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# Questioning the Regional Integration of Higher Education in ASEAN: Equality for All?

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## Abstract

*Regional integration in ASEAN, within the framework of ASEAN Community has three pillars. ASEAN Socio-Culture Community as one of the pillars brought the vision of equality of access toward education aligned with the United Nation Sustainable Development Goals. Specifically, integration of higher education is institutionally spearheaded by the ASEAN University Network (AUN) established in 1995, which currently is still the only legitimate HEI's platform under the ASEAN Secretariat. This paper discusses the question on the exclusivity of AUN membership that had created the narratives of doubt among the non-member universities of AUN. By taking the case studies on selected universities in Indonesia and Thailand, the research is conducted with the qualitative method using triangulation of data collection from in-depth interview and structured focus group discussion (FGD) as primary sources, supplemented by the desk study on current research on the area of regional integration and higher education management. The result presented the positive view on the question posed in the research. AUN is adapting to change, with several universities are now holding the status of associate membership. AUN also stated that they are under the preparation of making scheme and procedure of new membership application. As a unique space of integration in ASEAN, AUN is continuously adjusting to accommodate the needs of the greater audience.*

*Key words: higher education, ASEAN University Network, inclusive, regional integration, ASEAN*

## Introduction

In the modern times, what it means by regional integration is not only defined by economic and political integration. It is also defined by the socio-cultural integration including cultural and people

mobility across the region, and regional standardization of the quality of education.

In this context, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) as the continuation program of

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which elapsed in 2015 is supportive of regional integration in the way that it calls for collaboration with regional initiatives in achieving its goals by 2030 including in the field of education. The goal number 4 from the UN SDGs is Quality Education. One of its targets is ensuring equal access for all men and women for affordable vocational and tertiary education, including university (UN SDGs, 2015). The target of this goal does not only mean equal access toward the tertiary education, but also equal access toward the same qualified universities for all men and women. Thus, the process of achieving this goal will involve the role of regional education standardization that could ease the process of global standardization. Consequently, it will improve the capability of not just university in achieving its goal of internationalization, but also improve the capability of youths in achieving what they need in the global competitive market.

Integration always gets around the Europeanization of the European Union, but another region is rising too. In Southeast Asia, regional integration has taken place ever since the Bali Concord was concluded in 2002 and the vision of ASEAN Vision 2020 was established. Hence, today we see the gradual integration of ASEAN Member States, under three main pillars, namely Political-Security, Economy, and Socio-Cultural. These three aspects of integration are named as the ASEAN Community. The ASEAN Economic Community is the spotlight after all of its achievements in

decreasing the trade barriers and improving the human mobility across the region, meanwhile the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, the third pillar, is rarely mentioned. Education, social and cultural exchanges, and human settlements are some objectives within this pillar (Letchumanan, 2015). But this poses several challenges to the Member States of ASEAN, in term of education itself. The biggest challenges are related to: (1) the different education system across the region; (2) the challenges of balancing the universal value from the region and local values (Umboh, 2013).

In this context, education integration is the priority of regular meeting of the Senior Officials on Education and University Networks in ASEAN, such as the SEAMEO-RIHED: Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization – Regional Institute of Higher Education and Development. In the term of higher education, ASEAN University Network (AUN) is spearheading the progress of higher education standardization and integration to let all students across ASEAN could enroll for higher education in any ASEAN countries without being concerned of the university's different grading and curriculum.

However, it is still an only unfinished vision. Currently, after 23 years from the commencement of the AUN in 1995, only 30 universities are involved in the process of quality assessment and curriculum standardization for the ASEAN University Network (AUN, 2017). The AUN is

planning to expand its participating member by the upcoming years, starting by giving the observer status of prospectus university, followed by quality assessment, and decided by the Board of Trustees of the ASEAN University Networks.

This exclusiveness emerging in the process toward an inclusive integration is not without precedence. Taking an example from the Bologna Process for the region of Europe with currently 50 signatories, both EU and non-EU member calling for the unification and standardization of higher education in Europe. Thus, a student in Andorra could enroll at Oxford, when they are qualified disregard where they enrolled previously (EHEA, 2016). Even during the Bologna Process, four countries were rejected from the process, namely, Kyrgyzstan, Israel, Kosovo, and Northern Cyprus (BFUG, 2007). It is always a long process for some integrations to become extensively inclusive, but the question is, whether the integration will be inclusive for all members within the designated region or not?

