

HESB

HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND BEYOND



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Regional
Student
Mobility

Editor's Message

This ninth edition of *Higher Education in Southeast Asia and Beyond* (HESB) is a special issue on regional student mobility in Asia, with a focus on the ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) programme.

The **introductory article** lays out the rationale for regional student mobility programmes today, particularly as COVID-19 has begun to put the brakes on globalisation trends in higher education. It also makes possible the kind of student exchanges and intercultural experience that technology still cannot – and should not – replicate.

Nakao Nomura then shows how the AIMS programme has brought success in establishing a sustainable student mobility platform between Japan and Southeast Asia, from which the number of inbound students with funding from their home countries and universities had drastically increased. **Dong Seok Seo** and **Hyeon Joo Kim** discuss how the AIMS programme relates to South Korea's vision for enhancing the nation's soft power, as well as being an educational hub.

Morshidi Sirat and **Zarida Hambali** write about how with the AIMS Programme, it was envisioned that Malaysia – a founding member of the programme – would transform from being an international education hub for international student recruitment to a knowledge and skills hub with a high proportion of students from ASEAN pursuing postgraduate studies in Malaysian research universities. Meanwhile, **Nopraenue S. Dhirathiti** offers a

perspective from Thailand – another founding member of the programme – as to how international experience through mobility programmes can also be seen as a way to strengthen institutional ties among higher education institutes across the region, which would further enhance other collaborations along the way, including degree and research partnership.

Romyen Kosaikanont and **Nordiana Mohd Nordin** reflect on the experiences of two pioneering universities in the AIMS programme, namely Mae Fah Luang University (MFU) in Thailand and Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) in Malaysia, and they share some of the key lessons learnt.

Finally, **Queenie Lam** gives us a brief on the Erasmus (European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students) programme of Europe, which has served as the inspiration for the AIMS programme and other student mobility programmes in Asia; while the **concluding article** situates student mobility programmes within the larger aims of internationalisation in the ASEAN context, discusses the implications of student mobility beyond education, and proposes some perspectives for addressing gaps in student mobility opportunities in the COVID-19 new normal.

We invite you to consider contributing to future issues, and to be a part of the conversations and debates on higher education in Southeast Asia and beyond. Meanwhile, we hope you stay safe and well in these unprecedented times.

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Between Globalisation and a Decoupled, COVID-19 World: Regional Student Mobility in ASEAN and the EU

LOKE HOE YEONG

Programmes for regional student mobility at the university level have been part of larger political projects for forging regional identity, even as the programmes themselves bear the desired scientific, cultural and economic impact.

Among the various action plans set out at the 14th ASEAN Summit in Cha-am, Hua Hin, Thailand, in 2009, regionalisation of higher education profiles was a priority item on the agenda. The Malaysia-Indonesia-Thailand (M-I-T) Student Mobility Pilot Project, initiated that same year, has grown into the ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) programme, which has built a student mobility programme at the higher education level for citizens of all SEAMEO (Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization) member countries.

The Erasmus Programme, which provided the inspiration for a number of regional student mobility initiatives in ASEAN, is a European Union (EU) student exchange programme established in 1987, which involved collaboration with the European Commission. There is now Erasmus+, the EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe, to contribute to the Europe 2020 strategy for growth, jobs, social equity and inclusion, as well as the aims of ET2020, which is the EU's strategic framework for education and training.

“ Student mobility programmes are highly predicated on the globalisation of higher education and, in turn, of human capital.

“ Student mobility programmes at the university level may have an impact on where graduates decide to build their careers in the region after higher education.

Student mobility programmes are highly predicated on the globalisation of higher education and, in turn, of human capital. In his article for this issue, Nakao Nomura notes how the AIMS programme presented an opportunity for another dimension to the globalisation of higher education in Japan – a top priority for Japanese universities because of reasons pertaining to the country's declining, ageing population. This reflects the phenomenon in higher education in non-English-speaking countries, where there are moves for instruction to be increasingly delivered in English. And to the bane mostly of academics, university league tables have had the effect of catalysing a convergence that is to the detriment of national higher education cultures.

What, then, is the value and rationale of region-based student mobility programmes, in this context of the globalisation of higher education? Globalisation trends may have peaked for now because of COVID-19, but a number of reasons remain salient.

The volatility in global trading and economic relations in the past half-decade presents a renewed rationale for greater stability at the regional level. Through the lenses of international political economy, regions such as Southeast Asia or Europe can form the basis of building blocks of more congenial international relations, leading to a strengthening of political and economic stability. Student mobility programmes at the university level may have an impact on where graduates may decide to build their careers in the region after higher education, or certainly in building personal and professional ties which can be valuable for inter-state exchanges.

The higher education destinations traditionally favoured – the US, the UK and Australia – nevertheless retain their draw among students in ASEAN and Europe. “Market forces” – to use the economic language – mean that students are free to choose where to pursue higher education. But then the *raison d'être* of regional student mobility programmes such as AIMS and Erasmus is that one cannot simply “leave it to the market” to ensure the smooth operation of such initiatives – to further stretch the economic analogy. Regional student mobility programmes are complex initiatives, as the experience of AIMS and Erasmus demonstrate, involving technical issues such as mutual recognition. This mirrors the complexities of regional integration initiatives at the political level.

States, in banding together on platforms of regional integration such as ASEAN and the EU, have decided that there is an overriding rationale for and benefit from programmes such as AIMS and Erasmus, and the world of higher education would be all the richer for them – the sort of student exchanges and intercultural experience that technology still cannot replicate, pre- or post-COVID.

Finally, with the travel restrictions and general uncertainties relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is strong potential for a rise in student mobility within Asia, with countries such as China and Malaysia potentially competing with English-speaking countries for students.

At the onset of COVID-19 in Europe, Simon Marginson, director of the Centre for Global Higher Education at the University of Oxford, offered the prediction that East Asia will emerge as a regional hub for international student mobility.

In turn, this might have the effect of spurring a country like the UK to maintain its status as a member of the Erasmus programme, which has

been under threat in the ongoing Brexit talks at the time of writing. Gordon Brown, the former British prime minister who is also the United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education, has recently led calls for the UK to remain a part of the Erasmus programme. More than half of British students who study abroad do so under the Erasmus programme, yet it is not currently being factored into the Brexit negotiations. Brown had pointed out that economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis required a sharp focus on maintaining and supporting pathways to business, scientific and academic cooperation.

The rationale for regional student mobility programmes today remain, particularly as COVID-19 has begun to put the brakes on globalisation trends in higher education. It also makes possible the kind of student exchanges and intercultural experience that technology still cannot – and should not – replicate. 🎓

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A New Dimension of Student Mobility between Japan and Southeast Asia through the AIMS Programme

NAKAO NOMURA

Globalising Higher Education in Japanese Universities

Globalisation in higher education is one of the top priorities for universities in Japan, as with other countries. However, in Japan, there is another significant driver for globalisation in higher education. This is closely related to the current situation of the Japanese demographic structure. Japan is a hyper-ageing society, meaning that the proportion of the ageing population is much higher than that of the young population. The ratio of those who are over the retirement age and supported by social welfare systems, such as pensions, is rapidly increasing. Meanwhile, the younger population which is supporting the social and economic systems by paying taxes is decreasing. This is due to the low birth rate and long life expectancy in Japan. As a result, the Japanese population has started decreasing since 2016 and according to demographic projection by public sectors, this trend will last for a few decades. This is closely related to the necessity of globalisation in Japanese universities.

