

## Internationalisation and Transformation of Higher Education in ASEAN Countries: A Distinctive Emerging Approach

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### Abstract

One recent transformation in the global higher education (Hénard *et al.*, 2012) ecosystem has been internationalisation of HE institutions. This paper draws on a recent, major in-depth investigation into the policy frameworks which underpin international higher education (IHE) in the ten nations of ASEAN. Supported by the British Council, the project places IHE approaches in the ASEAN region into the global context. Based on an assessment tool of the strength of IHE policies in over 40 countries worldwide covering student/staff mobility, quality assurance and equitable access/sustainability, the project shows that while across the region countries may be at different development stages of their IHE policy frameworks, there is evidence of regional commitment to IHE at the policy and institutional level, which compares favourably with other parts of the world. The paper argues that the rise of nationalist governments in various parts of the world, particularly in the west, may threaten internationalisation in dynamic HE systems. However, a distinctive approach to IHE may be developing in the ASEAN region which challenges nationalistic approaches and which is fostering innovation and collaboration. This 'ASEAN centric' approach to IHE has the potential to strengthen HE systems across the region, as well as the development of ASEAN itself.

**Keywords:** Internationalisation; Higher education; ASEAN; Southeast Asia.



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### 1. Introduction

In the context of an increasingly globalized world, international higher education (IHE) has become an important higher education policy and research agenda among countries around the world. Internationalisation is seen as an enabler for strengthening the capacity and profile of higher education institutions (HEIs) in supporting social and economic development at both national and international levels. IHE acts as a two-way street. For students, it helps them achieve their goals to obtain a quality education and pursue research while for institutions, it contributes towards gaining a worldwide reputation and position in the international higher education community (Hénard *et al.*, 2012).

For countries in Southeast Asia, regional cooperation in the higher education policy sector has been on the rise over the last decades. Despite the differences of political and socio-cultural backgrounds, countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are now intensifying efforts towards a shared vision for higher education. The launch of ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025, advocated the promotion of "an innovative ASEAN approach to higher education", leading to "the free flow of ideas, knowledge, expertise and skills to inject dynamism within the region" (McDermott, 2017).

The greater movement of ASEAN countries towards liberalisation in their socio-economic activities and closer interdependence at both regional and global levels have led to a rapid wave of changes in the higher education sector. But less is known about how the national higher education policies in the ASEAN member states support various aspects of international engagement and perform in comparison to those outside the region. Moreover, the potential for regional cooperation in higher education and its role on underpinning broader social and political collaboration merits further examination. The latter part of the 2010s have seen a rise in populist nationalist political forces across the world from Brazil to the UK. These forces challenge efforts at regional co-operation (the experiences of the European Union being the best example). Higher education co-operation may be an area where co-operation can continue and strengthen and help act as a bulwark in ASEAN against the negative impact of populist nationalism. Considering this, it is timely to explore the prospective future for IHE in the Southeast Asian region.

## 1.1. Aims of the Study

This study examined the national IHE policies of the 10 ASEAN countries (i.e. Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam) to obtain a global perspective of the aspect. It also looked into how much each national policy differs and supports international engagement at the HEIs in the countries.

Building on earlier work by the British Council, this study aimed to provide an updated data on the evaluation of IHE policies published by the British Council in 2016, entitled “The Shape of Global Higher Education: National Policies Framework for International Engagement – Emerging Themes”[Ilieva and Peak \(2016\)](#).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Higher Education Development in the Southeast Asian Region

The development of higher education systems in the Southeast Asian region have been characterised by various stages due to the diversity of political, colonial heritage, socio-cultural, economic, and geographical backgrounds within each country. According to Ratanawijitrasin (2015), the changing landscape of higher education development in this region is chiefly characterised by four major trends, namely massification, diversification, marketisation, and internationalisation.

In Malaysia, the first era of the transformation was marked by the implementation of the New Economic Policy which addressed issues pertaining to social inequality for higher education access. This was followed by the second era with the corporatisation of higher education institutions and the introduction of Private Higher Education Act (1996). Finally, in the third era, liberalisation and massification processes, led to the internationalisation of both public and private HEIs ([Abd Aziz and Abdullah, 2014](#)).

In Indonesia, the development of higher education began in the long colonial period, i.e. from 1500s to 1942 with the Dutch education system, followed by the post-colonial period which was marked by US-style education and modernisation of higher education, and then the era of the 2000s with the new education law ([Logli, 2016](#); [Wicaksono and Friawan, 2011](#)). The beginning of this third era saw a diversified structure of universities with autonomy and specialised fields, expansion of community colleges, and also dominance of the private higher education sector.

In Thailand, the modernisation of higher education began from as early as the 19th century, when a westernised education system was introduced and the first university (Chulalongkorn University) was established in 1917 ([Nicholls, 2016](#)). This early modernisation period (until 1931) was followed by the next three eras of higher education reform in Thailand: 1) the Post Revolution Period [1932-1971] which was marked by democratisation of higher education and the Private College Act; 2) the Development Planning Period (1973-1993) with the expansion of universities and establishment of two open universities; and 3) Globalisation and Internationalisation (1990-2014) with the reform of higher education administration through merging of ministries and promotion towards greater universities' autonomy ([Nicholls, 2016](#)).

In the Philippines, the transformation of the higher education sector was also marked by the country's colonisation, but religious influence can also be seen in the development process. There were generally three periods of higher education transformation in the Philippines ([Arcelo, 2003](#)). In the first Colonial Period (Spanish Regime), the only university was established, which was limited to people from the elite group and Catholic higher education institutions. In the second colonial period (American Regime: 1898-1946), massive expansion of higher education occurred with the establishment of the state higher education system, Catholic-sponsored institutions, the University of the Philippines, as well as other private institutions ([Arcelo, 2003](#)).

In Brunei, higher education development began from as early as 1914 to 1950s with the use of both foreign languages, i.e. English-medium and Arabic education in the formal education system. This was followed by the provision of adult and continuing education and a great shift towards technical and vocational education from 1954 to 1970s, establishment of Brunei Darussalam University and 12-Year Education policy from the period of 1980s to 1900s, and finally the establishment of other national universities, i.e, Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA) and upgrade of Brunei Technology Institute (ITB) to university status.

In Singapore, four phases of higher education transformation have occurred. The first phase, the Survival-Driven Phase (1959-1978), was marked by the creation of a single national bilingual system. In the second phase, the Efficiency-Driven Phase (1979-1996), massive transformation of higher education institutions occurred, particularly the merging of the University of Singapore and Nanyang University forming the National University of Singapore in 1980, and expansion of universities and polytechnics. The government of Singapore announced the New Education Philosophy: “Thinking Schools, Learning Nation” (TSLN) in the Ability-based, Aspiration-Driven Phase (1997-2011) and developed the framework for 21st Century Competencies and Student Outcomes (21CC) in the Student-Centric, Values-Driven Phase (2012-Present).

