

Attitude, Challenges and Aspiration for the Asean Community 2015 and Beyond: Comparative Public Opinion in Malaysia and Thailand

Guido Benny

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, School of History, Politics and Strategy,
National University of Malaysia, 43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

Abstract: The study investigates attitude, perception, preparedness and aspiration towards the ASEAN Community among Gen Y public in Malaysia and Thailand. It uses opinion survey method in soliciting information from 734 Gen Y respondents 374 in Kuala Lumpur and 360 in Bangkok between July and November 2015. The study showed that Gen Y in Malaysia and Thailand contended that of the ASEAN Community and its three pillars as highly relevant and beneficial for them individually and their country. Consequently, they exhibited great support for regional integration. Secondly, it reveals that Gen Y possesses strong sense of regional identities but they also exhibited strong nationalism sentiments. Thirdly, they perceived lack of proper understanding and preparation among people for regional integration, unequal education opportunities and institutional weaknesses and lack of political will in executing regional integration policies as the top three challenges for the establishment of ASEAN Community. Finally, majority respondents claimed to be prepared for the ASEAN Community. In addition, they aspired for stronger regional integration as in European Union but with some uniquely Southeast Asian characteristics.

Key words: ASEAN Community, opinion survey, Gen Y, attitude, identities

INTRODUCTION

Emulating the initial success of European regionalism, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has set its objective to forge further regional integration among member countries and embarked upon the ambitious project of creating the ASEAN Community to be established effectively at the end of 2015. However, in contrast to European regionalism, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is characterized by its elitist and state-centric and lacked public involvement in its formation (Acharya, 2003). Thus, there is a huge gap between the public and the elite in terms of decision making and the formation of ASEAN Community.

This study is intended to bridge the gap by examining public opinion in Malaysia and Thailand regarding regional cooperation and the formation of ASEAN Community. The ASEAN leaders have set the date for implementing the ASEAN Community by the end of 2015. As the time goes nearby, there is an urgent need to know the opinion of the public regarding national and regional identities, support and perceived challenges for the regional integration at the time of and beyond its implementation.

Theories of regional integration have shown that opinions and participation among the public would determine the success of such efforts (Benny *et al.*, 2014, Benny, 2015; Abdullah and Benny, 2013; Moorthy and

Benny, 2012a, b, 2013; Collins, 2008; Lindberg and Scheingold, 1970; Hewstone, 2011). However, there is no comprehensive measurement on the support, opinions, or consensus of the public on the creation of the ASEAN Community. There is also an absence of studies that have attempted to capture the voices of the public on an ASEAN Community. This is not to mention the absence of studies about public aspiration on the forms of each of the three pillars of ASEAN Community in 2015 namely the political security community, economic community and socio-cultural community.

This research investigated attitudes, perception, preparedness and aspiration of Gen Y in Malaysia and Thailand towards the ASEAN Community. More specifically, the research examined in detail aspects of perceived relevancy, perceived benefit, perceived impacts of the ASEAN Community in the near future and support for the ASEAN Community; sense of regional identities, nationalism sentiments and perceived challenges for the ASEAN Community and preparedness and aspiration for the ASEAN Community.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In achieving those objectives, the research employed quantitative opinion survey method in finding information from respondents in these target countries. Before each survey, the UKM research team made some

visits to our counterparts in Bangkok at Thamassat University, Chulalongkorn University and the University of Thai Chambers of Commerce for a few series of discussions.

The study includes eight variables and uses forty-two indicators to achieve its objectives. The first variable perceived relevancy was measured using three 6-scale Likert indicators adapted from the model of Guido and Abdullah (2011). The second variable perceived benefit was measured using seven 6-scale Likert indicators adapted from the model of Benny *et al.* (2015a, b). The third variable support for the ASEAN Community was measured using 3-6 scale Likert indicators adapted from the model of Abdullah and Benny (2011). The fourth variable regional identity sentiment was measured using two 6-scale Likert indicators adapted from the indicators of the 2013 Eurobarometer surveys (European Commission, 2013a, b) conducted by the TNS opinion and social at the request of the European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication. The fifth variable nationalism sentiment was measured using 5-6-scale Likert indicators adapted from the model of Benny *et al.* (2015a, b). The sixth variable challenges for the ASEAN Community was measured using 9-6-scale Likert indicators adapted from the model of Moorthy and Benny (2012b). The seventh variable preparedness for ASEAN Community was measured using four 6-scale Likert indicators developed from a few series of Focus Group Discussion conducted at the National University of Malaysia, Northern Malaysia University and Thammasat University. Finally, the eighth variable aspiration for the future of ASEAN Community was measured using nine 6-scale Likert indicators adapted from the model of Benny *et al.* (2015a, b).