Firstly, due to a decrease in the young population, the number of students who are graduating from high school and enrolling in university is decreasing. Japanese universities would thus need to be more open to enrolling students from overseas.

“ The main reason for Japanese students who are considering participation in study abroad programmes is to improve their language skills, particularly their English proficiency.

Japan Demographics – 2019¹

DEPENDENCY AGE RATIO

68.1%

World average dependency age ratio = 54.5%²

PRODUCTIVE AGE POPULATION
[15-64 years]

75.07 million

HAS BEEN DECLINING SINCE 1993

CHILD POPULATION

[0-14 years]

15.21 million

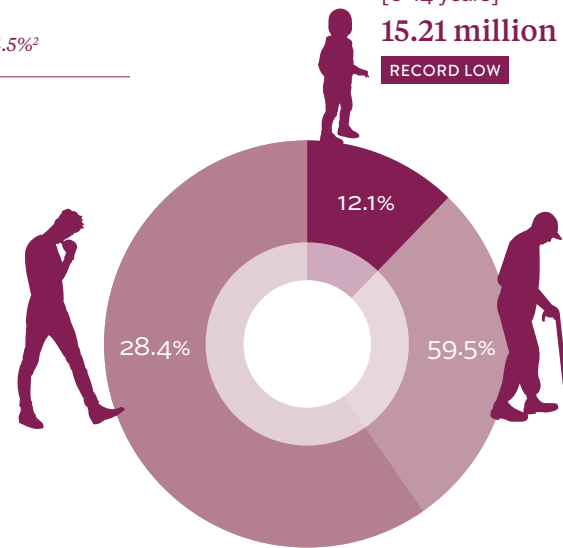
RECORD LOW

AGED POPULATION
[65 years and above]

35.89 million

1 in every 4 persons

RECORD HIGH



“The main reason for Japanese students who are considering participation in study abroad programmes is to improve their language skills, particularly their English proficiency.

Secondly, as the Japanese economic market would be shrinking, many private sectors targeting the domestic market may have to expand their businesses to foreign markets. Universities are expected to introduce educational contents and experiences to prepare domestic students to work in international business environments.

One of the actions for this is the Japanese national project, Global 30 (G30), which was started in 2009. Under the G30 project, many Japanese universities started offering degree programmes taught in English. English is not only used for teaching the courses but also for all services offered to students, including the conducting of the admission exercise and online examination for students staying overseas. Administrative staff with good English skills are deployed to support campus life during

1. Source: Statistical Handbook of Japan 2020

2. Source: The World Bank (2019)

their stay in Japan. These programmes were successful in increasing the number of inbound international students in Japan. However, many universities have also been utilising these methods for the globalisation of programmes taught in Japanese.

International Partnerships

For Japanese universities, international partnerships are quite important for establishing new degree programmes. One important reason is student recruitment. Admission exams and university guidance would be more effective if Japanese universities have partner institutions in the country or region where a significant number of applicants is expected to enrol for their degree programmes. Another factor is students' career development. Since many students who graduate from Japanese universities are expected to contribute to the Japanese business market in private sectors, the direction of business expansion which Japanese private sectors take is an important consideration in international partnerships.

Because of the above factors, most of the Japanese universities have strategic partner institutions and have opened extension or branch offices in Southeast Asia. For example, more than 50 Japanese universities have opened offices in Thailand.

Expanding Globalisation Through AIMS

Japanese universities usually recommend domestic students for study abroad programmes during their undergraduate study as an effective way to obtain international experiences, as well as to improve communication skills. The main reason for Japanese students who are considering participation in study abroad programmes is to improve their language skills, particularly their English proficiency. In Japan, English classes are mandatory in school. However, these focus mainly on reading and writing, and not listening and speaking. Therefore, Japanese students are less proficient in English oral communication, compared with students from other countries, as shown in their low average scores in major English proficiency tests. Many Japanese university students recognise this and decide to participate in study abroad programmes to improve their English speaking and listening skills. Those students tend to select countries where English is spoken as a native language, such as North America, Europe and Oceania, as destinations for their overseas study. Therefore, destinations for outbound Japanese students were mainly the abovementioned regions while students who went to Asian countries were very few.

Hence, the Asian International Mobility for Students (AIMS) programme was a good opportunity for Japanese universities as well as the Japanese government to provide another dimension to the globalisation of higher education in Japan. AIMS is one of the flagship projects by the Southeast Asian Ministry of Education Organization, Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO RIHED). To invite Japanese universities into AIMS, the Japanese government utilised an ongoing national project.

The Japanese government had been implementing the Inter-University Exchange Project (IUEP) as a scheme to promote globalisation in Japanese universities using financial aid since 2011. This project supports initiatives proposed by Japanese universities to bring globalisation to Japanese higher education with five-year government subsidies. During the first five years, the university needs to establish a sustainable project platform which can be run even after the subsidy period. Since 2011, IUEP has focused on different regions of the world and the focus in 2013 was on AIMS. 27 universities applied with various initiatives for globalisation through participation in AIMS and the Japanese government selected 11 universities to be partner universities in AIMS. Among these Japanese universities, the University of Tsukuba was assigned to serve as a national coordinator. The University of Tsukuba is also serving as an affiliate member of the SEAMEO secretariat and has strong links with institutions under SEAMEO, including SEAMEO RIHED.

Interactions Between International Students and Local Communities

AIMS has also brought some positive impact on the ageing society in Japan. This can be observed in several activities between inbound international students in Japanese AIMS universities and local communities in Japan, which are promoted by the Japanese AIMS universities as one of the universities' social services. The most popular form

is providing an open public space for casual conversations or seminars where international students and the local Japanese community can introduce their traditional cultures to one another. Active participants from local communities are mainly families with pre-school children and senior citizens. Since they mainly use English as the language of communication, parents of pre-school children participate with the expectation that their children will get used to English conversation, as well as interact with people from different cultures. Senior citizens participate in such events and enjoy exchanging or sharing their experiences with international students — the main reason for international students to participate, as such stories bring new knowledge which they cannot learn from lectures in the university. As there is mutual benefit for international students and people from the local community, interactions are quite active and events are run on a voluntary basis.

Establishing Student Mobility Between Japan and Southeast Asia

During the first five years of AIMS from 2013 to 2017, all 11 Japanese universities achieved the target of 25 outbound and 25 inbound students (total 50 for student mobility) almost every year. The total number of students became one of the highest among AIMS partner countries. The number of Japanese students who went to Southeast Asia dramatically increased compared to the period before AIMS. After 2017, although there was a slight decrease in the student mobility number, all 11 Japanese universities continued participating in AIMS with their own funding. Another important fact about AIMS is the funding for inbound students from Southeast Asia to Japan. Compared with outbound Japanese students to Southeast Asia, inbound students from Southeast Asia did not show any drastic increase even after participation in AIMS because Japan has always been a popular study-abroad destination for these students. However, after the participation of Japanese universities in AIMS, the number of inbound students from Southeast Asia who received funding from their home country or university significantly increased. In this sense, it can be said that AIMS brought great success in the establishing of a sustainable student-mobility platform between Japan and Southeast Asia. 🎓

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“**Senior citizens participate in such events and enjoy exchanging or sharing their experiences with international students — the main reason for international students to participate, as such stories bring new knowledge which they cannot learn from lectures in the university.**”

The Impact of the AIMS Programme on International Higher Education: Student Mobility between the Republic of Korea and the ASEAN Region

DONG SEOK SEO & HYEON JOO KIM

The Background of Joining the AIMS programme

The extent of a country's internationalisation has a bearing on whether it can become a global power that expands its sphere of influence and gain leadership beyond its borders. Particularly in modern society, people-to-people exchange is considered to have a higher influence on internationalisation than material exchange, which was regarded as important from the traditional point of view. The importance of the exchange of human resources reflects an undoubtedly significant aspect in the field of higher education as well. From the political perspective, the ASEAN+3 Plan of Action on Education: 2010-2017 was adopted during the 1st ASEAN+3 Education Ministerial Meeting in July 2012.