For the CLMV countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam), major expansion of higher education in these nations occurred at the end of the 1940s. In Vietnam, significant development of higher education can be said to begin within the period of 20 years of Reform (1986-2005) where multi-disciplinary universities, other non-public HEIs, and community learning centres were established and ministries were merged into the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) (Souvachana, n.d.). Cambodia also recorded late development of the higher education sector, where expansion began in the 1960s with the establishment of Khmer Royal University in 1960 and other higher education institutions in 1965 (Rany, Ahmad Nurulazam, & Hazri, 2012). As for Lao PDR,

significant transformation of higher education began only in the 1990s with the passing of three decrees marking the reform of both public and private sectors and the development of the framework for liberalisation of higher education (Siharath, 2010).

In the case of Myanmar, the development of the higher education sector in this country was dampened by closure of universities during the military regime period (Win, 2015). Universities were destroyed and students were relocated to newer institutions. Higher education reform was initiated through the launch of a comprehensive review in the late 1990s. The newly installed government of the National League for Democracy (NLD) through the Ministry of Education (MOE) is now setting aims to reconstruct Myanmar's higher education system through several prioritised areas, including capacity building and international collaboration at all levels.

## 2.2. Internationalisation of Higher Education

'Internationalisation' was defined by early scholars in terms of "a set of activities focused on a program of student and staff exchange with a short-term orientation" (Arum & Van de Water, 1992, p.202, as cited in [de Haan \(2014\)](#)). It is closely related to globalisation, but the two concepts refer to different processes. There are four broad categories of rationales for internationalization: political, economic, social and cultural, and academic ([de Wit, 2011](#)). In the academic setting, the internationalisation term is either curriculum related (such as international studies, global studies, multicultural education, intercultural education, peace education, etc.), or mobility related (such as study abroad, education abroad, academic mobility, etc.) ([de Wit, 2011; Qureshi et al., 2014](#)) Thus, internationalisation is a multi-faceted concept which has implications for every entity involved within the organisation or institution.

Nowadays, internationalisation has become a mantra in the higher education sector. The term 'internationalisation of higher education' (IHE) refers to "the process of integrating an international and intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution" (Knight, 1994, p. 7, as cited in [de Haan \(2014\)](#)). According to [Knight \(2006\)](#), internationalisation of higher education, at the national sector and institutional level, refers to "the process of integrating an international or intercultural dimension into the teaching, research, and service functions of the institution" (p.2). [Rezaei et al. \(2018\)](#) defined it as "mutual exchanges, and a consensus-based, preplanned process, in three axillary, including teaching, research, and services in universities, colleges, and HEIs" (para. 16).

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design

This study was conducted to examine the national-level landscape of IHE policy in 10 ASEAN countries. In achieving the main objective, a systematic mixed methodological approach was undertaken through three approaches:

#### 1) Engagement of in-country experts & British Council representativeness

Qualitative input about the British Council's framework of 37 indicators and review of the collected data was obtained from individuals with expertise in IHE-related fields from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Singapore). In Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam British Council experts were consulted.

#### 3) The use of an index-based country scoring analysis:

An index-based country scoring analysis was used to score each country along three dimensions of IHE:

*Openness*: government-level commitment to internationalisation; environment enabling international mobility of students, researchers, academic programmes and university research.

1. *Quality assurance and recognition*: a regulatory environment to facilitate the international mobility of students, education providers and academic programmes.

2. *Access and sustainability*: promoting student/academic mobility and international research collaboration; consideration of possible unintended consequences of internationalisation.

([British Council, 2018](#))

These three areas are subdivided into other categories as shown in [Table 1](#) below ([Ilieva and Peak, 2016](#)). Overall, there are 37 qualitative indicators used to construct the categories and sub categories in [Table 1](#).

**Table-1.** General Structure of the National Policies Framework (Global Gauge)

Overview: categories and indicators	Weight
<b>1. Openness and mobility</b>	<b>0.33</b>
1.1 IHE strategy	0.25
1.2 Student mobility policies	0.25
1.3 Academic mobility and research policies	0.25
1.4 Programme and provider mobility	0.25
<b>2. Quality assurance and degree recognition</b>	<b>0.33</b>
2.1 international students' quality assurance and admissions	0.33
2.2 Quality assurance of academic programmes	0.33
2.3 Recognition of overseas qualifications	0.33
<b>3. Access and sustainability</b>	<b>0.33</b>
3.1 Student mobility funding	0.33

3.2 Academic mobility and research funding	0.33
3.3 Sustainable development policies	0.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.0</b>

### 3.2. Data Collection and Scoring

The data scoring process for all countries were performed as follow:

1. Initial country scorings were prepared by using common agreed criteria based on British Council approach used in the production of The Shape of Global Higher Education reports: Volume 1 ([Ilieva and Peak, 2016](#)) and Volume 2 ([Ilieva et al., 2017](#)).
2. Further consultations with experts and a literature search were conducted by the research team to provide the scoring for other countries which did not have existing initial scoring data.
3. Individual country experts were asked to review the scoring of their country and comment on the scores awarded. This was to collect updated information with regard to the scoring of the country against the indicators in the British Council framework.
4. The project advisory group were asked for their perspectives on this initial scoring.
5. The inputs from the experts were cross-checked and triangulated to revise the country scores with relevant and updated information in order to produce the final set of scores for all countries.
6. The final set of country scores were organised and analysed by using the Microsoft Excel software. Statistical analyses used for the data analysis were descriptive analysis and frequency analysis.
7. In terms of the scores calculation, the average scores for all categories in the Global Gauge were graded on a scale between 0 and 10, in which a maximum score of 10 indicates criteria is fully met and a minimum score of 0 indicates criteria is not met ([Ilieva and Peak, 2016](#); [Ilieva et al., 2017](#)). The scores for each of the indicators were labelled by the following four levels to indicate the level of IHE strategies in each country:

Very high : for a weighted average score from 7.5 to 10

High : for a weighted average score from 5.0 to less than 7.5

Low : for a weighted average score from 2.5 to less than 5.0

Very low : for a weighted average score from 0 to less than 2.5

## 4. Results and Findings

### 4.1. Overview of the Countries' Scoring for National Policies Framework

It is important to emphasise initially that in the following analyses and results, a low score does not imply that a certain country does not have the urge or need to engage with internationalisation strategies for their higher education sector. It simply reflected the current stage of development in that particular area of IHE at the point when this study was conducted. [Table 2](#) indicates the performance of the ASEAN countries alongside countries in other regions who have been assessed in the previous reports in the series ([Ilieva and Peak, 2016](#); [Ilieva et al., 2017](#)). As seen from the table, ASEAN nations generally perform favourably in terms of IHE national strategies in comparison to other countries from across the world where data is available. In terms of overall score specifically, Malaysia was found to be performing well, in line with other developed countries like Germany and Australia. This finding supported the data obtained in the previous report ([Ilieva and Peak, 2016](#)) which found that Malaysia and Germany are both performing strongly against all the broad IHE categories.

Looking specifically by categories, Malaysia and Thailand indicate a very high level of openness towards internationalisation in their higher education sector, in line with Australia, China, Germany, and United Kingdom. As for quality assurance and recognition, Malaysia and Vietnam scored at a very high level, similarly like Australia, Germany, and United Kingdom. The area which many ASEAN countries seemed to be best performed is in terms of access and sustainability. In detailed, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand were found to be ahead of other more developed nations in the level of government's commitment for access and sustainability in higher education.