This is particularly important in ASEAN, when the process of integration seems to be exclusive only for certain universities. This exclusiveness, however, has also its own advantages. The small number of universities as members has enabled the AUN to fasten the process of standardization and quality assessment of higher education in each country. It includes the ability of the networks to conduct various workshops and training

regarding the quality of education in ASEAN as well as the integration of higher education under the regime of ASEAN Socio-Culture Community (ASCC). Here, it can be seen the paradox of integration. On the one hand, the exclusive networks enabled the forum to be more effective and efficient in achieving their goals. On the other hand, it indirectly and unintentionally left other universities behind.

By taking the experience of AUN and the case studies in Indonesia and Thailand, this study aims to discuss the process of integration of higher education in ASEAN with the perspective of the universities as the main actor of the integration process. The process of integration can be explained in two ways. First, seeing it outside of the box, observing the process of integration through analyzing the patterns comes within the legal standing being made by the states' actor. Second, is through observing each actor within the process of integration itself. The study aims to describe and analyze the process through the second way to gain clear and diversified picture of the experienced of the specific actors in term of regional integration of their field.

The study shall pose two main questions. First on whether the integration of higher education in ASEAN has already inclusive enough to cater all the needs of the higher education institutions in ASEAN? Second, on understanding the current condition of integration of higher education in ASEAN, what factors might

affect the process and what is beyond the current integration? By answering the questions, this paper seeks to fill the gap of discussion on the inclusivity of regional higher education integration in ASEAN.

### **Study Design and Research Method**

This study adopts a qualitative research method, with triangulation on data collection processes, combining in-depth interview, focus group discussion, and in-depth library research to the current research on the field of regional integration and the dynamic development of higher education in Southeast Asia (Berg & Lune, 2011). The triangulation has enabled the author to make the cross-reference between the results of the in-depth interview with senior leaders and senior officers within universities, result of the focus group discussion involving the university office of international affairs, as well as results of the in-depth library research on the current study in the same field to draw the red line of the research.

The countries selected as case studies in this research, Indonesia and Thailand, are chosen based on the almost similar development of economies, also the non-English speaking background, who exercise the comparable higher education reform direction. Both countries have started to put priorities in making higher education institutions as important actors in supporting the nation's competitiveness and development (Dewi, Heryadi, & Akim, 2017). The ground bases for institution selection in this research are their management status, their status of

membership in AUN, and their national and regional reputation. The sample of institutions taken as case studies was an opportunity sample, in which the data gathering processes were able to be conducted through professional contacts and formal request (Foskett, 2010, p. 41). Therefore, the results of the study present the early analysis of the question posed from the case studies rather than a generalization.

The primary findings are divided into two kind series of data in the mid-2017 and late-2017. First, the in-depth interview was taking place in the mid-2017 to two universities in Thailand: one is a private university in Thailand, member of the AUN, mention as university A, the other one is a non-AUN Member public research university that specializes in agricultural science, hereby mentioned as University B; also, to the representative of AUN Secretariat in Bangkok, Thailand. As for the universities in Indonesia, in-depth interviews were conducted in three institutions. University C is a public university, recently gained special autonomy from the government, University D is a public university, member of AUN, advances in Sciences and Technology; University E is a comprehensive public university, member of AUN, and one of the oldest universities in Indonesia. The in-depth interviews were conducted with the resource persons coming from the senior leaders and/or officers of each university who engaged with international cooperation activities.

Second, the findings were collected from the result of the Focus Group Discussion held in Bandung in October 2017, involving four universities based in Bandung city, namely: (1) University C, (2) University F, a private university based in Bandung; (3) University G, a public university, specialized and advances in education and pedagogy learning, and (4) University H, a private university based in Bandung. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) mainly discussed about the role of international offices in each university to conduct international cooperation and to achieve the internationalization of the university in the current trend of regional integration.

