

Needs of Thai youth on the cultural knowledge
of the countries in the ASEAN Community
ความต้องการของเยาวชนไทยด้านความรู้ทางวัฒนธรรม
ของประเทศในประชาคมอาเซียน

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Abstract

This qualitative research is the first part of the thesis, namely: *The innovative development of an electronic book on cultural uniqueness of ASEAN countries for Thai youth*. The purposes of the research were: 1) to study the cultural knowledge of Thai youth about the ASEAN countries, and 2) to study the needs of youth on the knowledge about the cultures of the countries in the ASEAN Community. The study areas comprised 12 educational institutions in Bangkok and its vicinity. The sampling groups totaled 72 informants, comprised 12 teachers and 60 Thai youths. Surveys, observations, interviews, focus group discussions, and workshops were used as research instruments. The researcher found that majority of Thai youth wanted to have information on Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia, respectively. The information about Vietnam, Philippines, and Indonesia was less interesting. Their interested areas in order of priority were: 1) social etiquette, 2) food, 3) religions, 4) language and literature, 5) clothing, 6) housing, 7) population 8) performances, and 9) festivals. In conclusion, Thai youth still lack awareness of ASEAN countries as well as their own country and the Thai cultural uniqueness of which they should be proud. Most were superficial and did not know as much as they should. There should be jointly campaigning before Thai people would lose their chances and interests in ASEAN Community.

Keywords: youth, need, culture, ASEAN Community

บทคัดย่อ

การวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพครั้งนี้เป็นส่วนที่หนึ่งของวิทยานิพนธ์เรื่อง: *การพัฒนานวัตกรรมหนังสืออิเล็กทรอนิกส์เรื่องเอกลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรมของประเทศอาเซียนสำหรับเยาวชนไทย* วัตถุประสงค์ของการวิจัยคือ 1) เพื่อศึกษาความรู้ด้านวัฒนธรรมของเยาวชนไทยเกี่ยวกับประเทศอาเซียน 2) เพื่อศึกษาความต้องการของเยาวชนด้านความรู้เกี่ยวกับวัฒนธรรมของประเทศในประชาคมอาเซียน พื้นที่ของการศึกษาคือสถาบันการศึกษาในเขตกรุงเทพฯ และปริมณฑล รวม 12 แห่ง กลุ่มตัวอย่าง ได้แก่ ครูอาจารย์ 12 คน และเยาวชนไทย 60 คน รวม 72 คน เครื่องมือในการวิจัย ได้แก่ การสำรวจ การสังเกต การสัมภาษณ์ การสนทนากลุ่ม และการประชุมเชิงปฏิบัติการ ผลการวิจัยพบว่า เยาวชนไทยส่วนใหญ่ต้องการเรียนรู้เกี่ยวกับสิงคโปร์ บรูไน มาเลเซีย ลาว พม่า และกัมพูชา ส่วนข้อมูลเกี่ยวกับเวียดนาม ฟิลิปปินส์ และอินโดนีเซีย เยาวชนไทยมีความสนใจน้อย พวกเขามีความสนใจวัฒนธรรมต่อไปนี้ตามลำดับ 1) มารยาททางสังคม 2) อาหาร 3) ศาสนา 4) ภาษาและวรรณคดี 5) เครื่องแต่งกาย 6) ที่อยู่อาศัย 7) ประชากร 8) การแสดง และ 9) งานประเพณี สรุปได้ว่าเยาวชนไทยก็ยังขาดความตระหนักในการเรียนรู้เกี่ยวกับประเทศในกลุ่มอาเซียนแม้แต่เรื่องของประเทศตนเองและเอกลักษณ์ที่ควรภาคภูมิใจ ส่วน

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ใหญ่มีความรู้เพียงผิวเผินและไม่ทราบว่าสิ่งใดควรเรียนรู้จึงควรจะร่วมกันรณรงค์ก่อนที่คนไทยจะสูญเสียโอกาสและผลประโยชน์ในประชาคมอาเซียน

