

COLLABORATION MODEL FOR ASEAN UNIVERSITY NETWORK: A CASE STUDY OF PHRANAKHON RAJABHAT UNIVERSITY AND NETWORKING UNIVERSITIES IN ASEAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract: One prominent strategy of the university network of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is to promote collaboration between the ASEAN universities. Although there are Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) among Asian Universities, the number of collaborative actions are considered extremely low. More than 10 years, PNRU implement on collaboration policy with other ASEAN's universities. The processes and obstructions of the collaboration between universities in ASEAN were studied by the researcher. This study showed present situation of PNRU and other ASEAN's universities collaboration. Therefore, the collaboration model between universities in ASEAN was established. The findings revealed that PNRU pursued collaborative activities covering only student and personnel exchange programs. The collaboration obstacles were: 1) policies and goals, 2) implementation plans, 3) university bureaucracy, and 4) language proficiency. A model for university collaboration comprised collaboration processes and principles. A collaboration model for the ASEAN university network involves clear goals, financial and resource support, implementation planning, and raising awareness of participants for collaboration.

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Introduction

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is composed of ten country members in Southeast Asia, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia. At the 21st ASEAN Summit, held November 21, 2012, in Phnom Penh, these member countries reached an agreement of launching the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) on December 31, 2015. The opening of the AEC was of benefit to the ASEAN member countries in several ways, including political, economic, social, educational, and cultural.

The Office of Higher Education Commission of Thailand (OHEC) supports Thai universities in establishing frameworks for collaboration between Thai universities and universities in other ASEAN countries. The frameworks need to include details of plans, projects, and activities that encourage the faculties, staff members, and students to acquire language skills and knowledge about ASEAN, so that they are prepared for the launch of the AEC. The OHEC also supports Thai universities developing frameworks for collaboration between ASEAN and non-ASEAN countries.

The Phranakhon Rajabhat University (PNRU) annual report of 2012 announced significant guidelines for membership of AEC, as follows: "The University should seek academic collaboration with universities in ASEAN countries so as to develop students and to share expertise among them." The PNRU has a policy on collaborative framework establishment to exchange expertise and experience with foreign universities. The university has signed MOUs with several other universities in ASEAN countries and conducted personnel and student exchange programs with many universities, such as, the Udayana University, the National University of Civil Engineering, University of Malaya, Vietnam National University, and Can Tho University.

The results of implementing the collaborative frameworks among these universities show that the faculties and college of PNRU are concerned about mutual benefit. However, some difficulties

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relating to this implementation have results from discontinuity in the coordination between universities.

Therefore, to increase the effectiveness of collaboration between the university networks, this study will establish a university collaborative model to support the strategies of the ASEAN University Network.

Collaboration Governance

Paauwe and Boselie (2003) viewed organization as institutional. Commonly, the organizational practices that include rule, regulation, and structure are influenced by their environment constraint. To retain their legitimate organizational existence, the universities need to emulate each other in representations and be acknowledged for their core value (Beckert, 2010). Organizational survival is generally known as the “isomorphism” concept (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In considering a university as an institution, it requires a similarity in action and management to others to retain legitimacy.

Since resources are crucial for organizational survival, Hillman, Withers, and Collins (2009) offered a plausible option, which was a form of joint venture with others, i.e., an inter-organizational relationship, with the belief of minimizing an environment of dependence.

The trend of collaborative building among universities is not only a reflection of the norm in accordance with an ideal university image, but also a window of an external resource and opportunity to support the individual university’s activities.

Vangen and Huxham (2012) argued that collaborative governance is a notion of co-ordination across organizational boundaries and with institutions that share the same goal, but to achieve this, they needed to only use their own resources. Based on reciprocity, O’Leary and Bingham (2007) viewed collaborative governance as a notion of co-operation and co-labor to achieve common goals.

Ansell and Gash (2008) proposed a well-known collaborative governance model, which consisted of four significant elements. The first element was the starting condition, which covers a wide range of issues, including balance of power and knowledge, incentives and conditions to participate, previous issues on collaborative, and conflict. The second element was the collaboration, which is composed of trust building, face-to-face dialogue that results in commitment, and sharing the understanding of the goal, value, and operations. The third element was an institutional design that induces participation, form clear ground rules, and transparency. The fourth element was having a facilitative leader.

Research Methodology

The scope of this study involved universities of Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia, which had each signed a MOU with the Phranakhon Rajabhat University (PNRU), Thailand, more than ten-year period, 2005 to 2015. The study subjects were two groups of university personnel, with Group 1: 15 administrators in charge of foreign affairs of all five PNRU faculties and three PNRU administrators; and Group 2: 15 administrators from all five universities in the sample group and three from each university. The study covered four main aspects, namely student development, teacher development, curriculum and instructional development, and research collaboration.