One of the key contents of the action plan was “promoting university student mobility among countries in ASEAN+3 region and establishing a quality assurance system for higher education”. It was a notable step for the Republic of Korea (hereinafter referred to as ROK) to show interest in a student mobility programme with the Southeast

Asian region. In addition, there were some suggestions that a clause about the Korea-ASEAN student exchange programme (“4.4. Enhance cooperation in education...to promote students and faculty exchanges and joint research in higher education”) should be included in the goals of the ASEAN-Republic of Korea Commemorative Summit (December 2014).

In accordance with the Korean government's policy direction to promote exchanges with ASEAN countries, the Ministry of Education and Korean Council for University Education (KCUE) examined the feasibility of participating in the Asian International Mobility for Students (AIMS) programme, which is a collaborative and multilateral student exchange programme among the ASEAN countries organised by the Southeast SEAMEO Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (RIHED). Korea was officially accepted to as a participant in the programme at the 9th Review Meeting in October 2015.

“ In education, cooperation with diverse countries has led to the valuable opportunity to learn good practices of foreign education systems as well as to share ours with other countries.

National Point of View

The primary benefit seen in interacting with other partner countries is the enhancement of the quality of higher education and the promotion of the competitiveness of universities' internationalisation. In education, cooperation with diverse countries has led to the valuable opportunity to learn good practices of foreign education systems as well as to share ours with other countries. In that sense, the quality of higher education can be mutually improved by forming a network of understanding and sharing of information through communication and cooperation activities with partner countries.

In addition, we can nurture global talents through interacting with other partner countries. The institutional engagement in academic mobility schemes provides a platform to broaden a multilateral cooperation among partner institutions and share sound practices and policies, which ultimately leads to the establishment of infrastructure to nurture global talents as well. Therefore, countries or institutions with these platforms can provide more opportunities for students to cultivate open-minded thinking and enhance their capabilities. Students who have experienced internships or academic exchange programmes abroad such as AIMS have higher chances of becoming global talents who can flexibly respond to the demands of change over time in social and economic paradigms, and can build the life they want.

KCUE had conducted a survey from 2017 to 2019 and found out that the greatest impact of the mobility programme on outbound Korean students was on their intercultural competencies. According to the result from the Semester 2, 2019/2020 survey, students' average satisfaction with the programme was 3.93 out of 5.00 and the opinion was that the programme was a great opportunity to enhance expertise in their majors for their future careers. So, this survey proved that studying abroad has a substantial effect on students' future careers and subject-related expertise.

Impact on Participating Universities

The impact of AIMS on universities in ROK is beyond description. ROK launched the programme with four consortia in 2016, and it has expanded to ten consortia as of 2019. Even though six universities joined the programme only from March 2019, during that relatively short period they have hosted and participated in various international activities and academic conferences to strengthen relationships among students and stakeholders. Essentially, the impact of AIMS on participating universities in the ROK can be summarised in three ways. Firstly, the most crucial determining factor for AIMS is “opportunity for interaction”. Participating in AIMS offers universities in ROK more chances to interact with universities in the ASEAN region. Student exchanges between ROK and Northeast Asian countries (such as China and Japan) or with North America have been active, but exchanges with the Southeast Asian region are relatively less active. However, thanks to AIMS, universities in ROK could get valuable opportunities to build networks and strengthen partnerships with the ASEAN region in the field of education.

Secondly, AIMS enables participating universities to develop academic curricula and extra-curriculum activities that reflect the local features of where each university is located. For example, Dongguk University in Gyeongju developed a curriculum specialising in hotel tourism as they are situated at a historical site which is famous for Korean cultural heritage and tourism. Similarly,

“**Invigorating the existing curriculum, combined with ROK’s attractive pop culture, will also strengthen competitiveness in higher education.**”

Gyeongsang National University has improved students' practical skills by providing activities based on an academic curriculum about agriculture in the Gyeongsangnam-do province, with modules such as International Cooperation in Agriculture. Therefore, foreign students who visit ROK have the chance to experience the distinctive features of various regions beyond the capital city of Seoul.

Lastly, under AIMS, a community has been formed where the members of ROK universities can interact with each other. In fact, ROK universities have organised joint activities such as an international conference, cultural experiences and language camps. AIMS project managers and coordinators of various nationalities share their knowledge with each other at international conferences such as the Asian Business and Economics International Conference to enhance the expertise of AIMS’s participating study fields. Similarly, outbound and inbound students from various universities are given the opportunity to participate in ski camps, language exchange programmes and derive a better understanding of each other's cultures. These activities naturally help students to build a common AIMS identity, exchange information with each other, see and learn good practices mutually, and ultimately improve the quality of higher education.

Taking a Step Forward

So far, AIMS has provided amazing opportunities for higher education institutions in ROK and their participating students to take on new initiatives as mentioned before. The impact that governments, universities and students can show through this programme is expected to be beyond simple cross-border movements. AIMS is related to the vision of ROK to enhance soft power. Interest about ROK has been on the rise recently. For example, Korean cultural industries such as K-pop, K-drama and K-beauty have become popular all over the world, and international students have become very interested in Korean language, culture, history and so on. Invigorating the existing curriculum, combined with ROK's attractive pop culture, will also strengthen competitiveness in higher education.

In other words, universities, which provide excellent environments for education, including having diverse curricula that reflect national characteristics and strengths, active faculty exchange between academic institutions, sharing information through community activities and so on, will make it possible to attract talented students from all around the world. And I think this is the aspect of soft power in higher education. ROK will not stop at its current achievement but will continue to develop more actively to become an educational hub in the world. 🎓

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ASEAN's Intra-Regional Student Mobility Programmes and Malaysia's Strategic Intent

MORSHIDI SIRAT & ZARIDA HAMBALI

Malaysia's National Higher Education Strategic Plan Beyond 2020, which was launched in 2007, provided a framework for Malaysian universities to collaborate with other ASEAN universities. The National Higher Education Research Institute, based in Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, took up the plan's challenge by organising the Strategic Dialogue on Higher Education and Developing Human Capital between Malaysia and Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV) Countries, also known as The Kuala Lumpur-CLMV Dialogue, on 1 and 2 December 2008. With financial and administrative support from the Ministry of Higher Education, a series of workshops and dialogues took place in 2009 in Malaysia as well as in Cambodia, Vietnam and Lao PDR to formalise a framework for the Malaysia-CLMV collaborative academic and research efforts.