**Table-2.** Overall rating of the level of government support for IHE strategies in the national policies framework

Countries	Overall Score	Openness	Quality Assurance and Recognition	Access and Sustainability
Australia	<b>Very High</b>	<b>Very High</b>	<b>Very High</b>	High
Botswana	Low	High	Low	Low
Brazil	Low	High	Very Low	High
Brunei	High	High	High	High
Cambodia	Low	High	High	Low
Chile	Low	Low	Very Low	High
China	High	<b>Very High</b>	Low	<b>Very High</b>
Colombia	Low	Low	Very Low	Very High
Egypt	Low	Low	Low	High
Ethiopia	Very Low	Low	Very Low	Very Low
Germany	<b>Very High</b>	<b>Very High</b>	<b>Very High</b>	<b>Very High</b>
Ghana	Low	Low	Low	Low
India	High	High	Low	High

Indonesia	High	High	Low	<b>Very High</b>
Kazakhstan	High	Low	Low	High
Kenya	Low	High	Low	Low
Malaysia	<b>Very High</b>	<b>Very High</b>	<b>Very High</b>	<b>Very High</b>
Myanmar	Low	Low	Low	Low
Mexico	Low	Very Low	Very Low	High
Nigeria	Low	Low	Very Low	Low
Lao PDR	Low	High	Low	Low
Singapore	High	High	High	<b>Very High</b>
Thailand	High	<b>Very High</b>	Low	<b>Very High</b>
Pakistan	High	High	Low	High
Philippines	High	High	High	High
Russia	High	High	Low	High
South Africa	Low	High	High	Low
Turkey	High	High	Low	<b>Very High</b>
United Kingdom	<b>Very High</b>	<b>Very High</b>	<b>Very High</b>	High
United States	High	High	Low	High
Vietnam	High	High	<b>Very High</b>	High

\*Note: Countries' scores for other non-ASEAN countries are based on the series of British Council's report: "The Shape of Global Higher Education: National Policies Framework for International Engagement – Emerging Themes" (Ilieva et al., 2017; Ilieva & Peak, 2016)

## 4.2. Country Scores by Category

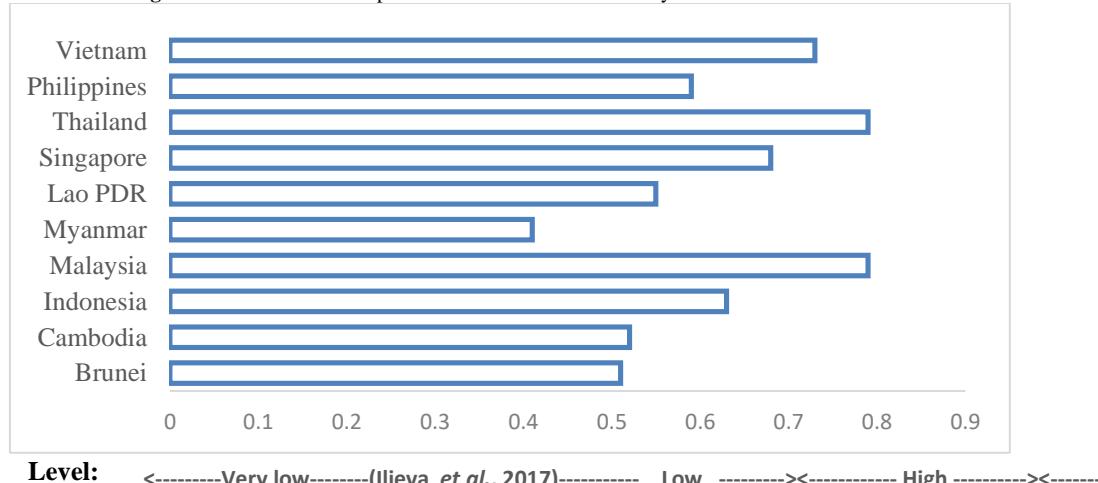
### 4.2.1. Openness of ASEAN Higher Education Systems and Supports for International Mobility

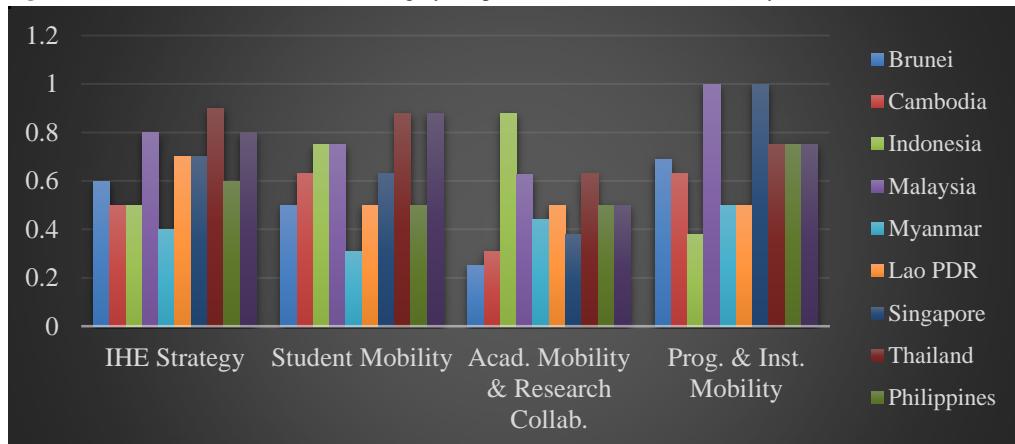
In this study, the openness of higher education systems focused on the government-level of supports and commitment for internationalisation through the inbound and outbound mobility of students, academics, academic programmes and collaborative research (Ilieva and Peak, 2016). The evaluation of openness consists of four sub-categories as below:

1. IHE strategy
2. Student mobility
3. Academic and research mobility
4. Programme and provider mobility

Figure 1 illustrates the overview of the governments' openness and supports for international higher education mobility in all ASEAN countries. As can be seen, the level of openness of most ASEAN countries generally are at a high level. Figure 2 and Table 3 indicates the level of scores for all the ASEAN countries by each sub-category of openness towards internationalisation.

**Figure-1.** Overall score on openness and international mobility for 10 ASEAN countries



**Figure-2.** Overview of scores for each subcategory of openness and international mobility for 10 ASEAN countries**Table-3.** Level of Scores for each subcategory of openness and international mobility for 10 ASEAN countries

Countries	IHE Strategy	Student Mobility	Academic Mobility & Research Collaboration	Programme & Institution Mobility
Brunei	high	<b>very high</b>	low	high
Cambodia	high	high	low	high
Indonesia	high	<b>very high</b>	<b>very high</b>	low
Malaysia	<b>very high</b>	<b>very high</b>	high	<b>very high</b>
Myanmar	low	low	low	low
Lao PDR	high	high	high	low
Singapore	high	high	low	<b>Very high</b>
Thailand	<b>very high</b>	<b>very high</b>	high	<b>very high</b>
Philippines	high	high	high	<b>very high</b>
Vietnam	<b>very high</b>	<b>very high</b>	high	<b>very high</b>

#### 4.2.1.1. Presence of International Education Strategy

First, the level of openness among ASEAN countries was measured in terms of the presence of internationalisation strategies in their national policies. Criteria used to measure this aspect includes:(i) national IHE strategy; (ii) a dedicated body tasked with promotion of IHE; (iii) an overseas presence; (iv) bilateral and multilateral agreements over the past five years; and (v) data collection and monitoring of internationalisation (Ilieva & Peak, 2016). **Table 3** indicated that there is a high level of national governments' commitment for internationalisation as observed in the presence of IHE strategies. It was found that it is possible to locate IHE in the strategic planning framework for HE in the majority of ASEAN countries.