คำสำคัญ: เยาวชน, ความต้องการ, วัฒนธรรม, ประชาคมอาเซียน

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1. Introduction

Being a leader in establishing ASEAN, Thailand has a potential to be a leader in building a strong ASEAN Community. Such status of the country needs to accelerate the development of education, because education is the foundation of all forms of development. Moreover, Thailand has therefore an important role to play in encouraging building up a strong ASEAN Community. So that the government has targeted Thailand as a center for education (Education Hub) and identified its role to promote international cooperation in education to support the ASEAN Community, and to increase competitiveness with other countries under globalization [1]. At the same time, the education will make the population of Thailand being coexist with other countries in ASEAN peacefully. Owing to the Education Development Plan No. 11 of 2555 to 2559, the aims of education were set the need to create awareness and competencies of Thailand with education especially to enhance understanding about the neighbors in ASEAN countries, and to promote Thailand as a hub for the development of the ASEAN Community to the high quality level and international level [2]. In moving towards the ASEAN Community there are some explorations on the readiness of Thailand showing that quite a few Thai people began to feel awake in ASEAN [3]. The survey was done with undergraduate students from leading universities of the member countries. The results showed that the Thai students' knowledge about ASEAN, was relatively low and located in the lower level students from Laos and Cambodia. Although ASEAN was born in Thailand, the minimum number of Thai people can recognize the year of establishment of ASEAN. Meanwhile, Thai people rarely pay attention to issues of social, cultural and political stability of the region. The country also needs to educate its

people on ASEAN Community especially in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community [4].

However, Thailand is in the current social crisis on education because the quality of Thai education downturns. According to the World Economic Forum (WEF-The Global Competitiveness Report) in 2012-2013 found that ranking the quality of Thailand education lagged behind in ASEAN countries. It was once again ranked on the rating of the WEF in 2014 with 148 participating countries, including all countries in the ASEAN region. Thailand was ranked in 8th place, in terms of the quality of education in ASEAN after Cambodia and Vietnam, which was same as in the previous time [5]. Such facts were consistent with the report of the Institute for the Promotion of Teaching Science and Technology. The analysis of the project on international assessments or PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, or OECD which was established in 2013 found that overall, Thailand score was below the OECD average in all subjects. Hence, Thailand was ranked 50 and classified as low. Solution for Thailand was hastened reform seriously [5]. Thailand is the ideal solution for rapid reform seriously; especially the education system needs big improvement. Otherwise, it will be a disadvantage for other countries [6].

Further studies found that Thailand's current culture too is in trouble because the society tends towards a society of learning to adapt intentionally knowledge to live comfortably in the changing world. Openness and freedom in the information age have made the access to knowledge very easy with technological advancements. This causes a state without borders and openness in communication, dimensions affecting the culture of Thailand. Moreover, the spreading culture across borders affected the

cultural uniqueness of Thailand. Especially the multinational entertainment which has sparked a stream of materialism and global culture increasingly influences the culture of Thailand. The cultural imperialism mutation in globalization is crucial to create a society that is going to lose its pride, making conflicts and culture wastes to Thai society. Generally, it is accepted that only old aged people in Thailand are still proud and realize that they are a part of a social and cultural awareness among the nation, including their pride in the arts and culture of Thailand, as well as the pride of being good citizens of the country [7]. However, as per a research done by the National Board of Education on children's feelings on culture of the country, by randomly selected children in schools across the country, it was found that, in addition to the recession of Thai education, the people also lack on sense of pride about their own country. The appreciation in the cultural uniqueness of the country is lowest and inversely proportional with the rapid development of technology. Although teachers has taken on some of ASEAN courses as defined in the curriculum. But there is still a problem because the youth have a superficial knowledge. It is not enough to use for daily communication as well as for accessing to the ASEAN social and cultural community efficiently.

