

ASEAN IDENTITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH LITERARY PEDAGOGY PERCEIVED BY TEACHING PERSONNEL AT UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTHERN TAGALOG REGION, THE PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

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As regionalism has become a prime interest within the Asia Pacific, participating member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) aspire to consolidate unity despite cultural diversity through forging an ASEAN identity. Institutions of higher learning are expected to explore educational innovations and curriculum reforms to facilitate the regional identity formation. Hence, this correlational research determined the awareness of ASEAN of teaching personnel (N=153) handling language, literature, humanities and social studies courses among state universities in the Southern Tagalog region of the Philippines. It also examined their assessment on the importance of literature curriculum practices as pedagogic tools in institutionalizing ASEAN identity in higher education. Through utilizing a researcher-made questionnaire and appropriate statistical measures, the results revealed that the teaching personnel are aware of the dimensions of ASEAN and considered the literary curriculum practices very important in instilling regional identity. Moreover, awareness of political integration in ASEAN of the teaching personnel significantly predicted their assessment on the importance of literary curriculum practices as this dimension of regional awareness is relevant and supportive to the cultural modelling tradition to literary study.

Keywords: ASEAN identity; cultural modeling approach; higher education; literary curriculum practices; literature pedagogy

1. INTRODUCTION

The initiative of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to promote cooperation among member countries within the principles of equality and partnership is believed to commence the establishment of peace, progress, and prosperity in the region. It is within this belief that the ASEAN integration has been conceived, continuously shaping the economic and political mechanisms that facilitate trades among ASEAN nations. To fully concretize this ASEAN aspiration toward sustainable development and shared prosperity, participating Southeast Asian nations had devised the ASEAN Vision 2020. One of the numerous thrusts of this political mutual agreement among nations is awareness of its regional identity. This consciousness of regional identity is believed to unify the leaders and citizens of member countries in achieving shared prosperity through increasing their consciousness of the historical ties and enhancing their awareness of their cultural heritage to embrace an ASEAN identity.

As ASEAN members accepted the challenges of regional integration, they started to embrace an open economy framework that is believed to facilitate and fuel human development and civic empowerment. This ambitious initiative in the region is formulated to emphasize the importance of collective efforts in bridging development gaps among its member countries (Hoi, 2018). This ASEAN aspiration tends to be elusive unless each member renounces its individuality and acknowledges its potentials and roles in ensuring inclusive growth despite the economic and cultural differences shaping the regional landscape. Consequently, the organization had devised initiatives to achieve its 2020 vision to strengthen the solidarity and cooperation among its members through fostering a common regional identity.

This regional identity encourages the ASEAN community to re-conceptualize its citizenship by not limiting it in one's own country but broadening its scope to communities within the entire region. Education is seen as a potent tool in concretizing the regional identity (Kristina, 2010). Through knowledge management and capacity building, ASEAN nations can take pride of their historical ties and cultural heritage as they cooperatively seek for social and economic progress. Since the earlier part of the 21st century, reforms had been made in basic education curricula among member countries to instill and strengthen the awareness of ASEAN among students. However, this educational drive appears to be deficient as numerous reports suggest that students from member countries are likely to deny their familiarity with ASEAN.

Thompson and Thianthai (2008) noted that Singaporean students had the weakest sentiment of conceding themselves as members of the regional community and revealed their little familiarity with ASEAN. Likewise, students from the Philippines exhibited a relatively weak domain of knowledge of the regional association and its members but have the potential to actively participate in the regional integration as shown by their positive attitude towards ASEAN.

While the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (2009) encourages member countries to instill regional identity through inclusion of studies in ASEAN arts, culture, and values in school curriculum; still, the ASEAN Curriculum Assessment Project Report revealed that the Philippines has little innovation in integrating ASEAN content in school curricula compared to other ASEAN countries (United States Agency for International Development, 2012). Moreover, ASEAN content in the primary and secondary school curricula, and instructional resources was found to be exclusive to social studies subjects and absent in other disciplines. The report also recommended that the country has to utilize its potential to explore its relationship with other member states and ASEAN. This assessment report appeals to the curriculum makers of the country for an improved integration of ASEAN content across educational levels.