However, the presence of IHE strategies can be observed in contrasting ways, either implicitly or explicitly in the policy statements and national development strategies. There are different drivers behind extending IHE within the region. The internationalisation strategies of higher education systems in the ASEAN nations may also vary by in terms of strategic implementation, aims or focus areas. For instance, in Brunei and Malaysia, the government has played a strong role in grounding the IHE agenda in their broader foreign policy ambitions. In contrast, for Thailand, Indonesia and Philippines, although the presence of IHE strategy is clear in these countries, it is seen more as a means to increase national competitiveness, rather than to achieve specific targets. As for Myanmar which indicates a low level of presence of IHE strategy, it does not imply that the country's government does not support internationalisation policy in their higher education sector. In fact, Myanmar's National Education Strategic Plan [NESP] (2016-21) includes targets related indirectly to internationalisation, such as the need to align with international standards.

In terms of the establishment of relevant bodies to support IHE in ASEAN, there are relevant education ministries who are responsible to take IHE forward in all countries. However, in several countries, there are separate entities within the ministries and even different ministries who are tasked for implementing the IHE strategies.

#### 4.2.1.2. Student Mobility

Secondly, the countries' openness for internationalisation in their higher education sector was measured in terms of student mobility, i.e. through the presence of policies related to inbound and outbound student mobility. The criteria included: (i) student visa policies; (ii) student visa procedures for international students; (iii) living and post-study work environment for international students; and (iv) tuition fees for international students (Ilieva and Peak, 2016).

**Figure 2** and **Table 3** illustrate almost similar patterns of government's support for student mobility in ASEAN as of the IHE strategies. There has been a high level of government's openness for student mobility in most of the ASEAN countries, with five of the countries scored in the very high level. This finding supported the results obtained in the previous report (Ilieva and Peak, 2016), stating that student mobility was 'the key component of most countries' national strategies. The study also found that there have been concerted efforts to streamline visa

procedures across the ASEAN region. As an example, in Indonesia, improvements have been made since 2016 to streamline the student visa process by integrating it with online application for temporary visas. However, the implementation of procedures related to students' visa may still vary according to the country's administrative process whereby the process can be quite lengthy and bureaucratic in some other countries.

Nevertheless, student mobility is also an aspect that is closely associated with broader social and political contexts, especially in Asian. Thus, countries with commonality in their political regimes have a distinctive view that shapes the policy on student mobility. As can be seen from the results, Myanmar still scored low in this aspect because there is only a small number of international student enrolments in this country. However, with the government's recent openness to international partnership, the country is now bolstering the procedures to promote student mobility as a part of a broader process towards its economic growth.

#### **4.2.1.3. Academic Mobility and Research Collaboration**

The third sub-category measuring the governments' level of openness on IHE was pertaining to the presence of policies related to academic mobility and the supports for international research collaboration and academic. This aspect was measured based on the following criteria: (i) streamlined academic visas; (ii) visa procedures for academics; (iii) the living and working environment for academics; and (iv) the inclusion of international research in national research assessment for the purpose of funding ([Ilieva and Peak, 2016](#)).

As observed from data in [Table 3](#), majority of the ASEAN countries scored highly in the internationalisation of academic mobility and research collaboration. Thus, it can be said that the ASEAN nations are now moving towards establishing international partnership through academic and research. Several pro-active approaches have been taken to foster research collaborations regionally and internationally. For instance, the National Foundation for Science and Technology Development ([NAFOSTED](#)) in Vietnam which provides funds for basic research carried out by Vietnamese Universities in various fields of study focuses strongly to support international engagement of both institutions and researchers through activities and programmes, such as to host and participate in international conferences and training abroad ([NAFOSTED, 2018](#)).

In terms of research assessment, although IHE was not widely featured in the national research assessment reviews and some countries do not have own national monitoring system for research in place, most of the countries consider international research as one of the key performance indexes (KPIs) for their higher education system. The Indonesian government has set a good example of policy action for research assessment whereby a greater weight is allocated on academics publishing in international journals as compared to domestically published ones. This kind of government-level support is potentially replicable across the ASEAN region.

However, in line with the previous report ([Ilieva and Peak, 2016](#)), this study also found a paucity of research evidence showing the national policies' high level of support for inbound academic mobility through preferential visa policies or working opportunities in the ASEAN region. It is still challenging for foreign teaching faculty and researchers to gain employment in most ASEAN countries. Although the visa procedures are clear and transparent in most countries, there is currently no specific policy or initiative to improve internationalisation in terms of inbound academic mobility, particularly concerning employment and family. It appears that the regulatory aspects for inbound academic mobility in ASEAN is an area which still needs to be streamlined. On the contrary, the majority of countries have some form of programmes in place to enhance outbound academic mobility, or in the case of Myanmar, are working towards improvement in that area ([Sharma, 2018](#)).

#### **4.2.1.4. Programme and Institutional Mobility**

This third sub-category of openness studies the presence of policies on institutional and programme mobility. It was measured by the following criteria: (i) scope for foreign education institutions to set up teaching and research entities; (ii) provision of cross border programmes; (iii) clarity and application of regulations for foreign institutions; and (iv) scope for domestic HEIs to set up independent teaching and research entities overseas ([Ilieva and Peak, 2016](#)).

This study found a significant difference between the countries in terms of the national policies' supports for programme and institutional mobility. Five of the ASEAN countries are notably at a very high level at this area, while some of the others are still at a low level. For instance, while Malaysia and Singapore especially are global leaders in terms of domestic international provision, it is at very early stages of development in Myanmar and Laos.

In most countries, there are regulations in place for the provision of cross-border programmes by foreign providers, such as through twinning, programme articulations and distance learning. Yet, domestic partnership is essential for the countries to establish international linkage with foreign higher education providers. The establishment of foreign institutions in this region often requires formal collaboration with domestic provider in the countries. In Myanmar, the universities are not autonomous and formal approval from relevant ministries are still required for foreign HEIs to establish international partnerships. Meanwhile, In Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore, the creation of any new foreign entities is regulated under private higher education laws.

Local knowledge is also important for the foreign programme and institutional mobility in ASEAN. In Indonesia, the Law of Higher Education do not explicitly provide the guidelines the regulatory landscape for foreign institution, thus it is difficult to navigate without expert knowledge and advice on the ground. In Philippines, the transnational education sector is highly regulated, therefore local knowledge and experience are helpful in navigating the policy framework.

Other than that, the setting up of domestic HEIs abroad are not happening much by several Southeast Asian countries. No evidence was found in Indonesia with regard to legislative provision allowing for local public

institutions to set up branch campuses or research entities overseas. While in Brunei, public HEIs run independently with their own council and boards, and formalised agreement is available for the setting up of domestic campuses abroad.