Many scholars have also found that among the successful students in the class whose potentiality are necessarily equipped with 20 learning features, most of Thai students have no such full features, in particular, the lack of cultural understanding of its neighboring countries and seeing the value of their own culture as well as foreign culture [8]. Considering the fact that Thailand has already entered into the ASEAN Community since early 2016, the researcher suggests that the youth should be developed insight into the matter urgently in order to bridge the gap of educational agencies involved in education at all levels. The findings of this research can be used to make more awareness of contents

that can be taken to develop learning materials to enhance the participation of the ASEAN Community. For this reason, the researcher has formulated and conducted a research project on the topic about the information learning needs of young people on culture of countries in ASEAN Community.

2. Research objectives

2.1 To study the cultural knowledge of Thai youth about ASEAN countries.

2.2 To study the needs of Thai youth on the knowledge about culture of countries in the ASEAN Community.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Population and samples

3.1.1 Population and research area

The research population were 1) Thai youth aged between 18-25 years, 2) Teachers in secondary schools and universities in Bangkok and 5 provinces in perimeter area.

3.1.2 Samples

The sampling informants were comprised of 2 categories totaling 72 as follows: 1) 60 Thai youths purposive selected from those who were studying in M.S.6 in 6 secondary schools, and in the first year of 6 universities in Bangkok and 5 provinces in perimeter area. These students had some experiences in ASEAN studies and 2) 12 teachers who were responsibility in ASEAN courses in the same institutions mentioned above.

3.2 Research method and tools

The research was conducted in the form of qualitative methodology. It's tools and methods used in collecting data, data analysis and data synthesis were as follows: 1) surveys, 2) structured interviews, 3) unstructured interviews, 4) observations, 5) focus group discussions, and 6) workshops

3.3 Research concepts and theories

3.3.1 The motto of ASEAN: "One Vision, One Identity, One Community", caused the realization and awareness for the necessity of studies on self-culture or cultural uniqueness and ASEAN culture

3.3.2 Symbolic Interactional Theory, being used in the definition of the word “cultural uniqueness”

3.3.3 Evaluation Theory (Descriptive Theory), being used in the creation of data collecting forms, i.e. interview forms, questionnaire forms, and focus group discussion forms.

4. Results

The results of the research: *The study on the needs of Thai youth on the knowledge about the culture of the countries in ASEAN Community*, are summarized below:

4.1 The study results concluded that the youth from the institutions in the context of active research areas basically understood the definition and general knowledge of ASEAN and ASEAN Community. They knew that ASEAN member countries being together based on the ASEAN Charter and the stability of the ASEAN Community depends on three main pillars, namely the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). Such knowledge was resulted with the ASEAN courses, learning activities, and various preparations to enter into the ASEAN Community of both government and private sectors.

However, the mentioned knowledge of the youth was very superficial. There are many concepts and understanding distorted from the facts including its understandable confusion between the words ASEAN, ASEAN⁺, and ASEAN Community. Most of the youth got misconceptions about the ASEAN Community that there was only one function that was ASEAN Economy Community or AEC. The rest two functions of ASEAN Community: ASEAN Political and Security Community (APSC) and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), were almost unknown. The results also revealed that most of the youth hardly see the importance of ASEAN Community. They assumed it as something distant and just a matter dealing with international business, which is less related to the common people especially the youth. A critically important issue is that young

people do not see the importance of the cultural uniqueness of the nation. They lacked of self-esteem, did not see the cultural value of their own country and of another countries including a negative attitude about the culture of neighboring countries, etc. Therefore it is extremely high time for the education sector of Thailand to solve these problems urgently.

