

Harnessing Educational Cooperation in the EAS for Regional Competitiveness and Community Building

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Authors:

Phillip McKenzie, Robert Horne, Andrew Dowling & Adrian Beavis
Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the Second East Asia Summit (EAS) held in 2007, the EAS leaders agreed to strengthen educational cooperation between their 16 countries. On behalf of the EAS, the ASEAN Secretariat commissioned this project to develop strategies for EAS participants to enhance regional economic competitiveness and strengthen community building in a balanced and sustainable manner through cooperation in education. Its scope encompasses regional cooperation in Basic Education (Primary and Secondary Education), Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), and Higher Education.

The report draws on a literature review of the experience with regional educational cooperation, analysis of published data, consultations with education and labour market authorities in each EAS country, a regional workshop, and inputs from organisations and individuals within the EAS region engaged in cooperative activities in education (Chapter 2).

Conceptual Framework (Chapter 3)

It is important to have a shared understanding of the key terms and ideas that define what is meant by international educational cooperation. Educational cooperation occurs whenever two or more parties work together to achieve an educational objective. International partners working together towards an educational objective may be: playing similar roles – e.g. two countries cooperating on an exchange program; in a purchaser-provider relationship (i.e. trade in educational services); or in a donor-recipient relationship (i.e. development assistance). These different forms of cooperation should not be viewed as alternatives to each other, but as complements and mutually reinforcing.

The project focused on cooperation at government-to-government level, either bilaterally or multilaterally, and the role that governments can play in stimulating, supporting and, where necessary, regulating educational cooperation to maximise its contribution to economic and social development.

The conceptual framework attracted the support of most participating countries, and it was generally felt to be a helpful means of analysing current cooperation activities and identifying gaps and future priorities. Nevertheless, it would benefit from some adaptation, and the following framework is proposed for future use:

International Education Cooperation (IEC) occurs whenever two or more parties from different countries work together to achieve an educational objective.

IEC may occur in any phase of education, including primary, secondary and tertiary education, early childhood and special education, and non-formal learning.

IEC may occur at any of the four following levels, and also between them:

- *Between governments;*
- *Between institutions;*
- *Between staff; and*
- *Between students.*

At the government to government level IEC is classified to five types:

- *People Exchange;*
- *Information Exchange;*
- *Facilitation of Trade in Educational Services;*

- *Regulatory Reform; and*
- *Development Partnerships.*

Educational Cooperation in Other Regions (Chapter 4)

Throughout the world there are groups of countries active in educational cooperation often linked to economic integration. These developments reflect a common concern to strengthen educational systems in order to compete in global markets. The project examined the role that cooperation in education has played in deepening integration in other regional economic arrangements (e.g. the EU), including the Bologna Process of reform in higher education, for the lessons learnt.

The Bologna Process aims to establish by 2010 a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in order to enhance quality and to promote mobility between the higher education systems of its 45 member countries. Among the EHEA's features would be a common system of credits for study, a common qualifications framework in three cycles – undergraduate, masters and doctoral, a diploma supplement to serve as a common format for certifying qualifications, and common criteria and methods of quality assurance.

A common higher education area offers a number of benefits to a group of countries aiming at economic integration. It facilitates the flow of highly qualified manpower across national borders, and hence economic integration; it promotes efficiency through widening choice for staff and students; and it enhances educational effectiveness and cultural awareness by promoting staff and student mobility. Diversity of standards and distance are larger issues for the EAS than for the Bologna Process countries, which bears upon the methods and the time-scale for achieving a common higher education area. However, some Bologna elements such as mutual recognition arrangements and credit transfer have already been piloted in East Asia.

The methods by which European countries work together to achieve long-term objectives are of interest for the EAS. Key features of the Bologna Process include biennial conferences of Education Ministers of the participating countries, supported by representatives of the universities and their students. These meetings take stock of progress over the last two years and set directions for the next two, including the identification of targets, common data requirements and indicators of progress.

The European Union is constituted very differently from the EAS. The EAS should aim to understand the European experience, and to use it as one ingredient in its own shaping policies, rather than to import European models as they stand. East Asia has developed forums for dialogue with Europe which will enable it to draw on the European experience, and share its own.

The Benefits of Educational Cooperation (Chapter 5)

The benefits of educational cooperation relate to closely to the benefits gained by individuals and societies from increased participation in education and improvements in educational quality. All countries report an increased emphasis on ensuring that young people can meet the challenges and needs of rapid transformation, and can participate effectively in a globalised environment.

While there is strong support for enhanced educational cooperation, and general agreement about its benefits, there is a lack of hard evidence about which sorts of cooperation programs are most effective in different sectors of education. The report lists some topics which should command priority for further research in this field.