For this research, selected parts of the interview and focus group discussion were excerpted. Meanwhile, to improve the validity and analysis of this research, the extensive confirmation was made with the current research about the related field until the first half of 2018.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### *Regional Integration Theory*

The theory of regional integration is mostly related to the case of regional integration of the European Union. Caporaso (2008) mentioned the four phases of regional integration as to include respectively the early phase of integration, goodness fit/misfit, mediating institutions and domestic structural changes. The theory itself is drawn from the preceding circumstances of the European Union from the early Rome Treaty in 1957 to the Maastricht Treaty in

1993 that marked the establishment of European Union. However, in the context of ASEAN, it is important to note that the dynamics must be different from the experience of European integration or other regions.

One different aspect is related to the origin of the establishment of ASEAN which comes from political and security rather than economic prosperity rationales. The other aspect is the relatively weaker institutionalization of integration process. However, in general, comparative assessment between European and Asian regionalism focuses on the inclusive network structure of Asian regionalism versus exclusive formal institutions in continental Europe (Katzenstein, 1996, p. 150). Network regionalization which main features are the regional identity-driven response to globalization and powers that rely mainly on non-institutionalized or inter-governmental working methods, is argued to fit the typology of regional integration in ASEAN (Warleigh-Lack, 2006, p.760).

#### *Integration of Higher Education*

Regional integration of higher education includes the broad-sense of the equal standardization across the region. Meanwhile, for higher education, the measurement of standardization needs to be more accurately considered based on the higher priority and importance of vocational function of the higher education. However, like other process of regional integration, higher education faces the same dual problems of integration: (1) resolving drawn-out

violent conflict in several sub-regions; (2) overcoming the extreme differences in economic prosperity and social development among member countries (Feuer & Hornidge, 2015).

The correlation between conflict prevention and higher education institutions relates to the improvement of youth's capability. In managing existing or residual conflicts, higher education integration concerns on how comprehensive these initiatives of integration facilitate the cultural tolerance, integration, and peaceful coexistence within the region (Selvaratnam and Gopinathan, 1984). Since numerous conflicts within the member of ASEAN are drawn from the cultural and political identity issues, it is understandable how the knowledge society could help to achieve the peace in the region. Here, it can be argued that building knowledge societies also means building the long-term peace and resilient in the region.

Higher education integration depends mainly on two factors to shape the control: (1) competitiveness/attractiveness of the region, and; (2) legitimation of their degree system (Feuer & Hornidge, 2015). In addition, the integration is also affected by the university characteristics and quality assurance. As stated by the AUN, those two aspects will remain important in the integration process. It is also the case during the Bologna process, where the admission of a country to enter the Bologna process was mainly based on the

attractiveness of a higher education in the country and the degree system.

Above all, higher education integration means creating space in the region for all member to come over as one. The ASEAN Integration of Higher Education is initiated by the meeting of elite networks including the Southeast Asia Minister of Education Organization (SEAMEO). Koh (2007), citing from Massey (2005), mentioned that space for integration needs to consider three things: (1) space as product of interrelations and is constituted through interactions; (2) space as the domain where heterogeneity and difference are not only permissible but norm, and (3) space as work of continuity in the field, not a static one-time event. To understand the process of integration, therefore, it is important to understand how space is created in ASEAN.

In ASEAN, the orientation of the integration resembles the regionalist-culturalist one (Feuer & Hornidge, 2015). It is argued that ASEAN is thriving for ASEANization in order to compete with Europeanization and Americanization of higher education (Nith, 2013). It aims to be unique unlike the other region across the globe (Kanyajananiyot, 2017). Nature seems to be inherent. It is withdrawn from the regional diversity of ASEAN to conduct the higher education with normative values applies to the process of law-making emphasized by each respective government.

The integration of higher education also tends to have two orientations: neo-

liberals with pro-business type and idealists, who focus on education quality and justice (Feuer & Hornidge, 2015). This can be seen in each ASEAN member states. Cambodia is facing the outburst of private HEIs (Sen & Ros, 2013). Meanwhile, countries in the peninsula such as Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia seemed to be more idealists with numerous special admission programs to make sure education is inherent right for all. The reform for both orientation centers around the “optimistic conceptual progression of integration’, ‘building knowledge society’, and ‘reform in the region’ (Feuer & Hornidge, 2015). Integration itself has been seen more competitive in the practices than it should be, balancing the dual process of building strategic partnerships across the region as well as defending the sovereignty and specialty afar from duplicating by the partner university.

Thus, it seems that a more complex analysis is needed to describe the process of integration of higher education in the region with cultural and political complexity like ASEAN. The divine gaps among the countries and the domestic structural instability are the challenges for integration.

