



Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities

**ASEAN COMMUNITY: A STUDY OF FAMILIARITY AMONG
YOUTHS IN KUCHING, SARAWAK**

MOHD RAZALI BIN OTHMAN

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ABSTRACT

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a political and economic union of ten member states in Southeast Asia. The organisation promotes intergovernmental cooperation and facilitates economic, political, security, military, educational and sociocultural integration between its members and countries in Asia-Pacific (ASEAN, 2020). This study provides an overview on the familiarity towards ASEAN and the initiative of ASEAN Community among youths in Kuching, Sarawak. This study also identifies the factors affecting the level of familiarity towards ASEAN and the initiative of ASEAN Community among youths in Kuching, Sarawak. The result of this study was analysed from the responses provided by the youths in Kuching, Sarawak. This study employs quantitative method in the data collection by using questionnaires to obtain information from the respondents. Overall, this study aims were to identify the level of familiarity towards ASEAN and the initiative of ASEAN Community among youths in Kuching, Sarawak. This study also aims to identify the factors affecting the level of familiarity towards ASEAN and the initiative of ASEAN Community among youths in Kuching, Sarawak.

Keywords: Youths, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), ASEAN Community

ABSTRAK

Persatuan Negara-Negara Asia Tenggara (ASEAN) merupakan sebuah pertubuhan antara kerajaan serantau yang terdiri daripada 10 negara di Asia Tenggara. Pertubuhan antarabangsa ini menggalakkan kerjasama antara kerajaan dan memudahkan integrasi ekonomi, politik, keamanan, ketenteraan, pendidikan, dan sosial budaya dia antara anggotanya dan negara-negara lain di rantau Asia Pasifik (ASEAN, 2020). Kajian ini memberikan gambaran berkaitan pengetahuan mengenai ASEAN dan inisiatif Komuniti ASEAN dalam kalangan belia di Kuching, Sarawak. Kajian ini juga bertujuan mengenal pasti faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi tahap pengetahuan mengenai ASEAN dan inisiatif Komuniti ASEAN dalam kalangan belia di Kuching, Sarawak. Hasil kajian ini dianalisis daripada maklum balas yang diberikan oleh golongan belia di Kuching, Sarawak. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kuantitatif dalam pengumpulan data dengan menggunakan soal selidik bagi mendapatkan maklumat daripada responden. Secara keseluruhan, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti tahap pengetahuan mengenai ASEAN dan inisiatif Komuniti ASEAN dalam kalangan belia di Kuching, Sarawak. Kajian ini juga bertujuan bagi mengenal pasti faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi tahap pengetahuan mengenai ASEAN dan inisiatif Komuniti ASEAN dalam kalangan belia di Kuching, Sarawak.

Kata kunci: Belia, Persatuan Negara-Negara Asia Tenggara (ASEAN), Komuniti ASEAN

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List Of Acronyms

AEC	ASEAN Economic Community
AFF	ASEAN Football Federation
APSC	ASEAN Political-Security Community
ASA	Association Of Southeast Asia
ASCC	ASEAN Socio Cultural Community
ASEAN	Association Of Southeast Asian Nations
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
NYDP	National Youth Development Policy
OCHA	United Nations Office For The Coordination Of Humanitarian Affairs
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
SEA	Southeast Asia
SPSS	Statistical Package For The Social Sciences
UN	United Nations
URL	Universal Resource Locator

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CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the paper's structure. This chapter will introduce the readers to the background of the study. Other than that, this chapter will also introduce the readers to the problem statement of the study.

Next, this chapter will provide the readers with the research question, along with the two research objectives. Finally, this chapter will provide the readers with the scope of the study, together with the significance of the study. In this chapter, we will also explore some important concepts that will be used abundantly throughout the study such as the concept of youths, ASEAN and ASEAN Community.

1.2 Background Of The Study

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations or more commonly known as ASEAN, is an intergovernmental organisation aimed primarily at promoting economic growth and regional stability among its members. ASEAN was established on the 8th of August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration, which is also known as the Bangkok Declaration (ASEAN, 2020).