To collect survey respondents, enumerators directly met respondents in public spaces in university's campuses (such as cafeterias, libraries or university corridors) and asked them to fill in the self-administered questionnaire. In each country, the respondents are separated to two groups of 180 respondents each. In each group, the purposive quota sampling design was determined to include: Gender (male and female 50%) and Professional education or working background (the graduate programme that a working youth enrolled is assumed to indicate his/her working background business, banking and economics (30%); social science, humanities and law (30%); engineering, technology and science (30%); others literature, education, etc. (10%).

Data acquired from the survey were analysed by statistical techniques. Firstly, univariate statistics are generated for each indicator. Secondly, statistical procedures and tests for comparing means of data from both countries are applied. The study used the univariate statistics procedures to obtain the descriptive statistical

profile of the variables. Whenever relevant, univariate data were analyzed by using the univariate analysis methods such as frequency distribution, percentage, mode, median and mean. To ease the analysis, the frequency distributions of 6-scale responses were regrouped into two response-categories. In this sense, those who disagree to the statement were combined with those who completely disagree and somewhat disagree. Additionally, those who agree to the statement were combined with those who completely agree and somewhat agree.

Finally, the study compared the responses from the two countries. For this purpose, the study used Independent Sample T Comparative Test to compare group for significant difference for each data distribution in each indicators of the study.

The survey drew samples in capital cities (Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia and Bangkok in Thailand) in between July and November 2015. The respondents involved consists of the Gen Y who attend the universities in leading public universities in each city, since it was logistically impossible (given time and resource constraints) to extend the sample to include the general public. The survey involved a total of 734 respondents, consisting of 374 respondents in Malaysia and 360 respondents in Thailand. The respondents can be described as follows:

- Gender. balanced between male (49: 48% Malaysia; 49% Thailand) and female (51: 52% Malaysia; 51 Thailand)
- Age of respondents, the study divides respondents into two groups 18-25 and 26-30. Those between 18 and 25 years old form the majority of respondents in the two countries (75% in general: 71% Malaysia and 79% Thailand)
- Formal education. In Malaysia, 51% respondents are Bachelor student, 44% Master, 3% PhD and 2% diploma. In Thailand, 49% are bachelor, 50% master, 1% PhD and 1% diploma
- Occupational background, half of respondents are students, followed by those working in public sector (28%), private sector employees (10%), self-employed (8%) and other occupation (4%)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Relevancy, benefits and support for asean community:

The study assume that it is important to know of whether the respondents think that ASEAN Community as relevant as well as beneficial for them. In addition, it is

also important to know the level of support among the public for the ASEAN Community and its three pillars. Perceived relevancy measures the importance of APSC, AEC and ASCC to the respondent individually as well as to their country and its people.

Relevance of ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC): Majority respondents (61% in general, 56% Malaysia and 66% Thailand) stated that APSC is important for them individually. A larger majority (73% in general, 72% Malaysia and 74% Thailand) agreed that APSC is important for their country and its people. Independent Sample T Test, the study found that perceived relevancy in Thailand is significantly higher than that in Malaysia both for individual (Malaysia Mean 3.56; Thailand 75) or for the country context (Malaysia Mean 3.86; Thailand 4.04).

Relevance of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC): Nearly three quarters respondents (75% in general, 70% in Malaysia and 81% in Thailand) stated that AEC is important for them individually. A larger majority (83% in general, 85% in Malaysia and 81% in Thailand) agreed that AEC is important for their country and its people. Independent sample t-test, the study found that perceived relevancy in Thailand is significantly higher than that in Malaysia for individual (Malaysia Mean 3.96; Thailand 4.23) but there is no significant difference for the country context (Malaysia Mean 4.37; Thailand 4.45).