#### 4.2.2. Quality Assurance and International Qualifications of Higher Education Provision

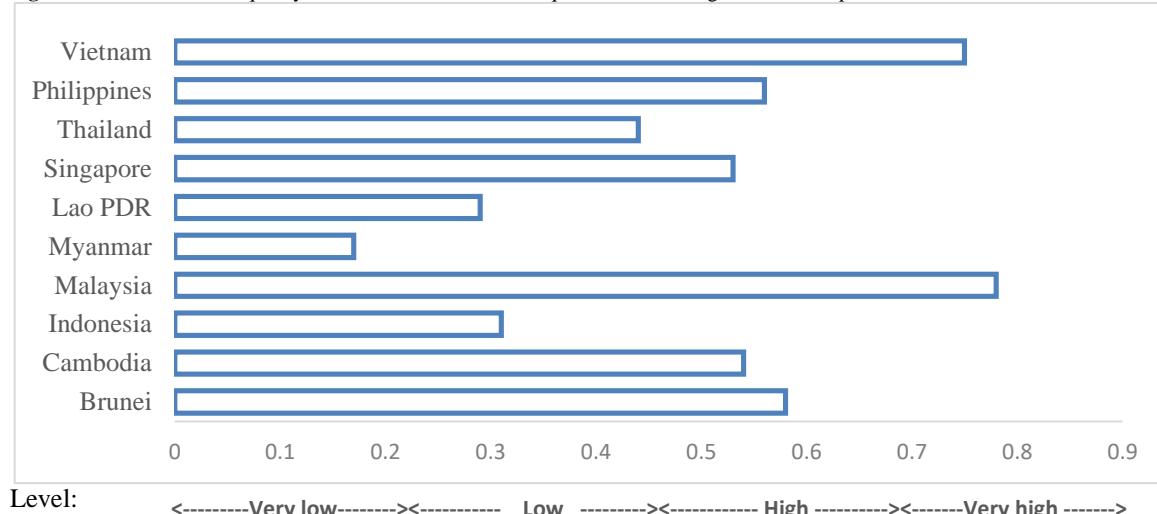
This category in the National Policies Framework studies the regulatory environment and its relationship to IHE strategies in the countries. The sub-categories include:

1. Quality assurance of international students.
2. Quality assurance of programme and provider mobility.
3. Recognition of international qualifications.

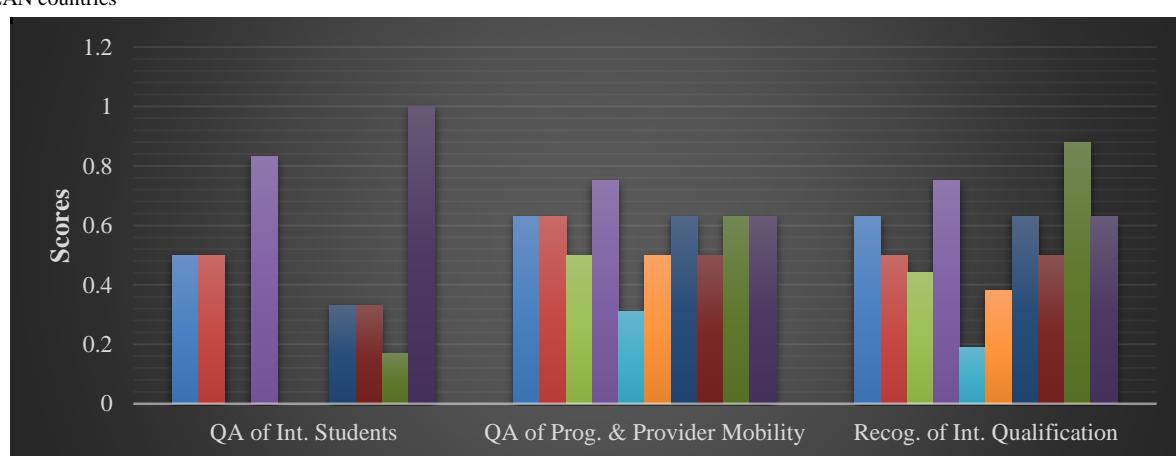
**Figure 3** illustrates the overview of the governments' supports and commitment for quality assurance and international qualification of higher education provision in all ASEAN countries. As can be seen, there is a great variation between countries in this area. While some countries are doing proactively in terms of the regulatory environment for quality assurance and international qualifications of higher education provision, some others are found to be at the low level. Therefore, it can be said the extent to which the structure of quality assurance is tailored for IHE provision is quite diverse in this region. This finding supports the main finding in the previous report, whereby the countries with a significant amount of transnational activity have better developed approaches in this regard as compared to those who are not.

**Figure 4** and **Table 4** indicates the level of scores for all the ASEAN countries by each sub-category of quality assurance and international qualification for higher education provision.

**Figure 3.** Overall score on quality assurance and international qualifications of higher education provision in 10 ASEAN countries



**Figure 4.** Overview of scores for each subcategory of quality assurance and international qualifications of higher education provision in 10 ASEAN countries



**Table 4.** Level of scores for each subcategory of quality assurance and international qualifications of higher education provision in ASEAN countries

	QA International Students	of	QA of Programme & Provider Mobility	Recognition of International Qualification
<b>Brunei</b>	high		high	high
<b>Cambodia</b>	high		high	high
<b>Indonesia</b>	very low		high	low
<b>Malaysia</b>	<b>very high</b>		<b>very high</b>	<b>very high</b>

<b>Myanmar</b>	very low	low	very low
<b>Lao PDR</b>	very low	high	low
<b>Singapore</b>	very low	high	high
<b>Thailand</b>	low	high	high
<b>Philippines</b>	very low	high	<b>very high</b>
<b>Vietnam</b>	<b>very high</b>	high	high

#### 4.2.2.1. Quality Assurance of International Students

This sub-category of quality assurance was measured through the following criteria: (i) entry and selection criteria for international students; (ii) code of practice for teaching and assessing international students; and (iii) policies and guidelines for engaging with recruitment agents (Ilieva and Peak, 2016).

It was observed from [Table 4](#) that there is a significant gap between the ASEAN countries in terms of the quality assurance practices regarding international students. In several countries, there are established national recognition bodies or agencies to provide information, support, and guidance for the HEIs in selecting qualified foreign students for entry. For instance, the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) has published a list of qualifications equivalencies across different countries and a large part the applications of foreign students are managed by Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS). Yet, in some other countries, the quality assurance procedures and processes related to international students are managed by individual HEIs and guidelines for international students' enrolment are available at institutional level, rather than at the broader national level. In Brunei, much of the work on foreign student entry is being undertaken at the level of HEIs themselves in developing their own policies, rather than at the sector wide level. Such contrasts also exist when examining quality assurance for teaching and assessment. In some countries, there are specific guidelines or framework developed for international student assessment, but there is a lack of such system in other countries. Nevertheless, the majority of countries in ASEAN are now developing their overall QA frameworks and significant attempts have been made to improve the quality framework of international students.