One important agenda at that time was short-term student mobility initially with Cambodia, with the intention to expand this initiative to include Vietnam and Lao PDR. Besides the funding issue, at a practical level there was a need for a coordinating body to oversee a formalised student mobility programme. Admittedly, the National Higher Education Research Institute, which had

initiated this idea, is a dedicated policy research institute of the Ministry and was in no position to be the coordinating body for the student exchange programme. Coincidentally, at that time Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, together with SEAMEO RIHED, were working on a framework to support a pilot student exchange programme in line with the ASEAN integration agenda. SEAMEO RIHED subsequently developed the Structured Framework for Regional Integration in Higher Education in Southeast Asia in 2009, with a focus on student mobility. What has and has not changed in terms of Malaysia's participation in the intra-regional student mobility programmes?

The Precursor: Malaysia-Indonesia-Thailand Mobility Pilot Project

The Malaysia-Indonesia-Thailand (M-I-T) Student Mobility Pilot Project for undergraduates was launched in 2010. From Malaysia's perspective, this pilot project should provide lessons learnt in terms of the technical and practical aspects of promoting intra-regional student mobility. While the pilot project was focused on short-duration academic exchange, Malaysia was envisioning a longer term

“Being a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, Malaysia was in a commanding position to showcase (international) higher education.”

plan to increase the number of inbound students from ASEAN countries. Additionally, for Malaysia the internationalisation of higher education through student mobility should also contribute to intercultural exposure, which is important for regional integration and understanding. Being a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, Malaysia was in a commanding position to showcase (international) higher education.

ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) Programme

Malaysia, as a pioneer in the M-I-T Student Mobility Pilot Project, saw the relevance of expanding this project for it could contribute to the international education hub objective, which was spelt out in the Internationalisation of Higher Education Policy 2011. To underscore the importance of short-term student mobility, since 2013 data on participating students in such programmes has been included in the Ministry's statistics on international students. Notably, this inclusion has contributed to Malaysia success in meeting its target of 100,000 international students in its education system by mid-2000. Between 2010 and 2014, the Ministry had allocated RM 1.4 million annually for this programme, with a cumulative funding of RM 5.006 million by 2014.

In 2015, the Ministry reviewed lessons learnt from the implementation of AIMS with a view to strengthening the programme's role as a springboard to attract alumni of AIMS to undertake further studies in Malaysia. From the review, AIMS

continues to underscore the importance of student flows between Malaysia and Indonesia. Not much has changed in this aspect.

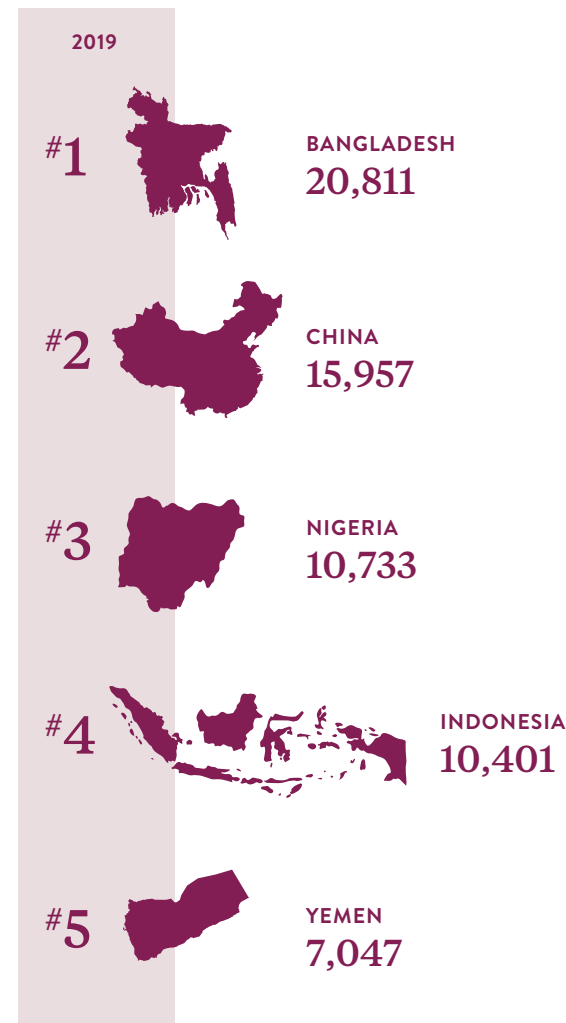
It is the Ministry's expectation that as AIMS participants were students of good academic standing, exposure to the Malaysian academic system should be a motivation for them to undertake further studies in Malaysia. It is envisioned that Malaysia would transform from being an international education hub for international student recruitment to a knowledge and skill hub with a high proportion of students from ASEAN pursuing postgraduate studies in Malaysian research universities.

The initial policy was for intra-regional student mobility to be developed as a platform to expose ASEAN students to Malaysia's academic system and socio-cultural environment from a non-monetary aspect. This was subsequently reviewed. A monetary aspect of student mobility and the internationalisation of higher education was soon introduced. (In 2012, the Ministry had allocated no less than RM 1.5 million to AIMS.) This was necessary considering reduced funding from the Ministry. Malaysian universities participating in AIMS were expected to explore innovative self-funding options.

Future Prospects

Based on the past and present situations, the Ministry and Malaysian universities have mixed reactions to the medium and longer term outlook for intra-regional mobility programmes such as AIMS.

Top 5 Countries of Origin of International Students in Malaysia¹



Responses from four of the nine participating Malaysian universities in this programme provided an overview of the future prospects for intra-regional mobility programmes. One university has suspended all mobility programmes for its students. The acceptance of inbound students from international partners has also been frozen since March 2020. While there are opportunities for virtual

1. Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics.

mobility programmes, this university's view is that a virtual programme may not give participating students the real experience. For now, a virtual mobility programme is not being explored.

Admittedly, there are potentialities for innovation in experiential learning with evolving models of student mobility based on technology. But support from relevant central agencies is critical for such innovative models of delivery.

Universities, despite the pandemic, are still receiving applications for mobility programmes from international partners. Three universities are responding positively to such applications by proposing a virtual mobility programme, with one working on a global classroom to deliver the experience. Such preparedness in diversifying the mode of delivery could cushion the impacts of unexpected future shocks and disruptions to intra-regional physical mobility and are commendable.

With the current global pandemic situation, uncertainties over the post-COVID-19 scenario, and reduced financial support from the Ministry, these universities are expecting a downward trend in student mobility in the next few years. Internal funds for mobility programmes are also very limited. Arguably, an upward trend may be possible in the longer term with the adoption and implementation of virtual mobility programmes. Additionally, the AIMS committee and universities should consider asking the industries to contribute towards sending students abroad. 🎓

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Benefits of Intra-Regional Mobility from the Perspective of a Founding Member Country of AIMS

NOPRAENUE S. DHIRATHITI

Motivations for Participating in a Regional Student Mobility Programme

Nowadays, one of the core missions of higher education institutions (HEIs) across the globe is to provide students with the so-called "learning experience". This package of experiences is not limited to only research or teaching and learning, but also the extent to which students will be furnished with opportunities to be exposed to international and multi-cultural settings during their course of study. Therefore, for the most part, university administrators cannot be ignorant of the fact that it has become one of the missions of HEIs to ensure that students graduate with international mobility experience in their portfolios.