### **Result and Discussion**

#### *AUN: Space for Integration?*

The first space of the integration is about the organizational architecture where the plurality of network emerged (Jetschke & Murray, 2012). The ASEAN University Network (AUN) is not a part of

the ASEAN Vision 2020 agreed by the ASEAN Member States in Bali Concord and Hanoi Action Plan 2003, but it is an initiative comes as (un-)intended effect of education cooperation in ASEAN. This refers to the regular meeting of the Senior Official of Education of the member states as well as the advance development of the SEAMEO where the elites come together to create specific network and processes to build the blueprint of the AUN.

As functionalist argued, the spill-over effect is often unpredictable to the extent on what field the integration will take place after the previous integration finally emerged. ASEAN started as the community to create political awareness among the member states as well as creating the economic web within the Peninsula and Archipelagos. However, after the early 2000s, the development has finally arrived in the intersection where the institution of ASEAN took all the turns to be multi-dimensional regional institution, following the success of the EU after the commencement of the Maastricht Treaty by 1993.

As argued by Acharya (2001) and Ba (2009), ASEAN is a regional organization comes from the norm appropriation of its member. The cultural differences along with the different system of government are bound and tied together by the spirit of decolonization and challenging the Cold War. Thus, ASEAN had a fast development during the Cold War and facing the gap between the end of the Cold War to the establishment of the ASEAN Vision 2020 by 2002. Kahler (2000)



even argued that ASEAN is not a diplomatic cooperation platform, not until the end of Cold War. Meaning, it denied the rationalist argument that member of the regional organization is tied to the same interest for greater cooperation. Yes, ASEAN is tied by that argument, but not until 2002.

The AUN was built under this argument as well. At the beginning, the vision was too low with only 17 university members by 1995. The rationale of the small membership at this initial step was the view on how large membership would be a big deal to handle if all universities in the region with various standards of a degree came together as one network at that time. Also, there was an authority factor on AUN membership, where the government representatives from each ASEAN Member States were the one determining the chosen institutions from their country to be member of the AUN. Thus, the question of exclusivity of AUN was in the first place originated from how the membership was arranged, with the consideration of each member states on which universities were eligible to become the member of AUN.

The AUN itself is trying to open the membership for more universities gradually in order for the network to adapt to the changing system. Although the opening for unlimited number of universities to apply for membership in the AUN shall create hassled in the long-term, AUN is optimistic that open membership will come eventually to the

region, but gradual changes shall be expected.

AUN is not just working like other regional networking with membership fee. They are working based on the spirit of contribution, with layers of collaboration, policy dialogue level and operational level. Thus, AUN is trying to portray themselves as the voluntary network giving it best to create decent framework for the whole region. The expansions of AUN with participation of various dialogue partners including the ASEAN+3 and European Union, Asian Development Bank, and other partners, give AUN more sources of funding that help growth of the AUN. Currently AUN, along with various dialogue partners, are conducting programs that not limited to the AUN members or associate members, but also to the rest of universities and higher education institutions (HEIs) across the region, consist of faculty and student mobility, conference programs, as well as the scholarship programs, both for short-term or degree-based programs.

Within the last two years (2016-2018), AUN has been planning to achieve mainly five goals in its mission to create a standardized quality of education across the region. Those goals are (1) quality gap narrowed; (2) emerging priorities engaged; (3) exposure expanded; (4) in-depth awareness, and; (5) quality of teaching and learning (AUN, 2017). According to AUN, the AUN-Quality Assurance (here forward AUN-QA), is the tool in achieving those goals by incorporating universities (member or

non-member) to the same standard of the quality assurance. It is expected that the gap between university degree system and quality of grading could become thin in a long-term. In other words, the current institutions are working as board of director for the greater membership of the AUN in the region itself.

The purpose of AUN to create the system of AUN-QA is establishing an internal quality assurance system for the network's member universities and harmonizing the higher education in the region (Umemiya, 2008). However, some might argue that AUN is way too exclusive by saying that the membership is too limited to only 30 universities out of thousands across the region.

