STRENGTHENING EDUCATION COOPERATION THROUGH ASEAN PARTNERSHIP AND NETWORKING:
Lessons from Indonesia*

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ABSTRACT

It has been agreed by ASED Ministers Meeting in Bali in 2007 that *education* is defined as a vehicle to raise ASEAN awareness and create a sense of belonging to the ASEAN Community. *Education* therefore should be developed to a regional to support ASEAN community building through student and academic mobility and collaborative research and academic efforts.

One alternative strategy to build ASEAN Community is through cooperation and networking among relevant education institutions in ASEAN Members Countries. This is important because cooperation and networking are means of strategy to achieve ASEAN Caring and Sharing.

As a member of ASEAN, the Government of Indonesia through Ministry of National Education (MONE) has initiated some projects related to the above agreement, namely: (i) Review source materials on ASEAN for references in primary and secondary schools in ASEAN countries. (ii).Conduct capacity-building for teachers to acquire specific knowledge of ASEAN languages, cultures, and religions. (iii) Organize youth exchange programs for students or others. (iv). Strengthen education Institutions' Network through ASEAN University Network. (v) Develop more ASEAN Studies Programs at school and university level, and (vi). Initiate or develop quality standard of universities and primary and secondary schools in the region. Details of the programs are described in Section II of this paper.

Lessons learnt from Indonesia show that there are seven success points to make success cooperation and networking, namely (i) Understanding common problems, exploring common interests and identifying mutual gains of cooperating on a regional basis; (ii).Prioritizing the urgent programs that will benefit ASEAN for better life for ASEAN people. (iii). Using technique generally called 'problem-solving approach'. (iv). Sharing resources (budget and/or expertise), (v). Implementing joint efforts, (vi) Implementing the programs through win-win approach, and (vii) Agreeing to have regional integration and expansion, where regional institutions can act programs/projects on behalf of Member Countries to attain the intended goals and objectives.

Key words: ASEAN partnership, cooperation, networking, education, Indonesia

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Second ASEAN Education (ASED) Ministers Meeting in Bali, Indonesia on 16 March 2007 agreed to identify the significant role of education in ASEAN Community. The Ministers agreed to define education *is a vehicle to raise ASEAN awareness and create a sense of belonging to the ASEAN Community. Education therefore should be developed to a regional to support ASEAN community building through student and academic mobility and collaborative research and academic efforts.*

Consequently, efforts to enhancing and strengthening education cooperation through ASEAN partnership and networking among education institution in ASEAN region are therefore needed.

In order to move forward with the Strategic Framework and Actions, the Ministers have also given five directions for education collaboration among ASEAN Members Countries*,* namely:

a. Promoting ASEAN awareness among citizens, particularly the youth.
b. Strengthening ASEAN Identity through education.
c. Building ASEAN human resources in the field of education
d. Further strengthening ASEAN University Networking (AUN), and
e. Synergizing with Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO).

The ASED Ministers Meeting in Bali on 16 March 2007 has also suggested (6) six initial projects, namely:

a. Review source materials on ASEAN for references in primary and secondary schools in ASEAN countries.

b. Conduct capacity-building for teachers to acquire specific knowledge of ASEAN languages, cultures, religions that would aid in teaching ASEAN Studies in schools.

c. Organize youth exchange program for students or others.

d. Strengthen education Institutions' Network through ASEAN University Network in the area of teaching and learning, research and community development.

e. Develop more ASEAN Studies Programs that are not only in the in university level, but also in the primary and secondary schools. This would contribute positively to our efforts in promoting ASEAN awareness and identity among our younger generation.

f. Initiate or develop quality standard of universities and primary and secondary schools in the region. This is important particularly when students move from schools or universities in the different countries. Standardized quality of education among education institutions in the region will become a strategic key and strong foundation for the development of the nation and making ASEAN a highly competitive economic region..

The Government of Indonesia through Ministry of National Education (MONE) has also followed up the above agreement by implementing some projects that are related to the 5 (five) strategic directions as suggested by Ministers of Education who attended the ASED Ministers Meeting in Bali. This is not so difficult to implement the projects because they are in line with vision, mission, goals and objectives of the MONE.