The declaration was signed by the five founding fathers of ASEAN, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Currently, ASEAN has 10 member states, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam. In 2019, the total population of the ASEAN countries was estimated to be at 655.9 million people, with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of 3.2 trillion US Dollar (Hayes, 2021).

The ASEAN Community is a blueprint for a regional integration, which was initiated by the leaders of the ASEAN member states during the 9th ASEAN Summit Meeting that took place in Bali, Indonesia in 2003 (ASEAN, 2020). The initiative of the ASEAN Community was officially launched in 2015, with the signing of the 2015 Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the Establishment of the ASEAN Community (ASEAN, 2020).

The declaration was signed by the ASEAN leaders during the 27th ASEAN Summit Meeting, which took place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from the 18th until the 22nd of November 2015. There are three main pillars which made up the initiative of the ASEAN Community, namely the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC).

ASEAN Community, without a doubt, is an extremely ambitious initiative to achieve regional integration among the ASEAN member states. However, despite the great efforts displayed by the ASEAN leaders in turning this initiative into a success, we have to admit that there are challenges and obstacles that we need to face along the way before we can reach the ultimate goal.

One of the issues with ASEAN is the fact that its member states tend to have divergent interests and priorities (Heng, 2020). At the grassroots level, one of the issues is the level of familiarity with the concept of ASEAN Community among the population of ASEAN itself. Therefore, this study aims to explore the level of familiarity with the concept of ASEAN Community among the population of ASEAN, specifically the youths. On top of that, this study will focus on the youths living in Kuching, Sarawak.

1.3 Problem Statement

The initiative of ASEAN Community requires the collective efforts, not only from the leaders of the ASEAN member states, but also from the people of ASEAN itself. The diversity in culture, religion and language makes ASEAN as one of the most diverse regions in the world. Therefore, in a region that is as diverse as ASEAN, the element of familiarity is significantly important because it helps in building the unity among different cultures.

Due to globalisation, different and diverse cultures tend to associate themselves with the dominant culture (Khan, 2020). As a result, foreign cultures are then hit with stereotypes, biases and prejudices. Negative perceptions exist as a result of limited familiarity among different and diverse cultures in a community. This study could be the first step towards realising the goal of integrating ASEAN as a region through ASEAN Community.

This study was inspired by a study entitled, “Embracing ASEAN Community: Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei Youth Perspective”, conducted by Nurul Huda Marwan, Ahmad Nizar Ya’akub and Noor’ain Aini from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. The purpose of the study was to discover the youths’ awareness, attitudes and expectations towards the establishment of ASEAN Community.

According to the study, the respondents from the three countries were not very familiar with ASEAN. Only a small minority of 8.8% Bruneian respondents who are very familiar with ASEAN, while 6.5% and 6.6% for both Malaysian and Indonesian respondents (Marwan, Ya’akub & Aini, 2017). Most of the respondents stated that they are somewhat familiar with ASEAN. Nevertheless, the general attitudes of the respondents towards ASEAN Community are positively inclined. The success of ASEAN Community depends heavily on the people of ASEAN itself.

Hence, it is very important for the people of ASEAN to be familiar with the initiative of the ASEAN Community. In order for ASEAN to be able to function as a regional community, the people need to understand what ASEAN is about. Limited familiarity and knowledge about the organisation will become an obstacle for ASEAN to move forward and achieve the goal of ASEAN Community.

Based on the aforementioned study, limited familiarity can be understood as not being able to answer basic questions about ASEAN and ASEAN Community. For example, some respondents counted in non-member countries such as South Korea and China as a part of ASEAN. Countries such as Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam were also being overlooked by the respondents.

This paragraph will explain the differences between this study and the study mentioned previously. Firstly, the purpose of this study is to identify the level of familiarity towards ASEAN Community among the youths in Kuching, Sarawak. This study also seeks to identify the factors affecting the level of familiarity towards ASEAN Community among the respondents.

