Interview on Quality Education

Dr Choltis DHIRATHIHI
Executive Director
ASEAN University Network (AUN)
“The mission of ASEAN University Network, among many other programmes and projects, is to assist universities in the ASEAN region in upgrading and enhancing their quality standards. The AUN Quality Assurance Framework has been the main tool for this for over 20 years, but AUN is also assisting institutions to update their curriculum design, particularly in relation to the changing global context and the 4th Industrial Revolution. The “New-Generation” of students require particular ways of learning and a new mindset, so universities in the ASEAN region need to catch up with emerging trends of curriculum delivery.”

Dr Choltis DHIRATHIHI
Executive Director of the ASEAN University Network (AUN)
Partner of ARC6

Dr Choltis Dhirathiti is currently the Executive Director of the ASEAN University Network (AUN) Secretariat, an inter-governmental organization under the ASEAN Secretariat. He is also a Lecturer in Politics at the Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. Choltis has been teaching normative political theory at Chulalongkorn University since 1996. His academic research interests include history of Western political thought, philosophical idealism and political ethics. His public services to the public sector in Thailand involve thinking-skill trainings, citizenship policy and public sector strategies. Choltis has worked for ASEAN University Network (AUN) since 2009, where he employs his experience on public sector strategies, policy consultancy and human resource development to the work of regional and multilateral cooperation among universities in Southeast Asia.
What is the AUN mission on enhanced quality education in ASEAN?

The mission of ASEAN University Network, among many other programmes and projects, is to assist universities in the ASEAN region in upgrading and enhancing their quality standards. The AUN Quality Assurance Framework has been the main tool for this for over 20 years, moreover, AUN is also assisting institutions to update their curriculum design, particularly in relation to the changing global context and the 4th Industrial Revolution. The “New-Generation” of students require particular ways of learning and a new mindset, so universities in the ASEAN region need to catch up with emerging trends of curriculum delivery.

What is the state of education quality in ASEAN? According to AUN, what are the areas where ASEAN universities are outstanding, and what areas need to be further improved?

Quality Assurance in ASEAN has a long history, the first accreditation body was established in 1957 (PAASCU, the Philippines). At present, higher education quality standards are varying among ASEAN member states. Some are well developed such as Singapore, while others are still at the early stage of development such as CLM countries.

International comparative assessments done by OECD give insights in three categories (2016):

1) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)
2) Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)
3) Progress in International Readings Literacy Study (PIRLS)

According to the results Asian students performed well in the TIMSS and PIRLS, but are still behind students from Europe and Scandinavia in PISA ranking. However, students from Singapore have impressively swept the first rank in all the 3 categories. In overall performance, Singapore ranked the 2nd out of 144 countries with the strongest higher education and training systems to support economic competitiveness and growth. Except Singapore, which stands at the forefront of education, other ASEAN countries are required to improve particularly in the areas of reading, maths and science.

Universities in ASEAN, therefore, should focus on the improvement of the above subjects while strengthening the expertise of their own, either in research excellence or in other areas of expertise. Whatever the type of university is, the main mission to be accomplished by all is ‘quality’ education.

When we talk about the state of higher education quality in ASEAN, first we need to realize the main characteristics of higher education institution in the region that developed unevenly. We have so called “Top-of-the-League” or “World-Class University” in Singapore and mid-level quality institutions in ASEAN 6 such as Malaysia, Philippines, Brunei, Thailand, and Vietnam. Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar (CLM) are still catching up as a region, and they are evenly developed in the area of standard and quality.

What kind of projects does AUN manage to assist its member universities to become future-ready?

AUN has been undertaking strategies to assist member universities, addressing 3 main target groups: 1) policy body – university executive administration, 2) operational body – faculty members and academic administration and 3) students. The strategies are periodically updated in response to changes in global context and the development of higher education in the region.

The current AUN Strategic Work Plan 2017-2021 presented by the new AUN Executive Director comprises 5 areas of collaboration which aim to strengthen and enable the results and impacts to flourish in the widest area possible in Southeast Asia and beyond; 1) Curriculum Development and Innovative Learning Approaches 2) AUN-QA 3) Students’ Skill Enhancement Exposure and Experience 4) Research Collaboration 5) University Networking Platform.
How does the AUN Quality Assurance Network make universities more successful in providing relevant education for young adults?