4.2 The survey results on the youths' attention and requirement to learn the culture of each country in ASEAN concluded that most Thai youth wanted to know the information of Singapore, followed by Brunei, Malaysia, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia. The other three countries are Vietnam, Philippines, and Indonesia where the youth paid relatively little attention. The cultural information to the target groups were very interested as shown in the following order: 1) etiquette in society 2) food 3) clothes 4) houses and buildings 5) population and ethnic 6) language and literature 7) religion and beliefs 8) games and performing arts, and 9) traditional festivals. The youth showed less interest in treatments for various illnesses.

5. Discussion

The researcher has some comments on the results of study as given below:

The research results revealed that most of the youth need to know the information on developed countries and neighboring countries. They had relatively little attention in countries located in far away in other regions. The culture, which were very interesting for the target group were about social etiquette and the key factors in human life. On this point, the use of innovative media can be used to reinforce the curiosity even more. This opinion is consistent with the concept of electronic books on learning in the age of information and technology. It can stimulate the desire to learn its lessons. The youth can learn by themselves and have the resources that are easily accessible. The book can be used as interactive distance learning as well. This opinion is consistent with researches on the values of

electronic books which were considered as highly effective learning materials both in terms of knowledge contributes to understanding memory, seeking more knowledge, and leisure learning [9]. This conclusion is in consistent with the Constructivism Theory [10], a concept for the intellectual class, because the youth can create new knowledge from the study of innovation, and apply their knowledge into the everyday life. It is also in consistent with the views of George Herbert Mead on Symbolic Interactional Theory [11] on issues of human relationships in society is to recognize the meaning or importance of cultural activities in society [12]. People will live together in a mess surely must have realized the importance of what is a symbol of that culture together. It can be said that the awareness and understanding of the common culture is that the population of each country has recognized their nations according to their cultural uniqueness. Such comments reflect the research work that domestic society is like international society the so-called international community. Because of that, people in the community will be able to co-exist with regulation after having learned the meaning of a common culture. There is unity in the community which should be selected to serve as a cultural norm for people in the community for commonly held to be tidy, good quality and peacefully coexist [13].

However, the results of the research showed that the youth were interested to know little about the ASEAN countries, findings of this research is in consistent with the research by Sutantivanichkul [14], which found that the preparation of vocational education in Thailand, mainly in the least. It is also in consistent with the findings of Pattana *et al.* [15] which found that Thailand was very likely to push for national education to international education subject to under the framework of ASEAN cooperation but the education understanding of Thai personnel on ASEAN somewhat unclear. The results also indicate the need to prepare personnel to support ASEAN Community and explain the relationship

between education and enterprises to jointly produce quality human resources. Tangchitcharoenkul [16] found that Thailand must raise educational productivity starting from the quality of educational institutions and personnel, and also providing much more educational opportunities to students. Moreover the educational administrators should realize that an effective education is universal to produce graduates to meet the needs of the labor market. In addition, the results showed that the variables that influence educational reforms in keeping with ASEAN agreements were trends of the world's leading academic qualification of educational institutions. For these reasons, the researcher has planned a next research project on the development of an electronic book that is necessary and appropriate to engage in a campaign to create awareness and knowledge about the culture in ASEAN countries for young people of Thailand and the personnel in the field of education as well.

6. Suggestions

6.1 Suggestions for further utilization and application

The research results on the cultural knowledge of Thai youth about the ASEAN countries and the needs of youth on the knowledge about culture of the countries in ASEAN Community can be utilized extensively as follows:

6.1.1 Both secondary and tertiary teachers can use the actual background on knowledge of young students derived from the research results as fundamental information for the preparation of lesson plans, textbooks, lesson exercises, and learning materials, including home-works, self-study works and other assignments appropriately. In addition, the researcher is of the opinion that the teachers should have more direct experiences with ASEAN neighbors. And if possible, there should be cultural exchange programs for Thai students with some neighboring countries.

6.1.2 Educational institutions at all levels and concerning agencies can use the research

results in the development of cultural projects, course description, and curriculum on the culture of ASEAN countries. In addition, the institutions may take the knowledge from the research to develop innovative materials especially electronic books which students mentioned during gathering data. Such media can be easily accessed and studied both formally and informally. These things may help change the vision and strengthen a sense of pride of the youth on cultural uniqueness of the country, and finally stimulate them for eagerly getting to know the cultural information of the country itself and other countries.

