

HESB

HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND BEYOND

State *of the* Region

THE COMMEMORATIVE
10TH ISSUE

Editor's Message

In this commemorative tenth edition of *Higher Education in Southeast Asia and Beyond* (HESB), we have invited leading researchers and policymakers to share their insights and analysis of the future development of higher education in each of the 11 Southeast Asian countries. Each of their articles is accompanied by a profile of each country by **Zane Kheir**, which takes stock of the state of higher education hitherto in those countries.

Masitah Shahrill and Joanna Yacob look at access to higher education and lifelong learning, and the development of the future workforce in Brunei, in the context of “Wawasan Brunei 2035” (Brunei Vision 2035), the aspirational forefront of the country’s national strategy.

Say Sok and Rinna Bunry consider how Cambodia has no choice but to invest in its most valuable natural resource — its people — and how higher education development holds the key, given the country’s tragic history.

In Indonesia, where many of the objectives and operations of many higher education institutions are spread thinly across different missions, **Satryo Soemantri Brodjonegoro** argues that mission differentiation should provide a better investment plan.

Nanludet Moxom and Richard Noonan note that although quality assurance practices have been helpful for Laos’s Ministry of Education and its higher education institutions, the latter’s quality assurance systems have not been very effective or fully functional.

Morshidi Sirat and Abdul Razak Ahmad argue that Malaysia needs a reset, introducing a framework and trajectory for higher education which is more robust and in tune with regional and global co-existence, exhibiting a high degree of resilience, and with clarity on the role of the state vis-à-vis universities.

While investment into the education sector seeks to promote the development of more autonomous higher education institutions in Myanmar, **Maitrii Aung-Thwin** argues that stakeholders should consider balancing these initiatives by contributing to the development of state educational infrastructure and institutions, thereby ensuring that education reform will be more sustainable as Myanmar continues its multi-sector transformation.

Roger Y. Chao, Jr and Lorraine Pe Symaco envisage Philippine higher education in the next few decades to be increasingly benchmarked

internationally — initially within ASEAN standards but eventually with global standards — with an increasing number of joint programmes and transnational programmes offered and delivered by Philippine higher education institutions.

In the context of the pandemic, **Adrian W. J. Kuah and Katrina Tan** reflect on how the National University of Singapore has seen the opening of more access routes to learning, a greater focus on student engagement and motivation, a higher level of trust and reliance on self-directed learning, and the provision of space and time for students to explore their interests outside the curriculum.

Promptilai Buasuwan argues that the success of higher education institutions in promoting the creative and innovative society of the Thailand 4.0 policy will require socio-cultural and institutional transformation.

The **Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)**, in reflecting on its 20 years of supporting Timor-Leste’s national development, shares how it is helping to nurture human resource to lead the future of the region’s youngest nation, such as through teacher training at the National University of Timor-Leste.

Thanh Pham looks at three important trends that higher education in Vietnam should take into consideration for both short- and long-term development plans — the digitalisation of higher education, how selective it is with “borrowed” values and practices, and how it should actively reach out to the world.

In his overview, **Philip G. Altbach** argues that rather than focusing on elements that unite the region, it is worth reflecting on what divides it, and discusses if there are any points of constructive regional collaboration for higher education.

Finally, this special issue of HESB includes a collection of the latest available data on higher education across the 11 countries of Southeast Asia — on the gross enrolment rate, the number of higher education institutions, tuition fees, higher education spending as a percentage of GDP, and number of foreign students — which will make for a useful reference point for researchers, policymakers and the public alike.

We invite you to consider contributing to future issues and be part of the conversations and debates on higher education in Southeast Asia and beyond.

State of the Region

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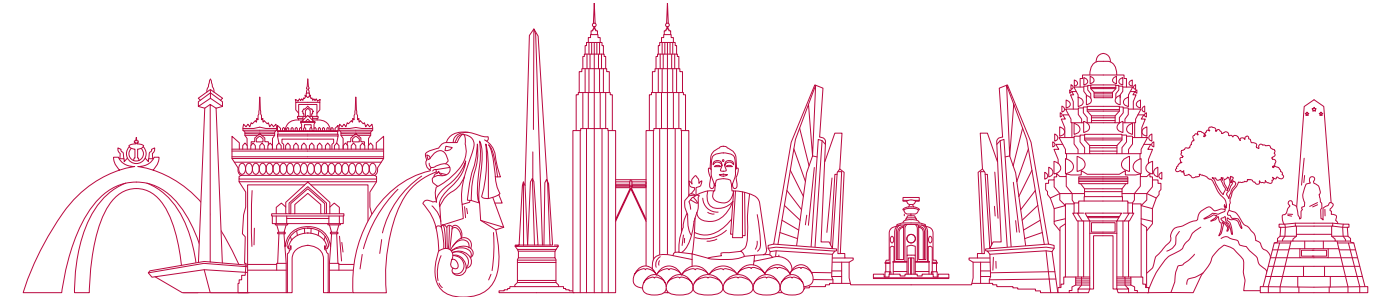
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Looking Back to Look Ahead

An HESB Retrospective



Issue 1

JULY 2016

The inaugural issue of HESB looks at higher education reform in the region, following trends of internationalisation and massification. It also looks at how governance, financing, and university autonomy affect the pace of change in higher education, and how policy makers can make effective change.

Issue 2

JUNE 2017

This issue discusses ASEAN's role in regional integration, the political framework of Southeast Asia, and the higher education initiatives that arise from these frameworks. Further, we look at the evolving cultural mission of elite East Asian universities, and Southeast Asian university governance reforms and autonomy alongside global neo-liberalism.



Issue 3

JANUARY 2018

This issue questions the role of universities and critical thinking in the world today, alongside growing economism in higher education institutions. We discuss lessons learnt from the California Master Plan in higher education, and the state of Hong Kong's higher education landscape 20 years after handover to China.

Issue 4

JULY 2018

This issue discusses internationalisation in higher education in the region and beyond. We dive deep into the varying responses of universities to the growing trend, with some nations pushing back against it as a “neo-liberal agenda of the West”, while others see it as a way to share indigenous knowledge and culture beyond borders.



Issue 5

FEBRUARY 2019

In this issue, we observe the role of leadership and management in higher education, and its quality assurance in the face of massification. We discover how the Tokyo Convention has harmonised different quality assurance systems in higher education. We also delve into the status of higher education in various Southeast Asian nations amidst economic and political transitions and reforms.

Issue 6

SEPTEMBER 2019

In this issue, we feature keynotes from the 6th Global Higher Education Forum. Education hubs in Southeast and West Asia examine the consequences of reforming higher education and research, while Taiwan looks at reforming its higher education governance.





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Issue 7

MARCH 2020

This special issue of HESB features keynotes from the second ASEAN-Australian Dialogue (AAED), which addresses the needs of international education in relation to business and industry. We also look at how universities are incorporating sustainability education into their curriculum and university direction, alongside UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Issue 8

JUNE 2020

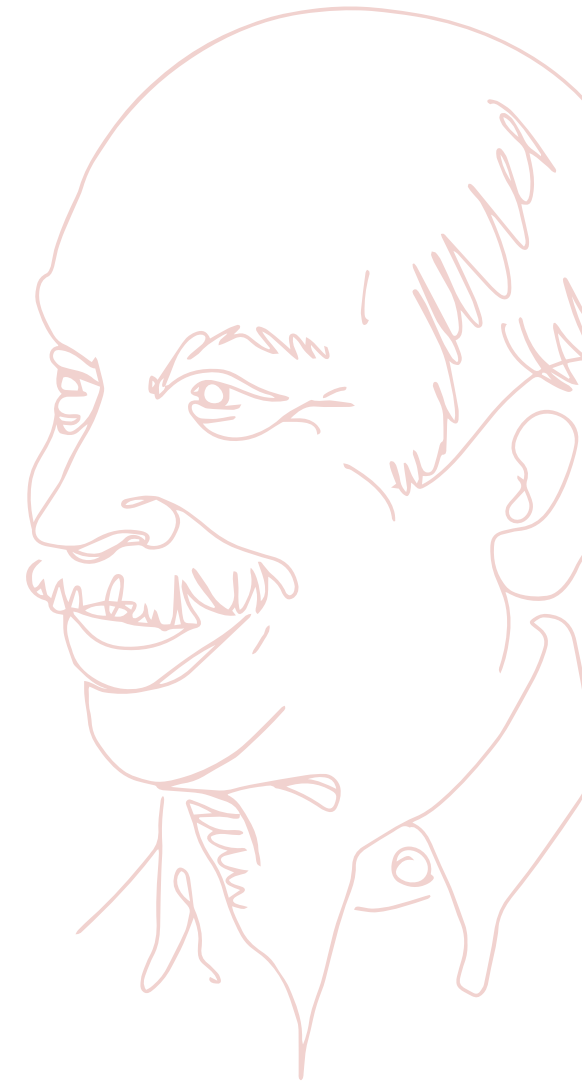
In this special issue, we look at the impact of COVID-19 on higher education institutes, and the long-term implications of their responses, from the adoption of virtual learning and its place in curriculums beyond the pandemic to UNESCO's response to pandemic-exacerbated learning inequality, and how the *bayanihan* spirit in the Philippines helped mobilise school communities during the crisis.



Issue 9

OCTOBER 2020

We focus on regional student mobility in Asia and Southeast Asia, in conjunction with the ASEAN International Mobility for Students Programme (AIMS). It envisions Malaysia as a regional student hub and builds a sustainable exchange platform between Southeast Asia and East Asian countries. We also look to contextualising student mobility programmes within the larger aims of internationalisation in ASEAN higher education.



A Platform for the Future of Southeast Asian Higher Education

The Genesis of HESB

In Conversation with S. Gopinathan

HESB Editor Loke Hoe Yeong (LHY) interviewed Professor S. Gopinathan (SG), Consultant Editor and Founding Editor of HESB, about the role of the publication, university ranking systems, and the fate of higher education in the face of the pandemic, in Singapore and Southeast Asia.

LHY: What spurred you on to start HESB, and what did you envision it to be?

SG: Two things, I think. Firstly, there was a model of a publication, which Professor Philip Altbach and the Center for International Higher Education (CIHE) at Boston College had been doing, which I was familiar with — the *International Higher Education (IHE)* journal. It was a publication intended to serve the international higher education community and to provide a source of ideas, and a platform for networking. CIHE continues to be our partner for HESB. Secondly, I was also aware that in most Southeast Asian countries, K-12 education had reached a stage of reasonable maturity. This is not to say there are no more issues around access, equity, quality, and so on. But by and large, primary, high school, and even some post-secondary education were already available in all these countries. In my view, the next stage of development was likely to be in higher education, and in particular, universities.

When I joined The HEAD Foundation, I was thinking, “How could The HEAD Foundation be of use to a new generation of scholars, who are building up higher education systems in their own countries? What were the policy and practice implications? What would be a good platform for sharing best practices?” We

concluded that a publication similar to IHE was the answer, especially since there were no such publications available in Southeast Asia, as far as we were aware.

LHY: *Since your PhD, you have built an academic career as a leading expert on Singapore's K-12 education policies. It would appear the project of starting HESB was a return to your first love of research on higher education. What drew you to do research on higher education all those years ago?*

SG: To tell you the truth, and this is a very prosaic answer — it wasn't as if I woke up in the middle of the night with an epiphany. After several years of teaching at the Institute of Education, I decided that I should do a doctorate. Philip Altbach offered me an opportunity to go to SUNY Buffalo [State University of New York at Buffalo] to study with him. And my initial connection with Philip was not through the academic study of higher education but through the book publishing industry.

In my early days as a book editor with the Oxford University Press in Singapore, I had written in the *Bookseller*, a British book publishing journal, about an inaugural series of bookfairs in Singapore. Libraries and bookshops were not widespread at that time. Philip read it and invited me to contribute a chapter on book publishing in Singapore, to his edited volume, *Publishing in the Third World*.

When I decided to do my PhD, I chose to go to America as I was already familiar with the British academic tradition. I then remembered Philip and asked him for some advice. He said, "What advice? Come to Buffalo!" I didn't know anything much about Buffalo at that time, but they had a fantastic education department, where I was exposed to critical discourses about education — which I did not encounter during my Masters in Singapore. And so, as they say, the rest is history. Philip was very interested in the centre-periphery model [from dependency theories in academia] — in terms of what constituted inequality in knowledge production and knowledge distribution around the world. Because the major publishing houses,

universities, and libraries were all in the Western world. We are talking here about the 1970s, when he came up with this concept of the inequities in knowledge production.

I am probably the first person in Singapore to have done a doctorate in comparative higher education. I did a comparative study between the then University of Singapore and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) — the former a British-style colonial university, the latter a Malay-medium national university that was established as a response of sorts to the University of Malaya (which was the colonial university of the time). A fundamental difference between the two universities was that University of Singapore was an English medium university and UKM was a Malay medium university.

LHY: *That was the 1970s, when Singapore had two universities, which were then merged into one. What are your reflections on the development of higher education in Singapore ever since?*

SG: In the 1960s, with regard to K-12 education, one major policy dilemma was: what should Singapore do with the medium of instruction in a differentiated system of education, the latter a colonial legacy? Singapore then had Chinese-medium schools, Malay-medium schools, Tamil-medium schools, and of course English-medium schools. The country later opted, controversially, for a national public system of education, in which English would be the medium of instruction. And so the language issue was fundamental in thinking about education policy, including medium of instruction issues at the university level.

In the 1970s, as industrialisation and economic growth gained pace in Singapore, the government became aware that the best students were going to English-medium education institutions. The Chinese-medium Nanyang University was in danger of not getting the best students. The government argued that if this trend continued, then Nanyang University was not going to be viable; that, if Singapore was going to survive at all, it was going to survive in terms of quality. Nanyang was a

private university, but it couldn't be allowed to die because the government would then be accused of trying to destroy Chinese-medium education. The government policy response was for Nanyang University to be converted into NTI [Nanyang Technological Institute] in the first instance, and then NTU [Nanyang Technological University].

So issues about language, identity and competing educational traditions were all, and continue to be, part of my thinking and research in terms of education policy. In a sense, my work at The HEAD Foundation now is the culmination of my early work on higher education.

LHY: *Interesting that you mentioned the issue of the medium of instruction. Fast forward to today, let's look at Southeast Asia more broadly. Obviously, the language issue has become very important for higher education in the past 10 to 20 years, perhaps due more to globalisation with the use of English in university classrooms. HESB, as an English language publication, is seeking to be the platform for higher education practitioners and researchers in the region to have dialogue lines in English. What are your comments in regard to this?*

SG: The medium of instruction issue in education in Singapore was resolved a long time ago. But it is still an issue of tension in many other Southeast Asian countries. I think the tension between national and international continues to preoccupy many policy makers. In the drive to establish universities as key national institutions, national languages had to become the main medium of instruction. But countries also wanted these institutions to be recognised internationally. Because the question was: how would these academics in, say, Vietnam, or Thailand, or Laos, communicate with the international academic community, if only a few in those universities spoke English?

So I see the emergence of many institutions where the faculty are bilingual. We can look at Malaysia, for example, which probably has the best example of a top-tier set of institutions, where large numbers of the faculty are bilingual. So in a sense, HESB as

an English language publication isn't attempting to meet the needs of all university faculty in the Southeast Asia region and beyond. It is able to say, in so far as language is not an obstacle for certain types of faculty, that its publication would be both relevant and useful.

Nevertheless, my wish further down the line would be for some of HESB's articles to be translated into, say, Vietnamese or Thai, and have two issues of that per year. I still feel that these languages, which are very much a part of the linguistic culture of these countries, must have enough materials in their national languages. I don't foresee a time soon when everything would be in English, and that everybody would be able to access it in English. But I think HESB, as it stands, is really just the first cut of what we are trying to achieve.

I think institutions such as The HEAD Foundation have a role to play in providing access to information, insights and best practices, and making them as universally available as possible.

“ I would think that earlier steps would be faculty exchange, or joint research. If, for example, there is a Southeast Asia-wide consensus that climate change and rising sea levels are going to be major challenges, then how could that be an opportunity for curriculum and/or research collaboration? ”

LHY: *In discussing Southeast Asia and issues of regional integration, what comes to mind is the European Union's Erasmus programme of student exchange. Do you think that is ultimately the model that Southeast Asia should emulate?*

SG: We are a long way away from that. I think the Erasmus programme provides a model of what is possible. But then when we talk about regional integration today, Britain has already left the EU. Euroscepticism in countries, such as Poland, is growing. There is tension and friction, and I'm not sure Southeast Asia even has the same degree of solidarity and common purpose as the EU. I think there are a lot of issues to work out. More bilateral exchanges may be a first step, perhaps.

I'm still perhaps the only person in NIE's history [National Institute of Education, Singapore] to have done fieldwork in a Southeast Asian country for a doctorate. This is in part because of the preoccupation today with university rankings, which drive the patterns in research collaboration. If you said in your CV that you obtained your PhD or a research grant from, say, Oxford University or Teacher's College at Columbia University, that counts for more than, say, a more modest research grant from a university in Southeast Asia, unfortunately.

Now, if there isn't enough collaboration between Southeast Asia universities at the level of joint research, faculty exchanges and sabbaticals, are we even able to talk about the mutual recognition of qualifications?

LHY: *I want to pick up on your point of faculty exchanges and student exchanges in the context of COVID-19 a bit later, but first — university ranking league tables. This is, of course, a major preoccupation today. It is an affliction for some, or a marker of progress and prestige for others, depending on whom you speak to. And here, I'm thinking of their impact on Southeast Asia, where some national systems are just not well-equipped to deal with the kind of pressure. Even Russia, a former superpower with universities that excel in scientific*

research, has not performed well in the ranking tables — to a very large extent because the Soviet legacy of university and faculty structures is simply just so different from the Anglo-Saxon university model, which the ranking tables favour. How do you get the kind of citation numbers if you're not even writing in English? Do you think this is going to be a huge problem for Southeast Asia as a whole, in terms of university rankings?

SG: Yes, I think so. As I noted earlier, I believe that countries in Southeast Asia have to come to a greater consensus around what it means to be a part of this region, and the core principles of state behaviour within this region.

There is tremendous diversity within this region, in terms of political histories and structures, size and complexity of education systems, including media of instruction, variety of post-secondary institutions and so on.

So, the question then would be, is it sensible, wise, feasible to think in terms of a Southeast Asian Erasmus where there is a mutual recognition of qualifications? I would think that earlier steps would be faculty exchange, or joint research. If, for example, there is a Southeast Asia-wide consensus that climate change and rising sea levels are going to be major challenges, then how could that be an opportunity for curriculum and/or research collaboration? So my wish would be for greater faculty exchange and for joint research around a certain set of commonalities.

Another area could be the emergence of the digital economy and what this could mean for countries — who's doing the thinking collectively around, not just what Singapore does as a digital nation, but also what lessons there might be for countries like Cambodia or Brunei.

What we need to do is build greater connectivity between ISEAS-like institutions and greater efforts on the part of ASAIHL [the Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning], RIHED [SEAMEO Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development], and so on.

“ So I think the relationships between public and private universities will change. If private universities are not financially viable, what happens to the students still in the middle of their courses?

LHY: *There are two more themes I wanted to cover, which have emerged in the past nine issues of HESB. Student mobility and faculty mobility in the context of COVID-19 now face huge challenges. Obviously, the digital solution shouldn't supersede the whole face-to-face, classroom experience. But also in a region such as Southeast Asia, greater technology utilisation is inevitable. Yet it is likely that the use of technology will only accentuate the disparities and inequalities across the region, especially within some larger countries. What's the roadmap here for technology use for the next five years for Southeast Asian higher education?*

SG: Singapore universities will have to figure out what the true strengths and weaknesses of online learning are. How do we begin to understand what is lost in online learning, which we take for granted in the face-to-face classroom experience? But then, when you have 400 students in an auditorium and one lecturer in front of them, can we really say that is the true nature of learning? That's not the Oxbridge style of tutorials, for sure — that is mass higher education!

Given that Singapore receives many foreign students, it could be more severely impacted than Laos or Cambodia. Singapore's universities had to scramble to create many more places for Singaporean students unable to travel to attend overseas universities. So in general, I think it's hard to predict what will happen. Universities are going to be chasing a moving target. And it will require a lot of contingency planning and flexibility.

LHY: *The final theme I wanted to discuss — the role of private higher education and foreign branch campuses. What's their future looking like right now, given the COVID-19 situation?*

SG: Private universities are going to be under tremendous stress, because the ability of students and their families to pay tuition fees is being compromised. A lot of students can't afford to pay tuition fees because of the declining economy. And in the UK, there's going to be huge consequences for British universities, because if they don't get EU students, and the domestic economy is declining, they are going to be in severe financial difficulties. And not just students. Faculty positions will be in jeopardy and funding for research may also decline.

So I think the relationships between public and private universities will change. If private universities are not financially viable, what happens to the students still in the middle of their courses? Are they going to transfer to the public universities perhaps? Is the state then able to expand the places in public universities? But state budgets will also suffer; if there is a decline in national economic growth, education budgets are going to shrink.

It's not quite a bitter winter for universities, though certainly not a spring or a summer for them either. The pandemic has brought on much reflection on the role of the state in these challenging times, and higher education has surely got to be part of this strategic, major rethink.

Brunei Darussalam

ZANE KHEIR

Brunei Darussalam, its name meaning “Brunei, the abode of peace”, is ASEAN’s smallest country in terms of population, with only 429,000 people in 2018, and second smallest in terms of landmass after Singapore. Brunei is an Islamic monarchy ruled by Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah who has absolute authority over the country’s institutions. Brunei was granted full independence from its status as a British protectorate in 1984. It was once a formidable empire that dominated the entirety of Borneo as a Malay sultanate with connections to the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra and the Philippines, but contracted following the expansion of European colonialism. Wedged between the Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak on the north of Borneo, Brunei’s demographics and language environment are similar to neighbouring Malaysia’s, with Malay and English being the dominant languages, with the exception that Malay written in the Jawi script still enjoys institutional recognition in Brunei. Culture in Brunei has a long history of influence from the Malay Peninsula, which is also true of its history in the field of education, where it often looks to Malaysia and Singapore as role models and as sources from which to import educational resources.¹

Brunei’s small population enjoys one of the highest standards of living in Asia and the world, with a GDP per capita of USD64,673, no income tax and full subsidy for higher education. Brunei’s economic prosperity is mostly attributed to its plentiful gas and oil reserves, exports of which totalled USD5.116 billion in 2017.² Its energy industry has also been a major provider of jobs for university graduates as well as opportunities for foreign direct investment.

Brunei’s higher education system is relatively small, with five public and two private higher education institutions (HEIs). Its flagship university,

¹ Geoffrey C. Gunn, *Language, Power and Ideology in Brunei Darussalam* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1997).

² “Brunei Energy”, Export.gov, last modified July 12, 2019, <https://www.export.gov/apex/article2?id=Brunei-energy>.

the University of Brunei Darussalam (UBD) was established in 1985 soon after independence. As of 2017, Brunei’s total enrolment was 12,135 students, a majority of whom were female, at 59%.³ UBD is by far the largest HEI in the country and enrolls approximately half of the country’s university students. All schools and HEIs in Brunei are required to abide by its bilingual language policy of instruction in English and Bahasa Melayu (the standard Malay from Peninsular Malaysia, not the Brunei dialect). All HEIs are overseen by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and Ministry of Religious Affairs, as several HEIs are either religious universities or maintain religious curricula (e.g., Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University). All universities and TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) institutions are respectively required to be accredited by the Brunei Darussalam National Accreditation Council (BDNAC) and the Brunei Darussalam Technical and Vocational Education Council (BDTVEC).⁴

One of the key features of Brunei’s higher education system, along with its primary and secondary system, is that the Bruneian government provides full subsidy for all tuition, making higher education free for citizens regardless of socioeconomic status. An assortment of scholarships and funding

³ Rose P. Tibok and Wendy Hiew, “Higher Education Systems and Institutions, Brunei Darussalam”, in *The International Encyclopedia of Higher Education Systems and Institutions*, eds. Pedro Nuno Teixeira and Jung-Cheol Shin et al. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2019).

⁴ Ibid.

programmes also allow Bruneian students to pursue undergraduate and graduate studies at universities overseas in addition to those in Brunei. In 2019, the MOE was allotted a budget of BND735 million, most of which went to staff salaries and recurring expenses, and only BND19,582,660 was devoted to developmental projects.⁵ There was no data on how much was given to HEIs.

Following the precedent of its larger neighbour Malaysia, in 2004 Brunei launched the Wawasan Brunei 2035 (Brunei Vision 2035) master development plan, which calls for Brunei to be recognised for its “highly educated and skilled people”. In 2014, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah reasserted the importance of monitoring the nation’s progress in implementing the vision, and established an advisory council composed of multiple government agencies. The first goal of the vision, which is directly related to education, comes under the responsibility of the MOE, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Manpower Council. The focus on monitoring and assessment also holds implications for the use of technology and transparency of data in education reform.

In 2018, the MOE released the Strategic Plan 2018-2022, which sets out three main strategic objectives:⁶

⁵ Azlan Othman, “MoE allocated BND735M budget”, Borneo Bulletin, March 17, 2019, <https://borneobulletin.com.bn/moe-allocated-bnd735m-budget/>.

1. Transform human resources organisation to a “performance-driven culture”
2. Provide equal and equitable access to quality education
3. Enhance shared accountability with stakeholders in teaching and learning development

Many of these changes will be implemented by the adoption of new information systems that monitor faculty and staff’s performance. The strategic plan emphasises the growth of the knowledge economy and a push towards use of big data, which can be used to create an effective human resource performance management and appraisal system. Considering Brunei’s noticeable gender gap in enrolment, the MOE aims to narrow this gap by improving access for male students and “at-risk” and “disadvantaged” learners at all educational levels.

Beyond the scope of higher education, Brunei’s job market has been unable to provide a diverse set of jobs for university graduates, which has led to an exodus of Bruneians with advanced degrees. In 2017, the Brunei Energy and Industry Department launched JobCentre Brunei, a platform to help match local graduates with private companies to boost employment and marketability of graduates and foster new apprenticeships. To sync the needs of the labour market with practices of HEIs, the MOE is not only working with energy officials, but aims to implement a “Labour Management Information System” to provide data to universities on the needs of the local job market, so that HEIs can shift enrolment away from low-needs to in-demand courses.

Internationalisation

In 2011, UBD launched the GenNEXT programme, a mandatory curriculum for third-year undergraduate students to either engage in an overseas exchange programme, internship, community outreach or incubation programme.⁷ UBD has also been at the forefront of Brunei’s internationalisation efforts, as it is active in attracting foreign students and faculty. In 2017, 33.8% of lecturers in Brunei’s HEIs were non-citizens. In addition to being an active member of the ASEAN university network, UBD also provides attractive scholarships for foreign graduate students, including tuition waivers, monthly stipends and research funding.

COVID-19 Impact

Though Brunei was among the lucky few nations to have been minimally impacted by COVID-19, the pandemic caused closure of all HEIs. The pandemic also proved to be a test of the nation’s ICT (Information and Communications Technology) infrastructure’s ability to cope with a sudden shift to e-learning. It also expedited the need to meet goals of upgrading infrastructure set in place by Wawasan Brunei 2035 and the MOE’s Strategic Plan. With the widespread shift to online learning, some instructors have been required to record online lessons and submit them to relevant oversight committees, making for an additional layer of performance monitoring.⁸

ZANE KHEIR recently graduated with a PhD in Comparative Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore.

⁶ Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam, “Ministry of Education Strategic Plan 2018–2022”, last modified 15 August, 2018, <https://www.moe.gov.bn/SitePages/Strategic%20Plan%202018-2022.aspx>.

⁷ Tibok and Hiew, “Higher Education Systems and Institutions, Brunei Darussalam”.

⁸ Najib Noorashid, Phan Le Ha, Yabit Alas, and Varissa Mae Yabit, “Beyond the Pandemic, Integrating Online Learning”, accessed October 10, 2020, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20201009150047136>.

Envisioning the Developments and Trajectories on the Future of Higher Education in Brunei Darussalam

MASITAH SHAHRILL & JOANNA YACOB

In the past few decades, we have observed several if not many evolving roles of higher education institutions in their effort to raise their standards and status amidst challenges and pressures from local and international educational and economy demands and influences. Envisioning the probable developments and trajectories on the future of higher education is normally associated with the latest global trends. The short-term goals are likely about adjusting to new norms while the long-term goals could be a paradox for the future of higher education – that is, the unpredictability of global educational demands that is influenced by technology, accessibility and the need to stay relevant whilst ensuring quality and the continuity of successful planning.

