

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSION**

This chapter comprises three sections: conclusion, recommendations, and future work. The details of each section are shown below.

#### **5.1. Conclusion**

Theoretically and practically, regionalization has been growing since the post Second World War period. Over the past decades, it has manifested as a truly global phenomenon which directly affects global architecture. Undoubtedly, regional integration will continue to be one of the driving forces which shape world polity and economy in the years to come (Lombaerde, 2006: 248). In Southeast Asia, the attempt at regionalization has been shown by the establishment of several regional actors, one of which is ASEAN. It has by far been the most vital one in Southeast Asia up to the present. Efforts to support the establishment of the ASEAN Community are evident in the introduction of cooperation in various spheres and through various mechanisms. Amongst all these mechanisms, the network is perceived to be one of the most effective tools to enhance cooperation for regionalization purposes in several fields, including higher education.

Taking into account the questions and hypothesis of this research, the literature review places an emphasis on regional cooperation development in Southeast Asia, particularly in the field of higher education: The progress of the AUN since its establishment is investigated. The field research concentrates on the impacts of the AUN's activities, particularly in terms of promoting regional awareness in respondents. Relying on evidence-based results, the impacts (what changed) after respondents' participation in AUN activities are measured empirically. In this chapter, a conclusion is drawn based on the research findings from qualitative and quantitative methods of investigation.

Through a study of both published and unpublished information regarding the first research questions<sup>1</sup>, it was found that the AUN has developed its roles and progress towards regional integration.

After a decade of operation, an adaptation of its role within the ASEAN Community can be observed. Following the aims of the ASEAN leaders and the ASEAN Subcommittee on Education (ASCOE) to establish an ASEAN University, the AUN was begun as a foundation. Despite being an inventive initiative for regional integration, it was decided that an ASEAN University should not be established in the form of a full-fledged campus, but as an ASEAN university network, by strengthening the existing network of higher education institutions in ASEAN countries instead. This has made the role of the AUN more static, regarding the aspect of strengthening the existing network of learning universities, institutions of higher learning, and human resource development. In addition, the AUN has also now shown its attempts at globalizing human resources through more implementation with dialogue partners. In terms of progress of its planning and implementation, an adaptation in accordance with the ASEAN aspiration can be perceived through the course of its development. Its key objectives have become more elaborate than what was originally stated upon its establishment. In addition, a new strategic framework has been formulated and is reviewed periodically. Furthermore, the initiatives of the AUN have started to become more comprehensive, as shown in its expanded key results areas of implementation. The attempt at globalizing human resources is also observed from an increase in cooperation with dialogue partners, more than just exchanges at the intra-regional level.

To test the hypothesis and answer the second question of this research<sup>2</sup>, investigation into the impacts of the AUN's activity implementation on participants was conducted by collecting **empirical data from field research questionnaires**.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 1.

**After comparing pre-test and post-test results which were made available after short programs, students generally showed a better performance after the activity. In the long program, results from the single test were higher in several aspects.**

Based on the results from the empirical data collection, participants were shown to have improved their ASEAN consciousness. The output of all sampling is shown to have met each program's objectives. In addition, the findings also signify that various factors, namely knowledge background, types of activity, and duration of activity, affect the participants' improvement. The results from respondents in each activity yielded very similar trends on many points. Significant in the findings was the conclusion to the hypothesis that these activities increased participant ASEAN consciousness. The overall results from this study show that youths who participated in academic cooperation activities, the AUN activities for this research, gained a greater regional consciousness.

The results prove that the channels which provide information about academic cooperation activities come mainly from student's educational institutions, professors, and friends. In addition, sources which teach about ASEAN matters mainly come from school. Relying on the results, one could say that education plays a significant role in enhancing knowledge and information about ASEAN, which could lead to more awareness about ASEAN. In addition, academic cooperation activities are also shown to have an impact on increasing ASEAN consciousness among participants. Hence, strengthening a network between ASEAN universities would definitely expand opportunities for youths with potential to be exposed to more ASEAN knowledge. This pinpoints that the role of higher education cooperation in regional development should not be underestimated, but instead should be developed to a larger extent.

Whether ASEAN Community will turn out to be a mirage or a reality, the regionalization process is significant. In accelerating the goal of achieving ASEAN community in the region in the very near future, many mechanisms have begun to

achieve this endeavor. Providing education regarding ASEAN or neighboring countries is one of the significant mechanisms which can create more awareness and understanding to build ASEAN awareness and identity for ASEAN's new generation. Understanding can bring us closer to peace among countries. A small, yet material part to ASEAN consolidation, academic cooperation should be intensified and broadened for the further development of human resources. Additionally, youth activities which aim to promote ASEAN awareness and understanding must be encouraged in order to prepare younger generations who are aware of their locality, national issues, regional significance, and the international atmosphere.