Literature pedagogy has the potential in stimulating ASEAN identity in schools and can redirect the country's curricular opportunities to heighten Filipinos' sense of belongingness to the ASEAN community. Beach et al. (2011) emphasized that cultural modelling, a literary tradition and teaching model, provides scaffold to the construction of identity. Carter and Long's Cultural approach as clarified by Bobkina and Dominguez (2014), regards literature as potent medium in transmitting cultural notions. As literary texts are considered cultural artifacts, students can be challenged to respond, interpret, and evaluate works of literature by synthesizing their knowledge of sociology, politics, and history. When applied in the analysis of various texts in ASEAN literature, students can be conscious of the ASEAN historical and cultural bonds that can increase and strengthen their sense of regional belongingness. As authentic material, an ASEAN work can provide opportunity for students to relate themselves to other people of ASEAN countries drawing on the similarities of their personal and societal experiences; thus, promoting an in-depth understanding of social connectedness despite the cultural diversity in the region.

While the possibility of increasing students' familiarity of ASEAN and their awareness of regional identity through literature pedagogy has been evident, the country's curricular priorities tend to remain unfavorable for the mobilization of ASEAN literature instruction in higher education. The new General Education Courses (C.M.O. No. 20 Series of 2013) appears to exclude literature instruction from the list of core

courses required in every academic program in the tertiary level. Opportunity for literature pedagogy is likely to be reduced in an elective course limiting its scope to those literary works considered as cannon. Pre-service teacher training programs for prospective literature teachers seem to provide minimal ASEAN content. Afro-Asian literature, a course common among Teacher Education Institutions honing future teachers of literature may have only emphasized works from notable writers in Africa and Asia and less from the emerging literature of the ASEAN community. While the potential of literature pedagogy in instilling ASEAN identity may have been overlooked by academic institutions of higher learning, curricular enhancement initiatives can be devised to enrich the existing provision to consider its role in forging ASEAN identity.

Knowledge of role of literature pedagogy in instilling ASEAN awareness becomes of great significance to educators and administrators of higher education institutions. This recognition of the value of literature instruction in achieving the ASEAN Vision 2020 can lead to a greater understanding of the uniqueness of each culture constituting ASEAN while searching for a common identity that can heighten the ties among people of the countries within the region.

Institutionalizing ASEAN identity in higher education is deemed significant in providing insights on literature curriculum practices as pedagogic tools in instilling ASEAN belongingness among college students as a response to the thrusts of ASEAN VISION 2020. Therefore, the present study aims to determine the awareness of ASEAN and the assessment on the importance of literature curriculum practices as pedagogic tools in institutionalizing ASEAN identity in higher education of teaching personnel handling language, literature, humanities and social studies courses among state universities in the Southern Tagalog region of the Philippines. It also tested the significant relationship between the awareness of ASEAN of the teaching personnel and their assessment on the importance of literature curriculum practices in awareness of ASEAN identity. Furthermore, it also identified which ASEAN dimensions significantly explain the assessment of the teaching personnel on the importance of literature curriculum practices in the awareness of ASEAN identity.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed the correlational research design for it intends to determine the degree of association between variables to understand the pattern of sets of data. According to Creswell (2012), a correlational research focuses on the extent to which two variables or more co-vary. This connotes that changes in one variable are reflected in changes in the other. This research design can provide the researchers an in-depth analysis of the variables under study which enabled them to better understand the problem.

