

# The Dynamics of ASEAN Universities' International Cooperation: Case Studies of Indonesia and Thailand

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**Abstract:** As one of the consequences of globalization, the nature of higher education and universities has drastically changed. The shifts could be seen in the way most universities nowadays are aspired to be world-class, also in how international cooperation of university has become increasingly important. Written based on a qualitative research conducted through interviews and literature reviews, this paper discusses the dynamics of international cooperation management of universities in two ASEAN members, Indonesia and Thailand. In this paper, two countries are selected as a comparison with consideration that both are non-English speaking ASEAN member countries, that have their best universities enlisted in top regional even world university ranking. By using the assessment from the awareness, commitment, organizational structure and selection of partners and platform of international cooperation, the results show that to enhance the performance of international cooperation, universities could take notes in having a more serious approach especially in making a renewable direct statement or commitment for internationalization continuously that always try to catch up the challenges from external and internal forces. A better organizational structure and improvement should be also taken into account, in order to meet the expectations and efforts needed to achieve the vision, mission and goals of the institutions.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Entering the era of massive flow of globalization, the nature of higher education and its institutions has drastically changed. It is seen nearly everywhere, where being world-class is what a university aspired to be. This current approach on higher education in globalization era, has also changed the role of international cooperation in universities. Universities these days, build and maintain linkages to gain and share benefits each other. Also according to Chan (2004), one of the most important rationale of universities alliance is to be able to compete and survive in the severe competition due to the massification and marketization of higher education.

It is argued that internationalization of higher education becomes one important key to help boosting the quality, reputation and global ranking of universities, where international cooperation counted as one important element within it. Together with broad scope of internationalization strategies, development of international collaboration and strategic partnership for teaching to research, are believed to play crucial role as tools of how

universities can survive and compete each other (Dewi, 2014; Maringe, 2010; Chan, 2004). Several researches also show the positive relation of international collaboration and research productivity in university, which support the importance of discussion on international cooperation of universities (Lee and Bozeman, 2005; Kwiek, 2014).

In regional context, cooperation and collaboration between countries or universities exist in several kind of platforms, from bilateral to multilateral one, such as a higher education consortium. South East Asia is not an exemption. In 1992, during the 4<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit, the call for the cooperation in the field of higher education and human resource development took place (AUN, 2017). Improving the quality of higher education in the region is one of the aims.

Looking at assessment on regional and global level, the data shows that some ASEAN universities are listed in top global university ranking. According to QS World University Ranking in 2017, National University of Singapore, is ranked 12<sup>th</sup> globally; Nanyang Technological University Singapore ranked 13<sup>th</sup> globally; University of Malaya Malaysia

is ranked 133<sup>rd</sup> globally, even in Thailand, Chulalongkorn University is ranked 45<sup>th</sup> in Asia and 252<sup>th</sup> globally and Mahidol University is ranked 61<sup>st</sup> in Asia and 283<sup>th</sup> globally, while in Indonesia, Universitas Indonesia is ranked 325<sup>th</sup> globally, Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) is ranked between 401-410<sup>th</sup>, and Gadjah Mada University is ranked between 501-550<sup>th</sup> (QS, 2017). From this data, it could be seen that Indonesia, as one of the key players in ASEAN, actually performs lag behind the other members, accordingly Singapore, Malaysia, and even Thailand.

As a country with non-English speaking background, Thailand shows their hard work towards the improvement of their global competitiveness and higher education development. With the similar background, Indonesian leading universities seemingly still in the middle of the process to be able to compete equally with their counterparts from Thailand.

Based on the background mentioned above, this paper discusses the assessment on comparison of dynamics of international cooperation in Indonesian and Thailand Universities. It aims to see what the similarities and differences are between the cases of two countries, and suggests the possibilities of further improvement of the international cooperation management.