6.1.3 Educational institutions, The Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Culture can use the results of this research as a tool to develop applications and missions based on the culture, for example; cultural demonstration, exhibition, performances, seminars, tourism, and other cultural events in order to raise awareness and instill pride in national culture including to arouse curiosity, interest and desire to learn about the cultures of the member countries of ASEAN.

6.1.4 Embassies of ASEAN countries in Bangkok or other foreign agencies concerned may use the results of the research to promote events, highlights, and outstanding culture to honor each country itself, and for mutual understanding and benefits as well as cooperation of all kind activities, and living together in the ASEAN Community peacefully.

6.1.5 The findings of the study revealed weaknesses in terms of quality of education in Thailand. The results also indicated visibility issues to hasten reform and development of education system, starting from the National Education Plan, and curriculum development as well as strategic management for educational improvement including the development of educational personnel in every sector concerned.

6.2 Suggestions for further study

Students, teachers and scholars who are interested in doing researches on culture and ASEAN Community may consider the following issues:

6.2.1 Research on any cultural dimensions of the ASEAN countries, such as outstanding tourist places, ASEAN arts, highlights of culture, world cultural heritage, etc. The research may conduct only one dimension of the cultural uniqueness for more elaborate study.

6.2.2 Research on culture of each country to conclude a common characteristic of ASEAN countries or the so-called ASEAN identity; for examples, Buddhist festivals, social values and beliefs, ways of ASEAN life, language and literature, and music and performing arts, and so on.

6.2.3 Study on the development of learning materials to arouse vision, conscious mind, and recognition of the young people on the pride of cultural heritage, highlights, and outstanding practices of the country.

6.2.4 Study on the development of texts or learning media on Thai cultural uniqueness to enhance and increase the knowledge, love, loyalty and pride on motherland.

6.2.5 Study on the needs of knowledge development on information about ASEAN and ASEAN Community to equip general Thai people for getting ready for being potential citizens of ASEAN Community.

6.2.6 Study on the knowledge needs and esteem of Thai people on the three pillars of ASEAN Community.

7. Conclusions

Current criticisms about the decline of education in Thailand are being happened continuously. Even during the past year, it was widespread said on the low potentiality in Thai education for ASEAN Community. There were many researchers and scholars commented on the unavailability of education because of continuous lack of enthusiasm and intensity. Despite the campaign with ASEAN in many schools, they were only a superficial matter. Students did not recognize the benefits that might be used in real life. The research results were consistent with the many criticisms. Especially on

issues of Thai youth hardly knew about the culture of ASEAN member countries and very little even about their own country, particularly the cultural uniqueness such as language, manners, values, and history which should be valuable proud to move forward steadily in the future.

At present Thai young people thankless failure to learn their own country, but often focus back to the culture of other nations such examples as often seen that they are crazy about foreign singers or performers. Such a lacking awareness of the importance and not interested in learning about culture, Thai cultural uniqueness would be decreased slowly. Thai people are even more unfavorable when activities along with the foreigners as can be seen from the current levels of labor mobility as well as brain level workers. Thailand seems to be at a disadvantage because of their ignorance of foreign people and culture clearly and well enough. These all results of a failure in education are vital. Even the findings indicated that many young people curious about the essentials of living in society, but not yet wide and deep enough. The youth are also much confused about the term ASEAN, ASEAN⁺, and ASEAN Community. They are also lacking on knowledge about the structure of ASEAN Community. There were only campaign and strategies for economic benefits in the AEC and at the same time it has almost no authority talking about the importance and practices of the APSC and two ASCC. These findings highlight the importance of accelerating the development of education about the culture of ASEAN countries seriously and without delay.

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