The respondents of this study were composed of 153 teaching personnel handling language, literature, humanities and social studies courses among state universities in Southern Tagalog region of the Philippines during the academic year 2018-2019. These state universities include Cavite State University in Cavite, Laguna State Polytechnic University in Laguna, Batangas State University in Batangas, University of Rizal System in Rizal, and Southern Luzon State University in Quezon. The respondents who gave their consent to participate in the survey were totally enumerated; hence, no sampling technique was applied. A researcher-made questionnaire was used as the main instrument to gather the necessary information needed in the study. The research instrument was validated by educational management experts and higher education teaching practitioners taking into consideration the clarity, balance, appropriateness of the item statements and their application to praxis, relationship to the problem, measure of construct, and other related matters. To facilitate the interpretation of the computed mean, the following mean ranges with their corresponding verbal interpretations were used: 4.50-5.00 – Extremely Aware/Extremely Important; 3.50-4.49 – Very Aware/Very Important; 2.50-3.49 – Aware/Important; 1.50-2.49 – Somewhat Aware/Somewhat Important; 1.00-1.49 – Not Aware/Not Important. To test its reliability, the researchers conducted pilot testing of the questionnaire to a group of 50 instructors and professors who were not included in the study. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was computed to assess the internal consistency of the item statements. The computed value 0.97 is greater than 0.70 affirming the questionnaire as sufficiently reliable. After establishing the validity and the reliability of the questionnaire, the final version was administered to the target respondents.

Before conducting the research study among the specified state universities, the researchers sought permission from their respective university presidents assuring them of the confidentiality of data and the research results. After which, the researchers were endorsed to their corresponding vice presidents for academic affairs. Kind assistance was provided to the researchers to facilitate successful administration and retrieval of the copies of the research instrument from the target respondents. The collected data were treated using Mean, Standard Deviation, Pearson *r*, and Multiple Linear Regression Analysis incorporating Stepwise method to determine the significant predictors of the respondents' assessment on the importance of literature curriculum practices in forging ASEAN identity from the dimensions of their awareness of ASEAN.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Teaching personnel's awareness of ASEAN

Looking at the role of literature pedagogy in ASEAN identity formation requires an examination of teaching personnel's awareness of the regional integration. This familiarity of the regional integration will enable them to provide reliable assessment on the importance of literary curriculum practices as pedagogic tools in forging this regional identity in higher education. Hence, the awareness of ASEAN of teaching personnel from state universities in the Southern Tagalog region was surveyed.

Table 1: Teaching Personnel's Awareness of ASEAN

Dimensions	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
ASEAN charter	3.54	0.76	Very Aware
Socio-cultural integration	3.54	0.90	Very Aware
Economic integration	3.51	0.84	Very Aware
ASEAN principles	3.42	0.84	Aware
Political integration	3.39	0.86	Aware

The teaching personnel's awareness of ASEAN along its five dimensions is illustrated in Table 1. Among the five dimensions of ASEAN awareness, the teaching personnel are found to be very aware of the ASEAN charter ($\bar{x}=3.54$), socio-cultural integration ($\bar{x}=3.54$), and economic integration ($\bar{x}=3.51$). The familiarity of the teaching personnel with the ASEAN charter and economic integration discloses their knowledge of the fundamental aspiration of this legal body that mutually binds its member states. This aspiration of alleviating poverty in the region by narrowing developmental gap through assistance and cooperation among participating countries drives the teaching personnel to be optimistic of their affiliation with ASEAN (Siar et al., 2017). This sense of belongingness and economic security with the ASEAN community can initiate effort to influence their students to embrace the regional amalgamation. Meanwhile, the teaching personnel's strong familiarity with the socio-cultural integration affirms their belief on the important role of humanities specifically of literature study in fostering ASEAN identity as this strategic initiative is prioritized by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (2009). Literary study as a tradition in humanities can help in instilling regional identity among tertiary students as this tradition permits the transmission of cultural notions gleaned in literary works through textual interpretation and analysis leading to multi-cultural education (Bobkina and Dominguez, 2014; Kristina, 2010). When institutionalized in tertiary education, this cultural exploration and transmission through literary study can help in nurturing students' familiarity and belongingness to the ASEAN community.