#### 4.2.2.2. Quality Assurance of Program and Provider Mobility

This sub-category on the quality assurance of programme and provider mobility was measured through the following indicators: (i) monitoring of foreign institutions; (ii) monitoring of domestic institutions overseas; (iii) enforcement action; and (iv) collaboration with regional and international quality assurance agencies (Ilieva and Peak, 2016).

As can be seen from [Table 4](#), most of the ASEAN countries are at the high level in this aspect. All ASEAN countries already have, or moving towards the development of significant inbound transnational education (TNE) in order to build up their higher education system. There are established national bodies or agencies and quality assurance framework for the recognition of foreign programmes and institutions in some countries, while others are implementing own national quality assurance regulations to monitor both local and foreign providers in general.

Most of the ASEAN countries are also actively taking part in international collaboration on quality assurance standards through both regional and international networks, either through their national quality agencies or the ministries. Myanmar, for instance, has become a member of several international quality assurance networks, such as Asia-Pacific Quality Network, the ASEAN QA Network (AQAN), the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific organisation, the ASEAN University Network and the Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning. Singapore is also a participant in AQAN and three of its main institutions participate in the ASEAN University Network - Quality Assurance (AUN-QA).

However, there is still a gap in terms of the setting up of specific regulation to monitor the quality of foreign programmes and institutions. The ASEAN nations are either having the regulatory system in place for monitoring the accreditation and quality assurance of foreign programmes' and institutional mobility, or are still in the process of developing the regulatory infrastructure of such system. There are certain challenges to develop the quality assurance infrastructure in some countries. In Vietnam, tighter regulatory framework has led to closure of TNE programmes in the country because of irregularities. In Myanmar, there is currently no unifying national qualifications framework for its higher education sector, although the government has developed a two-stage plan for developing the system in the country.

#### 4.2.2.3. Recognition of International Qualifications

This sub-category of quality assurance considers the following criteria for studying the local government's support for the recognition of international qualification: (i) foreign degree recognition; (ii) recognition of TNE qualifications; (iii) communication with the labour market; and (iv) collaboration with regional and international recognition agencies (Ilieva and Peak, 2016).

As observed from [Table 4](#), majority of the ASEAN countries scored highly in this aspect. This is consistent with the previous finding on the countries' openness for foreign collaboration, whereby there is evidence of efforts among the ASEAN countries in ensuring the transparency and consistency of foreign qualifications. Although the recognition of TNE qualifications is considerably not as advanced as that of foreign qualifications, significant work is currently being undertaken for improvement in this area across the region. For instance, in Malaysia, the MQA has developed a Malaysian Qualification Framework (MQF) that classifies qualifications based on a set of criteria that are approved nationally and benchmarked against international best practices. In Singapore, although there is no

central authority to assess or grant recognition for degrees obtained from overseas institutions, individual institutions and bodies administer their own recognition.

There is also extensive collaboration among the countries with regional and international QA agencies. In many countries, the national academic recognition bodies or ministries are taking an active part in attempts to improve recognition procedures across borders.

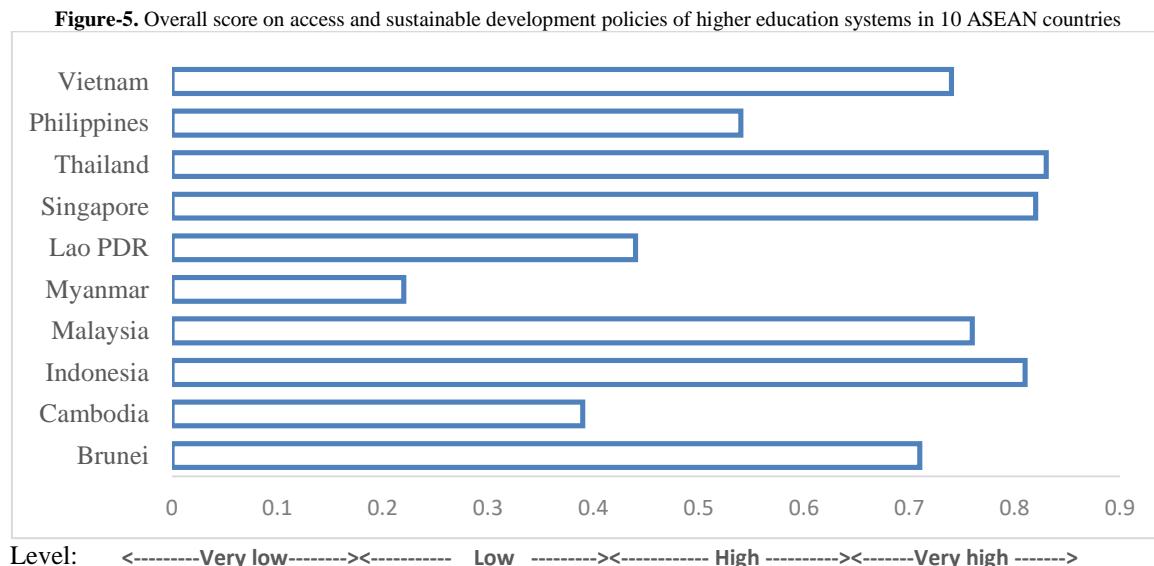
However, all the ASEAN countries scored less in terms of the provision of information to the labour market and other professional bodies on the comparability of foreign and TNE qualifications. This could be due to the lack of coordination and proper communication link to synchronise information between ministries or relevant agencies with the industries in the countries.

#### 4.2.3. Access and Sustainable Development Policies of Higher Education Systems

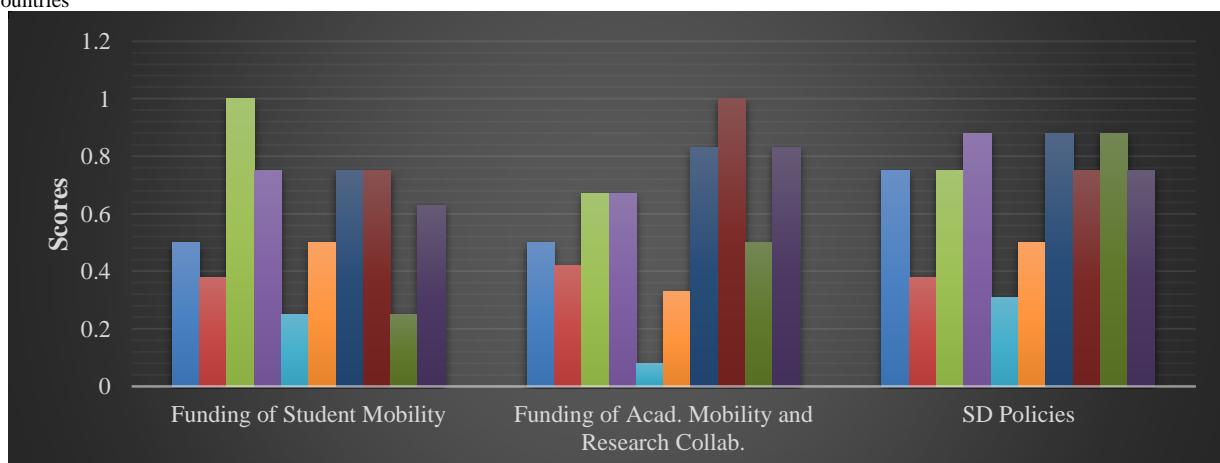
The third category in the National Policies Framework measures the governments' support for access and sustainable development policies of higher education systems in the ASEAN countries. The sub-categories include:

1. Funding of inbound and outbound student mobility
2. Funding of inbound and outbound academic mobility and international research collaborations.
3. Sustainable development policies

**Figure 5** illustrates the overview of the governments' supports and commitment for access and sustainable development policies of higher education systems in all ASEAN countries. As can be seen, there is also a significant gap in the extent of national policies' focus across the region with regard to this theme. While six of the countries scored highly in the general aspect of access and sustainability, some others scored low. This could be due to the large variation in the economic strength across ASEAN and this may shape how the government in each country engage their policies and practices with this aspect of IHE. **Figure 6** and **Table 5** indicates the level of scores for all the ASEAN countries by each sub-category of access and sustainable development policies of higher education systems.