Brunei Darussalam’s Educational Vision

Brunei Darussalam, a country with the smallest population among the 11 Southeast Asian countries, has always placed the development of a quality education system and future workforce as the aspirational forefront of the country’s national strategy, “Wawasan Brunei 2035” (Brunei Vision 2035).¹ The first of the three goals of the vision focuses on ensuring people of the country are educated, highly skilled and accomplished. In realising this vision, we are guided by the national philosophy of *Melayu Islam Beraja*, or Malay Islamic Monarchy. The educational levels span holistically, from primary and secondary, to technical, vocational and higher education. The country’s Ministry of Education regulates all government and private education institutions, while the Ministry of Religious Affairs specifically regulates educational institutions offering components of Islamic religious education.



Three Goals of Wawasan Brunei 2035¹

- 1 Educated, highly skilled and accomplished people
- 2 High quality of life
- 3 A dynamic and sustainable economy

The Higher Education Landscape in Brunei Darussalam

In Brunei Darussalam, the higher education levels are categorised as university colleges, polytechnics, institutes and universities. Consequently, there are officially seven higher education institutions — five government and two private — that fall within this category. The main foci of each higher education institutions are generally the same — to strive for quality and excellence in teaching and learning, and produce skilled and employable graduates. However they very much differ when it comes to their respective institutional programme offerings, strategic initiatives and processes. A few place great emphasis on current and future research initiatives in order to develop research areas and to increase research productivity. For the benefit of this commentary, we will only attend to the educational landscape of all higher education institutions in Brunei Darussalam as a general collective.

The first formal higher education institution, Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) was established in 1985, a year after the country gained

its full independence. This was followed by Institut Teknologi Brunei in 1986, which was upgraded to university status in 2008 and renamed Universiti Teknologi Brunei (UTB) in 2016. In order to cater to the growing demands of the Islamic academic disciplines, Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) was established in 2007. Politeknik Brunei was established in 2008 but operations only began in 2012. Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (KUPU SB) was set up in 1975 as an Islamic Religious Teachers' Training College, and upgraded to a university college in 2007. Furthermore, KUPU SB is under the purview of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Meanwhile the two private higher education institutions are Kolej International Graduate Studies (KIGS) and Laksamana College of Business (LCB) established in 2002 and 2003, respectively. According to the latest available statistics provided by the Ministry of Education, there are a total of 11,406 enrolled higher education students and 832 lecturers.²

In this commentary, the discussions will specifically focus on a few relevant strategic thrusts related to the development and purpose of education — such as access to higher education and lifelong learning; the role of technology in light of the sudden realisation surge of online education or the blended mode of teaching and learning caused by current pandemic; aligning the Fourth Industrial Revolution and higher education; and growing the workforce by producing future-ready graduates. All these are pertinent to what may shape the future of the higher educational landscape in the country.

Improving Opportunities to Lifelong Learning

Improving opportunities to lifelong learning is listed as one of the strategic initiatives in the Ministry of Education's strategic plan in Brunei Darussalam. Four institutions in the country have set up their respective lifelong learning centres in offering programmes, which are inclusive and follow flexible study pace and blended learning approaches. These facilities are UBD's Centre for Lifelong Learning (C3L, established

in 2016); UNISSA's Centre of Leadership and Lifelong Learning (C4L, established in 2017); UTB's Continuing Education in Science, Engineering and Technology (Tri-CED, established in 2018); and PB's Centre of Excellence for Lifelong Learning (CELL, established in 2020). These higher education institutions have been tasked to take on the responsibility of reskilling or upskilling the existing workforce in order to meet the demands of the global market. Due to the fast-changing pace of international markets, it is important to recognise the need for shorter accredited higher education training programmes that have lifelong learning modes. There is also an increasing need to align institutional-level qualifications with the country-level accreditation criteria for online learning. The need for a revised policy may offer major potential for change in mainstreaming and growing lifelong learning.

Transforming Teaching and Learning Approaches

The unprecedented and ongoing global pandemic has caused sudden changes in educational policies. We have observed significant rises in the workload of educators and changes to their teaching approaches. Adjusting and revising the provisions on the teaching of modules or courses, learning delivery and transforming assessment approaches using various online platforms have quickly become the new normal in the country. Alternative instructional approaches have also been implemented, such as the practice of blended learning, and consequently began the exploration of the blended pedagogy underpinned by a lifelong learning perspective. Blended learning mode typically involves face-to-face or physical classes, and lesson materials or resources containing video lectures, discussions and assessments, which are provided online; and occasionally utilising e-Portfolio in documenting and showcasing the records of work conducted. Nevertheless, with the influx of online learning we need to seriously consider upgrading our online learning systems, such as Canvas and other existing online education platforms.

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¹ Government of Brunei Darussalam, “Wawasan Brunei 2035”, www.wawasanbrunei.gov.bn

² Ministry of Education, Brunei Darussalam, “Brunei Darussalam Education Statistics 2018”, accessed September 4, 2020, <http://www.moe.gov.bn/DocumentDownloads/Education%20Statistics%20and%20Indicators%20Handbook/Brunei%20Darussalam%20Education%20Statistics%202018.pdf>

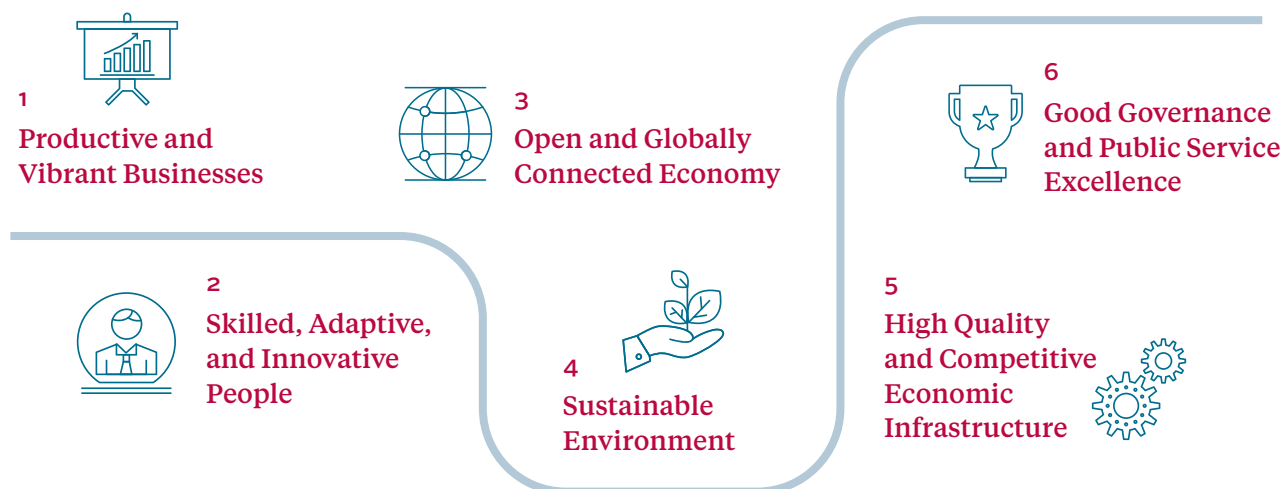
The Fourth Industrial Revolution and Higher Education

Coined by Klaus Schwab in 2016, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, or IR 4.0, is about converging technology with economy. Its advent has also impacted many aspects of human endeavours including education. IR 4.0 is a national agenda for Brunei, and higher education institutions play a meaningful role in the implementation of this nation-wide initiative — through teaching, research and development, innovation, commercialisation, and creating IR 4.0-ready human capacity. A deeper understanding of Brunei’s initiatives need to be sought, and support needs to be acquired for implementation and delivery in order for higher education institutions to be aligned with the pursuit of this agenda. Additionally, to ensure employability of graduates, it is now necessary for higher education institutions to redesign existing educational systems to an adaptable and flexible system, which supports teaching and learning for the fourth as well as future industrial revolutions.

Growing the Workforce of Tomorrow

Higher education institutions play a major role in preparing and equipping students with the most relevant and up-to-date knowledge, to face current as well as future educational and industrial needs. It is also important to think about higher education institutions as knowledge hubs where innovation can thrive.

Six Aspirations in the Economic Blueprint of Brunei Darussalam 2021³



³ Ministry of Finance and Economy, Brunei Darussalam, “Towards a Dynamic and Sustainable Economy”, accessed February 7, 2021, http://deps.gov.bn/DEPD%20Documents%20Library/NDP/BDEB/Econ_Blueprint.pdf.

“It is also important to think about higher education institutions as knowledge hubs where innovation can thrive.”

In 2021, Brunei released its latest economic blueprint supporting the third goal in Brunei Vision 2035, “Towards a dynamic and sustainable economy”. Its first policy direction, “Continue providing high-standard education system which will produce experts, professionals and technicians to meet industry demand” pointed to having skilled, adaptive and innovative people as one of its aspirations. As higher education providers, in order to produce graduates who are highly skilled, marketable, and future ready, we need to consider developing and equipping our students with relevant skillsets — among them analytical and innovative thinking, emotional intelligence and so on — which will complement their academic knowledge.

Future Aspirations

There are undoubtedly other strategic thrusts that can be further explored — for example, enabling self-sustaining higher education institutions; attracting highly talented graduate research students; focusing and venturing on specific niche research areas to increase collaborations with international researchers and industry partnerships; achieving international reputation through the ranking exercises of the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) and the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings; and having programmes accredited and certified by professional agencies.

All the above require constant monitoring and reflection on the best practices in which we will subsequently apply and put into action. What will matter most will be the commitment and dedication of the higher education community — the leaders, lecturers and researchers, administrative and support staff, the stakeholders comprising of students, alumni, industry and many more, to further improve, to maintain and sustain, and finally to make all these a continuous reality within the next 20 years. A whole-of-nation approach will indeed be an advantage. This will not only benefit the country but will also help us towards achieving the country’s national vision. 📖

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to acknowledge Pg Dr Mohamad Iskandar Pg Hj Petra, Dr Abby Tan Chee Hong and Associate Professor Dr Jose Hernandez Santos for their valuable inputs to this commentary.

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Cambodia

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Cambodia is a mainland Southeast Asian country of 16.25 million people wedged between Thailand and Vietnam. Like neighbouring Thailand, it is officially a kingdom in which Buddhism is the state religion. Cambodia has one of the smallest populations among ASEAN countries and the lowest GDP per capita in the region of USD1,640. Cambodia has a modestly sized higher education system, with 49 public universities and colleges managed by numerous different government ministries, and 56 private or vocational institutions as of 2011.¹ Higher education institutions (HEIs) are composed of two main categories: universities, which are managed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MOEYS), and TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) institutions, or “independent schools”, which are managed by others, the largest being the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training.

From the mid-1970s when Cambodia’s entire education system was virtually destroyed under the Khmer Rouge, to 1997 when the government relaxed university laws allowing for the opening of private universities, Cambodia’s higher education system underwent immense change. Prior to 1997, not only were all universities public, they also operated on tuition-free models. This abruptly ended following the 1997 reforms. Despite Cambodia’s relatively poor higher education enrolment rate of roughly 12% in 2018, its overall enrolment has shown significant increases from only 10,000 in the early 1990s to over 200,000 in 2013.² Cambodia’s low university enrolment is directly linked to shortages in funding and the dominant perspective throughout the country that higher education is a private good. In 2010, Cambodia spent an average of USD218 per student, compared

¹ “Cambodian Higher Education: Vocational or Tertiary Education?” JustLanded.com, accessed January 25, 2021, <https://www.justlanded.com/english/Cambodia/Cambodia-Guide/Education/Cambodian-higher-education>.
² Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, “Policy on Higher Education 2030 — April 2018”, accessed January 25, 2021, <http://www.moeys.gov.kh/en/policies-and-strategies/policy-on-higher-education-2030.html#.YA6PLXczaRs>.
³ UNESCO Bangkok, “Education Systems in ASEAN+6 Countries: A Comparative Analysis of Selected Education Issues”, *Education Policy Research Series Discussion Document No. 5* (2014), Education Policy and Reform Unit.



with USD531 in Vietnam.³ The funding that the government provides to universities is based on historical and political funding models, which make transparency and systematic auditing a formidable challenge. Aside from funding issues, Cambodia’s economy arguably cannot provide employment for a substantial number of university graduates, as 60% of its labour force is still engaged in the agriculture industry.⁴ Only 14.7% and 31.3% of Cambodian university graduates between the respective ages of 20-24 and 25-34 participate in the job market.⁵ The most popular majors in Cambodian universities are business, social sciences and law, with only one in five students majoring in STEM disciplines, due to their higher associated costs and the limited availability of trained faculty.⁶

Overall, Cambodia’s higher education system faces many challenges, ranging from lack of a comprehensive system of financial governance, to transparency and resource allocation. Although average annual tuition fees of USD300-400 are inexpensive by regional standards, they still function as a high barrier to entry for many Cambodian students. Public universities rely

heavily on tuition fees as their main source of revenue, which cover 80-90% of institutional expenditures for large institutions in Phnom Penh.⁷ Government scholarships for students provide tuition waiver and a modest living allowance for approximately 15% of students, and are financed directly by the universities. The total budget of the MOEYS was 12.3% of Cambodia’s national budget in 2017, of which an average 3-4% was allotted to higher education — a figure that is five to six times lower than the world average.⁸ Scarce funding has also translated into depressed salaries for academic staff at public HEIs, who earned an average monthly salary of USD100 for a 12-hour work week. In 2018, only 3.4% of university academic staff were PhD holders, though the government aims to increase this figure to 5% by 2023.⁹ Poor support for academic staff has also translated into weak research output, with no Cambodian universities appearing in the Times Higher Education World rankings, and nearly 65% of faculty members at Cambodian universities claiming to be involved in no research activities, according to a 2015 survey of 444 people at 10 universities.¹⁰

⁴ Yuto Kitamura, “Higher Education in Cambodia: Challenges to Promote Greater Access and Higher Quality”, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Asia Pacific Higher Education*, eds. Christopher S. Collins, Molly N.N. Lee, John N. Hawkins and Deane E. Neubauer (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016).
⁵ Top Proleong, “Higher Education Divide and Industry 4.0: A Blessing or a Curse for Cambodia’s Rural Graduates?”, *Khmer Times*, July 3, 2019, <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50620273/higher-education-divide-and-industry-4-0-a-blessing-or-a-curse-for-cambodias-rural-graduates/>.
⁶ World Bank, “Cambodia — Higher Education Improvement Project”, April 26, 2018, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/loans-credits/2018/04/26/cambodia-higher-education-improvement-project>.
⁷ Mak Ngoy, Sok Say, Un Leang with Bunry Rinna, Chheng Sokunthy and Kao Sovansopha, “Finance in Public Higher Education in Cambodia”, *Working Paper Series No. 114*, May 2019, Cambodia Development Resource Institute.
⁸ Ibid.
⁹ Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, “Education Strategic Plan 2019–2023”, June 2019, <https://www.moeys.gov.kh/index.php/en/policies-and-strategies/3206.html#.YA6TfXczaRs>.
¹⁰ Kimkong Heng, “Post-Pandemic, Higher Education Reform is the Priority”, *University World News*, accessed October 24, 2020, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20201020094948838>

There have been signs of reform to stimulate a research culture in Cambodian universities and conform to regional standards. One step was the establishment of the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia in 2003, which aimed to introduce new quality assurance measures. More significantly, in 2010, the MOEYS launched the Higher Education Quality and Capacity Improvement Project in conjunction with the World Bank to provide USD23 million to fund higher education quality improvement between 2011 and 2015. This funding was allotted to improving the quality of teaching, university management, project-based research and enhancing the access and retention of disadvantaged students, providing 1,050 “special-priority” scholarships.¹¹

In 2018, the MOEYS released the Education Strategic Plan (ESP), a four-year plan for 2019-2023 that encompasses reforms in Cambodia’s primary, secondary and higher education systems. The ESP set a range of new goals for Cambodian higher education, including a stronger focus on national and international accreditation and implementing a centralised higher education management system, requiring 40 public universities to input data into a government-run system. This plan also aims to provide new block grants to institutions that offer specialised training that respond to the country’s need for economic and social development. This is a considerable incentive considering that nearly 84% of higher education spending in Cambodia is privately funded. Unlike other countries in the region, Cambodia lacked a national student loan scheme until very recently.

Higher Education Vision 2030

As regional and global trends towards privatisation and university autonomy spread, in 2014, the MOEYS released the Higher Education Vision 2030 to introduce substantial reforms to the higher education

system. This long-term initiative is Cambodia’s equivalent to long-term plans in Malaysia and Thailand (i.e., Malaysia Education Blueprint and Thailand 4.0) and aims to shift the country’s HEIs towards international standards, increase enrolment and research focus in STEM disciplines and meet the needs of the digital economy. Along with the ESP, the 2030 roadmap encourages further integration with ASEAN countries by increasing partnership programmes with foreign universities and participating in the ASEAN International Mobility Students Programme. Though Cambodia has a negligible number of international students, partnerships with other ASEAN universities and inter-university exchange would be an outlet to internationalisation and further recognition.

COVID-19 Impact and Response

Although Cambodia has emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic relatively unscathed, with just over 300 cases, the pandemic has had an effect on its education system and the government’s higher education initiatives. In July of 2020, the MOEYS released a comprehensive response plan to the COVID-19 pandemic, allotting a special budget of USD31.4 million to adapt working and teaching environments to be suitable for pandemic conditions and equip schools with infrastructure to conduct remote learning. These upgrades, however, will benefit Cambodian institutions in the long-term beyond the scope of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since early 2020, a total of 124 HEIs have been closed, impacting 222,000 students. The closure of these HEIs across the country runs the significant risk of curtailing the feasibility of the goals put in place in the ESP, as tuition fees constitute a large proportion of university funding.

¹¹ Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, “Higher Education Quality and Capacity Improvement Project (HEQCIP)”, accessed January 25, 2021, <https://www.moeys.gov.kh/index.php/en/heip/higher-education-quality-and-capacity-improvement-project-heqcip.html>.

Potential Scenarios of Cambodian (Public) Higher Education in 2040

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Landscape-wide, not much has changed in the effort to transform public higher education (HE) in the past 20 years, and there is little synergistic effort to strategise its development to serve the national aspiration for economic development and social progress. Perhaps with the exception of quantity, quality and relevance of HE institutions is a big concern, and their contribution to the national development aspiration of a higher middle-income economy by 2030 and an advanced society by 2050 (i.e., the visions and aspirations) is next to impossible. If the development is to take a natural course and if there is little endeavour to systematically strategise the required development, there is little chance that Cambodia can produce adequate skilled, well-rounded talents and advanced innovation to achieve its national agendas.

Selected development in the past 20 years

Viewed against its dark past, little resource, and limited state capacity, higher education has achieved fairly impressive growth, especially in quantitative terms. This is possible due to improving individual purchasing power and a cost-sharing programme against the backdrop of a neoliberal economy and laissez-faire state. However, there are concerns, especially in terms of quality and relevance, limited expansion of the university missions, poor collective university leadership and management, and the inability of higher education to catapult the nation to achieve its national aspirations.

Gross enrolment has increased nearly tenfold, increasing from 28,080 in 2000 to 223,221 in 2010, and 201,910 in 2020 – the gross enrolment rate stands at 10.75%. If enrolment is left to natural growth based on an annual average growth rate of 8.75% in the past 20 years, by 2040, we may have 510,758 students. Despite the promising figures, there are concerns. The enrolment is relatively low and concentrated in non-science and non-technology

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programmes. This is caused by the lack of proactive counselling for student programme selection, rigid enrolment schemes, and low national investment to expand enrolment in these and other priority programmes in social sciences and humanities.

Data on faculty and staff indicate promising albeit “natural” evolution. Faculty have increased from 2,397 in 2000 to 10,711 in 2010 and 16,676 in 2020. To serve projected increases in enrolment, 17,025 full-time faculty and a comparable number of support staff will be needed in 2040. With external support and expansion of local graduate programmes, improvement in the number of terminal degrees can be seen. Nevertheless, in absolute terms and relative to more prominent HEIs in Malaysia, Thailand and even Vietnam, the number of PhDs and competent professionals is very low. Besides, the faculty teaching loads are very heavy, and the faculty generally regard research and service as being of secondary importance. Against the background, career management is traditional and rudimentary, and there is little national investment in postgraduate qualifications, especially in priority fields and important professions.

Another development is the rapid increase in the number of academic programmes and HEIs. The

latter has increased from 23 in 2000 to 97 in 2010 and 128 in 2020. Major concerns include much fewer STEM programmes and relatively low-quality programmes: few programmes accredited, poor internal quality assurance systems and graduate employability. HEIs are predominantly teaching enterprises, and there is little strategic national orientation and investment to promote research and development (R&D). The few leading HEIs have been struggling to promote research, mainly with external funding. While some HEIs are accredited by the national agency, only one private HEI is accredited by the ASEAN University Network. Results from employer surveys and tracer studies indicate concerns over skill gaps and low incomes from first jobs.

Against this backdrop of HE “underdevelopment” vis-à-vis the required graduates and innovation is the limited state capacity to steer the development, rather low collective will to achieve a common national agenda, absence of a committed champion for important initiatives and a pool of transformative leaders (those who perceive leadership as not merely holding positions, but as an obligation for institutional development and social transformation), and frank and sincere dialogue amongst the key leaders at multiple levels.

Potential scenarios in 2040

Given limited quality data availability and no comprehensive database, it is rather challenging to systematically assess higher education development, let alone to portray the scenarios. We simply attempt to project three broad scenarios based on data available and our experience and knowledge.

One scenario, which is very unlikely, is that higher education will be left to take a natural course. There would thus be little strategic national steering and investment. Higher education development, including graduate and programme quality, access, university governance and management, and university missions would not be much different from now. There would thus be little hope that higher education would produce adequate qualified talent and innovation to drive economic development and social progress, i.e., to achieve national visions. There would be little major orientation and counselling, and students would be left to choose what they could pay for available programmes. There would be little national investment to expand enrolment to produce a large pool of quality graduates, especially in strategic priority fields. There would be little proactive national steering and investment to increase and enhance priority academic programmes to make them internationally competitive and nationally relevant. There would be little attempt to systematise and strictly implement progressive careers for faculty and staff. Career development would be left to evolve naturally, and talented academics and professionals would be further sucked up by the growing, more promising private sector and regional economies. Those staying behind would be absorbed with teaching and continue to exhibit little commitment to research and services. The government would show little interest in strategic investment to promote R&D, and public and private HEIs would continue to be profit-oriented teaching enterprises, producing graduates mainly to serve the lower end of the market.

Another scenario, the most probable, is that the development will be “partially” steered by the

government, within a fragmented higher education system and a “routine” national policy, which receives selective investments. This will result in “islandic development” or “pocket of higher education development” as the government and development partners will invest in selected priority areas, programmes and fields, and/or HEIs. The ability of the sector to produce adequate quality graduates and innovation to drive the desired economy and society will be impossible, and the extent of its impact on achieving the national visions will hinge on the scale of investment, extent of the collective steering from the government, commitment of key leaders, and individual purchasing power.

Strategic enrolment orientation to achieve the required number of qualified graduates in targeted priority fields may not be a national priority, and the government may continue its routine major orientation. Strategic, targeted national investment to increase adequate enrolment in priority fields to achieve the visions will be unlikely, although the government and development partners may inject random, partial investment to promote certain fields and research areas. Academics will prioritise teaching; support staff will provide basic administrative services; and an academic career and university employment will continue to be less attractive to top talents and expatriates. Their career paths will probably be left to evolve by themselves and at a slow pace. There will be little strategic steering from and collaboration among the key institutions to create a progressive, professional career management system to promote transformative academic leadership and to attract talents from outside academia, the expatriate community, and from overseas. There will be inadequate steering and investment to promote academic programme orientation to enhance the priority programmes to produce sizeable professionally competent graduates to drive the national visions. Depending on priority and budget availability, the government may conduct random investments to promote selective fields. Given the aspiration to see some centres of research excellence, there will be some national

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investment in R&D, although it will be ad hoc and can be “islandic” and will not be strategically planned or large enough to produce the required innovation to achieve the visions. Quality will evolve rather naturally, and the aspiration to have a higher education system comparable in quality to contemporary peers in the high middle-income countries in ASEAN can be far-fetched.

The final scenario is the existence of an advanced system, one that can produce qualified graduates and innovation to achieve the 2030 and 2050 aspirations. If the past 20 years provide an accurate inkling, this scenario is unlikely. It could happen only if there were systematic transformation, within and beyond the sector, and strategic mobilisation of collective genuine commitment at multi-layers of administration, and firm demonstration of championship and transformative leadership in each HEI, across key government institutions, and the higher education system.

To achieve the scenario, it would basically start with accurate data on the types, number, and attributes of graduates and types and scale of innovation the nation needs to achieve the visions, and firm commitment to national investment and

to implementing such a programme with good faith. Higher education development would then be steered by an overarching national blueprint, translated into each individual HEI’s development strategy to promote teaching, learning and research, especially in priority fields and research clusters. It would need adequate strategic investment, and strict execution and monitoring. The implementation would require strong support from wholehearted, committed transformative technocrats at all levels, politicians and policy makers, and genuine transformative academic leaders who value academic excellence.

Higher education would need to be treated as a critical national agenda — one that is core to driving other national developments. At the pinnacle of the system, there needs to be a national champion who will hold its development as the core political portfolio and be empowered to grip it tightly and close to the heart. First, there would need to be a politically competent, adept political champion who dares to simplify the multi-faceted complex system, mobilise and manage the complex coordination and communication at the national level and who can hold all key institutions and agents at all levels accountable for achieving an

advanced higher education system. Second, there would need to be a large pool of wholehearted, genuinely committed politicians, policy makers, senior technocrats, and university leaders to demonstrate genuine, sustained commitment to open and frank dialogue — who are willing to talk to each other openly and amicably, listen to each other attentively, and work collectively and accountably for the common good of higher education and national development. Besides professional competence, this would require skills, attitudes, personal and professional ethics, an open heart, and certainly transformative leadership. Third, it would call for professionally competent university leaders to mobilise university resources, especially faculty and staff, to execute the national and institutional agenda. To nurture committed, professionally competent transformative academic leaders and professionals, it is necessary to establish excellence in teaching, research, and service. Establishing collegiality, strong academic cultures, professionalism, committed transformative leadership, and entrepreneurial endeavour is important.

Conclusion

Besides money and its sound management, strong political goodwill, transformative university leadership, and excellent faculty and professionals are core driving forces for such advancement. Given its tragic history which almost depleted its most valuable resource — the “knowledgeable”— to achieve its national aspirations for 2030 and 2050, Cambodia has no choice but to invest in its most valuable natural resource: its people, and higher education development holds the key. 📖

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to thank Dr Vicheth Sen of the University of British Columbia, Sivhuoch Ou, a PhD candidate of the University of Guelph, and The HEAD Foundation for their insightful comments on a previous draft.

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Indonesia

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Indonesia is ASEAN's largest country both in population and landmass. It is an archipelago of over 17,000 islands, and home to over 267 million people, making it the world's fourth most populous country. While Indonesia is incredibly diverse, over half its population lives on the island of Java and over 80% of its population are Muslims, making it the world's largest Muslim-majority country. However, its government is structured as a secular constitutional republic. Though the Indonesian economy relies heavily on agriculture and natural resources, it is one of the region's fastest-growing economies with notable future potential and a demographic dividend due to its young population. Despite a sizeable demographic of citizens living in poverty, in recent years Indonesia has seen a growing population of middle-income and affluent consumers who maintain savings rates above global averages.¹ Nevertheless, Indonesia still lacks HEIs that meet global standards to train and retain quality students to avert a brain drain.²

Formal education in Indonesia has roots in Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim traditions and the establishment of religious schools throughout the archipelago. However, modern HEIs such as the University of Indonesia and the Bandung Institute of Technology were first established in the early 20th century during the Dutch colonial period. Following its independence in 1946, Indonesia's education system lacked the infrastructure to accommodate its large population; with only 10 HEIs and approximately 6,500 students enrolled at the time, Indonesia's higher education system was tiny relative to its population. In the 1960s, the New Order Government under President Suharto introduced a comprehensive higher education development plan, which linked higher education to national development and increased university enrolment.³

¹ Andriansyah, "Savings and Investment in Indonesia", November 1, 2016, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3736572

² Global Business Guide Indonesia, "Indonesia's Brain Drain Pains", March 17, 2014, http://www.gbgingonesia.com/en/main/business_updates/2014/upd_indonesia_s_brain_drain_pains.php

By the 1990s and 2000s, Indonesia's higher education system had expanded massively, with its student population more than tripling from 1990 to 2009. More than two-thirds of HEIs in Indonesia were established since 1990 and, as relatively young institutions, student enrolment often superseded quality. In 1996, the government started to implement policy changes that shifted university governance towards autonomy despite laws that emphasise autonomous HEIs as state-owned entities. These changes were reaffirmed by the 2012 Higher Education Law, which positions HEIs with a role in national development and technological innovation. As opposed to non-autonomous universities, which are managed directly by the education ministry, autonomous HEIs are overseen by a Majelis Wali Amanat, or a board of trustees that represents the government, university staff, students and stakeholders. The 2012 law also initiated a funding model for public HEIs, which granted funding based partially on student enrolment as opposed to other performance indicators. Autonomy ultimately gave HEIs more control over their financial governance.