3.2 Teaching personnel's assessment on the importance of literature curriculum practices in ASEAN identity formation

As literature pedagogy permits cultural modelling, identity formation that fosters sense of belongingness to the ASEAN community can be cultivated by practices constituting a literature curriculum. Teaching personnel's assessment on the importance of literature curriculum practices in ASEAN identity formation was surveyed. The result of the conducted survey is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Teaching Personnel's Assessment on the Importance of Literature Curriculum Practices in ASEAN Identity Formation

Curriculum practices	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
Making connections	3.81	0.87	Very important
Applying critical lenses	3.74	0.99	Very important
Inferring symbolic and thematic meanings	3.68	0.84	Very important
Constructing social worlds	3.65	0.87	Very important
Posing questions	3.65	0.86	Very important
Explaining characters' actions	3.63	0.86	Very important
Perspective-taking	3.61	0.85	Very important

According to the table, the teaching personnel among the surveyed state universities considered the curriculum practices in literary pedagogy as very important in instilling ASEAN identity to tertiary students. It is notable that three curriculum practices comprising of making connection ($\bar{x}=3.81$), applying critical lenses ($\bar{x}=3.74$), and inferring symbolic and thematic meanings ($\bar{x}=3.68$) are considered most favorable in awareness of regional identity through literary study. Making connections deals with associating past and present experiences to construct students' understanding of themselves and their world. The respondents view this practice as beneficial in providing opportunities to create cultural connections to understand the universality of the way of life among people of varied races. This understanding of the universality of human life can

minimize individuality among people from diverse races which can help them to view themselves as members of the global community who can easily facilitate regional interaction and identity formation instead of identifying with a particular cultural orientation. Beach et al. (2010) and Bañez (2018) emphasized that understanding of the universality of human life can lead to social connectedness which can encourage students to see their lives as reflections of other peoples' undertaking making them socially conscious of others and increasing their sense of belongingness to the global community. This can help minimizing cross-cultural misunderstanding which is favorable to regional identity formation.

The teaching personnel also considered applying critical lenses anchored on formalism as very important to regional identity formation. Examining the formal elements of ASEAN works to distinguish their unique features can strengthen students' sense of belonging to the ASEAN community which is beneficial in awareness of regional identity as this stylistics approach to literary analysis enables them to explore instances of foregrounding among ASEAN works that can reveal the writers' unique styles. This exploration of literary styles prevailing ASEAN works can concretize literary traditions that are unique in the region. The uniqueness of the literary traditions can establish the identity of ASEAN literature that is helpful in constructing regional identity to be embraced by people of participating countries. Leech and Short (2007), and Appleman (2014) emphasized that the uniqueness of literary writings is a manifestation of the writers' literary style and identity.

Furthermore, inferring symbolic and thematic meanings is considered very important by the respondents in creating awareness of regional identity. This curriculum practice of eliciting meaning from literary texts through examining similarities in languages and signs of ASEAN countries regards cultural symbols as artifacts of ASEAN citizens. This association exercises students' ability to infer conceptual representations of language, signs, images, gestures, dress, behaviors, actions, and the like which are essential elements of societal constructs (Beach et al., 2010). Looking at the similarities of these symbols can help students to discover cultural connections of their own country to other ASEAN symbols which can cultivate sense of belongingness beneficial in establishing the regional identity. Peregoy and Boyle (2008) affirmed that cultural artifacts such as signs and symbols found in literary texts, if closely explored, can help students discover personal associations among signs and symbols that can help in the construction of their identities.

3.3 Relationship between awareness of ASEAN and assessment on the importance of literature curriculum practices in forging ASEAN identity

Correlation analysis between the respondents' awareness of ASEAN and assessment on the importance of literature curriculum practices in institutionalizing ASEAN identity was conducted. The result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Relationship between Awareness of ASEAN and Assessment on the Importance of Literature Curriculum Practices in Forging ASEAN Identity

Awareness on ASEAN	Curriculum practices in literature pedagogy						
	PT	CSW	ECA	ISTM	MC	PQ	ACL
	r-values	r-values	r-values	r-values	r-values	r-values	r-values
ASEAN charter	.540**	.545**	.531**	.523**	.529**	.514**	.475**
Economic integration	.566**	.545**	.571**	.522**	.551**	.529**	.460**
Socio-cultural integration	.518**	.500**	.503**	.503**	.517**	.487**	.447**
Political integration	.575**	.538**	.567**	.526**	.517**	.549**	.499**
Principles	.588**	.537**	.563**	.522**	.517**	.566**	.467**

