitigating harmful risks will enhance consumer confidence in newly launched technologies or services powered by AI. It may likewise reduce complexity and enhance legal certainty, lowering

regulatory risks and paving the way for more investment in AI innovation.

While AI governance is still in its nascent stage, the global AI governance landscape is complex and evolves rapidly. Governments across the world have issued several regulations. For example, the European Union has endorsed a rights-driven EU AI Act. At the same time, the US has adopted market-driven AI governance through the Advancing American AI Act of 2022 and the Artificial Intelligence Risk Management Framework in 2023. China’s state-driven regulation is more detailed, addressing different applications and types of AI due to its vertical approach. OECD’s AI Policy Observatory has recorded over 1,000 AI policy initiatives from 69 countries.

Six ASEAN Member States have issued their national policies on AI. Singapore has issued 25 governance initiatives, including the National AI Strategy and Model AI Governance Framework. Viet Nam, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines have also developed AI strategies. At the regional level, ASEAN Member States established the ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics and endorsed this at the 4th ASEAN Digital Ministers’ Meeting on 1-2 February 2024 in Singapore. The Guide, which includes national and regional level recommendations, adopts a market-driven approach to balance the economic advantages of AI technology and its associated risks. During the 11th AEC Dialogue, the ASEAN Digital Senior Officials Meeting (ADGSOM) representative shared that ASEAN is forming a Working Group on AI Governance (WG-AI) to discuss pertinent issues related to governing AI and promote safe and responsible use of AI.

Despite efforts to strengthen regional AI governance, most ASEAN Member States have adopted a horizontal and soft regulatory approach, which is more voluntary. During the dialogue, the representatives of the Ministry of Communications and Informatics (Kominfo) of Indonesia and MyDigital Malaysia highlighted that this approach was taken as governments



continue to learn about AI, particularly its scale and use in different sectors. ASEAN Member States' current efforts are focused primarily on mitigating AI's risks without hindering its potential development and contribution to the region.

Kominfo Indonesia and MyDigital Malaysia noted that the lack of technical capacity within governments is another challenge to regional AI governance. Government agencies need more understanding of complex and fast-evolving AI systems and have limited personnel with AI expertise. Given these challenges, collaboration among government, industry, the research community, and relevant sectors is crucial to facilitate the cross-pollination of ideas and a healthy discourse on pioneering and proactive policies and technologies to create ideal conditions for responsible AI to flourish in the region.

Business aspiration on AI governance in ASEAN

During the 11th AEC dialogue, the business representatives highlighted the following recommendations:

Applying principle-based regulation is proposed to create a space for innovation while ensuring compliance. A principle-based regulation means compliance is not achieved by following a series of prescriptive rules but by applying the principles to how AI is developed and deployed. This approach was also used in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in 2018, and it has been proven to elevate governance, monitoring, raising awareness, and strategic decision-making regarding the use of consumer data. Most global tech companies' privacy policies today follow the GDPR, and companies such as Apple, Google, Meta, and Microsoft offer GDPR protection to their global users. Considering the success of GDPR, ASEAN governments may use this as a reference for developing a similar principles-based regulation for AI. Since AI is still rapidly evolving, a principles-based approach will help ASEAN companies keep up with the pace of change and technological breakthroughs.

AI governance should ensure inclusivity. ASEAN is a highly diverse region with varying socio-economic conditions, cultures, languages, and levels of technological advancement. AI regulation should be inclusive to ensure that policies are tailored to address the unique needs and challenges of each Member State and that AI does not discriminate against any social or gender groups in the region. Additionally, since AI systems are increasingly used to aid decision-making, there are concerns that outputs may perpetuate existing discriminatory effects or injustice on specific demographic groups if AI systems are not adequately managed. Therefore, AI governance shall ensure that the design, development, and deployment of AI shall align with inclusivity and equity principles.

An inclusive policymaking process is crucial in developing inclusive AI governance. AI is developing rapidly, and information asymmetry between regulators and industry could slow down innovation. Therefore, transparent and continuous consultations with cross-stakeholders shall be implemented throughout the development of AI governance. The cross-stakeholder consultation shall include representatives from government agencies, the private sector (including big and small tech companies), academia, and the general public, particularly those from marginalised communities. The development of AI governance should be transparent and open, allowing stakeholders to understand the decision-making process and provide input. These could be implemented through public consultation, workshops and forums, and online platforms. AI governance should be based on reliable data and evidence to ensure that decisions are made with the best and latest available information.

Way forward

The ASEAN WG-AI is expanding the ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics to include a supplementary framework to address generative AI. This expanded Guide will look at the unique risks posed by

generative AI and how the principles and framework in the existing Guide could be adapted to ensure responsible design, development, and deployment of generative AI. The expanded Guide will be presented for endorsement at the 5th ASEAN Digital Ministers Meeting in Thailand in January 2025. Additionally, ADGSOM is drafting the ASEAN Responsible AI Roadmap, set to be finalised in mid-2024, which will complement and enhance the ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics by providing actionable steps for ASEAN policymakers and stakeholders to create ideal conditions for responsible AI to flourish in the region.