Since 2014, all public and private HEIs in Indonesia have been managed by the Ministry of Research,

Technology and Higher Education (MORTHE), marking a trend towards decentralisation of Indonesia's university system under the Ministry of Education and Culture. HEIs are now required to gain accreditation from the National Accreditation Agency of Higher Education (BAN-PT), to be granted recognition and funding by MORTHE. Indonesia also has a system of religious HEIs, which are managed separately by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In 2015, MORTHE launched its first four-year strategic plan from 2015–2019, promoting universities as key facilitators of culture, knowledge, technology transfer and economic development.⁴ Private HEIs on the other hand are operated autonomously from MORTHE, but are overseen by a non-profit foundation and KOPERTIS, an organisation that coordinates private HEIs in 14 major regions.⁵

Trend Towards Vocational Education

Indonesian secondary education in recent decades has been evenly divided between academic-track and vocational-track curricula. However, to meet the demands of the labour market and reduce the skill-mismatch that has plagued the Indonesian job market, the government has made it a priority

³ Paulina Pannen, "Higher Education Systems and Institutions, Indonesia", in *The International Encyclopedia of Higher Education Systems and Institutions*, eds. Pedro Nuno Teixeira and Jung-Cheol Shin et al. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2020).

⁴ Ibid.; Kementerian Riset, Teknologi dan Pendidikan Tinggi, 2015. Peraturan Menteri Riset, Teknologi dan Pendidikan Tinggi (Ministry Decree) No.13 Tahun 2015 tentang Rencana Strategis Kementerian Riset, Teknologi dan Pendidikan Tinggi 2015–2019. Jakarta: Kementerian

Riset, Teknologi, dan Pendidikan Tinggi [Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education, 2015. Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education Regulation (Ministry Decree) No.13 of 2015 on the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education 2015–2019. Jakarta: Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education].

⁵ Paulina Pannen, 2020.



to shift a larger proportion of secondary school students into vocational-track education and boost enrolment in TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) institutions, aiming for 70% of students to be on track by 2020.⁶ While academic-track curricula are broad and provide general education courses, vocational-track schools, or SMKs, are more specific and offer students eight majors of specialisation. Based on 2016 estimates, Indonesia would need to annually add 3.8 million new skilled workers to the workforce to achieve a needed pool of 113 million skilled workers by 2030.⁷ Added challenges to meeting the demands of the labour market are geographical in nature, with most TVET schools being private institutions clustered on Indonesia's two most populous islands: Java and Sumatra. Increasing proportions of high school graduates in recent years are expected to boost enrolment in both TVET institutions as well as universities, particularly from lower-income demographics who will be accessing tertiary education for the first time.⁸

As of 2018 there were over 3,200 HEIs in Indonesia,⁹ over 90% of which are private. Indonesian HEIs are categorised as follows:

- 1) Schools of Higher Learning
- 2) Academies
- 3) Universities
- 4) Polytechnics
- 5) Institutes
- 6) Community Colleges

Schools of higher learning by far make up the majority of HEIs, at nearly 2,500 institutions; however, their individual enrolment numbers are often small. In addition to secular HEIs, there are an additional 1,171 HEIs with religious affiliations in Indonesia. Though Indonesia's higher education system has been undergoing a trend towards autonomy and decentralisation, the past two decades have shown a resurgence in madrasah, or Islamic schools, and Islamic knowledge, which was greatly marginalised under the Dutch colonial regime and secular independence movement.¹⁰

Regarding budgeting, Indonesia has long suffered from under-funding in its public higher education system. However, recent trends show increased spending compared with the early 2000s. In 2018, MORTHE received IDR40 trillion from the government, composing 12.5% of total education expenditures. Though Indonesia spends more on education than Cambodia and Myanmar, it still lags behind its other ASEAN neighbours Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam. Limited government spending on higher education forces public universities to rely on student tuition as a source of revenue. As the majority of Indonesian students are enrolled in private HEIs, education budgets depend more on consumers rather than the government.

Higher education fees in Indonesia are extremely complicated to calculate, as students have historically been required to separately pay for an assortment of fees in addition to regular tuition.

However, in 2013, the process was slightly simplified with the introduction of the "single tuition fee", or *uang kuliah tunggal* (UKT), requiring public institutions to only charge students this single tuition fee, which is broken down into eight tiers determined by their economic status.¹¹ In 2010, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) launched the Bidik Misi Scholarship programme for disadvantaged high school graduates who aspire to attend university. As of 2013, only 140,000 students were granted full scholarships to participating universities, covering tuition costs and providing stipends. The Directorate General of Higher Education also distributed approximately 8,000 scholarships to students attending private HEIs, though the coverage remains relatively limited. Effectiveness of the scholarship programme is believed to be impacted by a poor selection process of recipients, frequent late payments, and lack of public awareness of scholarship opportunities.¹²

E-Learning and the Impact of COVID-19

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 took a toll on Indonesia's economy, causing capital outflows and depreciation of the Indonesian rupiah not seen since the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. While Indonesia's financial system is significantly healthier now than in the late 1990s, Indonesia's education system was not prepared for the shutdown brought on by the pandemic. The Indonesian government ordered the closure of all universities as of March 13, 2020, though many universities

struggled to transition to online learning. Despite the suspension of in-person classes, many students opted to remain in Jakarta or other large university cities where internet access is stronger.¹³ Although the proportion of Indonesians accessing the internet has exploded from only 10.92% in 2010 to 47.67% in 2019,¹⁴ the quality of connectivity in Indonesia is extremely unequal, with only 25% of internet users in eastern regions such as Maluku and Papua having access to stable connections. In 2017, the Indonesian government launched a large-scale e-learning strategy, aiming to tackle gaps in access and reduce costs, which led to 49 major courses being offered by eight major HEIs and over 800 massive online open courses (MOOCs) offered by 44 smaller HEIs.¹⁵ COVID-19 undoubtedly sparked an amplification of a pre-existing imperative for e-learning in Indonesia, which grew by 25% between 2010 and 2015, and is the only access point to education for young people scattered in remote islands throughout the archipelago. According to a survey by a nationwide student executive board, approximately 77% of university students felt unable to pay tuition in 2021, and 92% incurred an additional cost of IDR200,000 a month on mobile data to conduct schoolwork online.¹⁶

⁶ Dragana Borenovic Dilas, Christopher Mackie, Research, Ying Huang, and Stefan Trines, Research Editor, "Education in Indonesia", WENR, March 21, 2019, <https://wenr.wes.org/2019/03/education-in-indonesia-2>.

⁷ "Indonesia needs 3.8 million new skilled workers per year: Govt", ASEANAffairs.com, December 1, 2016, http://www.aseanaffairs.com/indonesia_news/labour/indonesia_needs_3_8_million_new_skilled_workers_per_year_govt.

⁸ World Bank, "Tertiary Education in Indonesia: Directions for Policy", June 2014, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/20024>.

⁹ RISTEK-BRIN (Ministry of Research and Technology, National Research and Innovation Agency), "Statistics", accessed February 16, 2021, <https://international.ristekbrin.go.id/statistics/>.

¹⁰ OECD, "Education in Indonesia: Rising to the Challenge", March 25, 2015, <https://www.oecd.org/publications/education-in-indonesia-9789264230750-en.htm>.

¹¹ Single Tuition Fee (UKT) at PTN", biyakuliah.net, accessed February 16, 2021, <https://biyakuliah.net/uang-kuliah-tunggal-ukt-di-ptn/>.

¹² World Bank, "Tertiary Education in Indonesia", 2014, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/20024>.

¹³ Nivell Rayda, "College Neighbourhoods Are 'Like Ghost Towns' as Jakarta University Remains Shut Amid COVID-19", November 28, 2020, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/indonesia-university-jakarta-depok-kukusan-ghost-town-covid-19-13592120>.

¹⁴ World Bank, "Individuals Using Internet (% of Population) — Indonesia", accessed February 16, 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=ID>.

¹⁵ Paulina Pannen, 2020.

¹⁶ Dyaning Pangestika, University BEMs Urge Nadiem to Cut Tuition During COVID-19 'Study at Home' Policy," Jakarta Post, June 4, 2020, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/06/04/university-bems-urge-nadiem-to-cut-tuition-during-covid-19-study-at-home-policy.html>.

Building the Future Through Higher Education 2020-2024

SATRYO SOEMANTRI BRODJONEGORO

Each year, more than four million children are born in Indonesia. Given the right opportunities, practically all of them would be capable of finishing high school and going on to complete some type of higher education degree. If these degrees were from relevant, high-quality programmes, these graduates would likely begin their forty-plus years in the labour market, well equipped to find and excel at interesting and challenging work. A range of benefits would accrue to them as individuals. They could expect higher incomes, less unemployment, and advantages for taking care of the health and education of their children throughout their lifetimes.¹

The Higher Education System

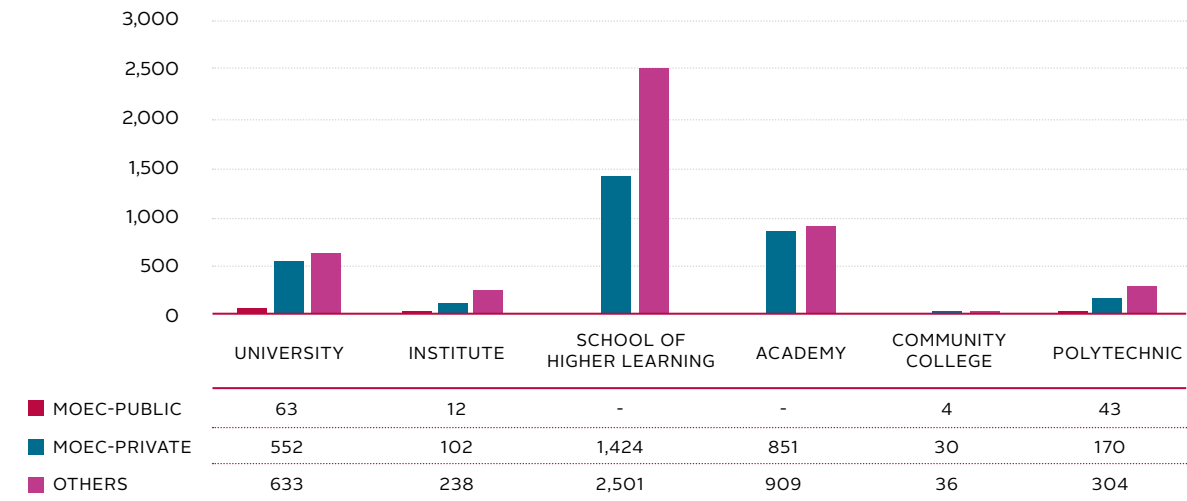
Higher education expansion in Indonesia is a result of increased high school graduation rates coupled with increased private and public spending. Growth has been significant in terms of student numbers, doubling between 2013 and 2019. The gross enrolment rate increased from around 29% in 2014 to around 34.6% in 2018.² Indonesia has more than 4,600 higher education institutions (HEIs) that are predominantly private, diverse in terms of size, quality and focus, and not yet well known outside of Indonesia.³ The majority of these HEIs are regulated by either the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) or the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA), with a few others regulated by other ministries, namely, the Ministry of Industry, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Tourism. Coordination between ministries is weak, resulting in system fragmentation and incoherence. This paper

¹ World Bank, "Tertiary Education in Indonesia: Directions for Policy", June 2014, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/20024>.

² Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education, Indonesia, 2019.

³ Ranking Web of Universities, "Indonesia", July 2020, <http://www.webometrics.info/en/Asia/Indonesia%20>

Number of HEIs per type, 2019



primarily focuses on the system regulated by MOEC in which there were about 2.9 million students studying in 122 state universities in 2019, out of a total of about 7.9 million students in the national higher education system. The rest of these students study in private institutions or state non-university institutions (e.g., polytechnics, academies, etc.). Thus, the private sector has accommodated most of the growth in the system — serving about 73% of higher education students — atypical on average for Asia where approximately 35% of students are enrolled in private HEIs.⁴

However, quality has not kept pace with quantity. If “quality” is defined as “fit for purpose”, the quality gaps in Indonesian higher education are shared by many such systems globally. But gaps are larger in Indonesia. There is no Indonesian HEI in the top 500 Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2020 although three made it to the top 500 of QS World University Rankings.⁵ There is also no Indonesian HEI in the top 1000 ARWU rankings.⁶ Given the large number of HEIs in Indonesia, these statistics do not reflect well on system quality. The university ranking systems are indicative of an overall quality issue and a system-wide ranking is informative regarding underlying issues and constraints. The 2019 U21 Ranking of National

Higher Education Systems ranks Indonesia at 50 out of 50 national higher education systems.⁷ However, it needs to be emphasised that “last place” in this ranking is expected given the rather youthful age of the higher education systems and the economic status of Indonesia as a middle-income country.

Government Intentions

Government plans expressed in the Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Nasional 2020-2024 (RPJMN 2020-2024) — translated as National Midterm Development Plan — are ambitious and focus on strengthening human capital to support national competitiveness and productivity. A total of eight strategies that reflect policy direction are identified in the RPJMN 2020-2024:

⁴ Asian Development Bank, 2018.

⁵ Times Higher Education, “World University Rankings 2020”, accessed January 26, 2021, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2020/world-ranking#!page/0/length/25/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/stats; QS Top Universities, “QS Top University Rankings: Who Rules?”, accessed January 26, 2021, <https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/world-university-rankings/2020>.

⁶ ARWU, “Academic Ranking of World Universities 2019”, accessed January 26, 2021, www.shanghairanking.com/.

⁷ Universitas21, “U21 Ranking of National Higher Education Systems 2019”, accessed January 26, 2021, <https://universitas21.com/what-we-do/u21-rankings/u21-ranking-national-higher-education-systems-2019>.

- 1) Strengthening HEI's as a source of innovation, through establishment of Centres of Excellence.
- 2) Partnership with industry and providing incentives for HEIs and industry to undertake strategic research and facilitate mobility of academics between HEIs and between HEIs and industry.
- 3) Improving quality and usage of research through strengthening linkages with industry.
- 4) Improving relevance through establishment of new study programmes that match curriculum with industry needs, widening access to certification, shortening waiting time before employment, and creation entrepreneurship programmes.
- 5) Expanding endowment funds from the private sector and philanthropic community to increase access and quality of education.
- 6) Implementing mission differentiation that covers three areas: research-intensive, teaching-intensive, and vocational.
- 7) Increasing autonomy and accountability of HEIs.
- 8) Improving the quality of private HEIs to support achievement of RPJMN targets.

In 2020, a new administration at the Ministry of Education and Culture launched a set of policy directives for the higher education sector, labelled "Kampus Merdeka" (autonomous campuses). The directives are intended to:

- 1) Increase autonomy by encouraging existing HEIs to become autonomous, as well as allowing more leeway for universities to open new study programmes.
- 2) Improve performance measures by simplifying the accreditation process and making reliable tracer studies compulsory.

“**Poor-quality education at any price is not a good investment, and its provision to those students less able to pay higher fees creates disparity and an opportunity cost for those who can least afford it.**

- 3) Provide more learning options for students, particularly by allowing them to turn out-of-class experience into credits.
- 4) Facilitate stronger links between industry and HEIs, as well as between HEIs nationally and internationally.
- 5) Introduce competition and potentially allow local HEIs to model best practices by inviting foreign universities to establish a presence in Indonesia.

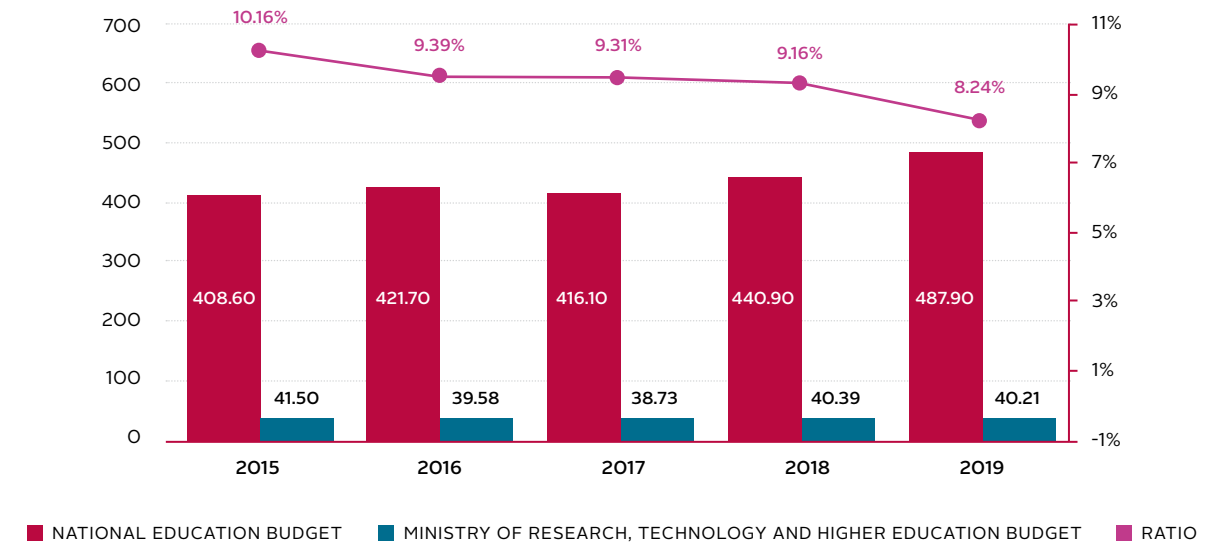
Resource Issue

Of the 50 countries in the U21 ranking system, only 15 had a higher GDP than Indonesia in 2019.⁸ Indonesian HEIs in general are severely resource-constrained compared with their counterparts in comparative countries. Indonesia's spending has been modest, at only around 3.7% of the country's GDP, comparably low to its neighbouring countries such as Thailand, at 4%, and Malaysia, at 6%.⁹ GDP is higher in these two countries than Indonesia. During the past five years, the national education budget share for higher education has also declined, from 10% in 2015 down to 8% in 2019.

⁸ World Bank, "Data Bank: World Development Indicators", July 1, 2020. <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>.

⁹ World Bank, 2013.

Higher Education Budget as a Share of National Education Budget 2015–2019 (IN TRILLIONS OF RUPIAH)



Policy Environment

Private providers absorbed more than 60% of the demand for higher education in Indonesia. Yet, the quality of private HEIs varies, just as the public HEIs, but on a larger scale. Government support for private HEIs is inadequate given their potential to help meet national higher education objectives in support of economic and social development. Poor-quality education at any price is not a good investment, and its provision to those students less able to pay higher fees creates disparity and an opportunity cost for those who can least afford it. The private higher education system needs to be mobilised through government intervention. Investment opportunities include: competitive grant systems to improve quality, incentivising mergers and acquisitions within and throughout the private HEI sector, and public-private partnerships.

Conclusion

There are multiple missions that HEIs should consider where it is commonly accepted that no HEI can be the champion for all missions due to resource

and capacity issues, and also the advantages of specialising in fewer areas. Specialisation and focus on a limited range of study programmes can be one dimension of mission differentiation that reflects depth of academic strength and strength reputation. Currently, in Indonesia many HEIs' objectives and operations are spread too thinly across different missions — for example, too many universities focus on research when they may be better suited to primarily focus on high-quality teaching.

Mission differentiation should provide a better investment plan. Financing policy, systems and investment planning, should be linked to achieving a more effective, efficient and balanced mission differentiation across the higher education sector, and based on the comparative advantages and capacity of individual HEIs. 📖

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Laos

ZANE KHEIR

Laos, also known as the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), with a population of 7.06 million, is ASEAN's only landlocked country.¹ Along with its larger neighbour Vietnam, Laos has been ruled by a one-party communist government since 1975, which has centralised control of most of the country's institutions. Laos's small economy — with a GDP of USD58 billion — is heavily reliant on its natural resources and geographic position along the Mekong River, though it is growing at a rate of over 7% annually. Approximately 67.1% of its population resided in rural areas in 2015,² most of whom did not have access to higher education. Lao is the official language of the government and native language of the majority population; being a former French colony, French remains a language of significance, particularly to Lao education — the French colonial government was the first to establish a centralised schooling system in Laos. Laos, a Buddhist society historically, also has a long tradition of education for children in temples in rural communities. As a low-income country, the Lao government prioritises access to basic education for its citizens. As higher education institutions in French Indochina (of which Laos was a constituent part) were concentrated in present-day Vietnam, universities and colleges have only emerged in Laos recently.

Laos's higher education system had a late start relative to its neighbours, with its first comprehensive university — the National University of Laos (NUOL) — opening in 1996 following the merger of 10 smaller HEIs which were managed by different government ministries. Substantial changes to the Lao higher education system were provoked by the collapse of the Soviet Union, which made it less viable for Laos to send its students to neighbouring communist countries for university education; the number of Lao students studying abroad in 1991-1995

¹ United Nations Institute for Statistics, "Lao People's Democratic Republic", accessed January 25, 2021, <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/la>.

² Lao Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Planning and Investment, "Results of Population and Housing Census 2015", October 21, 2016, <https://lao.unfpa.org/en/publications/results-population-and-housing-census-2015-english-version>.



dropped to a quarter of the number during the period of 1986-1990.³ The establishment of NUOL as Laos's flagship public university occurred following the onset of the New Economic Mechanism (NEM), the government's introduction of structural reforms in 1986 with the objective of transitioning from a centrally planned, socialist economy to a market-oriented one.⁴ In the 2000s, three additional public universities — Champasack University, Souphanouvong University and Savannakhet University — were respectively established in the south, north and centre of the country. In tandem with the opening of these universities, the government allowed several private HEIs to open in 2000 as part of wider reforms. To date, NUOL remains the most prestigious institution in the country with the most qualified staff and best resources. It is the only university that offers PhD degrees. NUOL has also received considerable assistance from the Asian Development Bank in reorganising itself towards autonomy prior to 2001.⁵ Its fifth university, the University of Health and Science, is the only public university administered by the Ministry of Public Health. Between 2000 and 2007, NUOL's enrolment grew from only 9,689 to 37,112.⁶ However, in recent years, enrolment in Lao universities has been

declining, which reflects the lack of demand for skilled labour in the local job market. In 2020, NUOL only had 20,075 students enrolled, a 54% decrease since 2007. Likewise, only 14% of Laos's university students majored in STEM disciplines in 2012, while 42.5%, 12.8% and 19.4% majored in social sciences; business and law; and the humanities and education, respectively.

The Ministry of Education and Sport (MOES) is currently the primary body responsible for governance of Laos's HEIs and TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) institutions. The public higher education system is highly centralised, and although universities have the autonomy to develop curricula to meet market demand, any changes must be approved by the MOES. All university faculty and staff are considered civil servants with similar salaries and employment packages as others in the public sector. As of 2017, only 9% of university faculty have PhDs and 55% have Master's degrees.⁷ The scarcity of trained faculty has translated into a weak research culture in Lao universities and a stronger focus on teaching. Prior to 2012, public universities charged only a registration fee for its students and received

³ Bounheng Siharath, "The Higher Education in Lao PDR and Roles of International Cooperation for Its University Development — National University of Laos", Graduate School of International Development [blog], Nagoya University, accessed January 26, 2021, https://www2.gsid.nagoya-u.ac.jp/blog/anda/files/2010/06/19_bounheng-siharath.pdf.

⁴ Keiichi Ogawa, "Higher Education in Lao PDR", in *The Political Economy of Educational Reforms and Capacity Development in Southeast Asia Vol. 13*, eds. Yasushi Hirosato and Yuto Kitamura (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), 283-301.

⁵ Yves Bourdet, *Strengthening Higher Education and Research in Laos* (Stockholm: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, 2001).

⁶ Ministry of Education, "Economic Relevance Survey Report", 2009.

⁷ Ministry of Education and Sports, "Department of Higher Education Statistics", 2017.

the rest of its funding directly from the MOES. After the introduction of tuition fees in 2012, however, university revenues increased by approximately 45%.⁸ However, the long-time normalisation of tuition-free higher education in Lao HEIs has made it a difficult transition for students and families to accept, contributing to declining enrolment. Public universities also started leasing space on their campuses to the private sector to diversify their revenue away from government funding.⁹ In 2013, approximately 15.3% of the education budget was assigned to higher education recurring expenses, and TVET institutions received 3.5%. In 2014, 36.6% of the government's education budget (or 1.3% of GDP) was devoted to higher education.¹⁰

Education Sector Development Plan (2016–2020)

In 2016, the MOES released their four-year plan for developing Laos's education system. Regarding higher education, the ministry cites a mismatch between public and private HEIs' course offerings and labour market demand, which has contributed to shrinking enrolment. As part of the plan, the MOES aimed to have 200,000 students (45,000 of which are at the five public universities) by 2020. In addition to aiming for 85% graduate employability, the plan focuses on increased access for disadvantaged demographics by providing additional scholarships and loans to ethnic minorities, low-income and female students, with a target of 45% female

enrolment.¹¹ The MOES also promised to create new student service centres and career counselling offices in public HEIs to guide students to employability, link academic training to job market preparation and address study challenges. Overall, the MOES allotted a budget of USD90.04 million (835.42 billion kip) over the four-year period, 41% of which is devoted to administrative expenditures, while the remaining was invested in new facilities and infrastructure.¹²

As for TVET institutions, the MOES's four-year plan also set out to increase enrolment in TVET institutions to 51,000 students by 2020 from 34,500 in 2016. Over the same four-year period, the MOES contributed USD67.84 million (629.76 billion kip) to TVET institutions, USD15.73 million of which was invested in the construction of new classrooms, student and teacher dormitories and experimental classrooms.¹³

Internationalisation

Internationalisation in Lao higher education primarily takes the form of joint degree programmes and MOUs with foreign institutions; research centres that focus on neighbouring countries (e.g., the Research Center on China in NUOL); and the presence of foreign institutes within Lao universities. The NUOL has 151 MOUs with 31 foreign institutions as of 2020. In 2010, following the Lao government's signing of the comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership with the People's

Republic of China in 2009, the Chinese government-linked Confucius Institute established a branch inside NUOL, bringing 185 Chinese language teachers to Laos. In 2019, the Chinese government funded and opened a new Confucius Institute building in Vientiane with modern facilities, which Lao officials hoped would "build a window for the Lao people to look into China" and foster bilateral exchanges.¹⁴ The Kunming University of Science and Technology in neighbouring Yunnan Province is also active in internationalisation projects in Laos, jointly managing NUOL's Management Science PhD programme with the university's postgraduate office and coordinating the establishment of an additional Confucius Institute in northern Laos together with Souphanouvong University in 2018.¹⁵

Collaboration with institutions from foreign countries is not limited to those from China. The Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), funded by the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, invested USD2 million into the construction of a vocational training centre in Laos between 2002 and 2005, which enrolled over 500 students in 2008.¹⁶ In 2000, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) opened the Laos-Japan Center in NUOL, offering training in business and development studies for Lao students. In 2010, the centre changed its name to the Laos-Japan Human Resource Development Institute (LJI) to focus on human resources development, training in Japanese-style management and facilitate Japanese-Lao bilateral relations with cultural events and language classes. LJI offers two-year MBA programmes co-instructed by Japanese and Lao lecturers, from which 248 students graduated in 2017.¹⁷

⁸ Khamtanch Chanthay and Saykhong Saynasine, "Higher Education Systems and Institutions, Lao People's Democratic Republic," in *The International Encyclopedia of Higher Education Systems and Institutions*, eds. Pedro Nuno Teixeira and Jung-Cheol Shin et al. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2020).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ World Bank, "Lao PDR: School Autonomy and Accountability Country Report 2016", April 2017, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/27663>.