## 2 METHODS AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper presents the dynamics of international cooperation management in universities in Indonesia and Thailand. The approach of methodology in this paper is a qualitative one, where the data are taken through interviews and literature reviews. The data collections were mainly consisted of the semi-structured interviews with senior leaders or officers in universities that responsible for the international cooperation management, such as the Vice Rector or the Head of Office of International Affairs (OIA), also from the important documents related to international cooperation.

The analytical framework of this paper will be based on the concept of international cooperation in internationalization of higher education. To see the dynamics of international cooperation, this paper will adapt and combine the model of international cooperation process and strategy from Chan (2004) that explain how a higher education institutions see the importance of international cooperation, and turn

it into commitment in paper and in action, supported by conducive organizational strategies such as governance, organizational structures, staffs resources, financial resource and support service (as cited in Heryadi et al., 2017).

As for the design, the analysis will be taken from the institutions chosen from both Indonesia and Thailand. The data from Indonesian case will be based from three institutions which are Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB), Gadjah Mada University (UGM), and Universitas Padjadjaran (UNPAD). While in Thailand, the data are taken from the Mahidol University (MU). The basic considerations of the selection are the type of institutions (comprehensive universities or special focused institutions), management status, reputation, and their membership in academic networking or consortia, in this case the ASEAN University Network (AUN).

## 3 CURRENT DYNAMICS OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION: COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT BETWEEN INDONESIA AND THAILAND

### 3.1 Appraisal from National-Level Policy

The dynamics of international cooperation in Indonesian higher education institutions could not be separated from national policy on higher education in general. In Indonesia, the 2015-2019 vision of Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education (Kemenristekdikti) is to create the qualified higher education and the knowledge, technology and innovation capacity to support the nation's competitiveness (Kemenristekdikti, 2015). To achieve the vision, the ministry and directorates under it formulate strategic plans that include the priority to boost the number of international publication and citation level of Indonesian scholars, also mentions the importance of university cooperation and partnership to improve affectivity, efficiency, productivity, creativity, innovation, quality and relevance of *Tridharma* (education, research and community services) as the role of university (Kemenristekdikti, 2015).

From the national level, the government has provided adequate support in the term of legal

framework that regulate the general platform for the international cooperation of higher education (Heryadi et al., 2017). As for programs, Kemenristekdikti supports university to develop their international cooperation through several aspects, such as widening the chance for cooperation from working group, exhibition to the development of academic collaboration; providing grant schemes for academic partnership from grant for the science consortium development, facilitation of international cooperation and strengthening the international office to technical training for academic cooperation (Heryadi et al., 2017).

On the case of Thailand, the higher education policies always relate to the national strategy and national economic and social development plan that is based by the guidance philosophy from the King of Thailand. Currently, the grand framework of Thailand government is the 20-Year National Strategy (2017-2036). As for the development, it is guided by the 12th National Economic and Social Plan (2017-2021) which was initiated in 2016. In addition, the Thailand 4.0 is now used as the country's economic model that focuses on a value-based economy that push creativity and smart innovation.

Higher education and its institutions, are given mandates to contribute to the success achievement of Thailand 4.0. Universities are expected to play major part in developing knowledge of technologies needed in order to implement the strategy within the Thailand 4.0 framework. Higher education is believed to be able to support Thailand 4.0 in the efforts of maximizing the national human capital development (Eua-arporn, 2017). For the advancement of higher education quality, Thailand's government continually developed policies and strategies to fit the expectation from the current globalized world.

The responsible government body to manage the higher education provision and promoting higher education development in Thailand is the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) under the Ministry of Education. The policy recommendations and higher education plans that fit the international standards are formulated within this office. Consisted of several bureaus, the Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy is the one that responsible for the international cooperation sector in higher education management (OHEC, 2017).

### **3.2 Examination on the Institutional-Level**

In institutional level, by referring to the suggestion by Chan (2004), the dynamics of international cooperation could be assessed from several stages of processes, which are: 1) the awareness of needs, purposes, and benefits of international cooperation; 2) commitment through mission statement and strategic plan; 3) organizational structure; 4) implementation and resource provision; 5) review and assessment; 6) refinement and improvement, which within the process includes the strategy of selection of partners in accordance with goals, objective and compatibility. In this paper, the assessment is focusing on the awareness, commitment, organizational structure and selection of partners and platform of international cooperation.