These two instruments, developed by the ASEAN WG-AI and ADGSOM, could lay the foundation for future ASEAN governance on AI, covering the use of AI in technologies, new business models, and rapidly evolving and yet unknown cases of AI use. Many of these innovations are taking place in academia and businesses. Therefore, involving academia and the private sector will enable these groups to share perspectives and expertise to support and inform the development process of the supplementary framework and the roadmap. Convening a multi-stakeholder and consultative approach throughout the development of these instruments is essential to ensure that the framework will be forward-looking, business-friendly, and fit for purpose.

Disclaimer: This insight is built on the discussion during the 11th ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Dialogue and written in collaboration between the Enterprise and Stakeholder Engagement Division and Digital Economy Division at the ASEAN Secretariat.

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<https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/ASEAN-for-Business-Bulletin-Special-Edition.pdf>

BRIDGES

ASEAN Member States seek to revitalise the "spice culture" in the region as a source of collective identity



The Spices and Flavours of a Shared Cultural Identity

Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia's Team on the ASEAN Spice Project

Spices are an integral part of Southeast Asian cuisine. They create the unique flavour profile of our countries' most iconic dishes. Think of *tom yum* without galangal and chilli peppers, or *pho* without coriander, cardamom, and star anise.

The use of spices in food has bound the Southeast Asia region for centuries. It is a shared tradition that predates the colonial era.

Spices have not only enriched the region's gastronomic offerings, but Southeast Asian countries have also used them for wellness. The traditional spas in Indonesia and Thailand include massages with essential oils from sandalwood, cinnamon, ylang-ylang, and nutmeg. In addition, turmeric, ginger, and galangal are some primary ingredients

for *jamu* herbal drinks that have been inscribed as a wellness practice in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list in 2023.

Some spices are endemic to Southeast Asia, such as Thai basil, *temulawak* (Javanese ginger), Vietnamese mint leaves, *kampot* pepper, and cloves from the Maluku Islands. Others, such as cardamom, cumin, and legumes, were brought through trade and migration. Those spices have been traded along the route connecting the east and west

for over two thousand years and further developed and utilised in various local contexts.

Despite the abundance of spices in the region and our spice-filled culinary heritage, the spice culture of Southeast Asians has been overlooked. Spice culture encompasses the knowledge and practices in cultivating, producing and using spice for multiple purposes. Instead of seeing spice culture as a relic of the past, people should embrace spices as a unifying element of our

Delegates had the opportunity to identify the similarities of spices used in various products and services in their respective countries



On their visit to the Royal Palace of Yogyakarta, delegates engaged in a discussion about the role of spices in Javanese tradition and rituals



Delegates posed with the signature 'ASEAN Way' handshake during the programme in Karangrejo Village

diverse cultures and a source of the "we-feeling" promoted by the narrative of an ASEAN identity. Further, spices have a vast potential to advance gastro-diplomacy and cultural industries in ASEAN.

In view of these, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, supported by the ASEAN Secretariat, organised the "ASEAN Spice: The Connecting Culture of Southeast Asians" from 26 to 31 May 2024. The event aimed to solicit participants' different perspectives on the region's spice culture and pave the way for the establishment of a network that will foster ideas of collaboration in the future.

Twenty participants from 10 ASEAN Member States consisting of academicians, researchers, practitioners, and entrepreneurs participated in the event.

They had the opportunity to delve deeper into Southeast Asia's spice culture, focusing on Indonesia, through various activities. They visited the Borobudur Temple and learned about temple reliefs depicting ancient wellness traditions that utilised various spices. The participants also engaged with local communities at the Karang Rejo Village near the Borobudur Temple which have developed sustainable tourism practices highlighting spice-based products and services. These communities are currently involved in discussions about

the possible multinational nomination of the historic spice route into the UNESCO World Heritage list.

On the second day, an academic seminar took place at the Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) in collaboration with the university's ASEAN Studies Center (ASC). Two expert speakers from UGM, Dr. Sri Margana from the Department of History and Dr. Dafri Agussalim from the Department of International Relations, delivered the keynote. They explored the historical aspect of the spice trade in Southeast Asia and its continuing influence from the past to the present. The importance of embedding spice culture into the mainstreaming of cultural regionalism of ASEAN is also discussed. They proposed reconnecting the cultural ties between the ASEAN Member States and revitalising our collective identity related to spices. The similarities in spice cultures can play a role in bridging differences and fostering mutual understanding between people in the region.

Representatives from 10 ASEAN Member States also spoke at the seminar. They exchanged knowledge about multifaceted approaches to preserving and promoting their country's spice culture. The underlying message was clear: we must further develop the spice culture as a living heritage that can remain relevant to the contemporary context. Participants called for a joint action to support innovation in spice culture, balanced with upholding its integrity and values.