¹¹ Ministry of Education and Sports, Laos People Democratic Republic, "Education and Sports Sector Development Plan (2016-2020)", May 2016, https://www.dvv-international.la/fileadmin/files/south-and-southeast-asia/documents/ESDP_2016-2020-EN.pdf.

¹² Ibid., 70, Figure 8.4.

¹³ Ibid., 64–65, Figure 7.4.

¹⁴ "New compound of Confucius Institute handed over to Laos", China Daily, June 28, 2019, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201906/28/WS5d15acf1a3103dbf1432adcc.html>.

¹⁵ "First Confucius Institute in Northern Laos Inaugurated", Xinhuanet.com, July 15, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-07/15/c_137324317.htm.

¹⁶ Hong-Min Chun and Kyu Cheol Eo, "Aid for Skills Development: South Korea Case Study", 2012, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000217875_eng

¹⁷ "MBA Program", Laos-Japan Institute, accessed January 26, 2021, <http://180.131.148.80/index.php/en/programs-courses/business-courses>.

Higher Education in Lao PDR: Challenges and Direction

NANLUDET MOXOM & RICHARD NOONAN

The higher education sector in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) has quite a unique context. It consists of 117 higher education institutions (HEIs). Of these, 57 are public — five universities, 40 colleges/institutes (including specialised institutes, Buddhist colleges, and a Fine Arts Institute) and 12 teacher education institutions (TEIs) — and 60 are private (including branch campuses of foreign HEIs).

They are all largely managed or regulated by the Ministry of Education (MOES) through the Department of Higher Education. Many public HEIs are also managed by their parent ministries — for instance, the University of Health Sciences is under the authority of the Ministry of Health, and the Banking Institute is managed by the Bank of Lao PDR, the country's central bank.

Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning

The MOES sets the guidelines for curriculum development in HEIs. Entitled the “National Curriculum Standards,” the guidelines cover associate degrees to doctoral degrees, and are more akin to detailed frameworks. This tends to hinder an element of creativity in curriculum planning, and in terms of its adaptability and competitiveness. In 2020, the MOES published updated versions of the guidelines. In the country, only the National University of Laos (NUOL) is able to offer doctoral programmes, of which it has four — in the faculties of Economics and Business Administration, Education, Forestry, and the Post-graduate Education Office. It is worth noting that the guidelines for the National Curriculum Standard for Masters Degrees was changed from two years to three, for master programmes offered part-time — defined as any programme, regardless of level run, that is less than five to seven hours per day or 25 to 35 hours per week. Furthermore, there is now a requirement that each student should publish a paper in an international journal.

Teaching and learning in HEIs is heavily classroom-based. While a student-centered approach is now advocated, a teacher-centered approach has been unavoidable. Furthermore, all faculties of the NUOL have been preparing to employ the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) curriculum, which is based on the hierarchical learning principle of Bloom's taxonomy and stakeholders' inputs. Bloom's taxonomy consists of six hierarchical cognitive processes, namely knowledge, understanding, utilisation, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. The development of a curriculum or programme should regularly take the feedback of stakeholders into consideration. At least one faculty of the NUOL has already completed the development of its OBE curriculum. All faculties are expected to implement changes to their curriculum by the end of 2021.

New university programmes in the pipeline include Nuclear Energy and Artificial Intelligence (AI). The NUOL will also introduce a module on entrepreneurship into every bachelors programme, to enhance employment opportunities for graduates.

“The MOES reported in its five-year education sector performance review for 2015-2020 that “staff skills and competencies have not kept pace with reforms within the sector and significant capacity building will be required in order to address the policy-implementation gap at all levels.”

Quality Assurance (QA)

There is a concerted attempt to enhance the quality of HEIs in the country. The quality assurance authorities of the five universities — called QA Divisions — are not independent bodies, with the exception of the QA Division of Savannakhet University (SKU). Members of SKU's QA Division are often young and junior though, and require training. The other four institutional QA divisions are managed by Academic Affairs Offices. Therefore, they do not oversee budgets of their own, nor can they independently select their own staff members. MOES published its locally developed quality assurance framework in 2013, which is the framework currently used. However, since the NUOL is a member of the ASEAN University Network (AUN) and AUN-QA, and is driven by its vision to be recognised regionally and beyond, it often applies the AUN-QA framework to conduct QA at the programme level. At least one faculty of the NUOL plans to invite AUN-QA experts to conduct a QA evaluation in late 2021. The QA systems of Laotian HEIs have not yet been fully functional or effective because of various inadequacies of QA members and the leadership, but things are improving.

Governance and Management

There is a discernible phenomenon of inbreeding in the selection of managers for public HEIs — it is often internal members of the institution who are selected based on seniority. For junior managers (for example, heads of divisions and departments), the selection process entails at least one round of voting by members of the specific authority, such as the departments, faculties, and offices of the institution. For senior managers, it would be up to three rounds. Manager selection is not a particularly meritocratic process, and this carries deep consequences. For example, the MOES reported in its five-year education sector performance review for 2015-2020 that “staff skills and competencies have not kept pace with reforms within the sector and significant capacity building will be required in order to address the policy-implementation gap at all levels.”

Staffing

The staffing of public HEIs is a bottom-up and top-down process. First, the departments of HEIs propose the number of staff members needed in their respective faculties. The faculties then submit these staff numbers to their institutions, which subsequently submit them to their parent ministries. Then, the process reverses. The ministries adjust the proposed number of staff needed according to the government's capacity, and send the numbers back to the HEIs, which would divide the numbers across the different faculties.

Recruitment is undertaken at the faculty level. Vacancies are typically posted on social media, faculty websites, and through personal connections. The application selection includes applicants sitting for examinations and interviews.

Generally, new staff members are on probation for one year. After that, they can become permanent staff through various forms of performance evaluation — usually peer evaluation and manager evaluation. At that point, they automatically become tenured staff. There are virtually no key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure staff member performances. Consequently, inefficiency in the functioning of the university is quite apparent especially in non-teaching roles such as in administrative matters. As COVID-19 has impacted the government's income, there will be more retirees than new staff members over the course of 2021.

To be formally recognised as a lecturer, an associate lecturer must apply for that appointment and meet a set of criteria. Promotions to associate professorships or full professorships, which are exceptional, require a doctoral qualification and a portfolio of externally refereed research publications. Their number of years of experience is also important in this regard.

Financing in Higher Education

The education sector is assigned an annual budget from sources such as the Ministry of Finance (MOF),

the Ministry of Planning and Investment, and through official development assistance (ODA). HEIs also derive additional income from tuition fees, and research and various services. However, universities often do not collect fees for academic services even though the regulations allow them to do so, likely because managers want to protect their bases of support.

Severe budget insufficiency has been a chronic issue for HEIs, as is the late supply of the budget from the higher authorities. From 2016 to 2020, the MOES received 13.5% of GDP on average per year, despite the government's promise of 18%. The higher education sector received just around 5.7% of MOES's budget during the same period. In addition, the budgets provided are often less than that requested by the HEI, which results in the need for adjusting their original plans of action throughout the university.

The NUOL is the only university that has financial autonomy — it submits its budget proposal directly to the MOF. The NUOL is now the country's pilot university in financial management, where the government offers only staff wages, allowances, and investment, while the operational budget is the responsibility of the NUOL itself. Before 2018, the NUOL's faculties had the right to spend fees collected from students, without approval from any higher authority, and could do so immediately. This resulted in a lack of transparency. Fees paid to the faculties now have to be transferred to the institutional account first, after which the NUOL withdraws it for the faculty. Thus, the NUOL's finances are now more centralised, in a manner referred to as a "one-gate finance flow".

Enrolments and Enrolment Projections

The total higher education enrolment rose from 2000 to 2013, and then began to decline, raising concerns about higher education policy and practice. A closer examination suggests that two main phenomena led to this decline. First, Laos experienced a rising economic growth rate from the early 1990s, accompanied by declining fertility rates, leading to

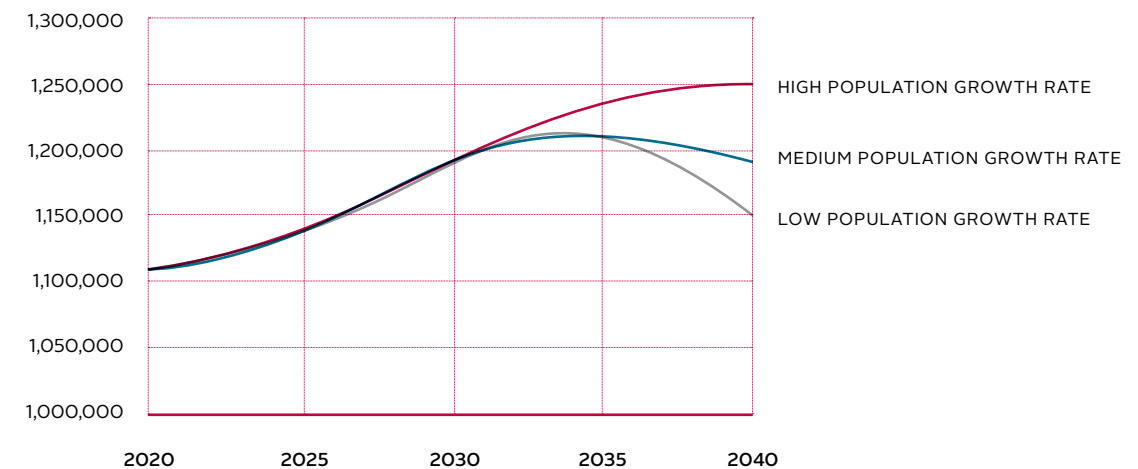
a slight decline in the higher education population cohort from 2012. Second, the rapid growth of employment opportunities in the industrial sector tended to attract many youth who did not see higher education as a path to more attractive employment opportunities. The total higher education enrolment in 2019/2020 represented approximately 10% of the higher education cohort.

The total higher education age cohort by the year 2040 can be projected based on population projections by the Lao Statistics Bureau, according to various scenarios relating to fertility, mortality, and migration rates. The difference between the upper and lower bounds of the higher education enrolment is approximately 100,000.

HEI ENROLMENTS IN ACADEMIC YEAR 2019/2020

UNIVERSITIES	39,277
PUBLIC COLLEGES	46,276
TEIs	8,501
PRIVATE COLLEGES	18,401
TOTAL HEIs	112,455

Projected Higher Education Cohort by the Year 2040 (AGE 17-24)



Conclusion

HEIs in Lao PDR have an authority-based culture which is less participatory and flexible in nature. HEIs are also heavily-regulated, which reduces the elements of adaptability and agility. Both HEIs and MOES face various challenges, such as in terms of quality, effectiveness, human resource, and budget constraints. It should be noted that although quality assurance practices are very helpful for the MOES/Department of Higher Education and the HEIs themselves, the quality assurance systems of HEIs have not been very effective or fully functional. Because they should serve the needs of all stakeholders, these quality assurance practices need to be better understood by staff. Finally, due to weak institutional autonomy, managers and academics are not in a favourable position to build up and invest more in their own capacity. 🏠

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Malaysia

ZANE KHEIR

Malaysia is a middle-income country that is geographically divided into two parts: Peninsular Malaysia and Malaysian Borneo (also known as West and East Malaysia, respectively). Malaysia has a highly diverse ethnic and linguistic landscape, with a majority Muslim Malay population, and large Chinese and Indian minority populations. Relative to most of its ASEAN neighbours, Malaysia is one of the most sparsely populated countries in the region relative to its size. Despite this, Malaysia's population has more than tripled since the mid-1960s, owing to organic population growth and migration.¹ As a former British colony with a long history of migration and cultural diversity, Malaysia likewise has a diverse higher education landscape.

The establishment of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971 marked a paradigm shift in Malaysian society, as a multi-faceted system of affirmative action was implemented, giving preferential status to *bumiputra*, which include Malay and other indigenous Malaysians. Undeniably, socioeconomic inequality in Malaysia is pronounced and has remained a key concern of the government for decades. In universities, which were all public at the time, new ethnic quotas were established, making it extremely competitive for Chinese and Indian Malaysians to gain admission to public universities. Large-scale urbanisation of Malays and a shift towards the Malay language in the public sector also created issues of secondary school compatibility with university curricula and employability. Also considering that Malaysia has the largest Chinese-medium primary and secondary education system outside of China or Taiwan, many Chinese-taught students opted to study abroad for university education. This environment led to large groups of Malaysian students leaving the country for higher education and subsequently employment, resulting in a long-term loss of talent.

¹ "Malaysia Population 1950–2021", microtrends.net, accessed January 27, 2021, <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/MYS/malaysia/population>.



Following the Private Higher Education Institution Act in 1996, which allowed for the opening and formal registration of private higher education institutions, private universities have mushroomed across the country. This change also created a space in the higher education field for non-*bumiputra* students who could not secure spots in public institutions or who were not matriculated in the public primary and secondary school systems. Private universities, which mostly specialise in business, IT and engineering in 2020 charge anywhere from RM40,000 to RM85,000 for a three- or four-year programme.² As of 2019, Malaysia had a total of 38 private universities, 414 private colleges and 10 private university-colleges.³

Although private universities have received a great deal of attention, shifts to privatisation have not left Malaysia's public universities unaffected. Whereas universities in Malaysia were once viewed as "national assets"⁴ and highly centralised, the advent of private universities has also resulted in a higher degree of university autonomy for public universities as well as new pressure to compete effectively with private counterparts.

² "The Cost of Higher Education in Malaysia", studymalaysia.com, July 3, 2020, <https://www.studymalaysia.com/education/top-stories/the-cost-of-higher-education-in-malaysia>.

³ "Higher Education in Malaysia: Private Universities", eTawau.com, accessed January 27, 2021, <http://www.etawau.com/edu/IndexUniversityPrivate.htm>.

Internationalisation

Malaysia arguably has one of the most dynamic higher education sectors in ASEAN regarding internationalisation. From comprehensive "twinning programmes" between Malaysian and foreign institutions — the offering of foreign degrees via Malaysian private institutions to full-fledged foreign branch campuses — the Malay Peninsula, and particularly the Klang Valley, has transformed into a new frontier of higher education development. One of the first ground-breaking institutions was the opening of Monash University via a tie-up with the Malaysian conglomerate Sunway Group in 1998. Since then, full-sized, foreign-owned universities such as the University of Nottingham have opened campuses to provide a British-style education experience for Malaysian and regional international students. In the southern state of Johor, the EduCity project, which is part of the Iskandar Malaysia mega-project, is a special zone allotted for foreign branch campuses, such as Newcastle University, the University of Reading, the University of Southampton and others. With proximity to Singapore, institutions in EduCity are expected to capitalise on overspill from Singapore and on the demographic of students from Johor who previously commuted to Singapore for education. The popularisation of the foreign-branch campuses

⁴ Sirat Morshidi, "Strategic Planning Directions of Malaysia's Higher Education: University Autonomy in the Midst of Political Uncertainties", Higher Education 59 no. 4 (2010): 461–473.

in Malaysia, of which there are 10 to date, has been in their ability to capitalise on Malaysia's affordability, appeal and relatively relaxed visa policy for students from the greater Muslim world and Global South, many of whom could not obtain visas to Western countries or afford studying abroad in English-speaking countries.

In 2016, following a historic bilateral agreement between then-Prime Minister Najib Razak's administration and the Chinese Ministry of Education, Xiamen University from China's Fujian Province opened in Malaysia the world's first overseas branch campus of a Chinese university. Despite being directly owned and operated by Xiamen University in China, the university teaches all courses in English, except for Chinese language and Chinese medicine. Xiamen University Malaysia is an experimental institution that primarily aims to give Chinese university students exposure to Southeast Asia and tap into the historic connections between Malaysia's Chinese community and their ancestral homeland in China's Fujian Province. Xiamen University was also chosen as its founder Tan Kah Kee was a prominent member of the Chinese Malaysian business community and was a figure that represented ties between China and Malaysia. As a young institution, Xiamen University Malaysia's impact is still unclear, but it has set an important precedent for possible future development of Chinese-owned universities elsewhere.

Overall, Malaysia is one of the fastest growing destinations for international students in Asia: in 2019, a total of 30,341 international students, or

5.49% of the total public university study body, were enrolled.⁵ With an estimated 130,110 in total,⁶ it is estimated that over 75% of international students are enrolled in private universities. The majority of Malaysia's international students come from countries such as Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Nigeria, Iran, Yemen and others in the developing world. The demographics of Malaysia's international student body undoubtedly reflect both Malaysia's long-term commitment to South-South Cooperation and historical ties throughout the Indo-Pacific region.

Impacts of the Malaysia Education Blueprint

In 2015, the Malaysian government released the Malaysia Education Blueprint (Higher Education) 2015–2025, the government's hallmark policy document that sets national guidelines for higher education reform. The MEB's primary goals include improving quality, standards and transparency in Malaysian public universities. Malaysian public universities traditionally received almost all of their funding directly from the Ministry of Education or Ministry of Higher Education through "block grants", comprising nearly 70% of university revenue. Block grants are being phased out under the MEB in favour of an Outcome-Based Budgeting (OBB) scheme, which relies on new KPI indicators which are managed by the Education Performance and Delivery Unit (PADU), a unit of the MOE set up for the purpose of implementing change under the MEB. While government funding is being substantially scaled back for public universities, who were prohibited by the MOE from raising tuition

fees, these changes have impelled public universities to develop innovative new ways of compensating for lost government funding. Government funding is also stipulated on the number of students matriculated, incentivising universities to expand their enrolment and streamline application processes. The MEB also includes ambitious goals regarding international students, which revises the original Vision 2020 goal of 200,000 students by 2020 to 250,000 by 2025, and advises universities to target "high priority markets" in ASEAN and countries included in Malaysia's South-South Cooperation initiative.

Since 2015, Malaysia has undergone numerous high-profile political upheavals, including the notorious 1MDB scandal in 2015, the country's first-ever electoral defeat of the ruling political coalition Barisan Nasional, which also marked former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's return to power. Amidst the breakup of Mahathir's short-lived Pakatan Harapan government in early 2020, leading to the appointment of Muhhyidin Yassin, the COVID-19 pandemic struck Malaysia, leading to the closure of its universities, affecting hundreds of thousands of students. In October 2020, the Ministry of Higher Education suspended universities nationwide from proceeding with registrations of new students and allowing international students from entering the country until the end of the year.⁷ Although Malaysia has undergone numerous political changes over the past two years, each administration has remained dedicated to fulfilling the goals set in place by the MEB, which remains the government's central policy document for higher education.

⁵ Ministry of Education Malaysia, "Quick Facts 2019: Malaysia Educational Statistics", 2019.

⁶ "Can Malaysia achieve 250,000 foreign students by 2025?", Free Malaysia Today, December 10, 2019, <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/leisure/2019/12/10/can-malaysia-achieve-250000-foreign-students-by-2025/>.

⁷ Joyce Lau, "Malaysia's U-Turn on Reopening Campuses Leaves Students in Lurch", Times Higher Education, October 8, 2020, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/malaysias-u-turn-reopening-campuses-leaves-students-lurch>.

Malaysia's Higher Education: Tumbled Out of its Trajectory?

MORSHIDI SIRAT & ABDUL RAZAK AHMAD

Since the early 1970s, Malaysia's successive five-year national development plans have had a brief section on higher education with narratives on its role in nation building and human resource development. In the late 1990s, the sector's trajectory reflected Malaysia's perspective on issues such as access and equity, massification and the quality of the provision of higher education, and the internationalisation of higher education. Policy responses to these issues were formulated in the context of Malaysia's aspiration to be a high-income nation by 2020. Against the backdrop of increasing types and number of higher education institutions, and its potential contribution to the economy, the National Higher Education Strategic Plan Beyond 2020 (NHESP) was launched in 2007. This was the first comprehensive higher education plan with a long-term development trajectory. In 2015 the Malaysian Education Blueprint (Higher Education) 2015–2025 (MEBHE) was launched, superseding the NHESP. The MEBHE prioritises higher education development, which adopts technology for and not at the expense of human development. But, the move from the NHESP to the MEBHE did not involve a major or drastic shift in the higher education trajectory to 2020 and then to 2025. Many of the underlying governance structures and arrangements prior to the MEBHE and the underlying assumptions that have underpinned innovation in higher education prior to 2015 were retained. In fact, the Minister's recent annual address for the development of higher education in 2021 did not mention a rethinking of the current trajectory despite the pandemic. In the absence of such ministerial directive, a major aspect of the current review of the MEBHE must begin with a new trajectory. In our view this review should not begin to think about enhancing the development of higher education (Wave 2 in the MEBHE) and subsequently, to produce a Higher Education Action Plan 2021–2025, without a new trajectory as the strategic planning framework.

10 Shifts to Spur Continued Excellence in Higher Education¹



This article is an attempt to think through the development of higher education after 2020 with an assertion that the higher education trajectory, which was the basis for the NHESP and the MEBHE, needs to be reviewed and a new trajectory put in place. Arguably, an Action Plan 2021–2025 based on the current trajectory will send higher education off-course. Worse, we anticipate it will tumble out of its trajectory. For the post-2020 era, a major shift or clear break from the current trajectory is highly desirable, as new key drivers or disruptors to higher education development have emerged. But technology will remain as the main enabler to move the higher education agenda post-2020. What are the components and implications of a new trajectory for Malaysia's higher education with the introduction of the clear shift in 2021?

Past Trajectory – The Achievements

The achievements of the higher education system based on the previous trajectory (2007–2020) can be gleaned and summarised from the U21 Ranking of National Higher Education Systems. This ranking methodology assesses Malaysia's higher education system in terms of resources, environment, connectivity and output. Malaysia was ranked 27th overall in 2015, an indication of its performance based on the implementation of the NHESP. In 2020, with the implementation of the MEBHE since 2015, the system was once again ranked at 27th position. Notably, there were positional changes between 2015 and 2019; there were commendable improvements in the performance at the institutional level, particularly in the research universities and some

¹ Ministry of Education, Malaysia, "Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education)", 2015.

Malaysia U21 Ranking²

Rank out of 50 countries		RESOURCES	ENVIRONMENT	CONNECTIVITY	OUTPUT	OVERALL
MALAYSIA		12	26	35	44	28
ASIAN NEIGHBOURS	SINGAPORE	9	11	5	19	10
	THAILAND	47	30	30	47	42
	INDONESIA	50	37	25	50	48
	HONG KONG	19	4	7	23	15
	SOUTH KOREA	18	39	32	18	21
GLOBAL BENCHMARKS	USA	4	3	15	1	1
	UK	21	16	3	2	8
	AUSTRALIA	16	8	8	6	9
TYPE OF METRICS USED		Government expenditure, investments, R&D	Qualitative assessment of policy and regulatory environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration globally and with industry • International student enrolment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research output • Institution rankings • Enrolment • Employability 	Average score of the four categories

Source: Annual report by Universitas 21, global network of research universities for the 21st century with 26 members that enrol over 1.3 million students and employ over 220,000 staff and faculty. The U21 Index compares national higher education systems for 50 countries.

private universities. But the system as a whole was in need of a review. Arguably, the previous trajectory worked well for some universities but not for others in the system.

The Disruptor – Previous Trajectory

The MEBHE acknowledged that technology is a major disruptor. It has changed the traditional way of delivering higher education, with technology-based learning through websites, learning portals, video conferencing, YouTube, mobile apps, and other blended learning tools. The MEBHE underscored the importance of Open and Distance Learning (ODL), Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), and micro-credentialing. Primarily because of the MEBHE's emphasis on technology-based learning, some Malaysian universities were able to shift to online learning and adapt well to

the learning requirement in the context of the new normal during the COVID-19 pandemic. On hindsight, this pandemic has vindicated the MEBHE's move towards digital learning pedagogy for both students and lecturers. It has highlighted the need to consider synchronous or asynchronous learning methods in Malaysian higher education institutions. There is a likelihood that a protracted international and national pandemic will drive higher education institutions towards domestic orientation or localisation, a dependence on online platforms for learning and research collaboration to sustain the "internationalisation" of higher education, and a hybrid higher education service delivery system with financial austerity as the overriding consideration. For Malaysia, insofar as the internationalisation agenda is concerned, a new higher education trajectory post-2020 is a priority.

“ On hindsight, this pandemic has vindicated the MEBHE's move towards digital learning pedagogy for both students and lecturers. It has highlighted the need to consider synchronous or asynchronous learning methods in Malaysian higher education institutions.

Future Trajectory – Its Components

For Southeast Asian countries that have internationalised their higher education systems, the impact of COVID-19 will be disorientating for some, and traumatic for others. Malaysia, for instance, has developed and pursued the pre-COVID-19 higher education trajectory on the expected monetary and non-monetary benefits of the internationalisation of higher education. This was exemplified by its internationalisation policy and the international education hub strategy. The review of the MEBHE, which is now in progress, comes at an opportune time and it has to take cognisance of the fact that a new trajectory is inevitable. In other words, this COVID-19-related disruption should provide the basis for envisioning and developing a new higher education trajectory.

Indeed, it is logical to expect that many countries in Southeast Asia will begin to envision the future in a similar fashion, with targets and outcomes of the process equally similar. Arguably, donor or sponsor agencies are the major source of uniformity

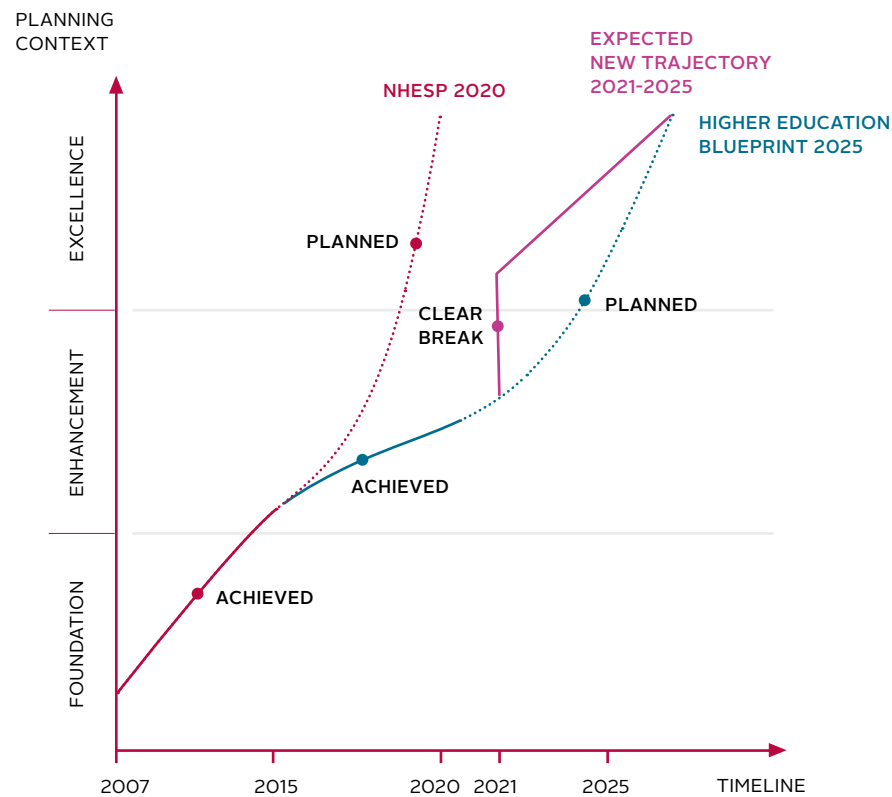
in response and policies. As a result, many will begin to offer a hybrid model, with pandemic-induced online instruction complemented by in-person classes for laboratory-based subjects. Undoubtedly, MOOCs will record a sharp rise in enrolment in Malaysia, as the successes of its pilot project prior to the pandemic will be the basis to convince sceptics. Demand is expected to increase for short programmes based on micro-credentials that provide certification leading to jobs in the technology sector and other technical areas. In short, the future trajectory should factor in the likely impacts of a prolonged recovery period, highlighting the need for practical and effective educational options.