Nonetheless, it is possible to state some broad conclusions about the benefits of the types of cooperation identified in the conceptual framework.

- Both staff and student interchange and transnational education operate to increase the quality and quantity of education on offer, and so enhance competitiveness.

Through first hand experience of other countries they develop appreciation of diversity and common heritage, and foster community building.

- Information exchange and sharing of good practice builds capacity within and across nations, and is clearly an area in which educational cooperation can make a substantial contribution.
- Regulatory Reform has worked in Europe to align tertiary education systems, open up choice and strengthen quality assurance. It has begun to do so in East Asia.
- Cross-border exchange of education services offers benefits in terms of improving the quantity, quality and diversity of education services. These are the kinds of benefits which might be expected to accrue from opening up international trade. Furthermore, cross-border exchange offers special benefits such as the rapid transfer of ideas and increased cultural understanding from person-to-person interactions.
- Development Partnerships: there is a large literature on the effectiveness of development assistance. It is well established that aid can be effective in enhancing the quality and quantity of education in recipient countries, depending on the nature of the program and a number of success factors, including those listed below.

The benefits of education cooperation cannot be taken for granted. A number of factors are important for the success of cooperative activities and to ensure that they achieve their objectives. At international level key success factors include:

- Cooperation must be seen by all parties as meeting genuine needs.
- Cooperation needs to be viewed as a two-way process whereby each country shares its strengths to help others as well as receives assistance in meeting its needs.
- High level political support.
- Strong links into national ministries and networks of education providers.
- A program framework in which the various components are mutually reinforcing: 'piecemeal programs don't work'.
- Realistic timelines.
- A well-resourced coordinating group or secretariat able to maintain momentum, support national personnel, disseminate good practice, and develop future plans.

Current Educational Cooperation in the EAS Region: (Chapter 6)

This chapter starts by setting current forms of educational cooperation in the EAS within an historical context. It also lists membership by country of the main multi-lateral organisations engaged in educational cooperation in the EAS region as this is a factor in shaping their approach to cooperation.

The main part of the chapter is a series of tables – one for each country – listing current forms of cooperation analysed by the five types listed in the framework used for the study, and the main sector of education concerned (schools, TVET and higher education). These tables are mainly concerned with government to government cooperation, and should be treated as indicative only, not least because of variations in the amount of information countries were able to supply. The tables are supplemented by examples of cooperative activities which the parties found particularly fruitful.

Based on the available information, the most extensive types of educational cooperation in the region appear to relate to people exchange and information exchange, especially in the higher education sector. In regard to regulatory reform there appears to be increasing levels of interest in skills recognition, qualifications recognition, qualifications frameworks, and quality assurance.

All countries reported some form of cooperation in most of the types. Many kinds of cooperation were reported, making it difficult to generalise. But three broad categories can be distinguished:

- The relatively high-income countries (Australia, Brunei, Japan, New Zealand, Korea and Singapore) have initiated a wide range of cooperation activities, with a global outlook. They are significant exporters of education and promoters of transnational education. They are active as donors in the EAS region.
- An intermediate group of countries consists of China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand. Within this group China and India are able because of their size to cooperate on a wide scale. Most members of the group are education importers, but some have a growing export sector. Development assistance is still significant for some members, but group members may also be donors or engaged in mutual assistance programs with developing countries, including by sharing expertise on effective strategies for achieving Education for All goals. There is growing interest among these countries in aligning quality assurance mechanisms and qualifications frameworks to international developments.
- Among the developing countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) study abroad and exchanges may be constrained by the availability of external funding, and education and training for migrant workers are important issues. The multi-lateral organisations play a particularly important part in enabling these countries to tap external expertise, as do development partners. These countries are adjacent and assist one another.

These groupings are only approximations, not least because conditions vary as much within countries as between them.

Intra-regional grouping is also important. For example, the SEAMEO Centres do much to shape the pattern of cooperation among the ASEAN countries. China, Korea and Japan form one geographical group, as does the Greater Mekong Sub-region in South East Asia.

Participation in international studies of student achievement involves eight EAS countries in the case of the OECD's PISA study and TIMSS, but only 3-4 countries for the other main achievement studies conducted by the IEA. It would seem therefore that quite a few EAS countries do not have available to them data on their students' achievement that would enable them to benchmark performance with other countries. From the perspective of developing countries in particular, participation in international studies can a very cost-effective means of capacity building. Developing relevant measures of educational quality at primary school level could be a focus for the EAS countries in collaboration with groups such as the IEA and OECD.

Specific Aspects of Current Cooperation (Chapter 7)

This chapter deals with three specific themes; the treatment of education in free trade agreements (FTAs), international student flows and scholarship schemes.