At the seminar, participants were organised into groups to generate ideas for collaboration on spice-based products or services. Guided by Helianti Hilman, a food biodiversity advocate and gastro-cultural ambassador, along with local practitioners of spice entrepreneurship, participants identified several areas of potential regional collaboration. These include *jamu* jelly snacks, rosella food and beverages, aromatherapy oil, a digital marketplace for spices, culture-based tourism packages, and joint media publications on spice culture. These areas demonstrate the significant potential of spices to advance ASEAN's culture industries centred around spices. They also raise the feasibility of establishing ASEAN-oriented small and medium cultural enterprises that combine resources from various countries.

The event concluded with participants optimistic that concrete regional action will soon be taken to nurture spice culture as a vital element of the Southeast Asian identity. The connections formed by participants and the wealth of knowledge shared during the event are expected to continue well into the future, opening doors for countless opportunities for partnership.

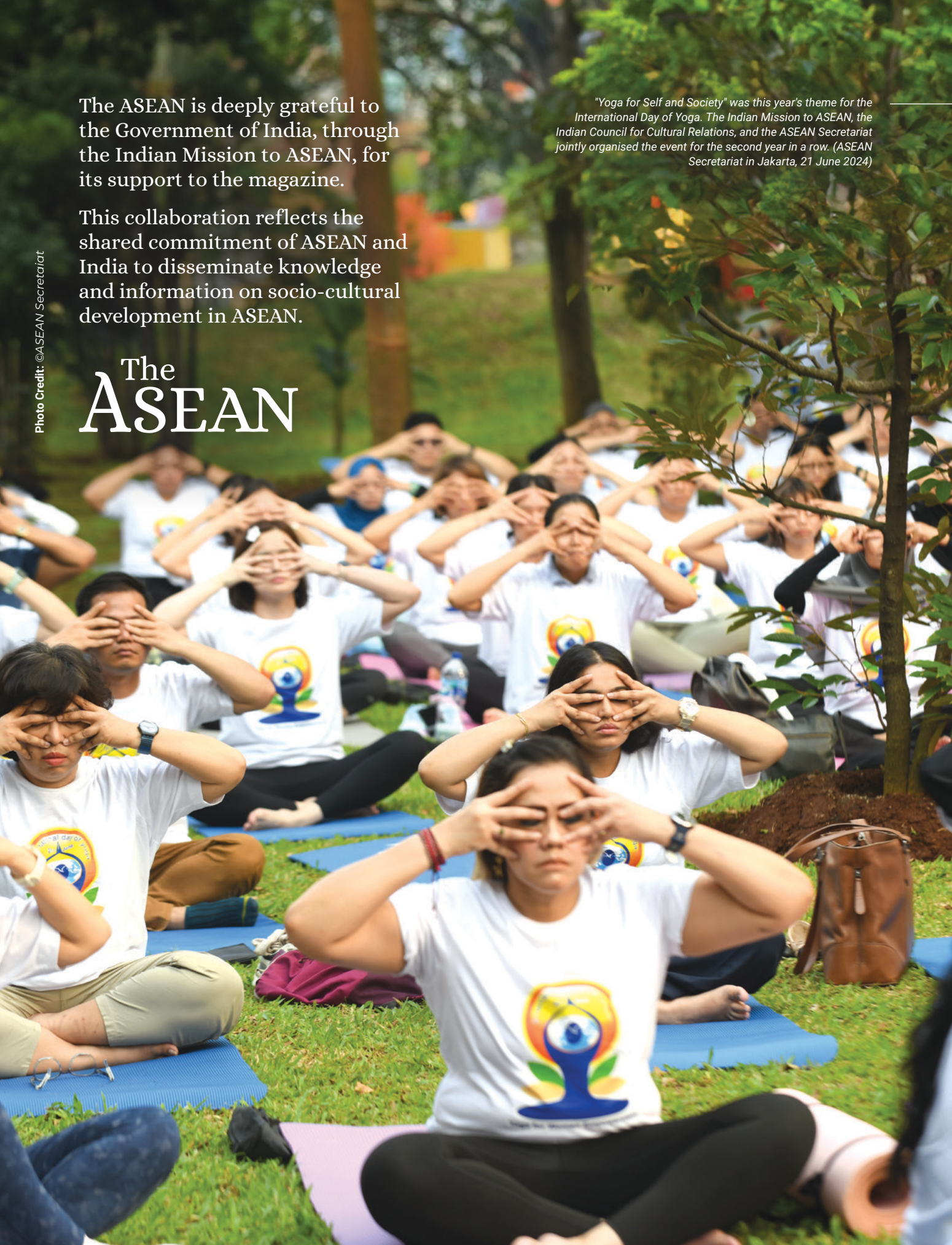
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This collaboration reflects the shared commitment of ASEAN and India to disseminate knowledge and information on socio-cultural development in ASEAN.

The ASEAN

"Yoga for Self and Society" was this year's theme for the International Day of Yoga. The Indian Mission to ASEAN, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, and the ASEAN Secretariat jointly organised the event for the second year in a row. (ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta, 21 June 2024)

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