The AUN Quality Assurance Network is de facto the quality assurance system and mechanism of ASEAN with a strong focus on developing quality assurance frameworks. It aims to improve the quality of education in Higher Education Institutions in the region. The AUN-QA model focuses on outcome-based education (OBE) as a way to address the stakeholders’ (employers’) needs. The outcome-based education is concerned with the achievements of the learner rather than the intentions of the teacher. The focus of OBE is on the results of learning, where the knowledge, skills and attitudes are formulated into the learning outcomes. The model is also taking into consideration the ‘input’ (academic and support staff, student quality and support, and facilities), the ‘quality enhancement’ (curriculum design and development, T&L, student assessment, quality of support services), and the ‘output’ (employability).

From the aforementioned statement, it is clear that the model is a complete process of quality assurance cycle that, if successfully implemented, would ensure the delivery of quality education and in turn would assist the university in producing high-quality graduates that address the market’s needs.

Why are interregional rectors’ conferences important, such as ARC?

ARC is a unique platform, and yet an important academic forum that promotes closer cooperation among higher education institutions between Asia and Europe. It provides them opportunities to discuss a number of mutually reinforcing developments and issues that connect the linkages of higher education. The policy recommendation to be presented at the ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting will possibly impact universities, students and stakeholders involved of the two continents.

What can Asian and European universities learn from each other?

Speaking of this year’s topic, “Future-ready Universities and Graduates: Quality Education Beyond the Horizon”, participating universities can enjoy the benefit of exchanging ideas, visions, good practices, and successful measures that being implemented in order to run future-ready universities and prepare graduates for the competitive labor market and life challenges.
The 6th edition of the ASEF Rectors’ Conference and Students’ Forum (ARC6) will address the topic of “Future Universities and Graduate: Quality Education Beyond the Horizon” and invites over 280 representatives from academia, governments, business and industry, students and youth associations as well as NGOs and IGOs.

The ARC6 consists of 2 programme elements: 1) a Students’ Forum 2) followed by a Rectors’ Conference. Close linkages between the Rectors’ and the Students’ is assured through a synergic exchange in which 4 Rectors’ attend the Students’ Forum as Mentors and 4 Students’ participate throughout the Rectors’ Conference.

Specifically, ARC6 aims to:
- Contribute to the policy dialogue on higher education in Asia and Europe and provide input to the agenda of ASEM Education Ministers
- Support the implementation of the SDGs
- Facilitate cooperation and long-term partnerships among universities across Asia and Europe
- Enable collaborations among student networks and associations
- Strengthen the linkages between universities, governments, business and industry, IOs and NGOs, and local communities

The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) promotes understanding, strengthens relationships and facilitates cooperation among the people, institutions and organisations of Asia and Europe.

Since 1997, ASEF has contributed as part of its rich thematic portfolio to education policy dialogue and capacity building, and facilitated youth networks. Run by ASEF’s Education Department (ASEFEdu), our projects strengthen collaborations between education institutions and exchanges among young people, academics and educators through interdisciplinary and pragmatic approaches. In doing so, we directly link these key players in education to the ASEM Education Process and ASEM Leaders’ Meetings. Find out more at www.ASEF.org

A premier university in Asia, the Singapore Management University (SMU) is internationally recognised for its world-class research and distinguished teaching. Established in 2000, SMU’s mission is to generate leading-edge research with global impact and produce broad-based, creative and entrepreneurial leaders for the knowledge-based economy. SMU education is known for its highly interactive, collaborative and project-based approach to learning, and for its technologically enabled pedagogy of seminar-style teaching in small class sizes.

Home to around 10,000 undergraduate, postgraduate, executive and professional, full and part-time students, SMU is comprised of six schools: School of Accountancy, Lee Kong Chian School of Business, School of Economics, School of Information Systems, School of Law, and School of Social Sciences. SMU offers a wide range of bachelors’, masters’ and PhD degree programmes in the disciplinary areas associated with the six schools, as well as in interdisciplinary combinations of these areas. Find out more at www.smu.edu.sg

In Partnership with

Supported by

A ASEF’s contribution is with the financial support of the European Union.