To respond to the argument of exclusivity, we could use the logic of AUN as the same with the laboratory test toward guinea pig. The current member is set of examples for what going to be applied to the whole region in near future. Within the board of trustee of the AUN itself, there are three kinds of member; (1) Secretariat of ASEAN (Sec-Gen and the Chairman of ASCOE); (2) country's representatives; (3) Director of AUN (AUN, 2017). It means the AUN is working as the sub-organization under the umbrella of ASEAN's secretariat. Thus, the program soon or later will have disseminated back to the greater region. For example, the ASEAN Credit Transfer System is currently available only for a member of the AUN because the university that currently meet the standards are only members. However, it

opens opportunity to get into the ACTS to enlist the application of the AUN-QA and later admit themselves to the ACTS system. There are 77 programs conducted by the AUN to mainstreaming the AUN-QA by July 2016-2017, incorporating member of the AUN, Associate Member of the AUN, as well as non-member to gain more knowledge about the quality management of higher education. These activities are important to note certain qualities that AUN has as the regional institutional backbone for the ASEAN's integration of higher education.

Second, ASEAN is a unique platform with great cultural diversities. Consequently, ASEAN University Network is a rich mix of cultures and education values coming from across the region. Thus, the works of the AUN took more considerations and times than the process of Bologna Process. In Europe, the Bologna Process took place in the single region with vast similarities, make it easier to create standardization, because culturally and economically speaking, their characteristics are mainly the same. In contrast, the biggest obstacles for ASEAN come not only from the economic gap among the member states, but also the gap in education quality. Umemiya (2008: 286-288) understands this condition and stated that the effort of ASEAN Integration by 2015 could have positive (un)intended effect on the quality of education in ASEAN. Countries like Singapore and Malaysia have changed from sending their student abroad to receiving overseas student. Countries like Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam are

working on the effort in gaining more exposures on publication and research to increase their quality in the region because research is one of the base qualities that AUN-QA focusing on (Umemiya, 2008).

ASEAN University Network is not a static organization which does not adapt to changes in their environment. In 1995, they only had 17 universities as members, but since 2013 they have 30 members with some universities applying for observer status and Quality Assurance for their universities. From 2007-2017, AUN has conducted 248 programs, incorporating 19 AUN members, 17 associate members, and one non-member university (AUN, 2017). The progress is considerably slow, but it takes the stand in the standardization of university and education quality in ASEAN. It makes the internationalization of HEIs is important, not just for the improvement of higher education quality in the region, but also as bargaining power in the regional level, since AUN is attractive due to its intensity in conducting intra-regional programs as well as improving the cooperation of ASEAN with the university partners beyond ASEAN such as ASEAN+3 and EU (Rezasyah, Konety, Rifawan, & Wardhana, 2017)(Gill, 2018).

*Talking the Practices of Integration in  
ASEAN: University Experiences*

AUN has been contributing significantly in spearheading the integration of higher education institutions in ASEAN by creating measurement system and quality assurance which enabled the member

universities to have the same standard and equal footing in term of higher education (Rezasyah et al., 2017). However, as mentioned previously, AUN still does not have an open membership, and it has postponed the application of many universities to join the AUN. The current programs are dominantly under the umbrella of the AUN-QA to many universities across ASEAN. Hasanudin University in Indonesia received a visitation from the AUN-QA team in February 2018 for three of their undergraduate programs after six other programs also have passed the AUN-QA by December 2016 and August 2017 (Puluhulawa, 2018). The successful result of assessment from the board of AUN-QA assessor, however, does not mean that the university is qualified to become the full member of the AUN. Here, it can be argued that the AUN is the exclusive platform that needs to maintain its exclusivity to remain effective in works and efficient in term of decision making to foster the process of integration.

Thus, the role of AUN here is the driver for integration. It is easy to say that the logic of exclusive membership of AUN is like the exclusive membership of the Security Council - it exists that way to make the world peace sustainable. Yet, in term of education, the network like AUN, which could foster the development of the colleges and universities, need to be more inclusive in term of membership and create more programs that support the inclusion of the higher education in the region.