The educational provisions within 19 Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) already concluded between EAS member states are briefly reviewed. The main points to emerge are:

- As yet few FTAs make more than permissive provision for mutual recognition of qualifications and periods of study. Some however establish processes through which recognition agreements could be developed;
- Commercial presence is the mode of supply most readily opened up by FTAs. Some FTAs do commit to significant liberalisation, especially in the tertiary education sector, but its impact is sometimes weakened by the absence of mutual recognition;

- FTAs usually allow the parties to make use of separately negotiated agreements on mutual recognition and other specified matters, so there is an opportunity to give effect to the outcomes of a Bologna-type process in East Asia.

International student flows are the second topic of the chapter. The data relate mainly to higher education and have a number of limitations. With those cautions, the main findings are:

- The total number of international students from EAS countries studying at tertiary level in all the countries covered by the tables rose by almost 90% between 1999 and 2005, from 440,000 to 835,000. Of the students in 2005, about 140,000 are from ASEAN countries and about 695,000 from countries elsewhere in the EAS area.
- Almost 90% of the growth in numbers between 1999 and 2005 is accounted for by students from China and India.

The data currently available are not adequate to support an active policy stance on international flows at EAS level. With respect to consumption abroad, it would be desirable to have the number of international students from other member states which each member country hosts, analysed by country of origin and by level of education – higher education, TVET and schools. With respect to commercial presence, data are needed about the number of foreign owned institutions at each educational level, and the numbers of international and domestic students which they cater for.

Scholarship schemes (see also Appendix 5) are quite small relative to international student flows. There seems to be consensus among donors and recipients that to get best effect from a limited number of scholarships, a focus on post-graduate studies and on students with high potential is needed.

The report suggests that:

- Where scholarships are offered as development assistance, an emphasis on helping the developing country to expand its own system of higher education and enhance its quality may be particularly effective;
- Where schemes aim to attract scholars and researchers from a global field, the EAS interest may be to support study in fields such as the sustainable use of energy and the moderation of climate change which the EAS leaders have identified as priorities for the region.

There is scope to expand scholarship schemes within the EAS area. Japan has indicated that it has in mind to bring proposals for an “Asian Erasmus” to the next EAS Summit.

Objectives and Strategies for Harnessing Educational Cooperation (Chapter 8)

The final chapter proposes objectives, priority themes, and processes for enhanced educational cooperation in the EAS area. It is envisaged that as a next step member governments, working with the ASEAN Secretariat, should draw up on the basis of this report a broad statement of objectives and priority themes for consideration and approval by the EAS leaders at their next summit. The following recommendations are made with that end in view.

Recommendation 1 - *To set the following objectives for enhanced educational cooperation in the area of the EAS:*

To build communities among the peoples of the EAS countries, notably through

- *Increasing the mobility of students, teachers and researchers in the area;*
- *The appreciation of one another’s heritage and history; and*
- *The learning of other languages.*

To create competitive advantage for the EAS region by:

- Promoting excellence at all levels of education through the exchange of information on good practice, and by bench-marking; and
- Enlarging choice in tertiary education and in the labour market through measures to facilitate the movement of students, staff and tertiary-qualified personnel across national borders, and by enlarging access for tertiary education providers to national markets.

To reduce disparities in educational opportunity within and between countries in order to:

- Facilitate access to basic and non-formal education and promote high standards through networking and institutional collaboration;
- Promote tertiary education and training in home countries, especially in the fields of science and technology, as a means to economic development.

Recommendation 2 - To indicate the following priority themes as a basis for following up the objectives:

- The teaching and learning of foreign languages.
- The teaching and learning of Mathematics and Science.
- Education for mutual understanding among the peoples of the EAS region.
- Enhancing the quality of school teaching.
- Enlarging Access to Education.
- Technical and Vocational Education and Training.
- Higher Education.

Recommendation 3 - To establish an Education Task Force to work through and elaborate the list of priorities indicated by the Summit leaders, and to propose processes for the on-going handling of educational cooperation; and to ask EAS Education Ministers to review the report of the Education Task Force, and to make recommendations to the next subsequent meeting of the EAS Summit.

A final recommendation relates to strengthening the information base about educational cooperation in the EAS region, improving data quality and sharing good practice about effective cooperation programs.

Recommendation 4 - The Education Task Force be asked to investigate options for: (a) developing comparable data bases to document international education cooperation activities in the region, including more detailed data on student flows; (b) strengthening evaluation of the impacts of cooperation activities and the factors associated with program effectiveness; and (c) disseminating good practice in educational cooperation throughout the region.

It needs to be recognised that to carry this agenda forward the ASEAN Secretariat and any Education Cooperation Taskforce would need substantial resources and realistic timelines.