Not only are students benefiting from gaining international mobility experiences upon their graduation, HEIs themselves are also benefiting from actively engaging in such programmes as part of their strategies to showcase their internationalisation portfolio. Among a wide variety of mobility programmes, regional mobility activities are cost-effective and viable choices for many HEIs as institutions are mindful about distributing resources to many other university missions. While internationalisation is a common practice nowadays, the geographical location of the mobility programmes and engagement is also an important consideration in terms of financial sustainability. Intra-regional mobility programmes have become an important mechanism to guarantee more opportunities for students to be supported by HEIs or to self-finance themselves to gain international experiences.

In addition, as part of a wider scope to promote regionalisation in many political and economic areas, intra-regional mobility programmes are integral to mobilising students and familiarising them with different cultural, political and economic settings. The

mechanism is deemed important to the process of regionalisation by fostering “people-to-people” connections, especially at a young age, for the students. This social mechanism is specifically evident in Europe where intra-regional mobility, be it systematically catered for by the governments or HEIs or self-financed students, has been embraced as a culture. Therefore, it is self-explanatory that these key motivations are embraced by the national governments, HEIs and students themselves in engaging actively in regional mobility programmes.

How AIMS Fits In with Other Initiatives for Mobility

There are many levels of mobility programmes all over the world, including those implemented by national governments, HEIs, international organisations or private sectors. AIMS has always been a concrete example of the inter-governmental endeavour to

systematically provide opportunities for students to gain from this dimension of internationalisation. Truth be told, the effort to promote mobility programmes could not have been accomplished by one sector or institution alone. Although HEIs are the major actors promoting the activities among students in their respective institutions, additional mobility programmes supported by the national governments as well as international organisations are undeniably vital for the expansion of scope and number of the activities. The special characteristic of AIMS is that it is inter-governmental in nature. Accordingly, the financial support and the sustainability of the mobility programme are guaranteed, which in effect encourage HEIs to strategise its mobility activities to align with their existing programmes.

Furthermore, another strong feature of AIMS is its nature of being an initiative to promote intra-regional mobility, which is rare within the Southeast Asian region. Compared to Europe, where the Bologna Process has been a catalyst for the expansion of intra-regional mobility programmes, there are no concrete governmental initiatives to promote mobility in the same fashion in Southeast Asia, except for AIMS. The gradual expansion in geographical area to include East Asian countries, including Japan and Korea, has also been a leap forward in echoing the commitment of governments and HEIs involved to promote intra-regional mobility programmes, which widen opportunities for students to gain more experience in those geographical areas. Specifically, the post-COVID situation will affect the way in which intra-regional mobility has been increasing.

“As part of a wider scope to promote regionalisation in many political and economic areas, intra-regional mobility programmes are integral to mobilising students and familiarising them with different cultural, political and economic settings.

“Student mobility programmes have always been seen as a starting point for HEIs to cement institutional ties among their strategic partners.

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

The Bologna Declaration was signed by 29 European Union member states in 1999, establishing the European Higher Education Area to facilitate mobility of students and staff in higher education. It has grown to cover 48 states and include a three-cycle higher education system of bachelor's, master's and doctoral studies, with a system of quality assurance and mutual recognition of qualifications.

Benefits from Engaging With Regional Partners and the Role of Student Mobility in the Region

As discussed earlier, the benefits of participating in intra-regional mobility programmes such as AIMS can be seen at the national, institutional and individual levels. The next step for AIMS would be working towards more engagement with regional partners to expand the geographical areas as well as the scope of the disciplines, which would open up additional opportunities for students in the future. While both the national governments and HEIs are reiterating the importance of internationalisation strategies in providing students with new skills and competencies, student mobility programmes are considered one of the activities that both players

need to instrumentalise to achieve the intended outputs and outcomes of graduate employability.

International experience through mobility programmes can also be seen as a way to strengthen institutional ties among HEIs across the region, which will further enhance other collaborations, including degree and research partnership. While areas such as research or degree collaborations may take more time and effort to accomplish, student mobility programmes seem to be attainable in a more promising and quicker fashion. Hence, student mobility programmes have always been seen as a starting point for HEIs to cement institutional ties among their strategic partners. In many cases, activities such as AIMS have been utilised to expand the so-called multilateral networks. Taking into account that there are other multilateral network-promoting mobility programmes, with different objectives and projection, such as the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) and the ASEAN University Network (AUN), the re-structuring of post-COVID intra-regional mobility might be on the rise. The discourse among international educators and HEIs across the region on addressing the post-COVID situation is to provide hybrid models of virtual and physical mobility as options for students. With the facilitation of regional platforms as mentioned above, different variations of virtual mobility can be tested and further developed, resulting in a new era for mobility programmes, both within and outside the region. 📖

1. Source: European Commission.

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AIMS: The Achievements and Impacts on Curriculum, Teaching and Programme Management

ROMYEN KOSAIKANONT & NORDIANA MOHD NORDIN

The Asian International Mobility for Students (AIMS) programme (formally known as Malaysia-Indonesia-Thailand Student Mobility Programme) is a unique and regional-level mobility programme led by the regional organisation SEAMEO Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO RIHED) while working in cooperation with governments and higher education institutions (HEIs). The ultimate goals are to create a common space for regional higher education using mobility, with credit transfer as a mechanism to harmonise and internationalise regional higher education. AIMS celebrated its 10th-year anniversary in 2019, which marks an important milestone for its expansion of mobility in nine countries, with 77 universities involved and more than 4,150 alumni. In 2018, a systematic assessment on the impacts of AIMS on participating students reflected high levels among selected intercultural outcomes, namely the ability to understand people from different cultures, ability to network with people in other countries and knowledge of ASEAN host countries (AIMS Research Working Group, 2018).

To celebrate the 10th-year anniversary, the authors jointly reflect on the experiences of two pioneering universities, Mae Fah Luang University (MFU), Thailand, and Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia, by asking two important questions on the key achievements and contributing factors for the success of AIMS in the area of curriculum, teaching and programme management.

MFU and UiTM: AIMS Experiences

MFU is a public autonomous university established in 1998. It is located at the border province adjacent to the Greater Mekong Subregion¹ (GMS) and at the heart of ASEAN. The university charter states its commitment to developing human resource needed by the

GMS, with the ultimate goal of creating global citizens. These global citizens are graduates who are equipped with knowledge relevant to GMS and global issues, the ability to work in a multicultural setting and a sense of social responsibility.

UiTM was inaugurated in 1956 as a training centre, and was subsequently developed and upgraded to Universiti Teknologi MARA in 1999. UiTM aspires to be world-class in all its endeavours and to forge ahead in a direction that is in tandem with the latest developments in the world. An internationalisation agenda has been central to UiTM through its mobility programmes, sabbaticals, collaborative network, research and consultancy activities, as well as an increase in international academic staff.

Both MFU and UiTM have prioritised internationalisation but with different goals: developing global citizens in the case of MFU and pursuing global academic excellence in the case of UiTM. A question worth asking is: what has AIMS contributed to the internationalisation process of both universities, especially in curriculum, teaching and learning, particularly from the faculties' perspectives?

Do Mobility Programmes Enhance the Quality of Curriculum and Teaching by Default?