#### **3.2.1 Awareness of Needs, Purposes, and Benefits of International Cooperation**

From the selected institutions in Indonesia and Thailand, the awareness of needs, purposes and benefits of international cooperation is affirmatively existed, although in different level of awareness. ITB, UGM and MU stated their high awareness in the needs of international cooperation as part of internationalization, while UNPAD shows medium awareness.

The senior leader in ITB is clearly aware on the benefits of international cooperation to the significance impact on university's international publication. By noticing that this positive correlation between the performance of international cooperation with partners from highly qualified universities and the number of citation, ITB positively look forward to focus on strategic alliances that will bring benefits to the achievement of the institution's goal (ITB, 2017a). While in UGM, the senior officer stated that international cooperation is needed as the main gate and contributor to the realization of the vision of university (UGM, 2017a).

While UNPAD mentioned the role of international cooperation as "part" of efforts in achieving the vision and mission of the institutions (UNPAD, 2017a), MU is positively aware that to be a world-class university that is recognized globally, internationalization is a key component to create one. Especially with the implementation of programs and activities on collaborative research, innovations

will nourish and be beneficial to enhance the country's global competitiveness (MU, 2017).

### 3.2.2 Institution's Commitment through Mission Statement and Strategic Plan

In all Indonesian institutions, the statement of vision of the institution include the aspiration to be world-class university. UNPAD's vision is to be a "Leading University in Delivering World Class Education in 2026" or world-class research university in 2026 (UNPAD, 2017b). ITB's vision is ITB as an outstanding, distinguished, independent, and internationally recognized university that leads changes toward welfare improvement of the Indonesian nation and the world (ITB, 2017b). While UGM's vision is to be a pioneer of national universities with world-class and innovative excellence, serve the interests of nation and humanity (UGM, 2017b).

However, regarding the international cooperation per se, between three institutions in Indonesia, ITB is a step ahead since ITB has a specific internationalization statement, which directly stated their awareness of the urgency of internationalization, and mention international cooperation as key element of it (ITB, 2008). This statement is a proof of governance commitment from senior leaders to plan, implement and evaluate the initiatives. In the case of UNPAD and UGM, there are no formal document provided according the institution's mission statement or strategic plan. Although in UNPAD's case, the commitment of internationalization is declared in the office's web, (UNPAD, 2017b). As for UGM, an attractive video is shared publicly, where the Rector described the strategic plan towards the goal of being world-class, to be able to compete and meet the standards of world's best universities (UGM, 2017b).

In Thailand, MU recently produced the university Globalization Strategy (2016-2019) shows a clear and direct prove of how the university's senior leaders are fully aware in the needs of serious planning and implementation of internationalization and international cooperation initiatives (MU, 2016).

### 3.2.3 Institution's Organizational Structure

In the case of organizational structure, all four institutions have appointed body or office that is responsible for the global engagement.

UNPAD has the Office of International Affairs (OIA) acts as the main gate of UNPAD to international arena. The OIA is stated as one of the most important office in UNPAD (UNPAD, 2017a).

Currently named as Universitas Padjadjaran's Global Relation and Advancements, the OIA is responsible in escorting the key dimensions of internationalization of UNPAD: internationalized staffs and students, international research collaboration, and internationally focused curricula (UNPAD, 2017b).

UGM also has the OIA that deals with the maintenance and the extension of international cooperation with the foreign universities and other international institutions. In addition to international cooperation with foreign institutions, UGM's OIA also engage in several major activities including organizing cultural and educational programs for international students; supporting various international conference and activities held at UGM; and providing assistance for international students or professors during their stay in Indonesia (OIA UGM, 2015). In addition, UGM also has its own units of international affairs in every faculty, for the operational platform of international cooperation under the supervision of OIA (UGM, 2017).