Overall, findings from the literature review correspond to the research questions while empirical evidence from the field research bears out the hypothesis set in this thesis. Hopefully, this empirical evidence can be beneficial for the further practical development of academic cooperation activities for regional integration.

## **5.2. Recommendations**

Relying on the research findings from the literature review and field research, some recommendations on improving the AUN are made. Some of these recommendations can also be adapted to other regional academic cooperation programs which aim to enhance regional integration.

The recommendations are made in the following points:

1. At present, there is a large amount of regional cooperation on education. Excluding bilateral and multilateral cooperation, speaking of merely academic cooperation which involves ASEAN countries can refer to a tremendous area: Southeast Asian cooperation, Asia-Pacific cooperation, and inter-regional cooperation. In order to avoid replication, it is important to emphasize the uniqueness of the direction of individual cooperation which makes itself distinct among concurrent forms of academic cooperation. In this sense, academic cooperation that has regional integration as its specific focus should have a number of functions

particularly to promote regional consciousness, as opposed to other efforts at academic cooperation which aim to achieve other purposes.

Taking into account the objectives of establishing the AUN, as addressed by ASEAN and AUN documents at the time of its establishment, the AUN's initiatives should serve ASEAN community by laying a strong foundation for ASEAN integration at the level of higher education. To be more specific, the cooperation should perform its active role in not only developing human resources and/or being involved in ASEAN higher institutions issues but also in promoting ASEAN consciousness to participants through its implementation. "ASEAN" would be meaningless without a strong sense of community. Therefore, as long as ASEAN countries still share the aim of establishing an ASEAN community, it is a must that their populations, especially from their childhood, possess a sense of 'ASEAN' belonging. Thus, it is suggested, since the AUN was established as one of the mechanisms to enhance regional integration, promotion of deeper regional awareness must underlie all of the AUN's activities, or most of them, if the overall goal cannot be applied in some cases due to unavoidable limitations.

2. Apart from the experience of taking part in assigned activities for each program, cultural exchange, and friendship network, participants must become more knowledgeable about ASEAN, particularly in gaining basic knowledge e.g. ASEAN member countries and their location, ASEAN issues. This will bring about ASEAN awareness and enhance the ASEAN consciousness of participants. Therefore, there must be a mechanism to carefully examine and ensure improved attitudes and awareness about ASEAN after participating in the AUN's programs.

Relying on the previous points, to ensure the impacts of the programs in operation, there must be an assessment procedure, assessment mechanisms, assessment benchmarks, and assessment tools in place, together with the implementation of the AUN's activities. Assessment must be conducted with participants, using qualitative and quantitative observation, to prove the credibility and effectiveness of the activities being implemented, as well as to find out the flaws

in each activity. For instance, by forming a monitoring and evaluating unit and performing activity tasks in the unit to ensure the effectiveness of their implementation. In this way, programs can be further developed to have a greater impact in serving the ASEAN community.

3. A conclusion drawn from the analysis of empirical data which is in accordance with the hypothesis, is that the AUN's activities have an impact on participants' ASEAN consciousness. Comparing pre-test and post-test questionnaire results reveals that participants feel they gain more understanding of ASEAN, a fundamental knowledge of ASEAN, and attitudes and awareness towards ASEAN. Although the findings show that these kinds of academic cooperation activities enhance the regional consciousness of participants, the increase is trivial in many cases while some cases show the reverse trend. Hence, it is recommended that future programs should be improved to have a more significant impact on participants after they join the activities.

Interestingly, the results from short activities show that between academic and non-academic activities, academic activities show a higher increase in ASEAN consciousness. Between an interdisciplinary activity which emphasizes each pillar of ASEAN (Japan-ASEAN Student Conference) and a specialized activity which focuses on a particular field (the 8<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Youth Cultural Forum), the interdisciplinary activity had more of an impact overall. From this perspective, one might say that the nature of the academic cooperation activity has a direct impact on participants' perception and attention. This point should be taken into consideration for future academic cooperation attempts, that is, whether the expectation from the initiatives is development in all-rounded skills or in a specialized skill.

4. Apart from promoting a sense of ASEAN Community, the academic cooperation activities should nurture a sense of social responsibility in participants. According to the research findings, individual progress is mentioned most when asking about participants' future plans. To foster this, academic cooperation activities might include initiatives on global concerns e.g. a program which gathers ASEAN

Youth to discuss a particular global issue like coastal erosion, global warming. They must also, apart from brainstorming ideas and sharing views, take action on that particular problem by participating in community service e.g. campaign for planting mangroves in ASEAN countries, campaign for teaching in the rural areas of ASEAN countries.

Gathering ASEAN participants from various fields to share ideas and concerns on the environment as well as social and economic development by taking action on those issues can help nurture a sense of social responsibility, while a sense of ASEAN community among participants is also promoted. This can simultaneously foster individual, national, regional, and global development.