**Figure-6.** Overview of scores for each subcategory of access and sustainable development policies of higher education systems in 10 ASEAN countries



**Table-5.** Level of scores for each subcategory of access and sustainable development policies of higher education systems in ASEAN countries

Countries	Funding of Student Mobility	Funding of Academic Mobility and Research Collaboration	Sustainable Development Policies
<b>Brunei</b>	high	high	<b>very high</b>
<b>Cambodia</b>	low	low	low
<b>Indonesia</b>	<b>very high</b>	high	<b>very high</b>
<b>Malaysia</b>	<b>very high</b>	high	<b>very high</b>
<b>Myanmar</b>	low	very low	low
<b>Lao PDR</b>	high	low	high
<b>Singapore</b>	<b>very high</b>	<b>very high</b>	<b>very high</b>
<b>Thailand</b>	<b>very high</b>	<b>very high</b>	<b>very high</b>
<b>Philippines</b>	low	high	<b>very high</b>
<b>Vietnam</b>	high	<b>very high</b>	<b>very high</b>

#### 4.2.3.1. Funding of Student Mobility

This sub-category on funding of both inbound and outbound student mobility considers the following criteria: (i) outbound scholarships and student loans for study abroad; and (ii) inbound scholarships or loans for international students.

**Table 5** reveals that a majority of the ASEAN countries scored high in this aspect, implying that the national policies in ASEAN generally include the supports for the funding of student mobility. Despite their varying stages of progress in their IHE work, all ASEAN nations were found to have some forms of financial supports for both outbound and inbound student mobility, either through the government, private, or foreign bodies.

In terms of outbound student mobility, various study abroad scholarship programmes are available to local students in the countries, although the funding varies greatly in size and extent due to the economic strength of the countries. In Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam, the governments have been proactive in allocating funds to support local students for study abroad programmes. Meanwhile, Brunei has a system of scholarships for local undergraduate and postgraduate students to study at universities overseas, with priority given to programmes that are not available locally. On the other hand, for the other countries where the government has less funding for the education sector, foreign bodies and institutions play a bigger role in offering the aid for local students to study abroad.

However, the funding support for in terms of inbound student mobility is less widespread in the ASEAN countries. The ones which exist tend to focus more on students from other ASEAN nations, rather than outside the region. Singapore is very supportive in this aspect, whereby the ministry provides scholarships for ASEAN and Indian nationals to study at Singaporean institutions. Other than that, the role of international partners is important to enable inbound mobility.

#### 4.2.3.2. Funding of Academic Mobility and Research Collaborations

This sub-category on the national policies' support for the funding of academic mobility and research collaboration was measured through the following criteria: (i) outbound academic programmes; (ii) inbound academic programmes; and (iii) funding of international research collaboration ([Ilieva and Peak, 2016](#)).

As seen from **Table 5**, while majority of the ASEAN countries scored high on this aspect, some other countries were at the low level. Again, the level of governments' support for the funding of academic mobility and research collaboration depends on the economic strength and resources in each country. Although the funding support for outbound academic programmes varies over the region, there is a desire and effort among the ASEAN nations to improve the academic capacity of the domestic HE system. The majority of countries either have some form of abroad programmes in place for local academics, or are working towards the efforts through international partnership. Thailand has one of the best known training programmes for academics, i.e. the Royal Golden Jubilee Ph.D. Program, which funds scholars to pursue PhD studies in Thailand and overseas. In Cambodia, the ministry has sent a group of locals to do their short courses, master and doctoral degrees in Australia and Malaysia under the World Bank Project.

However, there is less activity evidence for the national policies' funding supports for inbound academic mobility and research collaboration, due to the economic capability of the countries. Despite the limitation in this aspect, there is a willingness among the countries to establish in this area through international research collaboration. Although the national-level inbound academic mobility programmes are not in place in most of the ASEAN countries, there are examples of partnerships with external funding bodies to enable this area of work. As an example, Vietnam is an active participant in bilateral research agreements where there is a two-way flow of academics and researchers (e.g. the MoU between NAFOSTED and the British Academy).

#### 4.2.3.3. Sustainable Development Policies

The third criteria on access and sustainable development policies was measured through the following criteria: (i) anti-displacement policies; (ii) anti 'brain drain' policies; (iii) aid to developing countries and regions; and (iv) foreign language and intercultural competence policies ([Ilieva and Peak, 2016](#)).

As can be seen from **Table 5**, most ASEAN countries scored high in the area of sustainable development policies, although the policy areas in certain aspects are distinctive in each country. In the aspect of the displacement

of low-income or marginalised domestic students by foreign students, there appears to be no significant issues in this region, except for Singapore who has a political issue on this matter. This is due to the relatively low number of international students in many countries as compared to local students. As such, displacement of local students by international students is not an issue. Across the region, there is evidence of policies to support equitable access from other under-represented groups of local students. For instance, Indonesia's Higher Education Law stipulates that a fifth of the country's student population should come from the lowest socio-economic groups, and there are designated scholarships for this group.

As for the language and cultural sustainability aspect, the governments have been putting efforts to promote second language competence and intercultural awareness. Foreign language competence, particularly English, is perceived as important for the economic and social development in each country. Hence, efforts are underway to extend bilingual provision among the citizen. For instance, the Brunei-U.S. English-Language Enrichment Programme for ASEAN was initiated between Brunei and the US, aiming to strengthen ASEAN integration through building English language capacity, promoting greater awareness of the rich cultural diversity, and facilitating communication between teacher trainers, officers, and diplomats of the region.

Yet, 'brain drain' appears to be a common issue across the ASEAN region, including in Malaysia, Cambodia, Brunei, Indonesia and the Philippines. Nevertheless, there has been some efforts by several countries to counter this aspect. As an example, Malaysia has established TalentCorp which manages the Returning Expert Programme, which is a scheme offering attractive living and financial incentives to support the creation of the 'right setting' for returning Malaysians wishing to settle back in the country. The Brunei's government prepared a legal action against government-funded students who refuse to come home after completing their studies abroad.

Regarding the governments' role in engaging in development projects for capacity-building in developing nations, the economic factor again appears to be an issue. While some countries are developing their roles as donor countries in terms of financial and technical assistance, the others are more of the beneficiaries of such support.