Relevance of ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC): Majority respondents (60% in general, 56% in Malaysia and 64% in Thailand) stated that ASCC is important for them individually. A larger majority (71% in general, 68% in Malaysia and 74% in Thailand) agreed that ASCC is important for their country and people. Independent Sample t-test, the study found that perceived relevancy in Thailand is significantly higher than that in Malaysia both for individual (Malaysia Mean 3.54; Thailand 3.79) or for the country context (Malaysia Mean 3.79; Thailand 4.07).

Perceived benefits Firstly, when asked whether they perceived that the ASEAN Community (in this case, the AEC) brings a positive development for the economies of ASEAN countries, most of respondents (87% in two countries: 91% in Malaysia and 83% in Thailand) tended to agree to the statement. The study also revealed that, tested by independent sample t-test, the perception of benefit in Malaysia (mean = 4.52) is significantly higher than that in Thailand (mean = 4.32). Further, most of the respondents tended to agree that the benefits of the AEC include.

Promote ASEAN as a more compelling investment destination: The 88% in average: 92% in Malaysia and 83% in Thailand no significant difference in both countries (mean in Malaysia = 4.55; Thailand = 4.45).

Enhancing the customer base through cross-border sales: The 87% in average: 90% in Malaysia and 84% in Thailand) no significant difference in both countries (mean in Malaysia = 4.44; Thailand = 4.34).

Contributing to the higher economic growth in their country: The 84% in average; 90% in Malaysia; 78% in Thailand perceived benefits is significantly higher in Malaysia (mean = 4.51) than that Thailand (mean = 4.27).

Facilitating stronger business entities: In their country: 82% in average: 89% in Malaysia and 75% in Thailand perceived benefits is significantly higher in Malaysia (mean = 4.47) than that in Thailand (mean = 4.15).

Creating more jobs in their country: The 79% in average; 88% in Malaysia; 70% in Thailand-perceived benefits is significantly higher in Malaysia (mean = 4.47) than Thailand (mean = 4.03).

Encouraging more pan-ASEAN thinking solution on common issues: Such as ageing population, financial inclusion, consumer protection: 79% in average: 88% in Malaysia and 69% in Thailand perceived benefits is significantly higher in Malaysia (mean = 4.42) than that in Thailand (mean = 3.90).

Narrowing development gap in ASEAN (74% in average, 85% in Malaysia and 63% in Thailand) perceived benefits is significantly higher in Malaysia (mean = 4.42) than that in Thailand (mean = 3.81). Besides economic benefit, the study also found that the respondents perceived ASEAN Community (in this case the APSC) will provide more security and peace to Southeast Asia (71% in both country: 72% in Malaysia and 71% in Thailand). Tested using Independent Sample T-Test, the study found no significant difference between perception in both countries (mean in Malaysia = 3.92; Thailand = 3.97).

Support for the asean community. The study found that the support for APSC, AEC and ASCC is very high:

Support for the APSC: Three-quarters of respondents in both countries (75% agree; mean = 4.08) support. There is no significant difference in both countries (Malaysia, 75% agree; mean = 4.01; Thailand 75% agree; mean 4.16).

Support for the AEC: The 82% respondents in both countries (mean = 4.40) support. The test showed

that support in Malaysia (89% respondents agree; mean = 4.53) is significantly higher than in Thailand (74% agree; mean = 4.26).

Support for the ASCC: Nearly three-quarter respondents in both countries (73% agree; mean = 3.97) support. There is no significant difference in both countries (Malaysia, 73% agree; mean = 3.89; Thailand, 73% agree; mean = 4.04). In conclusion, majority of Gen Y in Malaysia and Thailand viewed the ASEAN Community and its three pillars as highly relevant and beneficial for them individually and their country. Consequently, they exhibited great support for ASEAN integration and its three pillars. The study indicates government roles in socializing the idea of ASEAN Community had influenced the high level of perceived relevancy, perceived benefits and support for ASEAN Community. During fieldwork, we observed how Thailand government had worked using massive campaign for introducing the idea of ASEAN Community to its public and, in fact, has played several roles in preparing its people. Malaysian government also has intensively introducing the idea of ASEAN Community as well as playing a role as the chair of ASEAN in the time of its declaration as effectively established in 2015.