For Malaysia, charting a different course for its higher education system as a result of this "seismic change" will require a dramatic shift in 2021. This shift will push the system on to a different trajectory to 2025 and beyond. What are the components of this dramatic shift? It is envisaged that the new higher education trajectory will need to consider the following: (a more realistic) international and transnational education positioning; enhanced online learning and collaborative research; regulatory flexibility for higher education institutions in both public and private sectors offering courses online and face-to-face; and government and institutional service delivery based on technology.

Post-2020 will see the emergence of a myriad of local and global alliances, driven by complex motivations and objectives, and using highly sophisticated management and business models propelled by advanced technology and data science. These will permeate the higher education system, a system eager to learn how resilience was developed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, some Malaysian universities already in severe financial stress are developing closer relationships with stronger institutions; merging with these institutions appears inevitable in the

² Ministry of Education, Malaysia, "Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education)", 2015.

Higher Education Trajectories in Malaysia



near future. The MOHE has been persuading smaller HEIs to merge since 2011 but with little success. Perhaps these higher education institutions and even some universities experiencing post COVID-19 trauma will see the logic of such mergers from a business perspective.

Higher education providers that may emerge and operate based on the future trajectory will represent an arrangement based on public-private, private++, social enterprises-private, public+private+non-governmental organisations, non-governmental individuals++, or even philanthropy++. Fundamental to the National Higher Education Enterprise (NHEE) business model will be the establishment of more alliances and collaborations – global in outlook and orientation, less state more society, and robustly competitive. Their approach would be more of inclusion rather than prestige or elitism, focussing on unleashing the potentials of each and every one instead of just a selected few. Empowerment, diversity, sustainability and balance, and debunking exclusivity will be the key aspects where the NHEE will emphasise and create the most impact.

“ Empowerment, diversity, sustainability and balance, and debunking exclusivity will be the key aspects where NHEE will emphasise and create the most impact.

Suffice to argue, the NHEE will dismantle and reconstruct the current governance model of universities, introducing a model that is future-proof and flexible, better served through alternative and innovative models of alliances, collaborations, and societal-driven enterprise. It is predicted that the NHEE will envisage higher education more as a global common good rather than a commercial commodity, as advocated by Simon Marginson in his book *Higher Education and the Common Good* (2016, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne). This is crucial because the future of Malaysia’s higher education competitiveness should be grounded on the ideals of advancing the greater societal good rather than converting it into a commodity. However, the public good ethos should not be confined to only domestic concerns, and it is vital for the new higher education actors to manifest the capability to translate such notion of common good into a global scale, propelled by a wider range and altered composition of partnerships and collaborations in the form of the NHEE.

Conclusion

The current pandemic has shown, in the case of Malaysia, that the higher education development trajectory cannot be based on the internationalisation agenda in the current mode and context. Future governance arrangements and

structure of the system must be flexible for higher education institutions to respond immediately to a very critical situation. In 2021, Malaysia needs a reset, introducing a framework and trajectory which is more robust and in tune with regional and global co-existence, exhibiting a high degree of resilience, and with clarity on the role of the state vis-à-vis universities (including private entities). A regulatory regime that determines which higher education institutions can and cannot offer online courses must be reviewed. From a regulatory perspective, all higher education institutions should be able to offer courses online to increase preparedness for future eventualities. 📖

This article was first published in the IPPTN Issues Paper No. 1 of 2021.

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Myanmar

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Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, is the largest mainland Southeast Asian country with a population of 54.5 million in 2020.¹ It is a constitutional republic with a diverse population of 135 ethnic groups, 68% of which consist of Burmese and six other large groups. Myanmar was historically integrated into the British Raj and remained a British colony until 1948. For decades, it was ruled by the military junta that centralised all the country's institutions under national control.² During much of this period, Myanmar was subject to international sanctions that weakened its economic growth and hindered its integration with the global economy. Government regulation and student strikes in the late 1990s also led to extended periods of closure for Myanmar's universities, which suffered from decades of under-investment.³ When the HEIs reopened in 1999, many universities were relocated outside of Yangon to other regions of the country. In 2011, however, Myanmar underwent a dramatic change, introducing democratic and economic reforms, which symbolised a new "opening" of Myanmar. Myanmar is now a fast-growing economy with a GDP of USD76 billion.⁴

Myanmar's higher education system has been characterised by a high degree of government control, with different ministries managing different institutions. The 1973 University Education Law categorised universities as either arts, sciences or technical institutions, all of which were managed by the Ministry of Education (MOE) or other government ministries. However, recent reforms have decreased the number of ministries managing HEIs from 13 in 2013 to eight in

¹ Worldometer, "Myanmar Population (Live)", accessed January 25, 2021, <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/myanmar-population/>.

² Roger Y. Chao, "Higher Education Systems and Institutions, Myanmar", in *The International Encyclopedia of Higher Education Systems and Institutions*, eds. Pedro Nuno Teixeira and Jung-Cheol Shin et al. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2020).

³ Marie Lall, "Education", in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Myanmar*, First Edition, eds. Adam Simpson, Nicholas Farrelly, and Ian Holliday (London: Taylor and Francis, 2018), 268–278.

⁴ World Bank, "GDP (Current US\$) — Myanmar", accessed January 25, 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=MM>.

2016, and the MOE and Ministry of Science and Technology have merged to jointly manage a larger number of HEIs.⁵ The size of Myanmar's higher education sector has also expanded rapidly, with only five universities in the 1930s to 174 in 2018.⁶ Historically, HEI management by the Department of Higher Education of the MOE was geographically administered differently in Upper and Lower Myanmar, but this was consolidated into a single department in 2015. All HEIs in Myanmar are public, as the government does not officially recognise private institutions. However, poor funding, low quality and a stronger demand for English-medium education has fuelled demand for private institutions. Myanmar's outstanding number of students enrolled in distance learning programmes — roughly two-thirds of enrolled students — is a distinct feature of its higher education system and an important historical tradition for the country since the 1970s.⁷ From 2011 onward, Myanmar's overall enrolment expanded significantly: in 2015 there were 225,718 students enrolled in normal programmes and 411,164 in distance learning programmes; total enrolment (including students in distance learning programmes) increased to 771,321 in 2017

⁵ Ministry of Education Myanmar, National Education Strategic Plan (2016–21) (Naypyidaw: Ministry of Education Myanmar, 2016).

⁶ CHINLONE, "Myanmar Higher Education Reform: Which Way Forward?", 2018, <https://gdc.unicef.org/resource/myanmars-higher-education-reform-which-way-forward>.

⁷ Ibid.

from 659,510 in 2011.⁸ Another noteworthy feature is the substantial number of women graduating from Myanmar's universities at undergraduate and postgraduate levels: roughly 59% of university graduates in Myanmar are women.⁹ Myanmar also boasts some of the lowest tuition fees for public universities in the region, with some institutions covering full tuition charges in exchange for treating students as employees who contribute to their operations.

In 2011, the government formed a National Education Committee (NEC) to co-ordinate the national education system, with higher education as a sub-sector. All HEIs have since been required to have their own management committee, which must include two members from the ministry that oversees the institution. The 2014 National Education Law saw the start of new changes in Myanmar's university system and would in theory move towards institutional autonomy and the establishment of new quality controls. It also aimed to sync Myanmar's standard number of years of pre-university schooling with other ASEAN members to facilitate regional integration. However, changes brought on by the new National

⁸ The breakdown between normal programmes and distance learning for 2011 and 2017 figures are not available.

⁹ Department of Population, *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census: Thematic Report on Education — Census Volume 4-H* (Naw Pyi Taw: Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, 2017).



Education Law were met with controversy and student protests, as the new law did not support the teaching of ethnic minority languages in universities, prevented the formation of student and teacher unions, and did not give the much anticipated full autonomy to universities.

Trend Towards Autonomy

In late 2015, the MOE released the National Education Strategic Plan 2016-2021 (NESP I), the latest education policy document that encompasses nine transformational shifts, two of which pertain to higher education and TVET institutions. The Ministry's goals for higher education include strengthening governance and management capacities, which entail the establishment of a National Institute for Higher Education Development (NIHED) and conducting systematic overseas study tours for university rectors and administrators to gain exposure to quality practices abroad. Establishing ties with foreign institutions is also seen as a means of enhancing quality and addressing the demand for English in higher education. Most importantly, NESP I aims to meet the long-term goal of institutional autonomy for universities — a shift from a government-run to a “government-guided” model, giving them the ability to self-govern, independently develop curricula and conduct research. In addition to encouraging universities to build systems of qualifications to link with the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, Myanmar universities have also been allowed to establish memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with overseas institutions

to promote collaborative research. Funding has also been allotted to a new President's Scholarship Program, allowing Myanmar students to study overseas, although the programme has since been discontinued. As a goal of the NESP is equitable access, the MOE has pledged to provide affordable accommodation for students, which remains a “key obstacle” to access for poorer students, and promote student support programmes, allowing low-income students to apply for financial support. So far, the government has carried out some of their policy objectives, declaring 16 of Myanmar's universities fully autonomous in September 2020.¹⁰

Regarding budgeting, the Department of Higher Education received 17% of the MOE's budget of USD1.32 billion in 2018.¹¹ Despite an increase from 11.28% in 2017, the MOE's budget for higher education has trended lower as it composed over 19% in 2011 though the overall education budget has steadily increased. As tuition fees remain relatively low, university funding is almost entirely dependent on the MOE's budget allotment. Widespread bureaucratisation and the centralised structure of university governance do not allow universities to diversify their sources of revenue. Furthermore, government funding for universities is spread out across the eight different ministries that manage different HEIs. As per the goals laid out by the NESP, the MOE planned to allot approximately USD568.5 million to the higher education sector from 2016 to 2021.¹²

CHINLONE Project

Funded by the European Union's Erasmus+ Programme, the CHINLONE Project (short for Connective Higher education Institutions for a New Leadership on National Education) was launched in 2017 to modernise and internationalise Myanmar's higher education system and help it transition into the knowledge economy. This three-year project (2017-2020) was a collaborative effort between three European universities (University of Bologna, University of Granada and University of Uppsala), a European university association, the Myanmar MOE and five Myanmar universities (Dagon University, University of Mandalay, University of Yangon, Yangon University of Economics, and Yezin Agricultural University). This project entailed special training for Myanmar universities' academic and administrative faculty to design “student-centred” curricula, establishing or strengthening universities' international relations offices to integrate Myanmar HEIs into global networks and particularly exposing them to European practices. CHINLONE project coordinators also provided a list of key policy recommendations for Myanmar policymakers, including providing stronger financial and academic support for teachers (ensuring they obtain PhDs, increased salaries and improved working conditions), fostering more inclusive, dynamic campus cultures, and creating incentives for faculty to conduct publishable academic research.

¹⁰ Thet Zin Soe, “16 Myanmar Universities Declared Autonomous,” Myanmar Times, September 3, 2020, <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/16-myanmar-universities-declared-autonomous.html>.

¹¹ Ministry of Planning and Finance Myanmar, “Myanmar 2018 Education Budget Brief,” 2018.

¹² Ibid., 236 (converted to USD)

Myanmar Education Reform: Balancing Private and Public Partnerships

MAITRII AUNG-THWIN

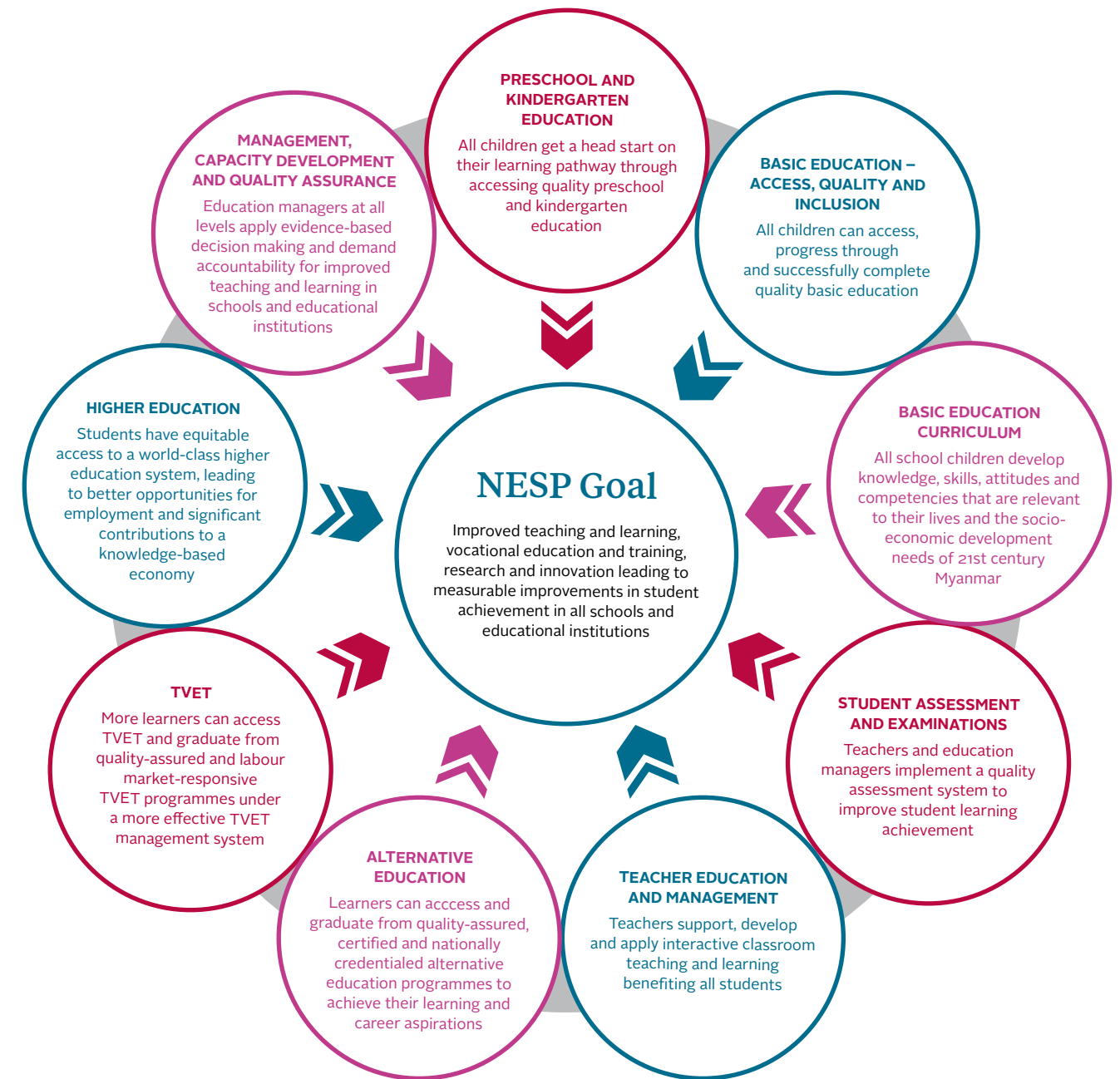
International investment into Myanmar's higher education sector emerged alongside the country's broader liberalisation that followed the elections of 2010. Between 2010 and 2020, Myanmar opened up its economy to foreign investment, adopted liberal democratic institutions, and embarked on a path of socio-economic reform that surprised observers and citizens alike.

In 2012, the Myanmar government announced a co-ordinated strategy for improving capacity and infrastructural needs. Education reform was identified as a critical component of the country's future development, a long-term vision that sought to align Myanmar's human capacity needs with its economic and political reforms.

That vision was first articulated in 2012 as the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR), a collaboration involving the government of Myanmar, the Asian Development Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, several national development agencies, and private philanthropy aid organisations. The CESR aimed to provide stakeholders with a rapid assessment report, recommendations for reform, and the establishment of a sector-wide costed education plan.

The resulting plan, the National Education Strategic Plan 2016–2021 (NESP I) provides a comprehensive overview of Myanmar's education sector: background and context, recent education policies, key challenges of the current system, a description of key education sub-sectors, financing information, and an implementation plan. NESP I identified nine transformational area requiring reform, including higher education.

National Education Strategic Plan I – 9 Transformational Shifts¹



¹ Ministry of Education, The Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, "National Education Strategic Plan 2016-21", 2016.

“ Education reform was identified as a critical component of the country's future development, a long-term vision that sought to align Myanmar's human capacity needs with its economic and political reforms.

The report identified four major challenges facing higher education that will shape education reform in the next decade. They include: 1) replacing the current model of centralised governance with a more corporate model that focuses on performance, accountability and autonomy; 2) improving the quality of the curriculum, learning environments, and research/teaching processes; 3) ensuring that Myanmar's higher education is affordable and accessible; and 4) improving the research capacity of higher education in Myanmar.

The following discussion surveys the immediate and long-term trends in Myanmar's higher education sector within the context of the central government's broader attempt to transform the country's economy, governance structures, and social contract with its many communities. It suggests that while promoting autonomy for institutes of higher learning will align education reform with the broader liberalisation of the country, developing state capacity in the education sector will ensure that the country's educational transformation is sustainable in the decades to come.

Immediate Context

The February 2021 enactment of Emergency Law by the military has raised questions about existing plans to restructure and increase investment in the education system. In 2020, 16 universities

were granted autonomy, giving them greater administrative space to shape their curricula and operations in dialogue with the communities they serve. Official statements by the military indicate that no changes will be made to domestic and foreign policy, a sign that coping with COVID-19 and distance learning will remain a priority.

COVID-19 caused a nationwide closure of higher education institutions that resulted in the interruption of examinations, the halting of admissions processes, the postponement of teacher training, and the attempted shift to distance learning. The lack of access to required equipment and reliable internet made it difficult for students to engage effectively with online learning tools while the lack of teacher training in distance learning and suitable learning materials rendered these temporary measures inadequate. Policy in the next year will focus on a two-phased system: the first constitutes the “response” phase that will ensure education continuity while schools remain closed.

With COVID-19 still in play for the foreseeable future, the immediate priority for the Department of Higher Education is to ensure education continuity through the development of distance learning materials, infrastructure, and creating alternative administrative processes to manage examinations, assessments and admissions. Long-term measures for the COVID-19 recovery phase will focus on the well-being of returning students, developing

management protocols for the resumption of face to face learning, assessing student progress, and reassessing the efficacy of content and learning approaches. Developing customised platforms to provide training for the trainers will likely be drawn from regional and international partners.

Given the fluid nature of the public health situation, autonomous institutes of higher education will still require continued government support and co-ordination in order to align local needs with broader national priorities.

Long-term Context

Uncertainty about Myanmar's political future once again raises questions about whether or not education reform will be achievable if the situation escalates into broader social disorder. Protests by various groups within the education sector also amplifies the possibility that universities and other institutions of higher learning might be temporarily closed.

If higher education reform continues to move forward, it will be framed by three strategies. It will

“ Myanmar is attempting to reform its economic, political, and social institutions after 70 years of civil war and 30 years of a command economy that did not yield a strong foundation from which to build a 21st century education system.

focus on: 1) strengthening education governance and management capacity; 2) improving the quality and relevance of higher education; and 3) expanding equitable access to higher education.

These three strategies will be supported by customised and complementary programmes to achieve the desired shifts in the higher education sector. Strengthening education governance will be a five-component programme to establish institutional capacity, while a six-component programme will support measures to improve relevance and quality of higher education. A third programme focusing on enhancing equitable access to higher education will compose of two components that will focus on good teaching, healthy learning environments, and student-support programmes.


Myanmar is attempting to reform its economic, political and social institutions after 70 years of civil war and 30 years of a command economy that did not yield a strong foundation from which to build a 21st century education system. The ambitious aims to rejuvenate higher education — in all of its forms — must be tempered by the reality that the current Myanmar state is barely a decade old, struggles with limited capacity, and occupies a marginal presence in much of the country.

Given the reinstatement of sanctions by the United States, foreign donors and international agencies may hesitate to continue working with the Myanmar government. Stakeholders should ensure that education reform continues — regardless of who is in government — by investing in both private and public programmes as Myanmar continues its shaky and complicated multi-sector transformation in the decades to come. 📖

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The Philippines

ZANE KHEIR



The Philippines is an archipelagic country of over 7,000 islands and has a population of over 106 million. Like its geography, the Philippines' population is demographically diverse with various ethnic groups and languages, of which the two largest are Tagalog and Visayan. Though declaring independence in 1946, the legacy of its long history of colonialism under Spanish and American rule has left a substantial imprint on its society; officially a secular state, the Philippines has the largest Christian population in Southeast Asia, and English is widely spoken as a second language of business and education, and is the main medium of instruction in all HEIs. The inception of formal education in the Philippines started under Spanish rule by different orders of the Catholic Church, and schools and HEIs with religious affiliations remain significant in higher education. The Philippine economy is also dependent on its sizeable demographic of overseas workers employed around the world, many of whom are trained in colleges and TVETs for the medical and hospitality industries. In 2019, Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) broke a new record by annually remitting a total of USD33.5 billion,¹ contributing approximately 9% to the country's GDP.

In 1994, the Philippines passed the Higher Education Act, which established the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), the main government agency overseeing higher education. Technical and vocational schools are managed separately by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). While the CHED solely manages most of the higher education field, around 88% of HEIs in the Philippines are private, making the CHED an agency primarily one for regulating and granting status to HEIs. In practice, private school associations develop their own curricula and maintain their own accreditation practices. Funding and autonomy are granted to HEIs that gain additional accreditation through independent organisations

¹ National Reintegration Center for OFWs, "Remittances Hit All-Time High of \$33.5B in 2019", accessed January 29, 2021, <http://nrco.dole.gov.ph/index.php/announcement/378-remittances-hit-all-time-high-of-33-5b-in-2019>.

within the Federation of Accrediting Agencies of the Philippines (FAAP). Private institutions that meet certain levels of accreditation through organisations affiliated with FAAP can apply for autonomous status from the CHED and operate outside of state-controlled curricula and standards.² From the early 2000s, systematic accreditation of private institutions by the CHED with the help of independent accrediting agencies has been crucial to training large numbers of OFWs for overseas employment, showing that private, for-profit HEIs in the Philippines play a key role in the government's economic policy.³

The Philippine higher education system is composed of several types of institutions: state university colleges, which are publicly managed and subsidised, and host the largest proportion of overall students; local colleges and universities, which are managed by local governments; other publicly funded HEIs; and private HEIs, which compose the vast majority of HEIs in the country. Although private HEIs are not officially differentiated by size or discipline, the vast majority of them provide Bachelor's level degrees and enrol more students than state university colleges, and local colleges and universities combined. There were a total of 1,943 HEIs in the

² Yasmin Y. Ortega, *Routledge Critical Studies in Asian Education — Emigration, Employability and Higher Education in the Philippines* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

³ Ibid.



Philippines in 2018, which is approximately 10 times the number in neighbouring countries, like Indonesia or Thailand.⁴ However, the quality of many of these institutions in an ongoing concern as many are not directly regulated by the CHED. Enrolment in the private higher education sector has shown the largest proportion of growth, with only one third of total enrolment in 2001, compared with 42% in 2011.

Overall enrolment in Philippine HEIs is substantial, at 3,590,000 students in 2016, a massive 40% expansion compared to 2006. However, enrolment suffered in the years following 2010, when the Department of Education overhauled the standard years of basic education to 12 years instead of 10, which artificially shrank university enrolment.⁵ Enrolment in TVET institutions predominantly consists of younger age groups, with 61% of graduates in 2012 being 15-24 years old⁶. The country's demographic structure, ongoing economic growth and continued demand for labour from overseas are expected to be supportive to higher education demand more generally. While the Philippines has a plethora of institutions and growing enrolment, it suffers from a lack of accredited programmes and an established research culture, with only

⁴ National Economic and Development Authority, "Philippine Development Plan 2017–2022", Chapter 10, October 3, 2017, <https://www.neda.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/10-Chapter-10-Accelerating-Human-Capital-Development-1.14.2019.pdf>.

⁵ QAA, *Country Report: The Republic of the Philippines* (Gloucester: The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2018).

⁶ National Economic and Development Authority, "Philippine Development Plan 2017–2022".

four institutions appearing in international rankings. The most popular majors of study are overwhelmingly business administration and education and teacher training, which compose a combined 46.3% of total enrolment, compared to engineering and technology, which only make up 12.5%.⁷

National Development Initiatives

In 2017, the Philippine central government under the Rodrigo Duterte administration created the “AmBisyon Natin 2040”, a long-term, multi-faceted development agenda aiming to bring the Philippines to upper-middle income status by 2040. The first phase of the vision manifested in the Philippine Development Plan 2017-2022, one pillar of which is development of human capital, which has direct implications for Philippine higher education. Also in 2017, the government passed the Universal Access To Quality Tertiary Education Act (aka Republic Act 10931), a ground-breaking policy reform that encompasses four actions:

- 1) Providing free tuition for students in state university colleges and recognised local colleges and universities.
- 2) Free tuition for public and private TVET institutions registered with TESDA.
- 3) Grants for low-income students in public and private institutions.
- 4) A new student loan programme for tertiary students.

To implement the Republic Act 10931, the government formed the Unified Student Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education (UNIFAST), which initiated reforms in 2018, resulting in 900,000 state university college students being relieved from tuition expenses in 2018-2019⁸. The entire programme required an investment by the government of PHP40 billion, most of which went to tuition waivers for state university colleges and subsidies for TVETS. In 2020, the government maintained and expanded the programme, and increased spending by over 10% to PHP44.2 billion.⁹ A unique feature of the government’s push for equitable access is that UNIFAST also provides subsidies for students in private TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) institutions that have received accreditation as well as for students in need who are enrolled in private HEIs.

Government spending on education has grown in recent years. In the Philippine 2020 national budget, the Department of Education, along with the CHED and TESDA received a larger proportion of the government’s budget than any other agency, at PHP692.6 billion.¹⁰ Education administrators have displayed a preference for improving quality and facilities of state university colleges, allotting them the largest percentage of the total education budget of PHP77.4 billion. To meet the government’s aim of increasing access to tertiary education through the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act, CHED was granted within their budget PHP7.1 billion for scholarships, grants, student support and other financial assistance.¹¹

Internationalisation

Regarding internationalisation, although the Philippines is behind some of its ASEAN neighbours in terms of international student recruitment, its institutions bank on its image as a provider of English-medium education, attracting non-English-speaking Asian students who seek affordable English instruction. In 2012, the Philippines had 24,000 students from South Korea studying English, compared with only 5,000 in 2005.¹² Though the number of Korean students enrolled in degree programmes is significantly smaller, at 1,200 in 2017, the growing popularity of English-language courses coupled with increasing quality of degree programmes are supportive for universities to attract more international students. Overall, in 2017, the Philippines hosted 12,946 international students for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, the majority of them from India, China, South Korea and Nigeria.¹³ Compared with other countries in the region, the process of applying for student visas and visas for foreign staff is relatively lengthy in the Philippines, requiring documents to pass through the CHED, immigration and foreign affairs departments in addition to Philippine overseas offices. High levels of bureaucracy act as a continued challenge to the Philippines developing itself as a higher education destination. Currently, foreign HEIs are unable to operate in the Philippines without a local partner who maintains at least 60% ownership, although some Philippine HEIs have created programmes within foreign institutions in the region.¹⁴

COVID-19 Impact

In March 2020, the Philippine government implemented a series of lockdowns in Metro Manila, the entire island of Luzon and throughout the country following the expansion of the COVID-19 pandemic. Regulations on movement significantly impacted the country’s higher education system. The nation’s leading universities, and particularly ones integrated in the ASEAN University Network, were the ones that most successfully coped with new restrictions, utilising work-from-home models and cloud software to switch to online teaching and allowing students to access course materials and join lectures via smartphones to accommodate those who lack internet connectivity at home. Universities have also been instrumental in developing locally made COVID-19 diagnostic kits and other healthcare equipment to reduce reliance on more costly foreign imports.¹⁵

⁷ The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, “QAA, Country Report: The Republic of the Philippines”, 2018.

⁸ UniFast, “Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act”, accessed January 29, 2021, <https://unifast.gov.ph/uniqtea.php>.

⁹ Jovee Marie de la Cruz, “P44 billion in CHED Budget for Universal Access”, September 17, 2020, <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2020/09/17/p44-billion-in-ched-budget-for-universal-access/>.

¹⁰ The Philippine Department of Budget and Management, “2020 National Budget: Continuing the Journey to a More Peaceful and Progressive Philippines”, 2020, https://www.dbm.gov.ph/images/pdf/files/2020_Quick_Glance_FINAL_v1.pdf.