5. Noticeably, it is difficult to gain full cooperation or participation from every ASEAN country without financial support for participants. This can be perceived from the sampling results. Apart from the Japan-ASEAN Student Conference, none of the activities had respondents from all ASEAN countries. This reflected that one of the major drawbacks to academic cooperation activities is the uneven financial status and economic conditions of different ASEAN countries.

In relation to the previous point, since the initiatives, as well as financial terms of the AUN have grown, if new initiatives tend to be in line with the scope of the implementation area of other regional academic cooperation organizations, an agreement on collaboration is encouraged to avoid repetition in implementation, to share the budget allocation for program implementation, and to have a larger impact.

6. A linkage of alumni must be created in order to weave stronger bonds between participants and send updates about programs and initiatives of the AUN to those who are interested. According to the research findings, apart from education, multimedia channels also play a significant role in distributing information to youths, particularly the internet.

Since the internet has helped make the world a smaller place, it should be used as a means of communicating with the world. A wise use of the internet could enhance cooperation to have wider impacts and reach the un-reached in the globalizing world, namely through means such as web-based alumni or information updates via social networks e.g. facebook and twitter. Importantly, after the creation of these communication channels, they must be updated constantly and instantly on a regular basis.

7. One of the obstacles in student exchange activities is due to credits transference. When some institutions do not allow credits transfer, students therefore are discouraged from applying to a program with no credits transference guarantee. In order to increase participation to a larger extent, assurance on credits transfer and agreements between universities are encouraged. In this aspect, the AUN must help accelerate a mutual agreement on credit transfer among ASEAN member universities. The accomplishment of degree granting efforts on a small scale can be the foundation for this goal on a wider scale, like the degree granting among AUN universities which was emphasized when it was established.

Having strong sense of regional community is crucial if this is to be the foundation for establishing ASEAN Community,. To gain more understanding about ASEAN as a region, students should be able to have direct experience in studying in a minimum of three ASEAN countries, particularly for those who are doing ASEAN Studies. In order to achieve this, quality assurance must be enhanced in order to lead to a joint degree granting program in ASEAN. A degree granting program in ASEAN Studies has been perceived as an ambitious task for the AUN, in addition to its commitment to the establishment of ASEAN Community by 2015. The AUN should show its active role in the aspect of higher education integration, and it must accomplish this within the timeline of establishing the ASEAN Community, which is 2015.

8. Acknowledging that communication is important for progressive cooperation, the availability and updating of information, channels of communication e.g. telephone, facsimile, website, must be active and responsive. Moreover, public relations regarding activities should clearly show the objectives of programs so that participants, or those who are interested, are well informed.

Moreover, more public relations efforts by the AUN itself are necessary when its operations are within a limited scale, particularly those that involve the plans of member universities. The research findings indicate that only those involved in AUN activities know about the AUN. Other students and faculty who have not participated in AUN activities, even in member universities, do not show any familiarity with or merely a trivial degree of knowledge regarding the AUN and its activities. To give more significant impacts, the AUN needs to be promoted to a wider range of people, especially those in the field of higher education.

9. Since the AUN's initiatives are expanding, the number of its staff must be in line with the growth of its tasks. Since the initiatives of the AUN have now been more comprehensively expanded, it is necessary to ensure that there are not too many programs for limited staff to handle, otherwise the progress of each initiative may not receive full attention and effort in being pushed forward. Each project should encompass an equal amount of attention, responsibility and opportunity.

Apart from the number, a variety in nationality is an additional employment issue. Taking the significance of "unity in diversity" to regional integration into account, "unity in diversity" in the organization is an essential part of organization for regional purpose. Going forward to enhance regionalization to a greater extent as it intends to grow, the ASEAN Secretariat staff should comprise varied nationalities, from ASEAN in particular, in order to create an international organization with a sense of regional responsibility for the development of the ASEAN region. By working together, opinions and views will be shared. Not only will this help create credibility as an international organization, it will also provide practice, especially among those who facilitate regional cooperation activities, in

understanding diverse backgrounds and learning how to compromise. Moreover, it is beneficial to have those who are indigenous to each ASEAN member country work and handle local affairs with member states, especially during the initial stages of ASEAN integration when language difficulty in each locality is still one of the major drawbacks. To initiate such progress, vacant posts must be posted through the AUN's website and other public sources.

10. According to research findings, many participants in long programs have explicitly shown their desire to continue their studies in their host country, while some past participants in the same programs are now working in host countries and many are seeking the opportunity to do so. It is suggested that there must be a follow up study on these participants. For instance, collect empirical data on past participants e.g. progress of past participants, what percent of them involved ASEAN development in their career paths after participating in AUN activities. The evidence based output could pinpoint the significance of such activities. Since it can be demonstrated empirically e.g. reports, and statistics, it will shape the results of these attempts at regional integration to become more solid and conceivable in their impacts. It could also help follow up if the human resource development activities arranged by academic cooperation organizations meet ASEAN aspirations.