The projects which have been done are based on the following guidance, namely:

a. Optimize educational resources available to enhance the existing programs in the area of ASEAN studies, and facilitate education institutions in Indonesia who want to initiate programs in the area of ASEAN studies.. This can be done through various ways and of them is the use of ICT in developing and updating information among the ASEAN countries.

b. Strengthen activities that bring ASEAN students, teachers, lecturers and researchers together through more ASEAN studies to increase the ASEAN consciousness.

c. Facilitate and support through more people-to-people interactions to strengthen the bonds and foster the ASEAN awareness.

d. Initiate and support a parallel collaborative process among researchers and academics of ASEAN Member Countries on the role of education in addressing the challenges and opportunities of multi-ethnic societies and the diverse ASEAN community.

e. Generate and utilize the usefulness (and relevant) information, ideas, and research results to ASEAN's education policy-makers.

II. INDONESIA EFFORTS IN ADRESSING COMMITMENT TO STRENGTHEN EDUCATION COOPERATION IN ASEAN REGION

In Indonesia, education is treated as a strategic locus for promoting the development of every learner's potentials. Education in Indonesia also places high premium on character building and the development of national outlook in the learners. This can serve as a framework of the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia. In this context, the Government of Indonesia is constitutionally obligated to provide educational services accessible to every citizen of the country (Anonymous, 2005).

Therefore, efforts to improve access to more quality education is a mandate that should be carried out by Indonesian people in accordance with the goals of the nation as contained in the preamble of the 1945 Constitution, namely to protect the whole Indonesian nation-state, promoting the people's intellectual development, promoting the public welfare, and participating in exercising the world order based on independence, everlasting peace and social justice

Based on the above brief information, one may conclude that education in Indonesia is not only will develop manpower for different levels of the economy in all parts of Indonesia, but also will refine sensitivities and perceptions that contribute to national cohesion. Because of these considerations, budget allocation for education in

Indonesia in FY 2005 and 2006 is the highest among other sectors, i.e. 9.5% of the total of the national budget. Presently, in FY 2009, it has been increased up to 20.0% as requested by the National Constitution 1945 (Nandika and Soekartawi, 2007).

Further, according to Soekartawi (2005) in his monograph entitled 'Seven Ways for Successful Academic Networking' argues that education collaboration through academic networking is very important. This is because networking is basically a major means of action, such as sharing, solidarity and equity among partners, either through the advantage of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) or 'conventional' network. He also believes that networking is one effective way of communicating, exchanging, transferring, and delivering information.

The following is progress of the projects or programs done by MONE based on suggested projects proposed by ASED Minister Meeting in Bali 2007.

Suggestion 1:
Review source materials on ASEAN for references in primary and secondary schools in ASEAN countries.

Actions taken:
1. The use of ICT in developing and updating information among ASEAN Members Countries
   - E-library, e-learning
   - Edu.net, School-Net
   - Distance learning
   - And other virtual learning systems
2. Books and teaching materials exchange among ASEAN Members Countries
   - Through collaboration among University libraries or other education-institution's libraries
   - Through e-books programs
3. Increase collection teaching materials (printed and non-printed) on ASEAN matters
4. Facilitate some universities who want to open ASEAN studies.

Suggestion 2:

Conduct capacity-building for teachers and lecturers to acquire specific knowledge of ASEAN languages, cultures, and religions

Actions taken:

1. Provide *scholarships* for ASEAN students, teachers and lecturers, such as *Darmasiswa'* (non-degree program) and second is '*Kemitraan Negara Berkembang'* or KNB (Master degree program) available for ASEAN citizens.

2. Organize and participate in various capacity-building programs for teachers and lecturers, such as short term trainings and study visits.

3. Promote initiatives of education cooperation by implementing projects in areas such as human and productive capacity building, technical assistance, exchange of best practices, particularly in issues relating to education, professional training, and science and technology.

Suggestion 3:

Organize youth exchange program for students or others.

Actions taken:

1. Conduct and participate programs on youth exchange programs for students or others. Presently, these programs become regular program at MONE.

2. Organize and participate in teachers and/or lecturers/Professors exchange programs.

Suggestion 4:

Strengthen education Institutions' Network through ASEAN University Network

Actions taken:

1. Active participation to various Asian Education Networks, i.e. AUN, SEARCA Univ-Consortium, GDLN, e-Education, SchoolNet, etc

2. Initiate SEA-ERNet (Southeast Asia Education Research Network) to strengthen collaboration in education research.

3. Conduct intensive bilateral meetings to increase education network and

4. Support bilateral initiatives undertaken by ASEAN Members Countries for enhancing education cooperation to benefit for people in ASEAN region. This includes support consultations and continuous exchange of views among ASEAN countries on issues which are the subject of the high-level ASEAN events as well as on other emerging issues relevant to education development.