Identities: regional versus nationalism: This study assumes that the opinion of Gen Y regarding regional identity and nationalism sentiments need to be examined because they may influence the attitudes towards ASEAN Community. Regional identity sentiment. This study argues that it is important to know the extent of how the public identify themselves with the region as it may indicate the acceptance among the public on the concept of regional integration. In specific, this variable reflects the extent of how the public identify themselves with the region as it may indicate the acceptance among the public on the concept of regional integration. It examines the sense of identification with ASEAN by using two indicators: self-identification as an ASEAN citizen and pride as an ASEAN citizen. The study found that:

Self-Identification as ASEAN Citizen: About <3-quarters of respondents in both countries (76% agree; mean = 4.21) agreed that they consider themselves as ASEAN citizen. Comparative test showed that the respondents in Malaysia (77% agree; mean = 4.23) showed no significantly different regional identity sense with those in Thailand (76% agree; mean = 4.18).

Proud to be ASEAN Citizen: A great majority in both countries (79% agree; mean = 4.20) tended to agree that

they are always proud to be ASEAN citizens. Comparative test showed that the respondents in Malaysia (82% agree; mean = 4.33) showed significantly higher sense of regional identity than those in Thailand (76% agree; mean = 4.06). Nationalism sentiment may influence attitudes on regional integration. Most studies under the social identity approach argue that national identity may go against regional integration and contend that individuals who have strong attachments to their national identity might perceive the unification of member states as a threat to national identity because it blurs the distinctions between national communities (Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Christin and Trechsel, 2002; McLaren, 2007; Shore, 1993; Smith, 1992). Furthermore, a study by Benny *et al.* (2015a, b) conducted in 2010 demonstrates the significant influence of nationalist sentiments on the attitude to prioritise ASEAN Economic Community and its three pillars.

National identity should be more important than regional identity: About >3-quarters respondents in both countries (79%; mean = 4.40) agreed. Comparative test showed that Malaysian respondents (85%; mean = 4.66) are significantly agreeable than those in Thailand (74%; mean = 4.13).

Cultural values of our country are better than those in other ASEAN member states: More than three-quarters respondents in both countries (76%; mean = 4.26) agreed to the statement. Comparative test showed that the agreement among respondents in Malaysia (84%; mean = 4.58) are significantly higher than those in Thailand (69%; mean = 3.94).

Government should try its best not to purchase goods and services from foreign companies/countries: Majority of respondents in both countries (58%; mean = 3.63) agreed. Comparative test showed that the agreement in Malaysia (71%; mean = 4.18) are significantly higher than those in Thailand (45%; mean = 3.07).

Government should protect domestic industries by creating trade barriers for foreign products: About two-thirds respondents in both countries (67%; mean = 3.97) agreed. Comparative test showed that the agreement in Malaysia (78%; mean = 4.36) are significantly higher than those in Thailand (56%; mean = 3.56).

Government should try to control the involvement of foreign business in every sector of our economy: About 71% respondents in both countries (mean = 4.04) agreed. Comparative test showed that agreement among respondents in Malaysia (86%; mean = 4.52) are

Table 1: Ranks of perceived challenges in each country

| Two countries (n = 734) | | Malaysia (n = 374) | | Thailand (n = 360) | |
|--|------|--|------|--|------|
| Perceived challenges | Mean | Perceived challenges | Mean | Perceived challenges | Mean |
| Lack of proper understanding and preparation among people for regional economic integration | 4.54 | Socioeconomic disparity amongst ASEAN member countries | 4.71 | Lack of proper understanding and preparation among people for regional economic integration | 4.52 |
| Unequal educational opportunities in ASEAN | 4.54 | Differences in legal and political systems amongst ASEAN member countries | 4.65 | Unequal educational opportunities in ASEAN | 4.49 |
| Institutional weaknesses and lack of political will in executing policies in relation to ASEAN integration | 4.48 | Unequal educational opportunities in ASEAN | 4.58 | Institutional weaknesses and lack of political will in executing policies in relation to ASEAN integration | 4.43 |
| Differences in legal and political systems amongst ASEAN member countries | 4.44 | Lack of proper understanding and preparation among people for regional economic integration | 4.57 | Differences in legal and political systems amongst ASEAN member countries | 4.21 |
| Socioeconomic disparity amongst ASEAN member countries | 4.33 | Institutional weaknesses and lack of political will in executing policies in relation to ASEAN integration | 4.52 | Lack of innovation culture in science and technology in most ASEAN member countries | 4.15 |
| Lack of innovation culture in science and technology in most ASEAN member | 4.33 | Lack of innovation culture in science and technology in most ASEAN member countries | 4.50 | Low education quality in the majority of ASEAN member states | 4.11 |
| Insufficient funds for implementing development plans in ASEAN countries | 4.30 | Insufficient funds for implementing development plans in ASEAN countries | 4.50 | Insufficient funds for implementing development plans in ASEAN countries | 4.09 |
| Low education quality in the majority of ASEAN member states | 4.29 | Low education quality in the majority of ASEAN member states | 4.46 | Socioeconomic disparity amongst ASEAN member countries | 3.93 |
| Lack of economic competitiveness in most ASEAN member countries | 4.10 | Lack of economic competitiveness in most ASEAN member countries | 4.45 | Lack of economic competitiveness in most ASEAN member countries | 3.73 |