All of these points should be taken into consideration in order to strengthen the impacts of future initiatives on academic cooperation and further development in intensifying regional cooperation on education for regional integration.

A summary of the recommendations is shown in the table below:

<b>CHALLENGES</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Emphasize uniqueness of role (academic cooperation for regional integration).</li> <li>2. Ensure improved attitude and awareness towards ASEAN after joining the activities.</li> <li>3. Overall results increase, but at trivial degree and/or reverse in some cases. Significance of impacts of activities could be increase by considering some variables.</li> <li>4. Nurture a sense of social responsibility in youth participants.</li> <li>5. Full participation limited if financial support is not provided, due to economic condition of some ASEAN member countries.</li> <li>6. From findings, internet plays a significant role in distributing information to youth.</li> <li>7. Some institutions do not allow credits transfer, students are discouraged from applying with no credits transf guarantee.</li> <li>8. Organization communication enhancement e.g. phone, fax, email, website. A very small number of people know about the organization.</li> <li>9. The AUN's initiatives are expanding. Single nationality staff at the AUN Secretariat.</li> <li>10. Participants in long program show more interest in studying and working outside ASEAN.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ensure that promoting ASEANness underlies all of the AUN's activities.</li> <li>2. Create a monitoring and evaluating unit to test the effectiveness of activities.</li> <li>3. Design an activity which suits the needs of ASEAN development e.g. achieving overall or specialized knowledge.</li> <li>4. Initiate future programs on global concerns and community service.</li> <li>5. An agreement on collaboration with other regional academic cooperation organizations in some future initiatives.</li> <li>6. Create a linkage of alumni to weave stronger bonds between participants and update the AUN's programs and initiatives for those interested.</li> <li>7. Accelerate a mutual agreement on credit transfer among ASEAN member universities by 2015 (ASEAN Community timeline).</li> <li>8. Check availability of, and update existing information in all means of communication regularly. More PR of organization to public.</li> <li>9. Increase a number of staff to be in line with the growth of tasks. Open up to more variety in staff nationality, particularly in ASEAN.</li> <li>10. Follow up process on participants' progress and involvement in ASEAN development. The data must be generated empirically and constantly (e.g. annual report, statistics).</li> </ol>

**Table 36: Summary of recommendations**

### 5.3. Future Work

Based on this research, some implications for future work can be concluded as follows:

1. The AUN initially focused mainly on academic cooperation within the limited scale of student and faculty exchange among ASEAN higher institutions, with the prime objective of hastening regional consolidation and solidarity. Entering a new millennium, the initiatives of the AUN now seem very diverse compared to its initial focus upon its establishment. Implementation has become more comprehensive while collaboration is not only intra-ASEAN but also involves more dialogue partners. In addition, sub-networks have also been established. Although some of the initial focus is still seen as one of the priorities of the AUN, for example, enhancing a degree granting program in ASEAN, particularly in the field of ASEAN Studies, the question is raised of whether the initial focus tends to be less emphasized than it was initially, as priorities have changed and increased. Future research could thoroughly study this aspect and provide useful recommendations for the future planning and direction of the AUN.

Since this research limited its scope to youth activities, further research could observe planning and implementation in a wider scope. Moreover, relying on a study of comparative regional integration, future research could also make a comparison by studying the mechanisms of enhancing regional integration in different regions e.g. Erasmus Mandus in Europe.

2. Relying on the findings from empirical data collection, in response to doubts on the extent of impacts, there was shown to be a slight increase in knowledge among ASEAN participants. However, analyzing the results of ASEAN participants in comparison with those of Japanese participants, shows that Japanese participants achieved more significantly knowledge increases than ASEAN participants in many aspects, such as benefit to participants, geographical knowledge of ASEAN countries, etc. Generally, Japanese participants performed better in responding to questions

which required knowledge about ASEAN, as compared to ASEAN participants. Meanwhile the results of ASEAN participants in terms of self-evaluation, that is, questions regarding ASEAN such as attitude and awareness about ASEAN, understanding various aspects of ASEAN, etc, were relatively higher than among Japanese participants. Apparently, the results reflect that we tend to think we know, but in practice are generally less aware of the region than those outside ASEAN. There could be many reasons and factors underlying this research finding and they should be identified and used as a reference for future activities of the AUN or other academic cooperation efforts which serve the ASEAN community. Moreover, further research could analyze whether other factors apart from those tested in this research (knowledge background, duration of participation, types of activities, nature and emphasis of the activity) affect the results of improvement. In this way, activities could be developed using a more pragmatic approach.