Suggestion 5:

Develop more ASEAN Studies Programs at school and university level

Actions taken:

1. Strengthen and expand the existing ASEAN Studies Programs at school and university level, and

2. Strengthen collaboration among education institutions who offer ASEAN Studies Programs

Suggestion 6:

Initiate or develop quality standard of universities and primary and secondary schools in the region.

Actions taken:

1. Set up the standard of National Education and has established an independent Board of National Education Standards (PP 19/2005)

2. Active participate in the discussion on quality standard of universities and primary and secondary schools in the region.

III. CONSTRAINTS IN IMPLEMENTING THE PROJECTS

Certainly there are some constraints in implementing education cooperation activities among ASEAN Members Countries (Sulistyo-Basuki, 2005; Dodi Nandika and Soekartawi, 2007a). They may be group into three, namely technical, socio-economic and political constraints.

1. Technical constraints

Some technical constraints, particularly if ICT is used for tool for cooperation and networking, are:

- The impartiality of the Internet dispersion (not all part of regions internet is available)
- The infrastructure problem (bandwidth, connection, electricity, computer)
- Course content management (learning and/or content management system, good and readable content).
- Complicated software which are not easily understood

2. Socio-economic constraints

- *People* who are able to operate and who use ICT as a tool of learning.
- *Language constraints*. For example in Indonesia, although English is the first foreign language taught at the Junior and Senior High Schools and even one or two semester at the tertiary level, English mastery is not quite satisfactory.
- *Cultural problems*. In Indonesia, people prefer talking over writing; prefer attending training conducted by instructors than self study as required by e-learning.
- *Resistance from the users*. Although the ICT literacy for e-learning required the lecturers' competency to log-in, inspecting and making posting, opening and answering e-mail, those items are still alien for some lecturers
- *Budget constraints*

3. Political constraints

- Lack support from the authority
- Change of curriculum.

IV. THE LESSONS LEARNT FOR ACHIEVING SUCCESS COOPERATION

Based on the experiences in implementing education cooperation in the last few years, it is indicated that there are some successful measures to be taken into account when we would like to have successful education cooperation. They are:

1. Understanding common problems, exploring common interests and identifying mutual gains of cooperating on a regional basis;

2. Prioritizing the programs/projects that are urgent. In this case, ASEAN should be at the driving force to identify priorities that are of interest to ASEAN (and the dialogue partners) that will benefits ASEAN for better life for ASEAN people.

3. Using technique generally called 'problem-solving approach'. This means the need of having harmonization, which aims to achieve compatible national approaches by ASEAN Member Countries is therefore important;

4. Sharing resources (budget and/or expertise) in order to implement special assistance, which focuses on capacity building to bridge development gaps across ASEAN Member Countries;

5. Implementing joint efforts, which are about developing regional approaches and regional institutions;

6. Implementing the programs through win-win approach, and

7. Agreeing to have regional integration and expansion, where regional institutions can act programs/projects on behalf of Member Countries to attain the intended goals and objectives.

V. CONCLUSION

MONE believes that cooperation and networking can be used as means of effective strategy to: *first*, increase equity and expansion or broadening of access to education. This can be meant to expand capacity of the education units in accordance with national priorities, and to provide the same opportunities to all pupils. *Second*, improve quality and relevance of education (Dodi Nandika el al, 2007; Soekartawi, et al, 2007; Soekartawi, 2008). It is expected that better quality education will have an impact on an improved standard of living of the people and the competitiveness of the nation, and increased comprehension and application of human values covering a strong faith and belief, possessing a noble character and ethics, a vision of nationalism, a strong personality, aesthetic expression and physical qualities. Finally, *third,* improve governance, accountability, and public image in all level of management,

in order to help the government on the allocation of resources and to monitor overall education performance.

Even though cooperation and networking have positive impact on improving education in the region, there are some limitations, i.e. technical, socio-economic and political constraints.

Experiences show that there are seven points for successful educational-cooperation and networking, namely *First,* if they are able to identify and/or to understand their common problems, common interests and mutual gains of cooperating on a regional basis. *Second*, if they are able to identify priority programs that will give benefit for people in their respective countries. *Third,* if they use a technique called 'problem-solving approach' as a basis of generating harmonization among ASEAN Members.

Fourth, if they are willing to share their resources (budget and/or expertise). This is because sharing resources is a reflection of commitment. *Fifth*, if they are willing to have joint efforts in implementing the programs. *Sixth*, if they are willing to implement the programs through win-win approach, and finally, *seventh,* if they are willing to agreeing to have regional integration and expansion

The cooperation and networking in education may not be working effectively and efficiently if the above successful measures are not met.

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