In ITB, the international engagement and cooperation is under the Directorate of Partnership and International Relation, with another classification between partnership and international relation. This structure also include the vice director for each field. The supporting body for international engagement is the International Relation Office (IRO). This office is responsible for several programs include building partnership with foreign institutions and international network also supporting the development of international education and research programs.

The International Relations Division Office (IRDO) serves as the main gate that will facilitate all international-related activities in MU. The current approach of internationalization organizational structure is also followed the changing external factors, from previously ASEAN Community towards more global force of innovation-based competition without leaving the ASEAN aspect. The adjustment of university administration is seen when in the past there was a vice president for research and one for internationalization, separated. While in the new administration, these two positions are combined together, so today vice president for research and international engagement is the same. It means that MU uses research as tools of internationalization (MU, 2017). In the IRDO of MU, there is also foreign staff which is a sign that MU develop the organization body towards more internationalized working team.



### 3.2.4 Selection of Partners and Platform

For the platform of international cooperation, ITB, UNPAD, UGM and MU stated that both bilateral and multilateral frameworks bring benefits, where bilateral cooperation focuses more to the deep connection between institutions while multilateral platform ease the efforts of achieving something bigger with comparatively lower energy. All institutions agreed that it is important to see whether the cooperation is a strategic one with real activities or not. This approach is necessary to avoid the sleeping MoUs or agreements.

All institutions selected here, have hundreds various agreements with national and international partners. In ITB, the partnership is categorized in education, research, training, entrepreneurship and recently, innovation areas (ITB, 2017a). In UNPAD, the scope of cooperation covers exchange programs on academic information and materials, students and staff mobility, joint research, visiting professors or lecturers, and other academic activities based on mutual agreement. While MU, as stated in the first globalization strategy, is currently focusing to establish and maintain a sustainable collaboration with selective partners. Means, MU focuses to as many as possible beneficial and profitable collaborations that are strategic.

For international networking group, almost all institutions are members of various consortia or grouping, where ITB, UGM (together with Universitas Indonesia and Airlangga University) and MU (with other four Thailand's universities) are members of AUN. The membership, which was firstly appointed by the government of each member countries, are stated to bring benefits for the member. ITB senior leader mentioned that their membership in such regional networking has placed the institution into advantageous privileged position (ITB, 2017a). However, for UNPAD that is mentioned as member of Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning (ASAIHL), there is no further significant data both on UNPAD's contribution to the association nor the other way around.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

After elaborating the dynamics of universities' international cooperation in Indonesia and Thailand, several points could be highlighted here.

First, that both in Indonesia and Thailand, the international cooperation and internationalization agenda is government-driven, although the national policy and framework is not the only rationale that push universities in both countries pursuing to be world-class.

Second, by taking the cases of top universities in the Indonesia and Thailand, Thailand universities have more advantageous position as the internationalization initiatives in national level in Thailand came earlier compare to Indonesia. Also with almost similar size of economy, Thailand has far less number of higher education institutions than Indonesia. This condition makes it harder and challenging for the government of Indonesia to manage the higher education institutions, especially when it comes about the balance distribution of quality and budget allocation.

Third, ASEAN universities could take notes in having a more serious approach especially in making a renewable direct statement or commitment for internationalization continuously that always try to catch up the challenges from external and internal forces. A better organizational structure and improvement should be also taken into account, in order to meet the expectations and efforts needed to achieve the vision, mission and goals of the institutions.

Lastly, regardless of the challenging dynamics in international cooperation management, the recent 2017 QS world university ranking enlists three top Indonesian higher education institutions, -UI, ITB, UGM-, as top 500 universities globally. It is a good sign that hopefully could motivate the Indonesian universities to enhance their quality and international visibility, and finally leading together with their other ASEAN counterparts such as Thailand, in Asia and beyond.

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