¹¹ Javier Joe Ismael, “Education has Biggest Slice of 2020 Budget”, Manila Times, December 27, 2019, <https://www.manilatimes.net/2019/12/27/news/top-stories/education-has-biggest-slice-of-2020-budget/667937/>.

¹² British Council, “Opportunities and Challenges in the Internationalisation of Philippine Higher Education Sector”, 2015.

¹³ Philippine Bureau of Immigration, “Statistics for Foreign Students in the Philippines”, 2018.

¹⁴ British Council, “Opportunities and Challenges in the Internationalisation of the Philippine Higher Education Sector”, 2015.

¹⁵ Nymia Pimentel Simbulan, “The Philippines — COVID-19 and Its Impact on Higher Education in the Philippines”, *HESB 8*, June 4, 2020, <https://headfoundation.org/HESB8/covid-19-and-its-impact-on-higher-education-in-the-philippines/>.

Higher Education in the Philippines: Prospects and Challenges

ROGER Y. CHAO, JR & LORRAINE PE SYMACO

In the next two decades (2020-2040), the Philippines will deepen its focus on the internationalisation of Philippine higher education, enhance regional and global partnerships, and increasingly benchmark internationally to enhance the quality of the country’s higher education sector. There may also be increasing regional partnerships within the ASEAN member countries and its dialogue partners, not only in terms of international student mobility, but also in the delivery and recognition of higher education courses and programmes. Furthermore, the increased focus on digital delivery of higher education caused by the recent health emergency (COVID-19) may not only influence the shift to a hybrid of traditional and digital delivery of higher education, but also enhance digital higher education partnerships within ASEAN and its dialogue partners.

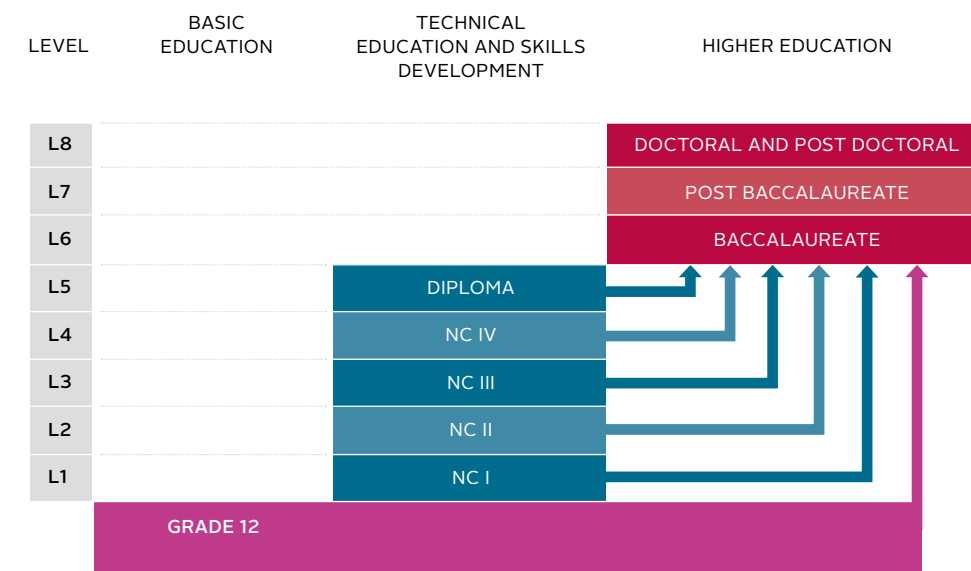
Internationalisation and Global Rankings

Although the Enhanced Basic Education Act (2013), the Universal Access to Tertiary Education Act (2017), and the development of Centres of Excellence/Development clearly show the country’s focus on enhancing quality and access to Philippine higher education, international standards and benchmarking have also been undertaken including significant use of International Organization for Standardization (ISO) certifications in both public and private higher education institutions. The mandated use of outcomes-based education in Philippine higher education and the 2019 Policy Standards and Guidelines on Graduate Education, which changed the typology and requirements (including at least one publishable journal article or a capstone project), can also be seen as a result of international benchmarking and practices.

“ Since 2004, there has been an ongoing process of developing the ASEAN Higher Education Area, and the past years have focused on enhancing ASEAN university co-operation, intra-ASEAN student mobility, and developing harmonisation tools that serve as a strong foundation for higher education co-operation between ASEAN member states.

At the policy level, the focus on internationalisation of Philippine higher education can be seen in the institutionalisation (and eventual passing to law) of the Philippine Qualifications Framework, which is to be refereed with the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework. In 2016, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) not only developed its framework and strategies on internationalisation of Philippine higher education (CHED Memo Order [CMO] 52), but also developed standards and regulations for transnational education programmes (CMO 62). The latest draft of the Philippine internationalisation roadmap, which includes key results areas, indicators, strategic initiatives and programmes, suggests a strengthening of internationalisation of Philippine higher education at sectoral, institutional, individual and systemic levels. The draft roadmap also emphasises the importance of creating a Philippine higher education brand, revitalising and enhancing global and regional partnerships, and capacity-building to promote and sustain the internationalisation of Philippine higher education.

The Philippine Qualifications Framework¹



¹ Philippine Government, "Philippine Qualifications Framework", accessed February 17, 2021, <https://pqf.gov.ph/>

At the functional level, the CHED and a significant number of Philippine higher education institutions have engaged in several internationalisation initiatives with national, ASEAN, and regional and global projects. These include the Europe-funded Tuning Asia-South East and the ANTENA projects, which focus on programme level harmonisation of learning outcomes and capacity building for the internationalisation of Philippine higher education, and the British Council's "Study on Capacity Building and Institutional Development of Higher Education in the Philippines through Transnational Education". Furthermore, the Philippines, including several of its higher education institutions, is actively participating in the various activities and programmes organised by the ASEAN University Network and the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization-Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO-RIHED). Since 2004, there has been an ongoing process of developing the ASEAN Higher Education Area, and the past years have focused on enhancing ASEAN university co-operation, intra-ASEAN student mobility, and developing harmonisation tools that serve as a strong foundation for higher education co-operation between ASEAN member states.

The Philippines, in its ambition to create a knowledge-driven society, not only aims to develop internationally recognised and competent graduates, but also to gain international recognition for the quality of Philippine higher education. Aside from tweaking the country's higher education system, the Philippines also envisions having several higher education institutions ranked in global university rankings.

The QS World University Rankings: Asia 2021 had 14 Philippine higher education institutions ranked. This went beyond the initial target of having at least 10 Philippine higher education institutions globally ranked by 2022. Various CHED initiatives, including funding for institutional research, international accreditations, faculty development scholarships, networking events, mentoring on the development of institutional internationalisation strategies, and even funding for publishing journals, are designed to enhance the quality and internationalisation of Philippine higher education institutions. At the faculty level, both at public and private institutions, international research publications are increasingly becoming a major criterion for promotions mirroring the "publish or perish" phenomenon in the global higher education sector.

2019 QS World University Rankings of Philippine HEIs²

RANK	NAME OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION
384	UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
651-700	ATENEO DE MANILA UNIVERSITY
801-1000	DE LA SALLE UNIVERSITY
801-1000	UNIVERSITY OF SANTO TOMAS

² Commission on Higher Education, Republic of the Philippines, "2019 QS World University Rankings of Philippine HEIs".

Higher Education and Emergencies

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has brought about significant challenges to the global higher education sector, including in the Philippines. Apart from the need to equip the higher sector of emergency mitigation efforts, the increasing use of digital technology in the delivery of higher education by most higher education systems is a fact. However, how does this impact the future development of the internationalisation of Philippine higher education? In October 2020, ASEAN education ministers called for the transformation of digital education, while in November 2020, the Korea Foundation together with the Sejong Institute organised the 2020 ASEAN-ROK Partnership Seminar "Building Resilience, Pioneering the Future", where one of the key topics focused on "ASEAN-ROK cooperation for evolving digital education in the Untact era". The increased interest in digital education cooperation, along with the utilisation of digital technologies in the higher education sector hints that national, regional and global higher education cooperation will include both traditional and digital education in the coming decades. Systemic changes will possibly occur in the coming decade to develop new rules and standards that incorporate digital education to ensure quality, relevance, and recognition of programmes, courses, and even micro-courses in the higher education sector.

Internationalisation of Philippine higher education will no longer be limited to the offering of traditional programmes, but will eventually include digital programmes at least initially within the ASEAN region. In fact, in October 2020 amidst the health pandemic, Saint Paul University, Cebu Normal University, and the Philippine Normal University (all Philippine Centres of Excellence in teacher education), together with the CHED and the Philippine Embassy in Phnom Penh, launched the "Developing Global Filipino Teachers Program" to equip, capacitate and enhance competencies of 1,152 Filipino teachers in Cambodia to qualify them in teaching positions and ensure higher salaries. Although not a full higher education programme, this example highlights the use of digital technology in Philippine higher education to offer educational services in an ASEAN member state.

The Future of Philippine Higher Education

The Philippine higher education sector, its policy initiatives and activities are aimed at developing the Philippines as a knowledge-based society. To achieve this goal, internationalising Philippine higher education, building and enhancing global and regional partnerships, and increasing Philippine higher education presence in the global university rankings are foreseen to be necessary initiatives

“ It is envisioned that the Philippine higher education sector will be more open to transnational education providers and potentially international faculty with its strong focus on internationalisation and the further implementation of Philippine policies on transnational education.

in the next two decades. Furthermore, the shift to and increased usage of digital technology in Philippine higher education may lead to a hybrid of both traditional and digital education in the coming years.

Philippine higher education 2030–2040 can be envisioned to be internationally benchmarked (initially within ASEAN standards but eventually with global standards) with an increasing number of joint programmes and transnational programmes offered and delivered by Philippine higher education institutions. With increasing pressure to publish in Philippine academia and the changes in graduate education, there is a strong possibility of having more Philippine higher education institutions ranked in Asian and even global university rankings. It is envisioned that the Philippine higher education sector will be more open to transnational education providers and potentially international faculty with its strong focus on internationalisation and the further implementation of Philippine policies on transnational education. This renewed focus is also highlighted through the passage of the Transnational Higher Education Act in 2019.

Although there may be challenges in international programme mobility from Philippine higher

education institutions, there is a strong potential for joint programme development and delivery within the ASEAN region and higher education institutions from ASEAN member states. Intra-ASEAN student and faculty mobility are foreseen to increase but the pace of increase will depend on the relevant ASEAN mechanisms and funding developed, as well as bilateral arrangements between the Philippines and partner countries not limited to ASEAN and ASEAN+3 countries. There is a strong possibility of continuing education or short courses delivered by Philippine higher education institutions, particularly to enhance the skills and competencies of overseas Filipinos workers in the next decade. Although the foundation for internationalisation of Philippine higher education is developed at the policy level, it remains a work in progress, but if sustained, Philippine higher education has the potential to deliver international quality education to its citizens at home and abroad, and to several other countries seeking an English-language based budget-friendly international education. 📖

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Singapore

ZANE KHEIR

The city-state of Singapore is both the smallest and most economically developed ASEAN member. Its almost entirely urbanised population of 5.6 million has a 97.5% literacy rate¹ and it enjoys the highest standard of living in the region. Singapore is also one of the youngest countries in the region, gaining independence in 1965 following its separation from Malaysia. Unlike many of its ASEAN neighbours, Singapore suffers from an ageing population and declining birth rate. However, despite demographic trends, from 2000 to 2018, Singapore has more than doubled its university enrolment, from under 50,000 to over 103,000. Combined enrolment in polytechnics and universities has also grown, but at a more modest 68.5% in the same period.

Over the past two decades, Singapore’s reputation as a global financial centre and trade hub has only grown in prominence, and the standing of its education system is no exception. Singapore’s higher education system has undergone significant developments, following then-Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong’s policy objective of turning the country’s flagship universities, the National University of Singapore (NUS) and the Nanyang Technological University (NTU), into “world-class” institutions. Since then, the universities’ global and regional rankings have steadily climbed, placing them shoulder-to-shoulder with prestigious Western institutions. Singapore now has a total of six public universities, including a National Institute of Education affiliated with NTU. The ascent of Singaporean universities has undoubtedly been bolstered by robust government spending: in 2018, the government’s tertiary education budget expanded to SGD4.6 billion compared to SGD3.08 billion in 2015 and SGD1.5 billion in 2000.² Government spending on education and education-development project is not only reflective of Singapore’s economic success, but, like other infrastructure projects, is viewed as a means of boosting political legitimacy in Singapore.

¹ Department of Statistics Singapore, 2020, www.singstat.gov.sg.

² Department of Statistics Singapore, “Table Customisation and Chart Plotting”, last modified January 21, 2021, <https://www.tablebuilder.singstat.gov.sg/publicfacing/createDataTable.action?refId=15204>



Major Developments

Despite the corporatisation of Singapore's public universities in 2006, government expenditures on tertiary education only grew, and additional funds were allotted to providing subsidies and start-up loans for foreign institutions to open campuses in Singapore as part of the Global Schoolhouse initiative. However, since its inception in 2002 and the opening of numerous foreign-owned campuses, some projects under the initiative have been slow to culminate; several foreign-owned universities, such as the Chicago Booth School of Business and the University of New South Wales, that set up campuses in Singapore have since relocated or closed due to lower-than-expected enrolment. However, in 2019, the École Hôtelière de Lausanne, a Swiss hospitality and tourism school, was granted certification to open a campus in Singapore with hopes to attract aspiring non-Asian hospitality students to gain Asia-specific experience.

While privatisation of higher education has been a prominent theme in Singapore and throughout the region, there is evidence of efforts by the government to transform reputable private universities into public institutions. In 2017, the Singapore Institute of Management, a private university that opened in 2005 and is known for its strong network of foreign partners through its SIM Global Education arm, was restructured to become the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS), Singapore's sixth public university. With an inaugural class of over 2,000 students, SUSS's core objectives of lifelong learning

and applied social sciences also reflect the wider goals of Singapore's Ministry of Education (MOE).

Regarding budgeting, Singapore's Tuition Grant Scheme (TGS) still remains a core source of funding not only for Singaporean students but also for permanent resident and international undergraduates. Tuition fees at public universities have consistently increased in recent years, with non-subsidised annual fees for an Arts and Social Sciences degree at NUS and NTU being SGD29,850 and SGD32,950, respectively, while most degree programmes at SMU cost as much as SGD44,770. In contrast, government subsidies reduce tuition fees by approximately 75% for Singaporean students, but only 45-50% for international students. Furthermore, permanent residents and international students who sign up for TGS are required to sign a three-year service bond with a Singapore registered company following their graduation. This incentive ensures that government subsidies for non-citizens ultimately contribute to the local job market and economy.

Singapore also boasts one of the highest degrees of internationalisation among ASEAN countries, with local private institutions partnering with foreign universities to import degree programme curricula as well as foreign faculty to teach on-site. Such programmes allow students to learn from instructors from foreign institutions, use identical curricula and resources as the partner university overseas, and be granted a degree from that university while residing in Singapore. Such

degree programmes not only appeal to Singaporean students but also make for a more cost-effective alternative for other students in the region to attain a higher degree from a Western university.

Another landmark in Singapore's internationalisation efforts was the establishment of the Yale-NUS residential college in 2011, marking the first time in history that an Ivy League university has established a physical presence in Asia. NUS's acclaim as Asia's top university in recent years has been further solidified through its symbolic tie-up with Yale. Yale-NUS, which is an appendix of NUS's main campus, attracts a large number of foreign students as well as professors directly from North America, bringing a unique American-style learning environment to Singapore. The establishment of Yale-NUS is, however, more than a simple institutional tie-up, but rather the setting up of an experimental liberal arts institution that emphasises the training of graduates to be "well-rounded" individuals who are well versed in both Eastern and Western traditions.³

One of the newest and most ambitious initiatives in Singaporean higher education came with NUS's announcement in late 2020 of its plans for a joint collaboration between its Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Science to form a new interdisciplinary college, the College of Humanities and Sciences. This unlikely collaboration is reflective of NUS's, and the MOE's, agenda of shifting away from subject specialisation to interdisciplinary learning. By bringing these two faculties together, NUS hopes to boost the competitiveness of its social science graduates, who currently belong to the university's largest faculty. These changes likely reflect an adaptation

to changing demands and dynamics in the local and regional job markets, which require "breadth of knowledge, depth, as well as the ability to integrate multiple disciplines to solve complex problems."⁴ NUS's planned joint collaboration runs parallel with SUSS's emphasis on practical, applied social sciences, and along with the ongoing development of Yale-NUS shows that Singaporean higher education remains committed to the social sciences and humanities, but is taking measures to adapt the field to changing economic circumstances.

Latest Developments in the Era of COVID-19

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, Singapore's MOE took extensive measures to monitor and regulate movement into and out of university campuses. Given Singapore's large proportion of foreign visitors and international students, ensuring the safe return of students at Singaporean universities was a matter of great concern. Universities like NUS required all students and staff to regularly take their temperature and upload them to online systems, obtain special permission in advance to enter campus, and required faculty to conduct classes via Zoom. This marked a sudden shift to large-scale online learning operations. It has also required staff to design exams and evaluations to be distributed online. As a means of relieving financial burdens brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, Singaporean public universities have frozen payable tuition fees for the 2020 academic year for local students. However, this special assistance is not available to permanent resident and international students.

³ Nancy Gleason, *Higher Education in the Era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

⁴ NUS News, "Preliminary consultations begin on proposed College of Humanities and Sciences", September 22, 2020, <https://news.nus.edu.sg/preliminary-consultations-begin-on-proposed-college-of-humanities-and-sciences/>.

Whither the University?

And not just where is it, but when is it?

ADRIAN W. J. KUAH & KATRINA TAN

*There are places I'll remember
All my life though some have changed
Some forever, not for better
Some have gone and some remain...*
– “In My Life”, Lennon-McCartney

Imagine this. Ten years from now, maybe 20, maybe sooner, a visitor to Singapore asks a local for directions to the National University of Singapore. She is met with a quizzical look, as though the question makes no sense. The local gestures expansively around him at the cityscape and replies, “NUS? But all this, all of this is NUS!”

Lower Kent Ridge Road. College Avenue West. College Road. Bukit Timah Road.

These are the locations of the campuses of the National University of Singapore. But more than merely places on a map, for those who have spent any length of time in them, they are edifices far larger than their physical buildings. They hold meaning, memories and experiences that go beyond their stated objectives — a place for learning, a place of work. For many, they are where we went to school; a physical location where we dutifully trotted off to for four years to get an education. The “university”, for all its self-flattery that it is an institution that transcends the prosaic and the quotidian, has always been bounded by space and time. The language we use reflects that: “Where did you go to school?” And many of us refer to those years in our early 20s spent in a particular place as “the college or university years”.

But perhaps that will soon change.

“ The “university”, for all its self-flattery that it is an institution that transcends the prosaic and the quotidian, has always been bounded by space and time... But perhaps that will soon change.

COVID-19 has shown us that it is possible to learn, take exams, hold discussions and get work done outside this container of the university campus. Instead of going to university, the university came to us, however remotely (in all senses of the word). We saw the opening of more access routes to learning, a greater focus on student engagement and motivation, a higher level of trust and reliance on self-directed learning (home-based learning, synchronicity and asynchronicity in teaching and learning), the provision of space and time for students to explore their interests outside the curriculum, etc. We saw what could be done when edutech became a necessity and not simply an alternative to be implemented in the near future.

However, the lifting of the Circuit Breaker¹ and the gradual move through the phases has seen the reversion to the mean, rather than the forging ahead into the new normal. The question is, can and should we give up the ground we already conquered? Can we exploit the gains from the COVID-19 experience? Does the university need to be contained within a set of buildings at set locations where people go?

John Dewey, deemed the modern father of experiential education, spoke of the paucity of traditional education in *Experience and Education* (1938). Its imposition from above, external discipline, learning from texts and teachers, rote learning of skills, preparation for a remote future, and static aims and materials, all fail in preparing

the young for future responsibilities, but instead inculcate “docility, receptivity and obedience.” Instead, he offered a progressive education based on his view that the social nature of mankind means that education is in itself a social process. As such, when education is treated as “intelligently directed development of the possibilities inherent in ordinary experience” — its potentialities are vast.

Where then, does this *ordinary experience* take place? Everywhere — within and without the traditional university campus. Dewey recognised that learning takes place in a variety of environments, and that while the school is a special one, nature and the social environment cannot be discounted. This harks back to his central premise that education is “a fostering, a nurturing, a cultivating standard form of social activity”, through “a process of sharing experience till it becomes a common possession”. Hence, education must transform its immature members from “uninitiated and seemingly alien beings into robust and trustees of its own resources and ideals.”

As such, education cannot be divorced from the purposes and practices of the community. It cannot be pigeonholed into specific locations over specific periods of time.

Technology has allowed the outside to be brought into the university — think of drone flights videotaping human and traffic flows in a city, or animations of volcanic eruptions. How about

¹ The Circuit Breaker in Singapore ran from 7 April to 1 June 2020. It was implemented as a stay-at-home order and cordon sanitaire by the Government of Singapore in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

² Geo Caching, <https://www.geocaching.com/play>.

bridging the outside and the inside, beyond brief sojourns on learning journeys or that mandatory fieldwork exercise?

Think instead of students setting up citizen science projects to track how light reflecting off an adjacent building at different times of the day affects the liveability of a space? Or student-community projects to identify and track movements and roosting locations of migratory birds? Or co-opting bands of cyclists to report the location of potholes in roads, so that data can be used to predict failure or as a reporting mechanism, or as sites where new materials can be tested?

We have the technology that allows us to catch a Pokemon in the zoo. What if we could layer such augmented and virtual reality on a patch of green space and see how adding a lake, a path, or a playground can impact the space? Or using anthill destruction to anticipate behaviour during a fire in Marina Bay Financial Centre Tower 3? Or having students and researchers doing something with the 774 geocaches² stashed across the island?

Such situated learning, expounded by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in 1991, where knowledge is delivered in an authentic context, has been shown

to be more effective, engenders communities of practice due to the high levels of social interaction and collaboration, and results in learners becoming engaged in more dynamic and complex activities. By sheer dint of locating the learning outside the classroom, the complexity we expect to see in real life is built into the learning environment. Multidisciplinary and complex problem solving segue seamlessly from knowledge acquisition.

But more than that, in bringing the students with our researchers out, we are also bringing the community into the university. Including the community in the learning and research demystifies research, puts a face to *the scientist*, allows parents peek into what their children are doing, and encourages the young to be curious, dream and aspire. It builds a more common ownership of the university and its work. It creates a bond which goes beyond the time spent there personally, or the money spent on sending a loved one there. It creates meaning and a sense of pride. It creates that “I am putting a man on the moon” moment.

In a country with mountains and seas, forests and urban areas, and a captive audience looking for different forms of engagement and ownership, never before has the time been so ripe for the university to leverage what it has on its doorstep. As one of the last stops in preparing our young for society, the university can and should embed itself in the community. Not only in companies and through internships, but in the lived experience of learning and living, so that we can continually seek to understand, improve and share.

The university does not stop at its invisible boundary line. The city is our campus; the campus is our city. 🏡

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“ By sheer dint of locating the learning outside the classroom, the complexity we expect to see in real life is built into the learning environment. Multidisciplinary and complex problem solving segue seamlessly from knowledge acquisition.

Thailand

ZANE KHEIR

Thailand is a constitutional monarchy of 66.5 million people as of 2019 and is the only ASEAN member that is not a former European colony. With a GDP of USD543.65 billion in 2019, it is the largest economy in mainland Southeast Asia, and the second largest after Indonesia.¹ Thailand also has one of the region's most booming tourism industries, with 32.6 million visitors in 2016, contributing to its recent economic success and over 10% of its GDP.²

Thailand's higher education system has transformed from a small enterprise in the 1970s, following the Private College Act in 1969, into a large complex system comprised of various types of institutions: limited admission and open admission public universities, both of which are fully supported by the government; autonomous universities, which are self-managed and are overseen by an independent university board; private universities; Rajabhat universities, which were originally created as education colleges; and specialised Buddhist and nursing universities. In addition, the Rajamangala University of Technology, a university group of nine campuses founded in 1975 as a college for vocational education, was upgraded to full university status in 2005 and now has over 21,000 students. Including all university types, there are over 170 higher education institutions in Thailand,³ slightly fewer than in 2012 when there were over 220. The contracting number of universities is due to mergers and closure of universities in the private sector in recent years.

¹ Trading Economics, “Thailand GDP”, accessed January 29, 2021, <https://tradingeconomics.com/thailand/gdp>.

² Reuters, “Thailand expects \$39.5 billion in tourism revenue in 2020”, July 3, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-thailand-tourism-idUSL4N2EA2IT>.

³ ICEF Monitor, “Thailand's Growing Supply-Demand Gap in Higher Education”, October 18, 2017, <https://monitor.icef.com/2017/10/thailands-growing-supply-demand-gap-higher-education/>.

⁴ Office of Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Education, Ministry of Education, “Number of Higher Education Students at Undergraduate Degree Level in the Formal School System by Jurisdiction: Academic Year 2014–2018”, 2019.



Unlike many countries in the region, Thailand has suffered from declining enrolment numbers, shrinking from 1.82 million undergraduate students in 2014 to 1.65 million in 2018.⁴ The majority of students are enrolled in public universities despite the number of private universities making up 48% of all universities in 2015. However, as funding for public universities is directly contingent on enrolment numbers, declining enrolment has significant implications for future funding prospects. Autonomous universities, on the other hand, receive government funding in the form of block grants, which are not dependent upon enrolment. Despite overall enrolment trending lower, government expenditures on higher education have increased nearly 62% from 2010 to 2019 to 101.8 billion baht.⁵ This is a surprising increase considering that Thailand's overall higher education sector is in an overall state of contraction: in 2015 there were over 50,000 unfilled seats in Thai universities due to fewer applicants. This trend has put increased pressure on Thai universities, prompting the government to reform the national system of enrolment. In 2018, the government implemented the Thai University Central Admission System (TCAS), which shortens the lengthy admission process to approximately six

months from ten months. It retains the legacy five-step admission procedure but prevents students from reserving places at multiple institutions, some of which they ultimately forfeit. This change is viewed by the government not only as a way of streamlining applications and minimising unfilled university seats, but also as a means of addressing disadvantages faced by low-income students who cannot afford to pay numerous application fees.⁶

Demographic Challenges

Though still regarded as a developing country in Southeast Asia, Thailand suffers from notable demographic challenges common in more developed economies. Its rapidly ageing population — of which 11% is now over the age of 65⁷ — and shrinking labour force have resulted in a supply-demand off balance in university places. The large number of universities in the country coupled with increased competition from abroad and a shrinking domestic pool of new students leaves many Thai universities in compromising positions; up to 75% of Thai universities are at risk of closing over the next decade if current trends persist.⁸ Reduced enrolment is particularly pronounced in the social sciences, where there is a surplus of graduates relative to jobs.

⁵ National Statistical Office, “3 Education Statistics: Education Expenditure by Function: Fiscal Year 2010–2019”, accessed January 29, 2021, <http://statbbi.nso.go.th/staticreport/page/sector/en/03.aspx>.

⁶ The Nation, “New University Admission Later This Year”, June 2, 2017, <https://www.nationthailand.com/national/30317070>.

⁷ ICFE Monitor, “Thailand’s Growing Supply-Demand Gap in Higher Education”, October 18, 2017, <https://monitor.icfe.com/2017/10/thailands-growing-supply-demand-gap-higher-education/>.

⁸ Terry Fredrickson, “75% of Thai Universities Could Close as Enrolment Falls and Foreign Competition Heats Up”, Bangkok Post, May 22, 2017, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/learning/advanced/1254175/75-of-thai-universities-could-close-as-enrolment-falls-and-foreign-competition-heats-up>.

⁹ Suan Sunandha Rajabhat, “Tuition and Fees”, accessed January 29, 2021, <https://ssru.ac.th/en/tuitionfees.php>.

Fees and Tuition

University fees in Thailand are still considered generally affordable compared to developed study destinations. Fees at public universities for Thais range from approximately USD1,000 per year at a Rajabhat or affordable public university,⁹ to USD4,500 per year at a medium-cost private university in Bangkok.¹⁰ The cost of living in Thailand is generally affordable, though costs in Bangkok — where one third of the nation's universities are located — are higher than the national average.