The effort to create inclusive program might have already taken place within the body of the AUN. The creation of AUN-SEEDNet (AUN-Southeast Asia Engineering Education Network) is an effort of the AUN to create more specified network catering more specific issue about curriculum and other matters that perhaps only become the needs of certain faculty. Nevertheless, other universities that are not capable of entering these exclusive networks (but feel the necessity to have the network for cooperation), have begun to create new association like AsTEN (ASEAN Teacher Education Network). AsTEN proposed to be a leading network of Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) of ASEAN members and serves as the medium for collaboration in research and academic activities within and across members (AsTen, 2015). The AUN has also capable to undergo the AUN-QA system to many universities across ASEAN, makes the AUN remain solid as the most legitimate institutions of higher education integration in ASEAN, as part of the ASEAN Vision to create ASEAN Community that aimed to build resilient in university student in ASEAN to face the global market of workforce competition.

#### *Thailand Universities: The Pattern*

In Thailand, the current guiding principle for higher education policy is the 20-year national strategy grand framework (Inside Thailand, 2016). It aims to achieve the goals of Thailand 4.0 industrial revolution, which among other is to make Thailand a high-income country based on knowledge-economy,

where the quality of human capital is crucial. Universities, here, are expected to follow the framework and contribute to the achievement of the goals.

University A, ranked as top three in Thailand, has a big vision of internationalization in term of students, lectures and staffs. The three aspects of internationalization of higher education that involved the students, staffs, and lectures are well-preserved by the office of international relations of this university. University A, among other universities in Thailand, has a strategy to make research as its main form of international collaboration with international public, not limited to education and research institute, but also government, international governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations. It appears that it has already successfully implemented the current cooperation within the ASEAN University Network as the regional framework, and bilateral Memorandum of Understanding with the United Kingdom, Norwegian Government and also another particular university across the globe. Besides, the role of government is strong here, since University A is working with Thailand Government's program of Thailand 4.0 under the Prime Minister Prayuth Chan O-Cha and the university is also becoming the spear of glocalization of the higher education in Thailand with the people-center development as the main engine to foster development of Thailand both inward and outward.

Like other non-English speaking countries, language is an enormous issue in Thailand. However, in an era of growing international network with the system of complex interdependence of research and the university as the main actor, these universities need to overcome the barrier. Vocational training for both academic and administration staffs is preeminent not only for the development of their capacity, but also for preparing the regional integration itself. As the university with an exclusive membership of the AUN, University A gains benefit that eases them in getting the regional partner for research and teaching collaboration. As a university with well-known medical school, the university has taken a great effort to remain as decent university along the time, helped by many networks they join in the international level.

Different from University A, University B in Bangkok is the national-public-autonomous university that ranked-well in the area of Agriculture and Forestry. This university has strategy to gain as many partner as possible without seeing the university rank as the one that really matters. Not being a member of AUN, thus, they could not gain better exposure for decent university partner. The university is focusing in more university-to-university arrangements under a centralized system within the university where all international affairs of the university are centralized to the main international division office. It has proven well since University B already gained improvement in the number of

international students and also ranks in Agriculture department despite the downward trend of the whole university ranking. They believed that it is due to the rise of the specialized university in Science and Technology such as the King Mongkut University of Technology Thonburi, as well as the demographic problem of the ageing society that consequently create the issue of student-university imbalance proportion. Despite all the issues, University B is committed to always open for wide-range international cooperation as well as improving its specialty in Agriculture and Forestry.

Improving only certain department in a university, however, has its own weakness. Media coverage mostly brings the university rank instead of certain department ranks. In term of networking itself, University B is a university with realistic view that it is hard to get a membership in the AUN. Thus, they are becoming the university with more open arm and receiving as many offers of partnership as they could, and plan to expand their partnership to be vastly developed first. As further steps, they are also open to be a part of universities network. For one example, they are the member of AsTEN, representing Thailand in the association.

Based on the experiences of the selected Thailand universities in this paper, there are possibly two ways that could be identified on how university reacting the face-off in the regional competitive networks of higher education entities. The first is the more selective

approach where university with high reputation leveraging their status to gain more exposure for strategic partners. Second, the more emancipative, open-arm university that believed ranks and exclusive membership does not really matter if you could reach out universities that less-seen by the more advanced and high-rank universities.

### ***Indonesian Universities: The Pattern***

Although international education activity has started long before the existence of Indonesia as a sovereign country, the beginning of internationalization efforts to boost up the competitiveness of Indonesian universities have just started recently (Dewi, 2018). Intense attention towards research and publication activities as well as international partnership and collaboration have only become priorities in the past ten years. In Southeast Asia, despite Indonesia is major player in regional economic affairs, it is not in education.