Other than that, this study will only be using the youths living in Kuching as the respondents. This study will also involve youths, coming from different academic backgrounds, instead of only limiting the respondents to those with social sciences background. Last but not the least, this study will not only involve university students. In short, everyone in the youth category, living in Kuching can be involved in this study. The term ‘youth’ will be defined in the literature review section later.

1.4 Research Question

- i. To what extent does the youths in Kuching familiar with ASEAN and the initiative of ASEAN Community?

1.5 Research Objectives

- i. To identify the level of familiarity towards ASEAN and the initiative of ASEAN Community among the youths in Kuching, Sarawak.
- ii. To identify the factors affecting the level of familiarity towards ASEAN and the initiative of ASEAN Community among the youths in Kuching, Sarawak.

1.6 Research Hypotheses

- i. The youths in Kuching, Sarawak are not familiar with ASEAN and the initiative of ASEAN Community.
- ii. The youths in Kuching, Sarawak received limited exposure towards ASEAN and the initiative of ASEAN Community at the university level.

1.7 Scope Of The Study

The scope of the study focuses on identifying the level of familiarity towards ASEAN Community among the youths in Kuching, Sarawak. Other than that, this study also focuses on identifying the factors affecting the level of familiarity towards ASEAN Community among the youths in Kuching, Sarawak.

In this study, the important concepts that we are going to use are the concept of ASEAN, ASEAN Community, the concept of youths and the concept of familiarity. These concepts will be explained later in a more detailed manner in the literature review section.

1.8 Significance Of The Study

This study will provide the information regarding the level of familiarity towards ASEAN Community among the youths in Kuching, Sarawak. Other than that, this study will also provide the information regarding the factors affecting the level of familiarity towards ASEAN Community among the youths in Kuching, Sarawak.

Although this study might not be able to provide any solutions for the problem stated earlier, it is still important for us to know the current level of familiarity with ASEAN Community among the respondents as the first step towards a successful regional integration.

1.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study aims to identify the level of familiarity towards ASEAN Community among the youths in Kuching, Sarawak. It also aims to identify the factors affecting the level of familiarity towards ASEAN Community among the youths in Kuching, Sarawak. As stated in the section above, this study will not provide any suggestions or solutions for the problem mentioned earlier.

CHAPTER 2:
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the works of literature review for this study. Literature review helps in gaining an understanding about the topic based on existing research and arguments which are relevant to the study. In this section, there will be four summaries discussing about the important concepts used in the study which are the concept of ASEAN, ASEAN Community, the concept of youths and the concept of familiarity.

The type of literature review that we are going to use is the integrative review. Integrative review is a form of research that reviews, critiques and synthesises representatives' literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated. Referring to this study, we will be using the study entitled, "Embracing ASEAN Community: Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei Youth Perspective" as the reference. From the study, we will form a new study, almost similar to the previous one, but with different aims and objectives. Therefore, integrative review will provide new framework and perspective based on the existing research done.

2.2 Association Of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is an intergovernmental organisation which was established by the governments of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand in 1967. The purpose of the establishment was to accelerate the economic growth, social progress, cultural development and to promote peace and security in the Southeast Asia region (Moon, 2020).

Brunei joined the organisation in 1984, followed by Vietnam in 1995, Myanmar and Laos in 1997 and Cambodia in 1999. Hence, there are currently ten member states in the organisation. According to Wood (2017), the Southeast Asia region is home to more than 622 million people, which means the region has a larger population compared to the European Union or the North America. The region also covers a total area of 4.5 million square kilometres.

ASEAN replaced the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA), which had been formed by the Philippines, Thailand, and the Federation of Malaya (now part of Malaysia) in 1961. Under the banner of cooperative peace and shared prosperity, ASEAN's chief projects centre on economic cooperation, the promotion of trade among ASEAN countries and between ASEAN members and the rest of the world, programs for joint research and technical cooperation among member governments and collaboration on matters of common interest such as social, cultural and scientific study.

According to the ASEAN Declaration, every member should work together in promoting regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries of the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter (ASEAN, 2020). Throughout its establishment, ASEAN has had its own ups and downs as an intergovernmental organisation.