Internationalisation, Student Mobility and Future Developments

The Thai Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC), a special unit inside the Ministry of Education that is responsible for higher education, has long made internationalisation one of its cornerstone goals. In 2009, the OHEC provided extra funding to Thailand's nine designated research universities¹¹ under the National Research University Initiative and Research Promotion in Higher Education Project to boost the regional competitiveness of Thai higher education. The OHEC has also been front and centre of the Thai government's multi-faceted national development plan Thailand 4.0, which aims to transform Thailand into an innovation-led economy and out of the “middle-income trap” by the 2030s. As universities are to play a crucial role in Thailand

¹⁰ Assumption University of Thailand Admissions Center, “Tuition Fees”, accessed January 29, 2021, https://admissions.au.edu/?page_id=1375.

¹¹ The nine are Chiang Mai University, Chulalongkorn University, Kasetsart University, Khon Kaen University, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Mahidol University, Prince of Songkla University, Suranaree University of Technology, and Thammasat University.

4.0, the OHEC has developed a corresponding University 4.0 blueprint, which includes a wide range of goals including the strengthening of ties between universities and industry, and having at least five Thai universities ranked in the world's top 100 higher education institutions.¹² As ASEAN integration is built into the goals of Thailand 4.0, internationalisation is also part and parcel of the OHEC's higher education agenda.

While the tourism industry has proved to be a boon for the Thai economy and placed it on the global map, transitioning from an image of solely a tourist destination to a higher education hub is proving to be an ongoing challenge for Thai universities in branding themselves abroad. However, Thailand's strong national image as a dominant regional powerhouse may function as an asset in its internationalisation process. Its medical tourism industry, which grew 358% from 2000 to 2017 and was worth USD11 billion in 2017,¹³ also built it a reputation as a medical hub, creating opportunities for its higher education sector. In October 2020, the Thai government approved a 62-billion-baht budget to build six medical excellence centres over the next 5-10 years, and is a cross-sector initiative between the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation, the Private Hospital Association and the Tourism Authority.¹⁴

Though Thailand is not often regarded as an international higher education hub, it now hosts 12,000 international students and is the third most popular study destination in Southeast Asia after

¹² Buasuwan, Prompilai, “Rethinking Thai Higher Education”, *Asian Education and Development Studies* 7, no. 2: 157–173; Start Up in Thailand, “Thailand 4.0: A Step Towards Digital Future”, accessed January 29, 2021, <https://startupinthailand.com/thailand-4-0-a-step-towards-digital-future/>.

¹³ Ezree Ebrahim, “The New Era of Medical Tourism”, Bangkok Post, September 24, 2020, <https://www.bangkokpost.com/life/social-and-lifestyle/1990983/the-new-era-of-medical-tourism>.

Malaysia and Singapore.¹⁵ Thailand primarily attracts students from neighbouring countries, most notably China followed by Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. Leveraging Thailand's strong reputation and relative affordability to attract international students could prove to be a viable strategy to abate shrinking domestic enrolment. Many Thai universities offer programmes taught entirely in English, not only to attract international students but to prepare Thai students for the globalised economy. However, the development of foreign branch campuses of Western universities in nearby Malaysia offering foreign degrees has proved to be a formidable force of competition for Thai universities. The relative strength of the Thai baht — an unlikely problem for the hyperinflation-struck Thailand of the late 1990s — and waves of political uncertainty are also less supportive to attracting foreign students and tourists alike. With changing administrations and constitutional reforms has come a revolving door of education ministers,¹⁶ posing another challenge to fulfilling Thailand's ambitious goals for the 2030s.

¹⁴ Public Relations Department of Thailand, "Strategies to Set Up Medical Excellence Centers in Various Parts of Thailand", October 8, 2020, https://thailand.prd.go.th/mobile_detail.php?cid=4&nid=10195.

¹⁵ The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, "QAA, Country Report: Thailand", 2019.

¹⁶ Rachel Michael, "Education in Thailand", WENR, February 6, 2018, <https://wenr.wes.org/2018/02/education-in-thailand-2>.

Rethinking Higher Education in Thailand for Thailand 4.0: Developing a Creative Economy

PROMPILAI BUASUWAN

Striving to overcome the middle-income trap and faced with the challenges of national development, the Thai government has embarked on a path to transform its economic model into a value-based and innovation-driven economy. Under the current administration of Prime Minister General Prayuth Chan-ocha, the Thailand 4.0 policy has been introduced which retains a focus on innovation and consists of three aims: 1) becoming a high-income nation through developing it as a knowledge-based economy, with an emphasis on research and development, science and technology, creative thinking, and innovation; 2) moving toward an inclusive society with equitable access to the fruits of prosperity and development; and 3) focusing on achieving sustainable growth and development, without destroying the environment. Thus, Thailand 4.0 places its emphasis on developing a creative economy based on creativity and innovation, and the development of new technologies.

Reforming Higher Education for Thailand 4.0

In its development of the Third Framework of the 15-Year Long Range Plan (2017–2031), the Office of Higher Education Commission has suggested a number of key changes that are required in Thailand 4.0. Since the future of the nation rests on the quality of its people, "Thai people 4.0" are the prime focus of the blueprint of Thailand 4.0. Future generations should aspire to be knowledgeable, highly skilled, socially responsible, maintain their Thai identity, and be able to use technology. For research and innovation, a multidisciplinary infrastructure, hands-on learning and research, innovative projects, and demand-led research are the focus. Public-private-community partnerships will be used as a key strategy to enhance the effectiveness of university academic services so as

to make them more responsive and efficient. Digital higher education such as massive open online courses (MOOCs), digital content, open lectures, flipped learning, etc., are also highlighted in this new long-range plan.

Thus, the blueprint for Thailand 4.0 also proposes new approaches to education. But the extent to which Thailand will be able to overhaul its education remains a challenge. Most of the lecturers currently teaching in higher education institutions have been trained in the use of traditional approaches, and can have difficulty adapting to the new approaches that will be required to educate new generations. A change of mindset and a revolution in teaching practices will be pivotal to the success of Higher Education 4.0.

Creative Society for Thailand 4.0: Concepts and Challenges

Although the notion of the creative society has been used in Thailand to promote a perceived “desirable” society, there has been no clear operational definition. A study on “Public and Private Partnership in Higher Education Institutions in Promoting a Creative Society”, conducted in 2013-2015 by the present author, employed a mixed-research methodology to formulate a conception of a creative society in the Thai context, and to propose new roles and practices for higher education in order to promote a creative society. The study conducted in-depth interviews with government officials, university administrators and faculty members, document analysis, and questionnaires.

Based on the findings from the in-depth interviews and document analysis, the understanding is that a creative society in Thailand encompasses socio-cultural, economic and political dimensions and can be summarised in the following three desirable characteristics: 1) a society that uses creativity as a basis for sustainable social development; 2) economic development of creative industries; and 3) a society that promotes equality, justice,

inclusivity and freedom of thought. Many respondents viewed the creative economy as a stepping stone towards a creative society, as a creative economy can spill over to other social dimensions. The concepts of a creative society that emerged from this study were in line with how Thailand 4.0 conceptualises a creative society and with its aim of sustainable development and social inclusivity through the use of creativity and innovation. The results of this study can therefore be used as a framework with which to analyse the key challenges of Thai Higher Education 4.0.

The in-depth interviews and documentary analysis suggest that the key challenges to Thailand becoming a creative society — and therefore to the success of Thailand 4.0 — are social structure, cultural values and educational practices. For example, inequalities in the socio-economic structure embedded in Thailand’s patronage system and in Buddhist beliefs about karma were regarded by some respondents as major impediments to Thailand becoming a creative society. In addition, cultural values of seniority, obedience, and cultural preservation or political censorship could obstruct freedom of thought, self-confidence and open expression.

Many respondents suggested that a conceptualisation of a creative society that views creativity as inherent to every human being regardless of race, age, gender, or socio-economic status could harness human creativity more effectively. Many studies have supported this view put forth by the respondents that diversity and divergence promote creativity. The respondents saw some important features of Thai culture that contribute to this wider view of creativity. For example, Thailand is a country of diversity with different cultures, traditions and lifestyles co-existing, and historically Thai people have been good at adopting and integrating different cultures to their own. Thai people are also flexible, have a sense of fulfilment and like to have fun.

“ Many respondents also viewed the stricter quality control systems that the government put in place in response to low quality and a market-driven economy in higher education as actually obstructing the integrated curriculum design and learning that they believed are required to foster creativity and innovation.

Thai Higher Education for a Creative Society: Impediments and Need Assessment

There was overall agreement among respondents that Thai education has generally focused on the transmission of knowledge, testing and accreditation, all of which are found to obstruct creativity, meaningful learning, and the courage to think and act differently. Some argued that in order to foster a creative society, creative education is needed. Many respondents saw students in higher education as products of basic education and believed that creativity should be nurtured at a young age and that beginning to focus on creativity and innovation at university level is too late. Many respondents also viewed the stricter quality control systems that the government put in place in response to low quality and a market-driven economy in higher education as actually obstructing the integrated curriculum design and learning that they believed are required to foster creativity and innovation. The in-depth interviews also showed that the respondents had a range of different views on the concepts of creativity and innovation and that they perceived these differences as a barrier to an inclusive society. For

example, responses from the government officers and university administrators tended to value creative ideas in the sciences and technology as important because of their economic value, whereas respondents in the fine arts, social sciences and humanities viewed creativity in wider areas as also being important in a creative society.

Socio-Political-Cultural Implications for Thai Higher Education 4.0

Since educational transformation is synonymous with cultural transformation, there is a need to reassess the effect of Thai cultural norms on creativity and individuality in the light of the accelerating pace of change. For Thailand 4.0 to achieve its goals, the socio-cultural and higher educational impediments identified from the in-depth interviews, document analysis and questionnaires in our study need to be discussed in detail.

While there are many aspects of Thai social structure and culture obstructing creativity, there are also some that can contribute to creativity. Many studies support the idea that diversity and divergence promote creativity. As noted previously,

different cultures, traditions and lifestyles co-exist in Thailand, with a large degree of adaptation and integration. Its people are known to be flexible, fulfilled and fun-loving. Although Thailand is a country with a constitutional monarchy with *lèse-majesté* laws — which to many foreigners might signify social inequality and suppression of freedom of thought and creativity — the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej was an inventor and supporter of creativity and innovation, and was a beloved role model to many Thais in applying a problem-based approach to sustainable development, agricultural reform and the welfare of the Thai people.

Conclusion

The success of higher education institutions in promoting the creative and innovative society of Thailand 4.0 will require socio-cultural and institutional transformation. Although there have already been some important successes, there are still many reforms that will be necessary for Thailand to develop the innovation, lifelong learning and knowledge-based society required for it to remain competitive in an age of global movement and uncertainty. Although the aim of this paper has been to identify reforms that will be required in higher education institutions and the challenges that will be faced in implementing these reforms, it is clear that reforms will also be required at the political, socio-cultural and economic levels. At the political level, there should be a stronger emphasis on the importance of freedom of expression. At the economic level, it will be necessary to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor. Finally, how well the balance can be struck between socio-political, socio-cultural and institutional preservation on the one hand, and challenging old practices and being open to new ideas on the other — all of which are still neglected in the government policy documents of Thailand 4.0 — will determine the success of Thailand 4.0. 🎓

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The original full article was first published in 2018 in Asian Education and Development Studies (Volume 7, Issue 2). The author wishes to thank the Thailand Research Fund for financial support that made the research underpinning this article possible.

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Timor-Leste

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Timor-Leste, or East Timor, is a young country located on the eastern half of Timor island in the eastern Indonesian Archipelago that declared independence in 2002. Though not an ASEAN member state, it holds the status of an observer and has expressed interest in joining the organisation. Timor-Leste's cultural heritage is rooted in four centuries of Portuguese colonial rule, which separated it from Dutch controlled parts of the archipelago. Timor-Leste's 1.28 million citizens are overwhelmingly Catholic, making it the only Catholic-majority Southeast Asian nation other than the Philippines. While many languages are spoken in Timor-Leste, the official languages are Tetum and Portuguese. Timor-Leste's economy, which is mostly dependent on the country's oil reserves and coffee exports, remains one of the least developed in the region. Over the past two decades, the country has been heavily reliant on international organisations for economic and political assistance. Although the Timorese government circulates its own coins, the US dollar is used as the default currency, replacing the Indonesian rupiah following the end of Indonesian occupation in 1999. East Timor's independence, with the help of the United Nations Transitional Administration of East Timor (UNTAET), also saw the introduction of a modern higher education system.

Under Portuguese rule, Timor-Leste had no functioning university system, and a small number of Timorese students travelled to Portugal for education. Under Indonesian occupation, the Universitas Timor Timur (UNTIM) was founded in 1986 as the primary HEI in Timor-Leste, and it had four faculties: the Faculty of Agriculture, Faculty of Social Policy, Faculty of Education, and Faculty of Economics and Management.¹ During this period, large numbers of Indonesian teachers were brought in to staff the university.² By late 1998 and early 1999, it had approximately 4,000 students. In September of 1999, all educational institutions in Timor-Leste were closed due to student

¹ Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Culture, "Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e (UNTL)", accessed February 7, 2021, <https://mescc.gov.tl/pt/untl/>.

² Robin Burns, "Education in Timor-Leste: Envisioning the Future" *Journal of International and Comparative Education* 6, no 1 (2017): 33–45.



protests against Indonesian occupation. Along with many other schools in the country, many of UNTIM's facilities were destroyed, and in the aftermath its students were deployed to help reorganise primary and secondary schools, leaving higher education in a state of dysfunction.

In 2000, to replace UNTIM, the National University of East Timor (UNTL) was established as independent Timor-Leste's first university. UNTL remains Timor-Leste's largest and most comprehensive university, and while located in the capital city, Dili, it also has branch campuses.³ By 2007/2008, there were 14 HEIs registered with the Ministry of Education (MOE)'s Directorate of Higher Education, and a total of 17,000 students enrolled nationwide.⁴ Regarding TVET education, the MOE collaborates with other relevant ministries to manage curricula and programmes. According to the 2015 census of Timor-Leste's education system, there were a total of 38,395 students in tertiary institutions, 66.7% of which were in the capital city of Dili.⁵

National Strategic Plan

In 2011, the MOE released their National Strategic Plan (2011–2030) for Timor-Leste's entire education

system. This strategic plan is the primary guideline that the government currently uses in overhauling its education system. Considering that Timor-Leste has still yet to meet many needs in its basic and secondary education sectors, developing higher education is not a high priority matter. Regarding higher education, however, the strategic plan called for the establishment of a National Agency for Academic Accreditation and Evaluation (NCAAA),⁶ which is to be responsible for determining standards and quality assurance on behalf of the MOE (which later changed its name to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MEJD)). The plan also proposes the construction of additional polytechnics, two specialising in tourism and hospitality in Lospalos and Hera and one in engineering in Suai, which will be located within existing secondary and technical schools to afford local students an opportunity to study at a more advanced level.⁷

As the country suffers from lack of a consolidated database between educational institutions, another long-term goal of the strategic plan has been the creation and development of the Education Management Information System (EMIS), which was first proposed in 2003 but made a stronger priority in the 2011 Strategic Plan. Prior to the

existence of the EMIS, data was either recorded on paper or simple excel spreadsheets, making the collection of data labour-intensive and inefficient.⁸ Constructing the EMIS has gone hand in hand with the upgrading of the technological infrastructure within the MOE and special training for all civil servants and administrators to make them digitally literate by the end of the strategic plan's first cycle in 2015.⁹ One of the most powerful features of the EMIS is its integration with other government ministries and its ability to track students and staffs' information using different metrics. As approximately 20% of Timorese youth were not in school, employed or undergoing any training in 2015,¹⁰ the EMIS is a crucial platform to monitor the progress of students as they advance through the education system. Since 2015, the MOE has published statistical yearbooks with the help of the EMIS. However, its largest flaw, which was highlighted in a comprehensive UNICEF survey, is that it does not collect data from HEIs or TVET institutions. As the EMIS system is not used in HEIs, it is far more challenging to collect data on student enrolment and other indicators in HEIs on an annual basis.

In 2020, the Timor-Leste Parliament passed their budget for 2021, granting a total of approximately USD78.4 million to the MOE, which is a 5% increase from 2019. Of the total budget, USD26.4 million was allotted to higher education, which includes a fund of USD4.8 million to finance the construction of the New Polytechnic School in Baucau and prioritise the

construction of the Polytechnic Institute of Aileu and Betano, and the New University City in Aileu. The construction of HEIs and TVET institutions outside Dili will admit and support students in rural areas, as approximately 26% of tertiary students in 2017 had to move to Dili to attend a HEI.¹¹ As part of the government's effort to modernise IT infrastructure, USD41 million will be spent on the installation of submarine fibre optic cable to the northern coast of Australia.¹²

Regarding internationalisation, UNTL maintains close ties with other universities throughout the Portuguese-speaking world: many Timorese researchers from UNTL are hosted at the University for International Integration of the Afro-Brazilian Lusophony in Brazil — a university which maintains a student body consisting of international students from Portuguese-speaking countries and forms curricula based on common interests and Portuguese-language education. UNTL also connects their students with an array of scholarship and funding opportunities with foreign governments and organisations, including the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and the governments of Australia, Japan and Portugal.¹³ The university's Faculty of Medicine also conducts a joint programme with the Cuban Medical Brigade to provide medical and nursing training.¹⁴

³ Ministry of Education Timor-Leste, "National Strategic Plan 2011-2030", accessed February 7, 2021, <http://www.moe.gov.tl/pdf/NESP2011-2030.pdf>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ United Nations Children's Fund and United Nations Population Fund, "Timor-Leste Population and Housing Census 2015: Analytical Report on Population", 2017.

⁶ The website is inactive although news reports as recent as 2021 still refer to the NCAAA.

⁷ Dili, Timor-Leste: República Democrática de Timor-Leste, "National Strategic Plan 2011-2030", 2010, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2012330450/>

⁸ United Nations Children's Fund, "Review of Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) That Track Individual Student Data: Timor-Leste", 2020.

⁹ Dili, Timor-Leste: República Democrática de Timor-Leste, "National Strategic Plan 2011-2030", 2010, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2012330450/>

¹⁰ United Nations Children's Fund and United Nations Population Fund, 2017.

¹¹ Ibid., 43.

¹² Government of Timor-Leste, "General State Budget for 2021 Approved, in Generality", December 2, 2020, <http://timor-lesste.gov.tl/?p=26200&lang=en&lang=en>.

¹³ University of Timor-Leste, "Programs e Projetos", accessed February 7, 2021, <http://www.untl.edu.tl/pt/cooperacao/programas-e-projetos>.

¹⁴ Augustine D. Asante, Nelson Martins, Michael E. Otim, and John Dewdney, "Retaining Doctors in Rural Timor-Leste: A Critical Appraisal of the Opportunities and Challenges", *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 92 (2014): 277–282, <https://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/92/4/13-123141/en/>.

COVID-19 Impact

Following the global outbreak of COVID-19, the Timor-Leste government ordered schools across the country to close, resulting in approximately 400,000 school children being out of school. School shutdowns and the repatriation of foreign staff and workers as a result of the pandemic have also crippled Timor-Leste's English training programmes. In July of 2020, the MOE signed an MOU with the US Embassy to strengthen ties in teacher training, English-language training, school rehabilitation and improvement of school meals.¹⁵ The Timor-Leste government made additional requests for external assistance from Australia, New Zealand and Cuba to manage the crisis in its education system arising from the pandemic. In addition, the government provided each Timorese household with USD100 for living expenses and an extra USD15 for electricity costs. The closure of schools has also resulted in the start of distance learning on all levels of education, some of which was conducted via radio and TV.¹⁶

¹⁵ Tatoli, "MEJD and U.S. to Continue Cooperation in the Four Priority Areas of Education", July 20, 2020, <http://www.tatoli.tl/en/2020/07/20/mejd-and-u-s-to-continue-cooperation-in-the-four-priority-areas-of-education/>.

¹⁶ Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport Timor-Leste, "COVID-19 Response Plan", May 2020, [http://www.moe.gov.tl/pdf/Annex%20B%20-%20Ministry%20COVID%20Response%20Plan%20\(MCRP\).pdf](http://www.moe.gov.tl/pdf/Annex%20B%20-%20Ministry%20COVID%20Response%20Plan%20(MCRP).pdf).

20 Years of Supporting Timor-Leste's National Development: Nurturing Human Resources to Lead the Future

JAPAN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AGENCY (JICA)

Timor-Leste is the youngest country in Asia, which gained independence in 2002. Since April 2000, before its independence, JICA has been assisting in Timor-Leste's national development. Over the following 20 years, Timor-Leste entered a period of reconstruction, forming the foundation of the country, and is now embarking on a period of development, extending economic growth and stability in daily life for all citizens.

Though there is support for a wide range of fields, the development of human resources responsible for nation building has been the most important priority among the forms of assistance extended by JICA. We look back at the progress of co-operation in the area of human resources development in order to enhance higher education, including teacher training at the Faculty of Engineering, Science and Technology (FoEST) of the National University of Timor-Leste (UNTL).

The new building of FoEST-UNTL, was completed in January 2020 with the support of the Government of Japan. As the country's only national university's engineering faculty, it is Timor-Leste's core of human resource development in technology.

Passing on Knowledge and Experience Gained Over 20 years

"There is a strong sense of awareness that 'we are building our own country', and UNTL instructors are very enthusiastic about communicating the knowledge and experience they have gained over the past two decades to students," Professor Shimakawa Koichi describes their ambition and enthusiasm. Shimakawa is Professor Emeritus at Gifu University, who has been teaching at FoEST-UNTL as an expert in electronics and electrical engineering since 2003. "For example, faculty members who have studied in

“ There is a strong sense of awareness that ‘we are building our own country’, and UNTL instructors are very enthusiastic about communicating the knowledge and experience they have gained over the past two decades to students.

Japan are voluntarily introducing a seminar-type of graduation thesis guidance. This is something that has never been done before at universities in Timor-Leste,” he adds.

In 2001, JICA began renovating facilities at FoEST-UNTL. The new faculty building was completed in January 2020. Today, JICA’s support for students and instructors continues, including the dispatch of Japanese experts and interns.

UNTL’s Dean of FoEST, Dr Ruben Jeronimo Freitas, who lectures at the Electronics and Electrical Engineering Department has also received direct guidance from JICA experts.

“In addition to improving the abilities of FoEST instructors, the results of JICA’s assistance, such as improving curriculum and the quality of education methods, are very significant,” says Dr Freitas. “Professor Shimakawa taught us not to expect any sudden big change, but to aim for substantial improvement little by little. I remember him saying many times the Japanese phrase *chotto chotto* [little, little],” he added with a smile.

Nurturing Human Resources at the Ports and Harbours — The Lifeline of the Country

The new ferry terminal in the capital city of Dili was completed with the support of the Government of Japan. Two vessels can be berthed at the same time and it can operate 24 hours a day.

For Timor-Leste, an island country that depends heavily on imports for many of its daily necessities, port development is an important issue. While JICA is focusing on the infrastructure development of port and harbour facilities, it is also focusing on the development of relevant human resources.

Mr Jose Madeira Marques, Vice President of the Port Authority (APORTIL), which manages port operations including Dili Port, is one such specialist. He visited Japan as a participant of a JICA training programme in 2007, when he was a member of the National Maritime Transport Authority (DNTM), and learned the basics of ship safety for approximately four months. After returning to his home country, he continued to study at JICA seminars and other events even after he assumed the role of director for port maintenance.

“It was Mr Marques who asked me questions very enthusiastically from the beginning of the session. Thinking more questions will be asked in-depth during the following session, I set up a time for individual explanations just for him,” says JICA Expert Sasa Kenji, who served as a lecturer at a seminar attended by Mr Marques.

Subsequently, Mr Marques and Mr Kenji cooperated to implement port development projects, and now they are responsible for overseeing and supervising the “JICA Project on Strategic Port Development Master Plan in Timor-Leste.” The two play a leading role in the port sector in Timor-Leste.

Nurtured Human Resources Active in Various Roles

JICA’s 20-year support for human resource development has generated mutual cooperation in various parts of Timor-Leste. FoEST-UNTL, in collaboration with APORTIL, continues research on tide level observation, which is important for port and harbour management. In addition, a growing number of graduates from FoEST-UNTL have joined APORTIL, and this has resulted in an expanding circle of co-operation through the development of human resources.

JICA will continue to support the new development of Timor-Leste based on the three pillars of “further development of infrastructure”, “continued diversification of industry”, and “provision of social services from the residents’ perspective”, with human resource development at its core. 📌

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article was originally published on July 24, 2020 on the website of JICA at https://www.jica.go.jp/english/news/field/2020/20200714_01.html

We would like to thank JICA for their permission to republish this article.

The **JAPAN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AGENCY** supports the socioeconomic development, recovery or economic stability of developing regions. Since 2000, it has supported the Government of Timor-Leste to improve the lives of the Timorese people through rehabilitation of infrastructure, human capacity building, and improvements in living and health conditions through activities by Japanese NGOs.

Vietnam

ZANE KHEIR

Vietnam is a densely populated country of 95.5 million¹ on the Indochina Peninsula that has been historically separated between north and south until its reunification in 1975 at the conclusion of the Vietnam War. Vietnam is an ethnically diverse country with over 50 minority groups, though Vietnamese is the dominant national language. Though culturally influenced by France's colonial rule dating back to the 19th century, French is not widely spoken in Vietnam today, but Vietnam remains a member of the International Organisation of La Francophonie, where it maintains cultural connections with France. Vietnam has enjoyed one of the fastest growing economies over the past 30 years following the market reforms under *Doi Moi*, launched in 1986, with real GDP growth of 7% in 2019.² Approximately 70% of its population is under the age of 35,³ making for a demographic dividend that has strongly benefitted Vietnam's booming manufacturing sector and has also substantially boosted the potential demand for higher education. However, Vietnam has still yet to capitalise on the masses of young people graduating from its general education system, showing a "disconnect" between general and higher education output.⁴

Vietnam, particularly its north, has a history of cultural influence from China, from which it adopted elements of the Confucian tradition and which influenced Vietnam's perspective on the value of education. Since independence from France and reunification, Vietnam's higher education system has followed the model of the former Soviet Union, and has been a highly centralised state-run system managed by three government ministries: the Ministry of Education and Training

¹ United Nations Institute for Statistics, "Viet Nam", accessed January 29, 2021, <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/vn>.

² World Bank, "The World Bank in Vietnam: Overview", last modified October 6, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/vietnam/overview>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ World Bank, "Improving the Performance of Higher Education in Vietnam: Strategic Priorities and Policy Options", April 27, 2020, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/33681/Improving-the-Performance-of-Higher-Education-in-Vietnam-Strategic-Priorities-and-Policy-Options.pdf>.



(MOET), the main body responsible for regulating HEIs, forming curricula and implementation of national accreditation; the Ministry of Science and Technology, which distributes government funds to public research projects; and the Ministry of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA), which manages its TVET institutions.⁵

Since the 1990s, Vietnam's higher education system has expanded massively in tandem with economic reforms and shifts away from the Soviet-style university system. The 1993 Prime Ministerial decree paved the way for multidisciplinary education in HEIs and the introduction of private HEIs. National universities remain the most prestigious in the country, and while private universities have grown significantly, there remains a strong stigma in Vietnam that private universities are second-tier and cater to students who could not secure a place in a public university.⁶ Public universities still outnumber their private counterparts today, with 171 public and 65 private universities in 2017. Among public universities, 21 are designated by the government as "key" universities with roles in national development. Vietnam's 2005 Higher Education Law defined all universities in Vietnam as either public, private, or

"people-founded" run by NGOs or other unionised organisations,⁷ which are ineligible for government funding. The growth of Vietnam's middle class has also been supportive to the growth of its higher education sector and demand for quality education. Vietnam had just over 1.7 million tertiary-level students in 2017.⁸

In 2012, the Vietnamese government passed the Higher Education Law. It aimed to increase university autonomy and reduce public universities' reliance on government funding, which accounted for approximately 60% of their revenues, while the other 40% came from tuition fees and other sources.⁹ Full implementation of autonomy, however, has been challenging, due to political reasons and management strategies relying on governing boards. The Higher Education Law was updated in 2018 to introduce more modern governance mechanisms, and to remove excessive bureaucracy and overlapping decrees from different ministries. MOET hopes that more public HEIs will eventually go fully autonomous under these changes. There are currently 19 fully "autonomous" public universities, all of which have foregone direct government subsidy for autonomy.¹⁰

⁵ Ly Thi Pham and Martin Hayden, "Higher Education Systems and Institutions, Vietnam", in *The International Encyclopedia of Higher Education Systems and Institutions*, eds. Pedro Nuno Teixeira and Jung-Cheol Shin et al. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2020).