The capacity of the office of international affairs or international relations in Indonesia is different from one higher education institution to the other. Some are already powerful enough to conduct independent cooperation with other universities. University D as one of the top-tier universities even ever hosted international guests from China that coming from various universities. Some other have already had long-cooperation with universities abroad. University C, for example, has cooperation with Tenri University in Japan and Ajou University,

Korea as well as other institutions that could provide scholarships for the graduates. In some cases of small universities, the activity of international cooperation is not strong enough to make the office of international affairs exercise their function.

As a member of the AUN, University D optimizes the leverage of its membership by joining various AUN meetings such as the AUN Rector Meeting, AUN International Office Meeting, AUN Transfer Meeting, AUN Business, as well as doing community engagement internationally across the region of Southeast Asia. There is a shared belief among many universities in Indonesia that inward-looking vision must dominate the purpose of the internationalization of the university. University D, University C, and University E has the same voice on internationalizing Indonesia to the world. When Indonesia is well-known for its strong political power in the region, the university are trying to vie with the other universities across the region.

Yet, the problem with integration is always about strategic planning of cooperation and partnership with other universities and companies related to research and innovation as the output of the joint-research. University D has many partnerships with engineering companies. The priority to be discussed in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will be about the copyright and patent of the research output and product. This is also the case in greater Southeast Asia as it

is still developing region with various regulative issue of property rights. In the case of the AUN, it has The AUN Intellectual Property Network as the network coordinated by Chulalongkorn University and another member of the AUN to understand the implementation of the WTO's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights. This case shows the significance of AUN engaging university in the economic deal and to act as the provider of scientific argument on the table (Techakumphu, 2016).

In the case of University E, as also one of the prestigious universities in Indonesia, it earns benefit from AUN membership through its role in the decision making of higher education integration in ASEAN. The university itself has an adaptive principle, in which it believe that regional framework and national regulation shall be adopted by the university in certain way that suited ti the university characteristic. The system of its internationalization is decentralization system. It means University E utilizes the smaller unit within the university to handle the operation of international affairs while maintaining the legal discussion in the international office in university level.

The existence of international unit in each faculty make the system transparent in its implementation and monitoring by the office of international affairs. The decentralization system aimed to find the hidden jewel that may foster the international cooperation of the university

even further. In addition, University E also highlighted that its programs and systems were sometimes emulated by other institutions, yet they are rather optimistic by saying that improvement of partner universities is a good sign of collaboration. It means that they are successful in placing the benchmark on what constitute a good program. Trying to be the norm entrepreneurs seems to be the goal for University E in term of internationalization in national and regional level.

The importance of setting a benchmark as one institution's main aptitude is corresponded to the statement of University F, G and H during the focus group discussion. It demonstrates that one university is leading on that issue. For example, if University E are succesful in setting benchmark for community engagement program across Indonesia, University G, as leading education and pedagogy-based university, is also leading in teaching pedagogy, setting benchmark as one of the earliest universities in ASEAN teaching the arts of pedagogy. University H, as private university, seems to be more proactive and leading in the number of international cooperation they have among the private universities in Bandung. The active role of International Office and full-support -with less-hassle-from the university bureaucracy are making it easier for faculty to gain more opportunity to cooperate with various university across the globe.

*Assessing the Regional Integration: on What Stage are we on?*

### ***Role of the Central Government***

The role of government is vital in facilitating the process of internationalization in ASEAN. The policy of higher education becomes the umbrella of the direction of universities to formulate their vision and missions, also to further exercise their strategies to achieve them.

In the context of international cooperation, Indonesia for example, the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education has a specialized sub directorate to support university cooperation domestically and internationally (Kemenristekdikti, 2015). Bureau of Cooperation and Public Communication is one of sub-organ right under the General Secretary of Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education of Indonesia that is responsible to handle the cooperation activities of the ministry, between Indonesia (as a state or represented by the university) and another country or universities abroad. The existence of these sub directorate and bureau are important in order to support the Office of International Affairs in each university to be able to compete in the international level.

As for Thailand, the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) is appointed under the Ministry of Education to promote Thailand's higher education, and to formulize the policy recommendations with international perspectives. The special Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy is also established under the OHEC, with some

tasks are to formulate strategies and implement international cooperation activities on higher education sector (OHEC, 2017).