It is perceived that better academic curriculum quality and higher visibility are benefits of a mobility programme. In the case of MFU and UiTM, participating in AIMS means an opportunity to benchmark curriculum, learning outcomes, programme structures, contents and management. Working with partner universities enables better understanding and stronger relationships as time goes by. In the context of MFU and UiTM, it also means visibility, trust and recognition of quality food technology programmes in the region. However, in order to facilitate mobility and connect with global communities, we learnt that a crucial factor is the quality and standardisation of the programme itself. Hence, there has been an effort to attain international accreditation by the Institute of Food Technology (IFT) based in the USA for the food science and technology programme in AIMS.

“AIMS celebrated its 10th-year anniversary in 2019, which marks an important milestone for its expansion of mobility in nine countries, with 77 universities involved and more than 4,150 alumni.”

1. The Greater Mekong Subregion is the sub regional cooperation supported by the Asian Development Bank in 1992. The members of GMS includes Myanmar, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand and two provinces of China, namely Yunnan and Guangxi. The member countries of the GMS except for Thailand had gone through the Cold War and had decided to open up their economies in late 1980s.

“ Being part of AIMS is a constant reminder of the importance of the ASEAN wisdom, culture and local knowledge on food technology.

Arguably, being part of AIMS is a constant reminder of the importance of the ASEAN wisdom, culture and local knowledge on food technology. Even though the food technology programmes have been internationally accredited, we have avoided a one-size-fits-all, Western-centric programme. For instance, MFU retains national and regional strengths by adding new courses, namely: (i) ASEAN Food and (ii) Traditional Thai Food in the IFT-accredited curriculum. As food is cultural, the programme has set a learning outcome for graduates to be equipped with global competencies with a regional outlook. Mobility under AIMS not only ignited the thought of adding these two courses, but also contributed to the presence of exchange students from ASEAN countries in these courses. In short, students under AIMS, when sitting in these classes, are fully benefiting from the impact of internationalisation.

Mobility under AIMS has also increased understanding of the teaching and learning culture of food science and technology programmes in ASEAN countries. In laboratory experiments, special attention is given to students with diverse

backgrounds and needs. Raw materials, such as halal meat, are arranged for Muslim students in courses such as meat technology. This can also be a case for discussion and awareness-raising for Thai students who are predominantly Buddhists. Another example is the demand of inbound mobility students for certain courses. Some non-Muslim students studying in predominantly Muslim countries have requested to enrol in beverage courses, wanting to learn about alcoholic drinks as these are not offered in their home institutions. Vice versa, students from MFU are interested to learn more about concept of “halal”. In the field, students were exposed to halal meat production and related matters.

Ms. A from UiTM shares her opinion regarding the ASEAN food-related courses:

“...the course ASEAN Foods which I find very interesting... This course, as the name implies, introduces students to the types of foods which are distinct to each of the 10 ASEAN countries; Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei, Cambodia, Myanmar (Burma) and Laos. I found this course very insightful as it explores in detail the different types of foods consumed by the people of the Southeast Asia regions, including the respective National Food for each country. Not only (are) we able to understand the food consumption patterns in these countries, we can also relate the dietary patterns to the culture, geographical locations and the effects of history on the food consumption style in each country.”

All of these experiences prove that improved academic curriculum quality did not happen by chance but with the efforts of faculties and programme managers in their continuous internationalisation and ASEAN-isation of the learning process. Efforts were made to maximise resources, and AIMS was perceived as an opportunity to create a community of learning for the high-standard food sciences and technology curriculum uniquely shaped by local and regional knowledge. All of these are a learning process for both lecturers and students. A constant reflection process can help ensure continuous improvement to the curriculum that meets international standards without losing its ASEAN and local identity.

Does a Quality, Standardised and ASEAN-ised Curriculum Mean Quality Graduates?

Reflections from students who participated in AIMS upon their return from their host country indicated that:

- i. they have gained confidence in their academic, professional knowledge and skills and feel that they are ready to work anywhere;
- ii. they have gained a better understanding about the ways of life and the culture of their host countries;
- iii. they are aspiring to work and live in ASEAN or other cultures.

To revisit the process of AIMS, it can be argued that these are the fruits of a systematic process of facilitation for participating students. In the context of both MFU and UiTM, it can be summarised that the process can be classified into three stages, namely pre-, during and post-mobility. For the pre-departure, the home universities’ faculty members-in-charge will discuss the student learning outcomes and collaborate with the host universities while international affairs officers will arrange for cultural orientation, set the target goals for exchange and facilitate all the logistical arrangements. Special language programmes for basic conversations are also provided to outbound students. During the exchange, faculty members are sent to visit outbound students to check on their learning and to minimise learning obstacles. In parallel, international relations officers create active and reliable communication channels with outbound students, making sure of their safety, wellbeing and maximising their learning abroad experiences. Upon students’ return, faculty members would organise academic experience sharing sessions for them with other faculty members and non-mobile students in order to create an interest in internationalisation at home. International affairs officers also created a system of evaluation for students’ self-reflection and opportunity for sharing with home students in other study programmes.

“ At the institutional level, it is not only the faculties that determine the success of students’ mobility or learning. High-level administrators and international relations officers are also important players in the internationalisation process.

Do Only Participating Students Gain from AIMS?

Mobility programmes are often criticised for being expensive and benefiting only the few who can afford to join. We also learnt that without good design and collaboration with clear learning outcomes, these limited numbers of mobility students may not get full benefits from the exchange. More often than not, it is presumed that the faculty holds the main responsibility to create the best learning culture and deliver the expected learning outcomes of mobility students. It is learnt that the faculty is one of the key players in determining the quality of mobility and students’ learning, but we should expand this opportunity to further explore the internationalisation process of higher education and to ASEAN-ise our own learning cultures.

The adjustments as a result of joining AIMS include the aforementioned international accreditation, harmonisation of systems, introduction of new subjects for ASEAN-isation, cultural sensitisation of laboratory settings, and maximisation of inbound students for internationalisation at home. These are possible due to the faculties’ continuous learning. These adjustments would not have been possible if faculties had not been working in collaboration with their AIMS or international partners. It is also important to point out that there are other stakeholders who are important in making students’ learning sustainable. These include the universities’ management who allow changes and flexibility in the system, international relations officers who support the intercultural learning and logistic arrangements, and surely both inbound and outbound students who are the key resources for the internationalisation of learning spaces.

Key Lessons Learnt

i. Benchmarking

AIMS can be perceived as a catalyst for the region to create a common higher education space. For MFU and UiTM, benchmarking with institutions in the network has expedited the process of the international accreditation of relevant degree programmes with increasing visibility.

ii. Internationalisation at home (IaH)

For many mobility programmes, it is often argued that only small numbers of students are the main beneficiaries. However, this article argues that if the faculties engaged in the mobility programme recognised the real benefits of the mobility programme, then it would be different. Faculties can create learning cultures among themselves, non-mobile students can significantly benefit from internationalisation at home and mobile students’ experiences of mobility can be maximised.

iii. Stakeholder responsibility

Another key issue in maximising the benefits from AIMS is that concerted efforts in implementing AIMS are needed. At the institutional level, it is not only the faculties that determine the success of students’ mobility or learning. High-level administrators and international relations officers are also important players in the internationalisation process. The university’s vision and mission regarding internationalisation and ASEAN-isation need to be clearly identified, with sufficient support for implementation. From this discussion, it is also shown that the process of internationalisation occurs both in and outside of the classroom.

iv. Sustainability of AIMS

To ensure the sustainability of the programme, the issue of return on investment was discussed. This is because after ten years of implementation, universities need to find ways to facilitate students’ mobility with sufficient amount of funding in order for this networking to continue growing and not solely depend on governments for funding. 📖

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National Policies on Mobility in Europe

QUEENIE LAM

Europe – the continent that brought us the wildly successful student-mobility programme, Erasmus (European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students), more than 20 years ago – may at first glance appear to be highly united in its enthusiasm for international student mobility. The situation on the ground, however, (in terms of both policy and practice) is much more complex than the “grand discourse” on European student mobility, of recent years, might seem to indicate.