Table 1: The features of the sample universities			
University	Country	MOU Signed	Respondents
1. Phranakhon Rajabhat University (PNRU)	Thailand	-	18
2. Vietnam National University of Social Sciences and Humanities (VNU)	Vietnam	2007	3
3. National University of Civil Engineering (NUCE)	Vietnam	2012	3
4. Can Tho University	Vietnam	2012	3
5. University of Malaya	Malaysia	2010	3

6. Udayana University	Indonesia	2005	3
Total			33
Source: Author			

This research employed three research instruments: Focus group interviews, to investigate the opinions and policies on inter-university collaboration; observation forms; and a documentary study to assess the MOUs.

The research team gathered data in three ways: 1) collecting data from related documents of the participating universities, so as to determine the framework, objectives, and interview questions; 2) organizing a workshop to identify activities, problems, obstacles, and outcomes of the collaboration; and 3) conducting a workshop to formulate a preliminary draft of a framework for collaboration between PNRU and networking universities in the ASEAN countries and then, verify and improve the framework for collaboration

Collaboration Activities Outcomes

The initial MOUs were signed by the PNRU faculties and their counterparts, by consent of PNRU and agreed to by the counterpart universities for reasons of benefits and good relationships. However, the collaboration and resource management were mostly initiated by the PNRU faculties. The framework for collaboration between each PNRU faculty and its counterpart covered these four components: 1) student exchange programs, 2) personnel exchange programs, 3) curriculum management collaboration, and 4) research collaboration.

Collaboration Activities

The findings reveal that PNRU pursued a few collaborative activities. Most of the faculties, at best, maintained good relationships with their counterparts. None of the PNRU faculties nor the College of Teacher Education covered all four components stated in the MOUs. They covered only two, namely, the student exchange programs and the personnel exchange programs. In other words, they did not conduct curriculum management collaboration and research collaboration. However, the College of Teacher Education and the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of PNRU implemented the MOUs with their counterparts in a wider area than other faculties. The College of Teacher Education managed to conduct collaboration activities with Can Tho University, Vietnam with which PNRU had signed their last MOU. Both parties continuously exchanged students and personnel. Noticeably, in this case, the PNRU administrators played a significant role in encouraging collaboration. Likewise, the administrators of Can Tho University responsively supported all activities. Meanwhile, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, PNRU, in coordination with the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam, conducted student and personnel exchange programs.

Collaboration Obstacles

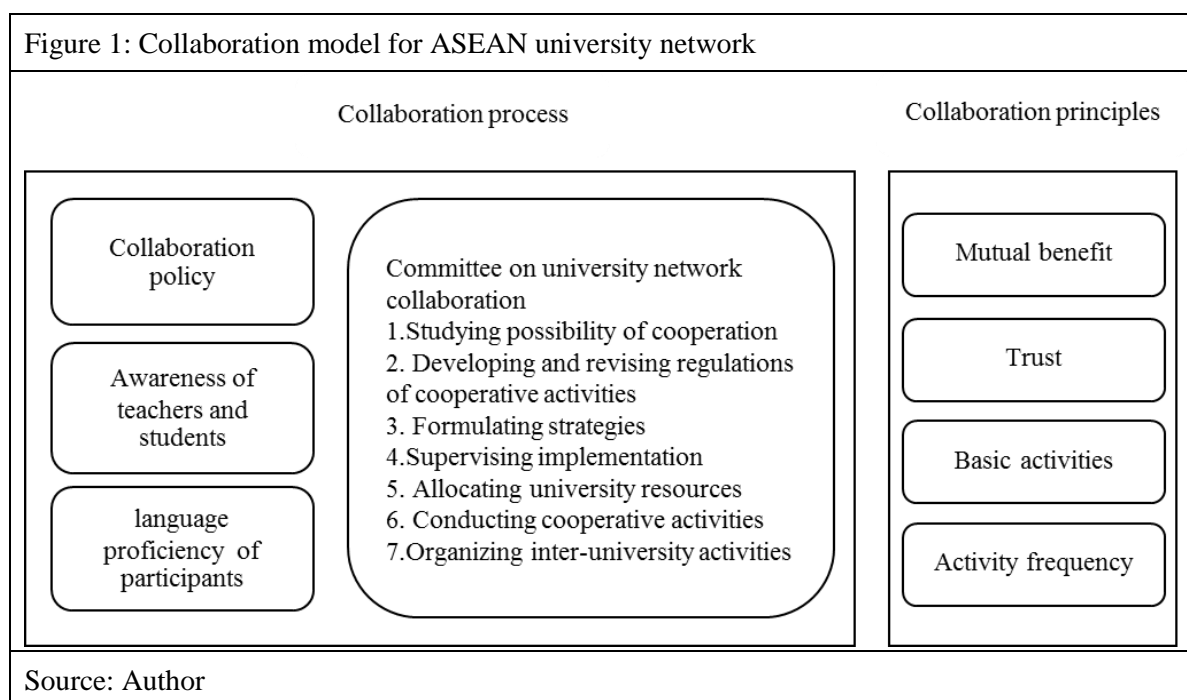
Obstacles for collaboration between PNRU and Universities in the ASEAN Countries were found as follows:

1. Clear policies and goals. The university and faculties had no clear policies and goals. Their collaboration lay on flimsy ground, despite each party having established a policy of collaboration with other universities in the ASEAN countries. The weaknesses and obstacles were identified as follows:
 - a. First, the universities had improperly selected their counterparts. In other words, they did not carefully consider the tangible benefits gained.
 - b. Second, in the early phase of their collaboration, the universities did not have adequate information and experience.
 - c. Third, signing MOUs often started from a personal connection. This led to difficulties in determining clear policies and goals.

2. Concrete implementation plan. The study revealed that every PNRU faculty, as well as the college, had no comprehensive implementation plan or activity schedules. Hence, collaboration activities were intermittently held only when convenient.
3. University bureaucracy. The university bureaucracy hindered the collaboration. For instance, many problems arose in travel expense reimbursements for personnel of the faculties and students due to lack of official rules and regulations. Another problem was that curriculum and scholarship schemes had to be taken into account in planning the student exchange programs.
4. Language proficiency. The foreign language proficiency of students and personnel was limited. Students and teachers felt they could not effectively communicate in the foreign languages, especially English, and thus were unconcerned with joining exchange programs and subsequently, became ineligible to apply for scholarships.

Collaboration Model for ASEAN University Network

The PNRU faculties developed the collaboration framework under the MOUs to yield great benefits. However, certain problems caused discontinuities in their collaboration. So far, only personnel and student exchange programs have been organized. The collaboration has not, as yet, covered curriculum development or research collaboration. This research finding has developed a collaboration framework that involves principles of a systematic approach, efficiency, mutual benefit, resource integration, and sustainability, as presented (Figure 1).



Collaboration Process

At the beginning, the university need to develop and declare a clear framework for collaboration with universities in the ASEAN countries. Moreover, goals and strategic plans should be established. The collaboration requires financial and resource support and effective implementation from all parties. Furthermore, a clearly stated policy about the university's purpose and vision could help boost confidence among the personnel at all levels.

Subsequently, an awareness of the importance of the collaboration should be raised among the persons concerned. Teachers and students should be equipped with foreign language skills. It is worth mentioning, that language is an indispensable tool for collaborative activities. Those who can communicate effectively can help achieve the goals of collaboration. Moreover, the teachers and students need to realize that collaboration is a way of advancing individuals and the universities.

Collaboration Principle

The collaboration principles for sustainability and continuity comprise the following elements:

1. **Mutual benefit.** In general, MOUs arise from a willingness. Therefore, both parties are willing to collaborate as long as they reap mutual benefit on an equal footing. Furthermore, both parties should not take advantage of each other where one has less or more educational resources, such as, budgets and facilities, than the other. That is to say, the amount of payment is not as important as the principle of being fair and sharing mutual benefit.
2. **Trust.** Trust is a fundamental element of collaboration. The implication of the initial collaboration framework suggests that trust is important for collaborative development. Numerous opportunities arise more often from trust than from official correspondence. The more both parties keep the commitment, the more trust they will gain from each other. Therefore, the faculties and universities must be supportive and adhere to the MOUs.
3. **Basic activities.** Under the MOUs, several collaborative activities are organized. In the early phase, both parties should learn how to work collaboratively, along with understanding the organizational cultures and work practices of each other. Therefore, they should begin with one or two simple projects with clearly defined objectives, procedures, and time frames. This would be more practical than to begin with several complicated ones.
4. **Activity frequency.** Sustainable collaboration involves frequent formal and informal activities, which the two parties help organize. The study showed that pairs of universities that regularly visit each other tend to progress in their collaboration, and informal communication helped increase the frequency of activities. In this regard, collaborative activities can be conducted through formal and informal communications.

Conclusion

In summary, the collaboration model for the ASEAN university network relies on collaborative processes and principles. To successfully implement activities, as stated in the MOUs, the universities should establish clear goals and raise the awareness of teachers and students about collaboration. Developing a committee that includes representatives from the participating universities to conduct and define will help implement action plans according to the MOUs. Moreover, the committee should hold regular meetings for establishing trust and groups of teachers and students should be equipped with language skills before participating in activities under the MOUs.

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