### ***Role of Networks in Join Research and University Partnership***

Cooperation among universities in the development of education and degree system as well as in in-depth research is important. Research-based universities such as University A, University D, and other universities across the region believe that research network is the most important part for the university development. Gill (2018) believed that the effort in creating functional regionalism in research collaboration is successful when no significant function barrier exists achieve it. It is the sign that theoretically, the existence of AUN and the expansion of university partner and dialogue partner shall excel the programs even further. The AUN is the way to excel the process to gain more decent research partner for the university. Imagine, if one university needs to conduct MoU to each university, they would like to have cooperation and joint research, how many MoU they need to make and keep it sustainable and active each year? More than hundred. The networks like AUN, SEEDNet, and AsTEN are the proper medium and efficient platform for the university in gaining more connections in term of exchange programs for staff, lectures and student as well as getting the university partners in terms of research for short, middle or long-term basis.



University A, B, C, and D admitted that the alumni networks is one of the important benefactors for generating research partner for the universities. University D said that dozens of the joint research emerge from the relations with the alumni in many well-known institutions across the globe. However, University B is rather hesitant in promoting themselves to university partner. Some universities might have seen university rank as big matter. The ranking of university seems to 'indicate' the capability of the university in teaching and research. The ranking also creates the bigger gap in the international network, since good-ranked university many times only wanted to cooperate with universities from their rank, and vice versa. The university ranking seemingly has become counter-intuitive, since it is creating more disparities among universities and makes the cooperation is harder for middle-rank to low-rank university group to get decent research and teaching counterpart.

#### *Roles of University's Offices of International Relations*

Offices of International Affairs or International Relations (OIA) hold a vital role for universities to socialize in the international networks. Some offices of international relations work only for the hospitality purposes, holding the reception of international guest as well as facilitating the MoU without participating in the implementation of the MOU. There are also cases where the offices have the extensive role to the level that the office

controls the whole system of international affairs across the university starting from the planning, signing the legal agreement, implementation as well as evaluation of the program. OIA from highly reputable universities such as University A, University D, and University E, have these extensive roles. Yet some other universities new to internationalization like University C is still trying to build its measurement about the role of the international office. Overlapping roles of the international office with the office of academic and student affairs sometimes become an issue in the university management.

In facing regional integration of higher education, OIA is challenged by the fast development of the networks. Those who could beat the pace will be able to excel in the development of their ranks and status in the region, those who fail, decided to make their own initiatives to adjust their pace. Every action has their own rationales, since the process of regional integration is not a rally to prove which networks are better, but instead working in parallel to create better education of the region.

The AUN, for example, demands the extensive role of the international offices to handle not only the quality assurance system and programs of the AUN that works beyond the level of university agreement, but also the active participation and mobility of the student, and also staffs (both academic and administrative). Facing this face-off, some universities find it hard, but along the

time, some universities like Hasanudin University in Indonesia, University of Economics of Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam, Universiti Teknologi Malaya in Malaysia, and some other universities have been coping up the race by becoming the associate member of the AUN-QA.

### Conclusion

Under certain circumstances, regional integration could entirely benefit the institutions, but sometimes, it also could hamper the development of the actors when they are not ready. Most ASEAN countries believed in the common interest they had on creating the vast community with depth and multidimensional integration as part of the ASEAN Community that gradually integrated ASEAN in every 10-year-phase. The integration of higher education in ASEAN through the ASEAN University Network is believed to be the (un)intended impact of the spill-over of the regional integration. As the result, the AUN has not yet entirely cover the whole level of higher education in ASEAN. Instead, they work in more intensive and exclusive environment, enabling them to effectively take a measurement of their membership as well as ease the process of decision making. The AUN will not always being the exclusive circle that will evolve gradually. The burden of proof is not entirely answered on whether or not AUN could provide equality for all. For now, they are trying to provide the equality in form of AUN-QA to university wish to admit for quality assurance. In the future, the discourse might change.

This paper has been discussing the undergoing research on current dynamics of regionalization process of higher education in ASEAN by analyzing the AUN and specifically taking the case studies from selected Indonesian and Thai universities. Therefore, future assessment by taking different approach that also examines other higher education institutions in other ASEAN member states will be very beneficial for the advancement of the study.

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