*Legend: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). PT-Perspective-taking, CSW-Constructing social worlds, ECA-Explaining characters' actions, ISTM-Inferring symbolic and thematic meanings, MC-Making connections, PQ-Posing questions & ACL-Applying critical lenses.*

Table 3 presents the relationship between the respondents' awareness of ASEAN and their assessment on the importance of literature curriculum practices in institutionalizing ASEAN identity. As presented, there is a significant relationship between awareness of ASEAN and assessment on curriculum practices in literature pedagogy in institutionalizing ASEAN identity. The computed r-values reveal a highly positive correlation which suggests that there is a significant relationship between the variables tested. This result implies that the respondents' awareness of ASEAN enables them to critically assess the importance of curriculum practices in literature pedagogy in instilling ASEAN familiarity among their students and strengthen their sense of regional belongingness that are beneficial for regional integration and identity formation. This result is similar to the observation made by Siar et al. (2017) that respondents from the academe who were found to be more aware of ASEAN compared to other sectors had a high expectation on the role of the regional organization in forging

regional identity and building quality education through faculty and student exchanges and the training of professionals in member states.

3.4 Regression analysis of ASEAN awareness dimensions as predictors of assessment on the importance of literature curriculum practices in institutionalizing ASEAN identity

To have an in-depth examination of the identified relationship between ASEAN awareness dimensions and assessment on the importance of literature pedagogy, multiple regression analysis was conducted to further determine the predictors of the respondents' assessment on contribution of curriculum practices in literature pedagogy to forge ASEAN Identity. The results of the conducted regression analysis are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Relationship between Awareness of ASEAN and Assessment on the Importance of Literature Curriculum Practices in Forging ASEAN Identity

Awareness on ASEAN	Curriculum practices in literature pedagogy						
	PT	CSW	ECA	ISTM	MC	PQ	ACL
ASEAN Charter		.213**			.273**		.236**
Economic integration	.321**	.240**	.341**	.302**	.352**		
Socio-cultural integration							
Political integration	.350**	.214**	.329**	.315**		.251**	.326**
Principles						.355**	
R Square	.383	.362	.381	.323	.339	.338	.275
Adjusted R Square	.375	.349	.373	.314	.330	.329	.265
F Value	46.539	28.222	46.144	35.858	38.404	38.314	28.450
Sig	<.0001	<.0001	<.0001	<.0001	<.0001	<.0001	<.0001

Legend: ** significant at $p < .01$. PT-Perspective-taking, CSW-Constructing social worlds, ECA-Explaining characters' actions, ISTM-Infering symbolic and thematic meanings, MC-Making connections, PQ-Posing questions & ACL-Applying critical lenses.

The results show that awareness of regional political integration best predicts educators' assessment on curriculum practices important to identity formation. These results reiterate the widely accepted notion that state policies have direct influence on educational practices of any country. This direct influence of state policies to educational practices was observed by Rañosa-Madrurnio (2019) within the context of language education in the Philippines. She noted that the country's policies on Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), and K12 Basic Education program have revolutionized the educational practices in the country to be at par with other ASEAN countries.

4. DISCUSSIONS

The role of literature pedagogy in institutionalizing ASEAN identity in tertiary education should not be underestimated as the respondents assessed the literary curriculum practices as very important to ASEAN identity formation. This potential of literary pedagogy in ASEAN identity formation encourages institutions of higher learning to mobilize the teaching of literature in tertiary education by considering the inclusion of ASEAN literature or studies as part of the curricular enhancement across different academic programs. This insight can help state universities in the Philippines and other countries within the Asia Pacific to acknowledge their roles in the realization of the ASEAN Vision 2020 for shared economic mobilization. To realize this vision, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) within the ASEAN community may initiate collaborations and partnerships for possible exploration on curricular and institutional practices that are supportive to the ASEAN Vision of creating regional identity awareness. Heads of academic affairs and members of the academic councils of the HEIs in the region may also consider the inclusion of ASEAN literature or studies as part of the curricular enhancement across different academic programs to harness sense of ASEAN belongingness and identity which are important in preparing students for the workplace challenges of the ASEAN integration.

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