This situation represents both a strength and a weakness. On the one hand, Europe (whether understood as a configuration of 27 European Union member states – or, the broader group of 47 Bologna process / European Higher Education Area signatory countries) presents a richly diverse higher education landscape. This variety clearly extends to the profiles presented by each country, when it comes to policies for international student mobility. Happily, this diversity allows different approaches to be tested – and accepted or rejected – according to unique national or institutional characteristics. The European Union works to help its member states moving toward the realisation of a European Union-wide benchmark for mobility by 2020, following the

endeavours of the European Higher Education Area to articulate its own set of mobility objectives for the rest of the decade. However, the lack of a systematic approach to mobility at the national level may prove to be a major stumbling block, on the road to achieving European-level policy goals.

Mobility Policies in the European Context

Mobility, when understood in the context of European higher education, is closely associated with the European Union’s Erasmus program – with good reason. Since its inception in the mid-1980s, Erasmus has stood out as the largest and arguably the most “successful” funding programme for short-term student exchange (hereinafter: credit mobility) in the world. With the introduction of other mobility initiatives, such as Erasmus Mundus, mobility has acquired an array of new meanings, beyond intra-European credit mobility in the European Union’s policy discourse. Attention is now being given to opportunities for non-European students to attain full degrees in Europe (hereinafter: incoming degree mobility) as well as academic / research staff mobility. However,

recent research in this area, conducted by the Brussels-based Academic Cooperation Association, has found that these new mobility modes have not yet gained the same level of attention in national policy circles, as the longstanding credit mobility activities.

Despite the high importance attached to mobility by national governments, in general, few European countries have articulated a national policy to deal in a systematic manner with the different types of mobility now in evidence in their higher education systems, although many *believe* they have such policies in place. A handful of nations – among them, the Nordic countries (notably Finland and Denmark), the Netherlands, and two Baltics (Estonia and Lithuania) – may be said to acquire something close to a national-mobility policy. In most cases, though, where there is evidence of some national-level constructs concerning mobility, their elements are found scattered across a number of different policy documents and purviews, ranging from education and research to immigration and labour. The Academic Cooperation Association’s research in this area finds that the breadth and depth of mobility policies vary to a great extent. Often it is even doubtful whether the national governments have a clear understanding of the distinctions between different mobility types (degree versus credit, incoming versus outgoing, etc.) when setting national-mobility priorities and targets.

Mobility: International or Intra-European

Up to now, clearly credit mobility in Europe has a strong intra-European orientation, while degree mobility meets a strong external dimension, aimed at third countries (i.e., non-European). However, both types of mobility are generally referred to as international mobility.

Outgoing credit mobility is the top priority for national governments in Europe, in contrast with outgoing degree mobility. Most countries clearly do not want to see outgoing degree mobility, fearing brain drain. Not surprisingly, however, a growing number of European national governments appear to be actively interested in incoming degree mobility, although this is not without its risks. On the one hand, attracting fee-paying degree students makes a good economic option, and is a trend seen clearly in such countries as the United Kingdom, Ireland, Malta, and Cyprus. However, others have registered deep concern about the high influx of students from neighbouring countries into their national systems, with perceived burdens placed on local taxpayers and local students seeking access and a high-quality (i.e., not overcrowded) educational environment. Austria’s experience with large numbers of incoming German students is a prime example of this dynamic. Nevertheless, many European countries still attach high priority to incoming

“ A growing number of European national governments appear to be actively interested in incoming degree mobility, although this is not without its risks.

degree mobility (presumably, from outside Europe) – with specific interest in PhD and master’s degree students, which is in line with the dominant discourse of attracting talent for “enhancing innovation” and “strengthening the knowledge economy”.

Moving Targets?

The quantitative targets and geographical foci mentioned in European national discussions of mobility are defined in surprisingly vague terms. Agreement seems to be coalescing in many circles around the notion of aiming for 20 percent or more for outgoing mobility and around ten percent for incoming mobility. The geographical locations of particular interest – for both sending and receiving students – include Europe itself (i.e., intra-European mobility), followed by Asia and the United States / Canada.

Similar loose ends are found with regard to geographic targets. While these objectives seem to be clearly identified, it is not always apparent which types of students might be the focus of these mobility actions. Without clear parameters, such targets remain largely symbolic signals of national aspiration, with little indicative value for guiding mobility development. The lack of clarity on these important specifics also makes comparing the mobility objectives across Europe exceedingly problematic.

Laying the Groundwork for 2014-2020

The European Union is poised to introduce a new programme in 2014 – Erasmus for All. Unlike the original Erasmus, the new architecture foreseen by the European Union for cooperation in education and training through 2020 will likely encompass all levels of education – as well as, cooperation efforts with third countries, particularly those in the European Union’s neighbourhood region. This is likely to introduce further complexity into the concept of mobility in Europe, in light of the possible extension of the heretofore “Europe only” Erasmus programme to countries outside Europe and the inclusion of intra-European degree mobility at the master’s level. As these developments unfold, careful reflection on the current state of affairs in European national policies on mobility is essential. More significantly, a systematic approach, based on clearly differentiated mobility types and well-defined targets among other key considerations, is most necessary for the formulation of robust national policies for advancing mobility. 📖

This article first appeared in International Higher Education in Spring 2012.

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“Ambitious but vaguely defined mobility targets could refer to mobility activities only tangentially related to study and/or research.”

However, Europe’s mobility aspirations are rarely defined in relation to any specific type of mobility. As a result, ambitious but vaguely defined mobility targets are seen as high as 50 percent, which left undefined could refer to mobility experiences as short as one week or mobility activities only tangentially related to study and/or research. Moreover, it is unclear whether countries aiming for 50 percent mobility aspire to have 50 percent of their annual cohort of students undertaking a study-abroad experience in a particular year or if 50 percent of their graduates within a certain time frame should have been mobile.

The Big Picture: Student Mobility, Internationalisation and the ‘New Normal’

S. GOPINATHAN, VIGNESH NAIDU & LOKE HOE YEONG

Originally designed as a tripartite pilot programme, what is today the Asian International Mobility for Students (AIMS) programme began life as the Malaysia-Indonesia-Thailand (M-I-T) student mobility pilot project in 2009. Today, nine countries and over 70 universities participate in the programme.

In this concluding article to this issue of HESB, we situate student mobility programmes within the larger aims of internationalisation in the ASEAN context, the implications of student mobility beyond education, and we propose some perspectives for addressing gaps in student mobility opportunities in the COVID-19 ‘new normal’.

Student Mobility and the Larger Aims of Internationalisation

While laudable, the AIMS programme of student mobility is but one component of a larger internationalisation strategy for ASEAN and Asian universities. Indeed, the stated objective of the AIMS programme, as expressed in the latest edition of its handbook, is to “contribute to the internationalisation of higher education in the region.”