## 5. Discussion

There are 5 key findings emerging from this study and they are described below.

### 5.1. IHE Policy Commitments are Prominent in ASEAN Countries

In the majority of ASEAN nations there are not separate IHE policy documents, rather there are commitments to IHE embedded within wider educational strategies. Crucially, there is also evidence of links between IHE and broader social and political objectives.

In Malaysia, for instance, the recent policy initiatives by the government of becoming a hub for international education, the HEIs have undergone significant transformation in their role and function, i.e. "from educating the elites and producing civil servants and professionals, to fostering nation-building and readdressing equity in societies". The Brunei's government also has implemented the Education Strategy in Brunei Vision 2035 with the objective to make the nation widely recognised for the accomplishment of its educated and highly skilled people as measured by the highest international standards (Grapragasem et al., 2014).

On the other hand, in Thailand, Indonesia and Philippines, although the presence of IHE strategy is clear, it is seen more as a mean to increase national competitiveness, rather than to achieve global target. As for Thailand, the Ministry of Education has formulated the Strategic Plan (2012-2017) and 15-year Long Range Plan on Higher Education (2008-2022) in order to provide citizens with the skills and capabilities necessary in raising national competitiveness. Among the core targets are to enhance higher education and country's competitiveness and to raise awareness of internationalisation and regionalization.

The Philippines' government has also indicated its commitment towards national development through IHE. The Commission of Higher Education (CHED)'s strategic plan 2011-2016 aims at the formation of high-level human resource, and generation, adaptation, and transfer of knowledge and technology for national development and global competitiveness. Philippine Development Plan for 2017-2022 is the first medium-term plan to be anchored on a national long-term vision which represents the collective vision and aspirations of Filipinos for themselves and for the country. Through the current administration, the plan will lay a solid foundation for inclusive growth, a high-trust society, and a globally-competitive knowledge economy by grounding its development thrusts on three pillars, namely care, change, and continued growth.

On the contrary, it was observed that IHE is not explicitly stated in the policy statements for higher education in Singapore. Nevertheless, the country has pursued the internationalisation agenda over a long period of time and the effort is observed in some of its significant accomplishment in higher education sector at both regional and international levels (Daquila, 2013).

As for the CLMV countries, they are shifting towards improving their national higher education systems in order to achieve the international standards. The transformation process focuses on various aspects of higher education, including governance, research capacity, quality assurance and performance management.

### 5.2. Student Mobility is Shaped by Wider Socio-Economic Forces

Student mobility is extremely important in ASEAN, but its extent varies greatly between nations as does the infrastructure to support it. Malaysia and Singapore are in the top 20 countries in the world for incoming international students, with students entering from across the region and outside. It is clear in the study that the mechanics in terms of visa processes to enable student mobility and the higher education institutions who can attract

international students exist in these countries. However, for Cambodia, Vietnam and Lao PDR, the priority is to construct relationships within ASEAN, and with countries with which they share values and customs. It is clear here, as when the landscape regarding international higher education policy above is concerned, that links exist between IHE in this context and a broader process of cultural development as ASEAN seeks to define and identity itself in the early 21st century.

### **5.3. Pan-ASEAN Collaboration is Key – Especially in Quality Assurance**

Distinct differences between countries exist here. Quality assurance where IHE is concerned, is related to the overall challenges systems are facing in developing robust quality assurance mechanisms. Of the different areas examined in the study it appears the one where the greatest amount of explicit international collaboration exists and structures to underpin it. Despite differences in capacity across countries, the exchange of knowledge and practice is relatively prevalent, via the ASEAN Secretariat, South East Asian Ministers Educational Organisation (SEAMEO) and ASEAN Universities Network (AUN) who are actively promoting regional collaboration and alignment in this area. The primary challenge in this regard though, for all countries with the probable exception of Singapore, is the development of quality assurance systems that can enable expansion of their whole system. The constraints associated with limited resources make quality assurance something that has to compete with other priorities.

### **5.4. Addressing ‘Potential Brain Drain’ and Developing Academic Capacity**

There are differences in capacity, size and power across higher education systems per se and this is certainly the case in ASEAN. Over the region there are efforts to enhance the higher education capacity of ASEAN higher education. These efforts are threatened to an extent by academic staff moving abroad and not returning. These issues have also been observed in parts of the world where there are efforts to increase growth in higher education capacities. Anxieties have been identified in other areas of the world where growth of higher education systems is occurring. The liberalisation of visa and other policies to attract other academics into the country to counterbalance the outward mobility may only have limited impact when institutions in the country do not yet have the capacity (or ‘prestige’) to attract such staff. Moreover, the development of capacity and prestige takes time. Hence, the efforts that countries across the region are making to ensure well-qualified nationals return home are evident. With regard to the issue of nationalism and these threats to system development, then a more developed collaborative approach in ASEAN would be beneficial here. The migration of staff from less economically developed to the more developed parts of the region if not properly regulated risks actually fueling not combating nationalistic tendencies.

### **5.5. Commitment to Research Collaboration is High**

The study identified numerous attempts to build research collaboration by ASEAN countries with those outside and within ASEAN. However, the capacity to develop such collaborations is distributed unequally in ASEAN. In the countries of Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines and Singapore specialist agencies exist to further such collaborations, while in the other ASEAN countries, such infrastructures are not yet in place. In all the countries though, that research collaborations tend to be led by larger and older institutions which have the necessary capacity originating from their histories and/or size. Policy appears to enable these universities to play this more leading role with the importance of having one or more world-class universities an idea that has been supported by ASEAN education policymakers, along with the importance of university rankings. This form of approach to IHE has implications for the relationship between IHE and nationalism. Focusing on the development of a small number of universities that will rank highly in particular global ranking systems will come at the expense of the development of international research collaborations across the whole of the higher education system. This approach may support the view held by certain populist politicians that higher education is part of a liberal elite which is not supporting the development of the majority of the population.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that policy approaches to IHE in ASEAN are characterised by diversity as much as commonality. It could be argued however that an ASEAN-centric approach to IHE that is distinctive to the region is developing. The five themes described above form the basis of such an approach. In themselves none are unique, but taken together, they cast ASEAN in its own distinctive light where IHE policy is concerned. They illustrate the extent to which IHE is working in ASEAN to deepen and extend broader social and political links across the region. To an extent therefore it is a force which can work against nationalistic trends. However, within IHE as in HE overall competitive pressures exist and the degree to which certain countries may wish to capture intellectual talent at faculty and student level at the expense of other countries IHE could also exacerbate political division in the region.

### **6.1. Suggestions for Future Research**

There is potential to develop this study to explore the outcomes of the policies described above. The limitations with studies such as this based mainly on assessment of the existence of different policies, is that the impact of these policies is not captured. Such further work may require qualitative research, such as through a series of focus group discussions, and also quantitative work mapping the policies against outputs in the area of IHE in particular concerning for example, the patterns of established memoranda of understanding and bilateral agreements within and outside the region among the ASEAN nations. In order to address these issues work could also include eliciting

inputs from other higher education stakeholders in the ASEAN countries, such as students, academics, and the local community.

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