ASEAN can be regarded as the second most successful regional organisation in the world, right behind the European Union. If we look through the history of the Southeast Asia itself as a region, we will not expect ASEAN to succeed as how it is today. When ASEAN was formed in 1967, there were still a lot of ongoing conflicts, even between the founding members themselves. It would have been difficult to find a more troubled region than Southeast Asia when ASEAN was established 51 years ago (Mahbubani & Tang, 2018). Southeast Asia was even described by the well-known British historian, C.A. Fisher as the "Balkans of Asia".

One example of how ASEAN has succeeded as a regional organisation is the adoption of two conventions, meant for countering transnational crime, namely the ASEAN Convention on Counter Terrorism, which was signed in 2007, and the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, which was signed in 2015 (Pakpahan, 2019). Due to its ability to preserve peace and stability in the region, ASEAN was also able to thrive economically. Since 2015, the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) has established the single and open market with plenty of economic opportunities for the member states.

Perhaps the most recent progress in ASEAN's economic sector is the establishment of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), a trading pact between ASEAN and several partners such as South Korea, China, Japan and New Zealand.

Despite having numerous successes to its record, ASEAN has also been constantly criticised for its failures as a regional organisation. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), ASEAN is failing as an institution and as a political grouping of nations. This statement was made due to the claim that ASEAN has failed to live up to its own aims, which is to resolve the humanitarian issues in the region.

The leaders of ASEAN have failed to tackle the humanitarian crisis of the Rohingya ethnic group in Myanmar (OCHA, 2019). Instead, the leaders have used the ASEAN Summit to advance talks about regional trading, which is considered as directly contradicting the values of sustainability and economic development for all (OCHA, 2019). The RCEP has also been criticised as not taking human rights concerns into account.

2.3 ASEAN Community

ASEAN Community is an initiative to unite and integrate countries in the Southeast Asia region into a single community. The idea of having an integrated region was first expressed during the 9th ASEAN Summit Meeting which took place in Bali, Indonesia in 2003. The initiative of ASEAN Community acts as a blueprint for the efforts of establishing an integrated region all the political, economic and cultural sectors.

During the 12th ASEAN Summit, which was held in January 2007, the leaders from every ASEAN member state pledged their continuous commitment to accelerate the establishment of the ASEAN Community. The initiative was translated into an agreement called the Cebu Declaration on the Acceleration of the Establishment of an ASEAN Community by 2015, which was signed by ASEAN leaders during the 2007 ASEAN Summit.

In 2015, the initiative of the ASEAN Community was officially launched with the signing of the 2015 Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the Establishment of the ASEAN Community (ASEAN, 2020). The establishment of ASEAN Community is a historic milestone and a culmination of ASEAN's resilience and dynamism throughout a journey of nearly half a century, and signals to the world how far and how well the ASEAN member states have achieved in coming together as one community (US Mission, n.d.).

There are three main pillars which made up the initiative of the ASEAN Community, namely the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). Before the establishment of ASEAN Community, these three pillars have been functioning independently under ASEAN.

The ASEAN Political-Security Cooperation (APSC) was established by the ASEAN leaders for the ASEAN member states to cooperate in the field of politics and security. APSC was established to make sure that ASEAN member states are able to live in a peaceful environment with each other. Members of the APSC have agreed to depend fully on peaceful and diplomatic processes in resolving any intra-regional differences and consider the fact that their security is intertwined with other members.

The APSC has six main components namely the political development, shaping and sharing of norms, conflict prevention, conflict resolution, post-conflict peace building, and implementing mechanisms. The APSC has been considered as successful in preserving peace and stability among the members of ASEAN.

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) is an initiative for the region to achieve its main goal of having an economic integration. According to AEC, ASEAN should be functioning as a single market and product base, a region with highly competitive market, equitable economic development and fully integrated into the global economy. The AEC also aims to transform ASEAN into a region which has a highly integrated and cohesive economy, a competitive, innovative and dynamic economy. It also focuses on the people of ASEAN as the centre of the community.