“Countries within a region as culturally diverse as ASEAN stand to benefit greatly from student mobility programmes, such as AIMS, which provide a potentially powerful platform for bridging these cultures.”

The July 2018 special issue of HESB focused on the university internationalisation project in which various policy challenges and opportunities around internationalisation were explored. The project examined the institutional policies and initiatives for internationalisation with regard to academic programmes, research, governance and leadership. It also sought to determine the extent to which institutions accommodate internationalisation policies and initiatives with local knowledge, capital, systems, identities and cultures.

That HESB special issue surfaced the realisation that countries as diverse as Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand all had some level of ambition to be international or regional educational hubs, whether that impulse came from government or the institutes of higher education. In discussing the Malaysian case, Hazri Jamil, Wan Chang Da and Ooi Poh Ling explained how the Malaysia Education Blueprint (Higher Education) 2015–2025 (MEBHE) encapsulates the aspiration to establish Malaysia as an international education hub that is valued by students for its “competitive advantage in providing value-for-money higher education — that balances quality and affordability with the added value of rich cultural experiences.”

Yet the 2018 British Council report “Shape of Global Higher Education: Understanding the ASEAN Region” noted that while student mobility has been important to institutes of higher education, it had not been its defining feature in ASEAN as it is in many other parts of the world. While mobility is important in the ASEAN region, it has sat alongside the development of academic talents as the core part of this ASEAN-centric approach to the institutes of higher education.

Beyond Education

For most students, the primary motivation to pursue an overseas education is to expose themselves to new and innovative ideas in their area of study and expand their employment opportunities. As the articles in this issue have demonstrated, the benefits can extend beyond one’s field of study.

Through the leadership of SEAMEO RIHED, the ASEAN Secretariat and other regional organisations, significant resources have been devoted to fostering a sense of camaraderie and friendship among Southeast Asian countries, and between the region and her neighbours. Countries within a region as culturally diverse as ASEAN stand to benefit greatly from student mobility programmes, such as AIMS, which provide a potentially powerful platform for bridging these different cultures.. Beyond providing a quality education, mobility programmes allow students to immerse themselves for an extended period in the culture and practices of their host country. This deeper understanding of the culture and practices of others, particularly among ASEAN’s youth, bodes well for regional integration and cooperation.

A prolonged decline in birth rates in economies such as Japan has resulted in serious labour shortfalls, that could potentially stymie economic growth – or at least as classical economic theory would posit. Student mobility programmes like AIMS provide these countries a pathway towards attracting talented international students to consider staying on and contributing to the local economy. Beyond mobility programmes, countries such as Singapore offer attractive scholarships to exemplary international students keen to enrol in local universities. Most such scholarships, in Singapore, require the recipients to stay on and work for at least three years upon the completion of their studies. Beyond being a potential source of talent to mitigate the effects of declining birth rates, student mobility programmes give countries a way to project soft power.

It would not be wise for smaller countries – as most SEAMEO member states are – to project global presence through military might. Their relatively small physical and population sizes will make such an endeavour costly and ineffective. As many larger countries begin to deglobalise and pay less regard to multilateral institutions, smaller countries have to find ways to project their importance and maintain their relevance. Quality higher

“ Is student mobility doomed in the COVID-19 ‘new normal’... during which about half a generation of students would have lost out on international mobility opportunities?

education is certainly one such way. Inclusive and internationalised higher education allows smaller nations such as Singapore and Cambodia to project a ‘larger than life’ global presence.

Mobility in the ‘New Normal’

COVID-19 has disrupted most facets of our lives including education. Lockdowns have resulted in many schools and institutes of higher learning (IHE) being forced to cancel physical classes, and in many cases move them online. Even as restrictions are eased, international travel is still tightly controlled, with many nations keeping their borders closed to non-residents. Over the last few months, these restrictions have forced IHEs to embrace new modalities of education, such as blended learning: we expect this and other modalities to stay after the pandemic.

Is student mobility doomed in the COVID-19 ‘new normal’, or at least in the next foreseeable few years, during which about half a generation of students would have lost out on international mobility opportunities?

Here, the prescriptions related to “internationalisation-at-home”, as discussed in HESB 4 (July 2018) earlier, may provide some inspiration. Conceived to widen the benefits of internationalisation for students, and with cost constraints both for students and institutions alike, the idea behind “internationalisation-at-home” is for institutions to increase the proportion of international students and diversify the list of their countries of origin.

Hazri Jamil, Director of the National Higher Education Research Institute (IPPTN) Malaysia, and others have noted the additional financial burden for students on top of their tuition fees – particularly for those in private universities – in being able to go abroad to gain overseas experience. Seen in this light, “internationalisation-at-home” is then a “set of instruments and activities for developing international and intercultural competences among all students within the home country.”

The corollary for students and universities is that there continues to be opportunities to gain international exposure – the ultimate aim of student mobility programmes – where the possibilities of student mobility per se are severely curtailed because of COVID-19-related travel restrictions. This does not have to come in the form of student exchanges and mobility programmes as we know them, but may require a more concerted push to design programmes, attachments and internships in international companies and organisations in the home country. 📖

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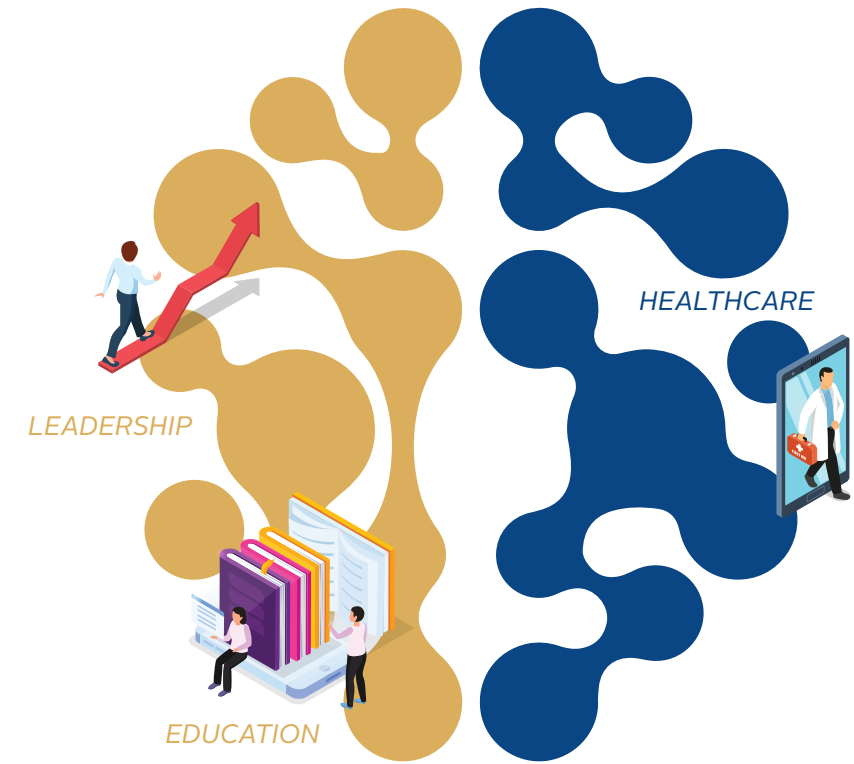
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