

## Chapter 13

# Higher Education in Peril: Challenges to Southeast Asian Academics

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### ABSTRACT

*Higher education institutions are the strategic assets that enable a country to hold a strong competitive advantage in the modern technological era. Higher education system has dramatically changed due to the paradigm shifts brought by the twenty first century trends. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has also changed the higher education system around the world. Due to such shifts, new performance standards have been created, and the higher education institutions across the globe including Southeast Asian region are facing different challenges. To explore these challenges a non-systematic narrative review of existing literature was carried out, which helped in examining the role of higher education in the modern era. Moreover, it also helped in presenting an overview of higher education system in the Southeast Asian countries by discussing the challenges experienced by it. Finally, this chapter has explored the options available for supporting the continual development of the higher education in the Southeastern Asia.*

### HIGHER EDUCATION IN MODERN TIMES

Higher education is the “innovative backbone” of any country’s prosperity (Markovits, 2017). Higher Education System allows a country to hold a strong competitive advantage in the modern technological era (Aleksejeva, 2016). It also diversifies the learning prospects, stimulate innovation, and enhance the employment opportunities (Zhong et al., 2019). Higher education acts as strategic assets as by fulfilling the human resources and technological requirements of the different sectors of economy (Khan & Yusoff, 2014). Therefore, if any country wants to flourish, then it must strengthen its Higher Education System.

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In earlier times the universities enjoyed freedom in performing their routine academic activities (Winefield et al., 2003), however things have now changed and universities have experienced a paradigm shift because of the modern trends of twenty first century (Belitski et al., 2019). Due to such shift new performance standards have been created for the universities, which are more quality and innovation focused (Mouritzen & Opstrup, 2020b). The new performance standards have replaced the conventional teaching styles (Mouritzen & Opstrup, 2020a). Due to the new standards the workload and pressure have increased and teachers are now performing both teaching and research related activities that has created a stressful environment inside universities (Daumiller & Dresel, 2020). This means that university teachers need to be more resilient and should possess self-efficacy so that they can work successfully in the ever-changing stressful environment of modern universities (Fathi & Saeedian, 2020).

The modern universities are also expected to survive on self-sustainable basis by not only generating resources for themselves but also contribute towards the socio-economic development of a country (Berchin et al., 2020). The sustainable universities are needed because the natural resources are depleting at a very fast rate, which suggest that institutions of higher-level learning should engage in applied research and tackle the problems related to sustainable development (Leal Filho, 2020). However, the modern universities are facing problems related to budget allocation, unavailability of relevant scientists or experts, legal constraints and in accessibility to latest technologies. All these problems act as a barricade by hindering the performance of universities towards ensuring sustainable development in any particular area (Moraes Silva et al., 2020).

## **HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES**

Southeastern Asia is one of the sub regions of Asia, which is one of the most fast growing regions of the world (Basri & Hill, 2020). Southeastern Asia is the education hub with more than 7000 Higher Education Institutions (Jarvis & Mok, 2019). This region has unique setup for its higher education with world top ranking universities in wealthy countries like Singapore and Malaysia to average universities in relatively not rich countries like Thailand and Indonesia (Guzman, 2019). Such variety has made the Southeastern Asian universities unique one by allowing it to contribute towards Sustainable Socioeconomic Development. Moreover, the Southeastern Asian region is developing gradually through the different trade and investments. This region has also witnessed increased mobility of people, particularly, tourists and businesspersons. Such context has placed the local universities at important position in the development of human resources that will lead to the creation of knowledge-based societies in this region (Leibo, 2019). However, due to the current wave of COVID-19 pandemic both business and tourism related activities are badly affected and it is likely to affect the overall socioeconomic development of the region (Abiad et al., 2020).

The Higher Education Institutions in Southeastern Asian region need to adapt to changes brought by COVID-19 pandemic, especially, they need to develop an online education system for meeting the educational requirements (Arumugam, 2020). However, the online education system mostly depends on the availability of information technology. Such limitation may impede the efficacy of online education system (Ractham & Chen, 2019). Southeastern Asian region should work on developing an effective online education system. This could be a challenge because there are more students and less resources, especially availability of technology (Gaol & Hutagalung, 2020).

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