⁶ Quang Chau, "Fighting the Stigma of 'Second-Tier' Status: The Emergence of 'Semi-Elite' Private Higher Education in Vietnam", in *Higher Education in Market-Oriented Socialist Vietnam: New Players, Discourses and Practices*, in eds. Le Ha Phan and Doan Ba Ngoc (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

⁷ WERN, "Education in Vietnam", November 8, 2017, <https://wenr.wes.org/2017/11/education-in-vietnam>

⁸ Ministry of Education and Training, "Statistics of Vietnam Education and Training 2018", <https://en.moet.gov.vn/reports-and-statistics/Pages/Sectoral-statictics.aspx?ItemID=3923>.

⁹ Quang Chau, 2020.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Vietnam's higher education system is generally underfunded by international standards, and as the government expects more funding to come from the private sector, proportions of government funding for tertiary education continue to shrink. In 2016, expenditures on tertiary education only drew 6.1% of the total education budget, or 0.33% of GDP, a significantly lower figure than its ASEAN peers.¹¹ On a per student basis, Vietnam only spent USD316 per higher education student in 2015. In 2017, tuition fees made up a significantly higher proportion of public HEI revenue at 55%, while government subsidy was at 22%. Public-private partnerships, which are common strategies for funding gaps in higher education, remain challenging in Vietnam due to high regulatory barriers.

While the costs of university in Vietnam are low by international standards, tuition and fees at public universities still come at a significant cost to many Vietnamese. University tuition is broad in range, as public universities that are subsidised can charge as little as USD250; unsubsidised HEIs can charge around USD700 for a social sciences degree and as much as USD1,700 for a medical degree. Private universities are out of the reach of many in Vietnam, as it is estimated that the cost of supporting a full-time student in a private HEI is approximately 60% of an average Vietnamese household's income.¹² Within the private HEI space, foreign universities have also become active in Vietnam, which started in 2000 with the opening of RMIT University in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Universities that are

either foreign-owned or provide foreign curricula, such as RMIT, can charge tuition in excess of USD13,000. Certain categories of students are fully or partially exempt from paying tuition at public HEIs, such as those with disabilities, and those enrolled in teacher education programmes,¹³ of which there were over 44,000 in 2017.¹⁴

Internationalisation

Vietnamese authorities have also made efforts to internationalise Vietnam's higher education system by expanding English-language education and strengthening ties with foreign institutions in countries like France, Germany, Australia and the United States. Three Vietnamese universities have membership in the ASEAN University Network,¹⁵ and some have even established ties with institutions in the Philippines as a means of internationalising via the introduction of English curricula.¹⁶ A sizeable number of Vietnamese students also study in foreign universities in the region, one of the most notable being Japan, which hosted nearly 35,000 Vietnamese university students in 2017, a number that has tripled since 2013.¹⁷ On the other hand, Vietnam hosts a far smaller 7,250 international students, an overwhelming 83% of whom come from neighbouring Laos, which has a history of sending students to Vietnam via their shared colonial heritage.

There are several private universities that were established as collaborative efforts with Vietnam,

such as the Vietnamese-German University (VGU) and Vietnam France University (also known as the University of Science and Technology Hanoi). Also several Vietnamese public universities have opened joint programmes with foreign universities: the Foreign Trade University hosts an array of joint programmes with universities in Australia, the UK, Japan, Taiwan, France and others, and offers business language training in Chinese, Japanese and French in addition to programmes taught in English.¹⁸

COVID-19 Impact

Vietnam has emerged relatively unscathed by the COVID-19 pandemic, with less than 50 deaths as of January 2021. However, the pandemic and the sudden imperative for e-learning and web-based resources have exposed Vietnam's lack of development in online infrastructure in higher education. A strong attachment to in-person education and weak demand for online resources in foreign languages has hindered past government attempts to encourage online education.¹⁹ Vietnamese universities' internationalisation practices and ties with foreign universities, who conduct classes in foreign languages, may be the centre of where Vietnam's shift to e-learning is the most pronounced.

¹¹ World Bank, "Improving the Performance of Higher Education in Vietnam: Strategic Priorities and Policy Options", 2020.

¹² Ngoc Anh Nguyen, "The Financial Allocations for Public Universities in Vietnam: The Recent Situation and Recommendations", Conference Proceedings from "Higher Education Financing Reforms", Ministry of Finance, Hanoi, November 2012 (in Vietnamese), cited in Quang Chau, 2020.

¹³ Quang Chau, 2020.

¹⁴ Ministry of Education and Training, 2017.

¹⁵ ASEAN University Network, "AUN Members", accessed January 29, 2021, <http://www.aunsec.org/aunmemberuniversities.php>.

¹⁶ Le Ha Phan, "Higher Education, English, and the idea of 'the West': Globalizing and Encountering a Global South Regional University", *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 39, no. 5: 782–797.

¹⁷ BMI, "BMI Market Report Vietnam", accessed January 29, 2021, <https://bmiglobaled.com/Market-Reports/Vietnam/student-recruitment>.

¹⁸ Foreign Trade University, "International Students Admission 2020", May 14, 2020, <http://english.ftu.edu.vn/admissions/undergraduate-students/joint-programs.html>.

¹⁹ <https://headfoundation.org/HESB8/covid-19-Challenges-and-Opportunities-for-Vietnamese-Higher-Education>.

Building on Existing Resources and Traditional Values as a Development Strategy for Vietnamese Higher Education

THANH PHAM

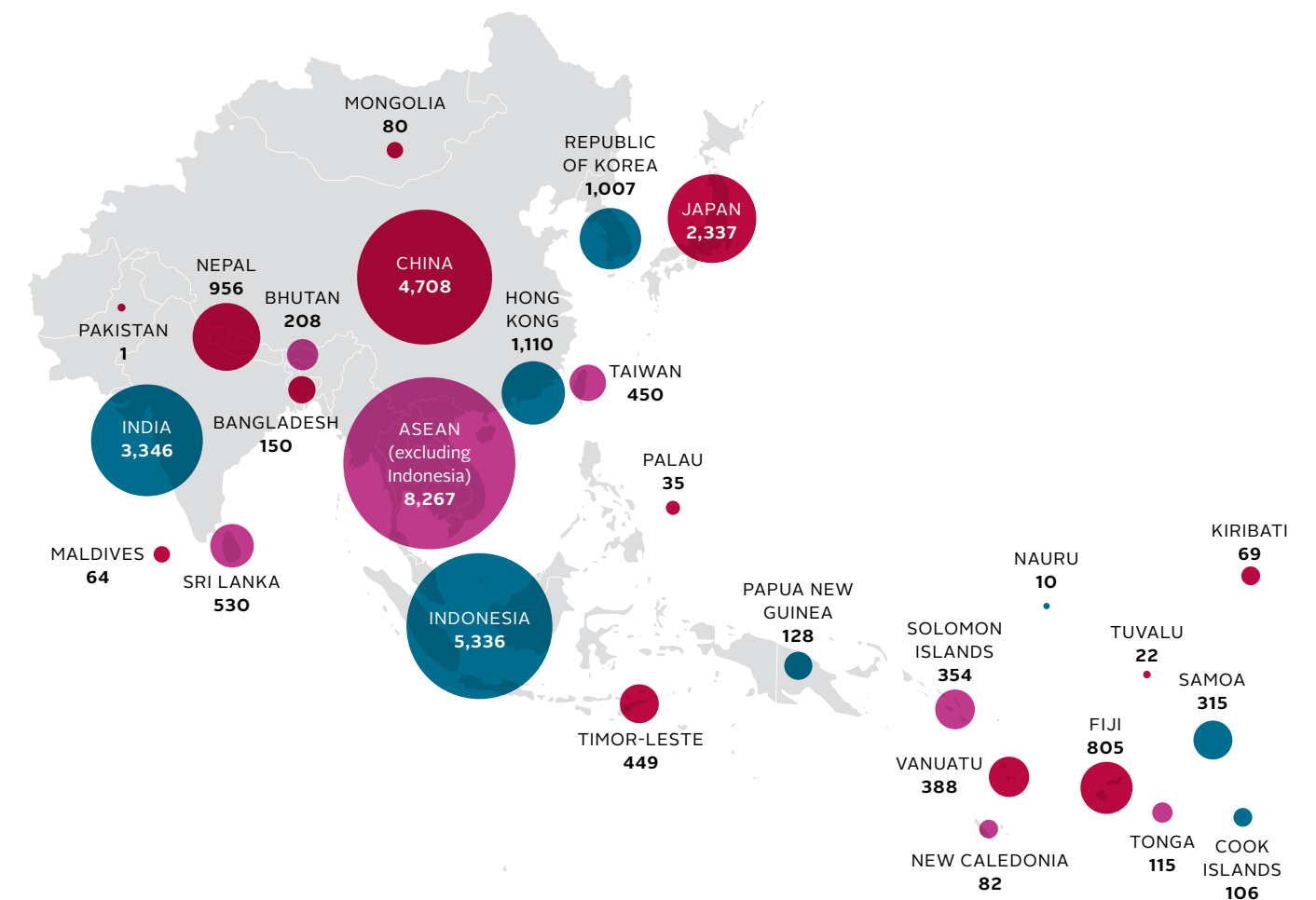
How to move forward in the post-COVID-19 pandemic context is a question that the higher education sectors in many countries including Vietnam need to answer. Below are three important trends that I believe Vietnamese higher education should take into consideration for both short- and long-term development plans.

Digitalise Education

Digital transformation of education has been widely introduced and strengthened during COVID-19 and needs to be sustained because this is a trend we can expect to continue. In fact, the pandemic was a spur to awakening Vietnam to recognise its existing resources and potentials. Vietnam has many advantages that can benefit the further digitalisation of education, of which the two most important ones are: its young population who can catch up with technologies quickly, and cheap and widely used technological services, especially the internet and mobile phone — an important asset that many more advanced countries do not have. However, the Vietnamese higher education system is one of the least digitalised, especially public universities. Fostering a technology-based education system will help the country build a workforce that is highly skilled and technologically literate to serve its economy, especially the knowledge-based one that Vietnam is targeting to develop. Besides, today's internationalisation and globalisation are increasingly characterised by “reverse mobility” — a phenomenon in which an increasing number of Western countries and their students become interested in and seek opportunities to

come to non-Western countries. For example, Australia and the UK have supported their students in sourcing opportunities for study and work abroad, through policies and other activities. The Australian Government's New Colombo Plan has enabled many of its students to undertake work placements and internships in the Indo-Pacific region. Similarly, between 2008 and 2011, there was a 27% rise in the number of British students moving overseas (mostly to Asian countries) for job opportunities.¹ When education is more digitalised, it will create easy access to a larger number of students who have an interest in learning about Vietnam. As such, opportunities to sell its education and culture will become more possible.

New Colombo Plan Students by Destination (2014-2018)²



¹ Thanh Pham and Denise Jackson, “The need to develop graduate employability for a globalised world,” in *Developing and Utilizing Employability Capitals: Graduates’ Strategies Across Labour Markets*, eds. Tran Le Huu Nghia, Thanh Pham et al. (London: Routledge, 2020), 21–40.

² Australian Government, “2017 Foreign Policy White Paper” (Canberra: DFAT, 2017), 113.

“ In our studies, we consistently found graduates needed to build social connections to facilitate their market entrance, understand working culture to navigate barriers, nurture resilience to overcome difficulties and pressures, and develop positive personal qualities to establish fruitful collaborations.

Be Selective With “Borrowed” Values and Practices

In my co-authored article in *HESB 8* we discussed a range of educational and cultural values that Vietnam should maintain and use as its strengths.³ In this article, I discuss how Vietnam should prepare its workforce after the pandemic as another example to be added to this argument. Since 1986, one of the biggest reforms in Vietnamese higher education is the implementation of a market-based education model, which strongly emphasises the need to train skilled workers. Consequently, higher education has been expanded rapidly and increasingly under pressures of fostering the preparation of students’ work-readiness. To respond, an increasing number of higher education institutions have shown their enthusiasm towards the employability skills agenda — a strategy prioritising the embedding of a range of professional skills (or soft skills) in teaching and learning programmes initiated in Europe around the mid-1990s. Undoubtedly, this initiative would help enhance graduates’ practical knowledge and skills — a longstanding issue in Vietnamese education — and to some extent respond to employers’ concern

about deficit communication, problem-solving and creative skills and insufficient work experience of fresh graduates.

However, the employability skills agenda has, in fact, been criticised by those who have used it because possessing a list of skills does not prepare students for post-study career life. Extensive evidence has showed that it is more about how individuals use their knowledge, skills, attitudes and resources to win job opportunities and maintain employment, and not simply possess a list of skills. In our studies, we consistently found graduates needed to build social connections to facilitate their market entrance, understand working culture to navigate barriers, nurture resilience to overcome difficulties and pressures, and develop positive personal qualities to establish fruitful collaborations.⁴ Many of these qualities are actually rooted in Asian educational values, especially Confucian values that highlight respect, community, diligence and persistence. In advanced countries where the employability agenda was born, more and more research has now argued for the incorporation of these Confucian values in higher education programmes so that

graduates can be equipped with a more-rounded package of a range of expertise knowledge, practical skills and positive personal qualities. As such, borrowed practices in Asian education have been widely discussed as to their pros and cons. Here I would like to emphasise that preparing students for the future workforce is another scenario in which Vietnamese higher education should carefully consider what and how to adopt foreign practices so that it does not lose values that are, in fact, its strengths.

Actively Reach Out to the World

Globalisation and internationalisation have become unavoidable phenomena in an increasing number of countries, including Vietnam. The fundamental meaning of internationalisation is exchanging or two-way trading of cultural values and practices. However, the dominance and popularity of Western culture and practices in many socio-economic aspects of our lives have made people often misperceive it as the opportunity for the West to disseminate sharings and the chance for the non-West to learn. This perception is being challenged by today’s mobility trends. As discussed above, “reverse mobility” might still be a new concept but it has happened and will be strengthened in coming years, especially after the pandemic. This is because European countries are facing one of the biggest economic recessions in history and Vietnam has become one of very few countries that have gradually recovered and could still develop economically based on its own resources and traditional cultural values. This means the country is building a very good image on the global map in terms of both economy and education. Therefore, this is the right time for the country and its higher education to not simply learn from, but reach out to other countries. Some suggestions for this scenario to happen are:

- Making better use of foreign-trained human resources who have English competency, advanced technological skills and updated knowledge in management and business;
- Investing more in marketing educational programmes and practices, especially unique ones;
- Developing better collaborations between industries and education so that graduates having a Vietnamese education could obtain better employment opportunities — a strategy that Japan has been using to boost its international student enrolments. 📌

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³ Thanh Pham and Huong Nguyen, “COVID-19: Challenges and Opportunities for Vietnamese Higher Education”, *HESB 8*, June 9, 2020, <https://headfoundation.org/HESB8/covid-19-Challenges-and-Opportunities-for-Vietnamese-Higher-Education>.

⁴ Thanh Pham and Denise Jackson, “Employability and Determinants of Employment outcomes”, in *Developing and Utilizing Employability Capitals: Graduates’ Strategies Across Labour Markets*, eds. Tran Le Huu Nghia, Thanh Pham et al. (London: Routledge, 2020), 237–255.

The Myth – and the Promise – of Southeast Asian Higher Education

Philip G. Altbach

Southeast Asia is a highly diverse region of 11 countries with a population of over 650 million — and contemporary higher education realities are just as diverse. There is diversity in religion, culture, political systems, economic development and systems and, of course, higher education. It is worth reflecting on the region's higher education realities and asking if there is, indeed, anything in common among these 11 national realities. Rather than focusing on aspects that unite the region, it is perhaps useful to reflect on the significant differences — and discussing if there are any points of constructive regional collaboration for higher education.

A Complex History and Its Impact on Higher Education

Southeast Asia has, of course, a rich history. It has also been subject to a range of foreign influences and conquests. The region can claim higher education traditions, including Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian and Islamic, dating back many centuries — all of which were external to Southeast Asia. Contemporary higher education is also the result of external forces. Indeed, the region was subject to every Western colonial incursion except that of Germany. The most influential colonial power in terms of higher education was British — Malaysia, Brunei, Myanmar, and Singapore — and in the longer term the impact of the English language. But France in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, the Netherlands in Indonesia, Spain, and then the United States in the Philippines all established higher education institutions in their colonies. Portugal in Timor-

“ Rather than focusing on aspects that unite the region, it is perhaps useful to reflect on the significant differences — and discussing if there are any points of constructive regional collaboration for higher education.

Leste largely ignored higher education as was common in its colonies. The only country to escape Western colonial rule was Thailand — but Western patterns were imported when the Thais established modern higher education in the 19th century and English became common.

As was common under colonialism, higher education was modelled on institutions in the metropole, and used the language of the colonisers. The purpose of higher education was to serve the colonial power through building an administrative cadre that could use the colonial language. Local population groups sought Western education to improve their economic and social status. As in all colonies, higher education was available to only a very small percentage of the population, typically 1% or less. In some colonies, Christian missionary societies and churches were engaged in sponsoring universities — and in the Philippines higher education was largely the responsibility of the Catholic Church during the Spanish colonial period.

The impact of the colonisers varied. Perhaps the largest and most lasting influence was that of the British colonial authorities and of other mainly missionary sponsors in the British colonies. The Dutch established just a few institutions in

Indonesia, as did the French in Indochina. In the Philippines, where the Spanish established the first universities in 1611, and when the United States became the governing authority in 1898, they changed the language of higher education from Spanish to English, and dramatically expanded higher education in the American model.

Post-colonial Realities

Independence came to Southeast Asian nations at different times following the Second World War, and under varied circumstances. Indonesia fought a short war of independence from the Dutch in 1945, and soon changed the medium of instruction in higher education from Dutch to Bahasa Indonesia — which allowed the rapid expansion of the very small Dutch colonial system. The French departed from Indochina in 1954, and the three countries (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos) were unstable and engaged in conflict for more than an additional two decades — with higher education getting little attention. North Vietnam was influenced by the Soviet Union and South Vietnam by the United States. Not much was happening in Cambodia or Laos. The British left the region in 1963 and the Malaysian Federation was established — Singapore left the Federation in 1965. The Philippines gained its independence from the United States in 1946.

In all of these cases, higher education was seen an important part of national development, and academic systems moved, at differing speeds, away from the tiny enrolments and small number of institutions that characterised the pre-World War Two period to larger systems — made possible by the expansion of literacy and the expansion of schools systems. Only the Philippines and to some extent Thailand had fairly significant higher education enrolments prior to this period.

Countries in the region have all expanded access to post-secondary education, but have significantly different enrolment rates. In Singapore, 89% of the age group participate in post-secondary education, at the top of the Southeast Asian countries, while fewer than 15% attend in Cambodia and Laos. Thailand and Malaysia educate a bit under half, while three of most populous countries in the region, Indonesia (36%), the Philippines (35%), and Vietnam (28%) still educate fairly modest proportions of their populations — but all are expanding rapidly. These figures indicate that most of the countries in the region lag behind the majority of middle-income countries globally.

The Interesting Case of Language

The language of higher education is, in much of Southeast Asia, complex and related both to the colonial past and the realities of the 21st century. The global impact of English is very much an issue in every country in the region. English is the sole medium of instruction in Singapore, Myanmar and the Philippines. Malaysia inherited an English-medium university system from the British, but decided to shift mostly to Bahasa Malaysia soon after independence, painstakingly developing textbooks and other infrastructure. The language issue was, however, the source of some conflict — and since the early 2000s the country has reemphasised English. The other countries in the region use the main national language, but with increasing emphasis on English as an important second language and in some cases the main language in some universities or faculties. Language policy remains a topic of importance and sometimes of conflict in the region, reflecting debates about national cultures, ethnic relations, engagement with the global environment and other issues.

The Rise of Private Higher Education

With rapid higher education expansion and the unwillingness or inability of government to provide access in public institutions, a private higher education sector has grown to be a substantial force in

“ Language policy remains a topic of importance and sometimes of conflict in the region, reflecting debates about national cultures, ethnic relations, engagement with the global environment and other issues.

most countries in the region. In the Philippines, for example, 80% of post-secondary students are in the private sector. Several of the Philippines’ top universities are private, mainly Catholic, institutions. Other countries in the region have lower proportions of students in the private sector, although more than half of enrolments in Indonesia are in private higher education — and with some exceptions the private sector is of lower quality than public institutions. Even Communist Vietnam has a growing and diverse private higher education sector. Only in Singapore and Brunei is private higher education a very small part of the system. Little is known regionally about the private higher education sector.

International Branch Campuses and Programmes

Another recent phenomenon in the region has been the development of international branch campuses. While no one has carefully catalogued all of them, there seem to more than 20, and the region, along with the Middle East, is probably the largest location for branch campuses. Australia has been especially active in the branch campus movement, but there are institutions from the United States, Britain, China and other countries active in the region. Singapore and Malaysia seem to be the main locations for branches, but institutions can be found in many countries, including Chinese branch campuses in Malaysia and Laos. There are also a large number of joint degree programmes with foreign universities located in Southeast Asian institutions. The Yale-National University of Singapore collaboration is a prominent example, as are the Singapore Management University and the Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), both of which were founded with the assistance of the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology respectively (Zhejiang University was also actively engaged in setting up the SUTD). Several Australian and British universities have joint programmes and branch campuses in Malaysia.

Southeast Asian Higher Education in the 21st Century

One might think that the region might have moved toward some common higher education elements in light of regional organisations such as SEAMEO and ASEAN, and a variety of regional education-related such as the Regional Institute for Higher Education and Development (RIHED) generally linked to ASEAN. But by and large this has not been the case. The higher education systems and academic institutions in the region remain nationally-focused and if there are external links, they are more often with universities outside of the region than within it. And there are significant variations among countries. Singapore is the only country in the region that has “world-class” universities recognised by the global rankings. Malaysia has made significant efforts to build its top universities. Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines have several universities that participate in global science and scholarship. Several of the countries in the region, for diverse reasons, underperform in higher education — in terms of access, quality, and the scope of their systems.

There have been a small number of initiatives to build effective collaboration among the region’s universities, including efforts in the areas of quality assurance and degree recognition, but overall accomplishments have been modest.

The reality of the early 21st century is that Southeast Asia is a geographical region of significant size and importance on the world stage, and with a number of countries with impressive rates of economic and social development, but in terms of higher education, despite some discussion and frequent conferences, there are few joint initiatives or research, and many variations among the countries in the region. 📖

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The Center for International Higher Education (CIHE) at the Lynch School of Education, Boston College, promotes the belief that an international perspective is needed to foster enlightened policies and practices in higher education. With this mission, CIHE was founded in 1995 to advance knowledge about the complex realities of higher education in the contemporary world through its research, publications, training programmes, and advisory activities.

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HESB

ISSUE 10 / APR 2021

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Impacting lives in Asia through *quality education* and *effective healthcare*

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Higher Education in Southeast Asia

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MALAYSIA

Population Size
32.66m
(DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICS, MALAYSIA, 2020)

Gross Enrolment in Higher Education
43.1% (UNESCO, 2019)

Number of Higher Education Institutions
492 (WWW.ETAWAU.COM, 2019)

Average Annual Tuition Fee
USD9,890-21,016
(Universiti Malaya, etc. Except foreign branch campuses)

Higher Education Spending as % of GDP
0.98%
(MINISTRY OF FINANCE, MALAYSIA; WORLD BANK, 2020)

Number of Foreign Students
82,000
(UNESCO, 2020)

SINGAPORE

Population Size
5.69m
(SINGSTAT, 2020)

Gross Enrolment in Higher Education
88.9%
(Universities and polytechnics. UNESCO, 2018)

Number of Higher Education Institutions
20 (DATA.GOV.SG, 2019)

Average Annual Tuition Fee
USD18,588-29,874
(National University of Singapore [NUS], Nanyang Technological University [NTU], Singapore Management University [SMU])

Higher Education Spending as % of GDP
1.0%
(UNESCO, 2019)

Number of Foreign Students
14,800
(Only NUS, NTU, SMU. QS QUACQUARELLI SYMONDS, 2021)

INDONESIA

Population Size
267.67m
(UNESCO, 2018)

Gross Enrolment in Higher Education
36.3% (UNESCO, 2018)

Number of Higher Education Institutions
3,226 (MINISTRY OF RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY, INDONESIA, 2018)

Average Annual Tuition Fee
USD3,200
(UNIVERSITAS GADJAH MADA)

Higher Education Spending as % of GDP
0.41%
(WORLD BANK, 2018)

Number of Foreign Students
7,677 (UNESCO, 2020)

MYANMAR

Population Size
54.67m
(UN DATA, 2020)

Gross Enrolment in Higher Education
18.8%
(UNESCO, 2018)

Number of Higher Education Institutions
174 (CHINLONE, 2018)

Average Annual Tuition Fee
USD1,650
(UNIVERSITY OF YANGON)

Higher Education Spending as % of GDP
0.32%
(MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND FINANCE, MYANMAR, 2018)

Number of Foreign Students
459 (UNESCO, 2020)

THAILAND

Population Size
69.63m
(UNESCO, 2019)

Gross Enrolment in Higher Education
49% (UNESCO, 2016)

Number of Higher Education Institutions
156 (MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND INNOVATION, THAILAND, 2020)

Average Annual Tuition Fee
USD3,900
(CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY)

Higher Education Spending as % of GDP
0.32%
(MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION, THAILAND, 2018)

Number of Foreign Students
31,571 (UNESCO, 2020)

LAOS

Population Size
7.06m
(UNESCO, 2018)

Gross Enrolment in Higher Education
14.5% (UNESCO, 2019)

Number of Higher Education Institutions
117 (NANLUDET MOXOM AND RICHARD NOONAN, 2020)

Average Annual Tuition Fee
USD246
(SOUHPANOUVONG UNIVERSITY)

Higher Education Spending as % of GDP
1.3%
(WORLD BANK, 2014)

Number of Foreign Students
468
(UNESCO, 2020)

VIETNAM

Population Size
95.55m
(UNESCO, 2018)

Gross Enrolment in Higher Education
28.6% (UNESCO, 2019)

Number of Higher Education Institutions
236 (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING, VIETNAM, 2017)

Average Annual Tuition Fee
USD2,500
(VIETNAM NATIONAL UNIVERSITY, HANOI)

Higher Education Spending as % of GDP
0.23%
(WORLD BANK, 2020)

Number of Foreign Students
7,250
(UNESCO, 2020)

THE PHILIPPINES

Population Size
106.65m
(UNESCO, 2018)

Gross Enrolment in Higher Education
35.5% (UNESCO, 2017)

Number of Higher Education Institutions
1,943
(QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION, 2018)

Average Annual Tuition Fee
USD79-1,140
(UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES)

Higher Education Spending as % of GDP
0.624%
(WORLD BANK, 2019)

Number of Foreign Students
12,946
(BUREAU OF IMMIGRATION, PHILIPPINES, 2017)

CAMBODIA

Population Size
16.26m
(UNESCO, 2018)

Gross Enrolment in Higher Education
14.7% (UNESCO, 2019)

Number of Higher Education Institutions
121 (LEANG UN AND SAY SOK, 2018)

Average Annual Tuition Fee
USD1,012
(THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBODIA)

Higher Education Spending as % of GDP
3-4% (MAK NGOY ET AL., 2019)

BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

Population Size
429,000
(UNESCO, 2018)

Gross Enrolment in Higher Education
31.5% (UNESCO, 2019)

Number of Higher Education Institutions
7 (ROSE PATSY TIBOK AND WENDY HIEW, 2018)

Average Annual Tuition Fee
USD2,250
(UNIVERSITI BRUNEI DARUSSALAM)

Number of Foreign Students
377 (UNESCO, 2020)

TIMOR-LESTE

Population Size
1.27m
(UNESCO, 2018)

Gross Enrolment in Higher Education
17.8% (UNESCO, 2010)

Number of Higher Education Institutions
7 (UNIRANK, 2020)

Average Annual Tuition Fee
USD210
(UNIVERSIDADE NACIONAL TIMOR LOROSA'E)

Higher Education Spending as % of GDP
6.79%
(Total education budget; no data on breakdown for higher education. UNESCO, 2018)



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