Chapter 1
Open, Distance and eLearning for ASEAN Integration

Alexander G. Flor
University of the Philippines, Philippines

ABSTRACT

The implications of integration among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations go beyond economics. Several ASEAN countries rank human capital as among their most valuable assets. This event signals shifts in human resource movements. A regional education system transcending national boundaries is an eventuality within the ASEAN. Such a system can best be expedited through open, distance and eLearning or ODeLA scoping study was conducted to: provide describe the state of play of ODeL within and among ASEAN countries; to identify needful national or regional ODeL policies that may facilitate ASEAN Integration; and to identify efforts that are underway within and among ASEAN that is consistent with ODeL adoption. The scoping study was guided by the current discourse on: the mainstreaming of ODeL; the focus on higher education; and the education dimension of ASEAN Integration. It adopted an integrated multi-level mixed methods design making use of quantitative methods, qualitative procedures and anticipatory methods, the latter two as aids to internal validity and depth of analysis. The study found that within ASEAN nations, open, distance and eLearning is being mainstreamed into higher education and will become a major mode of delivery in open universities as well as residential institutions in the future. It also found that perceptions on ODeL are quite positive across ASEAN and that there is a significant demand for ODeL programs at the higher education level. Furthermore, it was perceived that ODeL can promote ASEAN Integration because it fosters understanding among its multinational students who may eventually become the leaders of ASEAN tomorrow. The scoping study maintains that quality in ODeL is a function of content, delivery, pedagogy and assessment as seen from the lens of open education, distance learning and ICTs. Quality in ASEAN ODeL implies content infused with ASEANization themes, i.e. identity, community and a sense of self. It means a diversity of delivery platforms and pedagogies and supports the availability of multiple outcome-based assessment models.

INTRODUCTION

We call on Governments to recognize the important contribution of Online, Open and Flexible systems to meet the challenge of scale and quality in the provision of Higher Education and Lifelong Learning for the period 2015-2030. (The Paris Message - UNESCO, June 2015)

When the clock struck midnight on the last day of the last month of 2015, the integration of the ten Association of Southeast Asian Nations into one economic community commenced. The implications and ramifications of this development go beyond economics. Several ASEAN countries rank human capital as among their most valuable assets. Thus, this event signal shifts in human resource movements. How then can education, in general, and higher education, in particular, maximize the benefits and minimize the consequences of these shifts? What anticipatory moves should be done by ASEAN to ensure mutual benefits and synergies among their educational systems?

Some education observers are of the opinion that a regional education system transcending national boundaries is an eventuality within the ASEAN (Beerkens, 2004; Sirat et al., 2014). Such a system can best be expedited through open, distance and eLearning or ODeL[1]. More so when done within the context of a global information society and most especially within an integrated community of nations where economic barriers are being liberalized. Open, distance and eLearning or, more broadly, open and distance learning (ODL) is an educational mode employing a range of educational systems, strategies and approaches that reflect the convergence of open education philosophies and distance learning practice. As in the case of traditional distance education, the teaching learning situation is conducted with the learner and the teacher physically separated in space. However, the use of electronic/digital media, specifically, the Internet is highlighted (ICDE, 2010). Additionally, ODeL subscribes to non-restrictive, inclusive educational strategies such as open access, open admissions, open-ended educational timeframes, open educational resources, participatory assessment and others. Hence, a regional education system employing ODeL presents itself as among the feasible options for ASEAN Integration.

Prior to the regional adoption of this educational mode, a dialogue must first ensue between and among ASEAN nations to determine how ODeL can be tapped to promote regional integration. To this end, the UNESCO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific with support from the ASEAN Cyber University (ACU)has proposed a policy-level dialogue among ASEAN education stakeholders to promote cross-border provision and recognition of ODeL-based higher education. The dialogue will be built upon a comprehensive review of challenges, lessons learned and promising practices of ODeL in the ASEAN region and beyond.

Rationale

Before initiating a regional dialogue, however, a scoping study will have to be conducted for direction-setting purposes. A scoping study can provide a more accurate picture of the state of play of ODeL within and among ASEAN countries. Furthermore, it can identify needful national or regional ODeL policies that may facilitate ASEAN Integration. Additionally, it can also describe efforts that are underway within and among ASEAN that is consistent with ODeL adoption.

The findings of the scoping study may inform the regional policy-level dialogue on ODeL initiated by UNESCO and ACU. Moreover, it would result in a research framework and research agenda for more comprehensive follow-up studies.

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