significantly higher than those in Thailand (56%; mean 3.53). In short, Gen Y respondents showed quite strong sense of regional identities. However, the respondents also exhibited quite strong nationalism sentiments. Strong economic nationalism and the attitude of maintaining economic protectionism among Malaysian public is a worrying tendency that it go against and may be detrimental to regional economic integration in ASEAN.

Challenges for asean community: This study argues that the public perspectives on the perceived challenges for the construction of regional integration need to be understood from the public perspectives in order to obtain measures supported by the public. This study, thus, explored the respondents' perceived challenges for establishing the ASEAN Community nearing the time of its establishment at the end of 2015. The indicators were adapted from the study in ASEAN in 2010 by Moorthy and Benny (2012b). Table 1 shows the responses of the Gen Y ranked based on the mean value of their answers to nine perceived challenges indicators. Table 1 Ranks of Perceived Challenges in Each Country. Regarding challenges to the establishment of ASEAN Community, the study found that lack of proper understanding and preparation among people for regional integration, unequal education opportunities and institutional weaknesses and lack of political will in executing regional

integration policies as the top three challenges for the establishment of ASEAN Community. This finding substantiates that government should play more concrete steps in socializing and preparing the public as they saw lack of political will among national government in executing policies in relation to ASEAN integration.

Preparedness and aspiration for asean community: The study argues that preparedness among the public should be examined and their aspiration for the future should be looked after because true regionalism initiative should be supported by the public. The finding on preparedness and aspiration for the ASEAN Community is as follow preparedness for asean community. The study found that the majority of Gen Y respondents were quite optimistic for their preparedness for the ASEAN Community.

Preparedness to face more competition from other ASEAN member countries: Two-thirds respondents in two countries (66% agree; mean = 3.85) thought that they are prepared. Comparative test showed that the preparedness in Malaysia (69% agree; mean = 3.92) is not significantly different with that in Thailand (63% agree; mean = 3.77).

Preparedness to work in other ASEAN countries: More than two-thirds respondents in two countries (69% agree; mean = 3.93) claimed that they have sufficient skills.

Table. 2: Ranks of aspirations in each country

| Two countries (n = 734) | | Malaysia (n = 374) | | Thailand (n = 360) | |
|--|------|---|------|--|------|
| Aspiration | Mean | Aspiration | Mean | Aspiration | Mean |
| ASEAN Secretariat should be empowered to make decisions on certain urgent issues | 4.25 | ASEAN Secretariat should be empowered to make decisions on certain urgent issues | 4.36 | The abolition of passport requirements when visiting other ASEAN countries | 4.59 |
| The establishment of the ASEAN Court of Justice to solve legal disputes in ASEAN | 4.17 | The establishment of the ASEAN Court of Justice to solve legal disputes in ASEAN | 4.25 | Freedom for ASEAN citizens to work within ASEAN without a working pass or permit | 4.17 |
| The abolition of passport requirements when visiting other ASEAN countries | 4.15 | The establishment of ASEAN common time zone | 4.17 | ASEAN Secretariat should be empowered to make decisions on certain urgent issues | 4.15 |
| ASEAN Parliament elected by the people should be established | 4.08 | Each national language of ASEAN countries is declared as the formal language in ASEAN | 4.11 | ASEAN Parliament elected by the people should be established | 4.08 |
| The establishment of ASEAN Common time zone | 4.03 | ASEAN Parliament elected by the people should be established | 4.09 | The establishment of the ASEAN court of justice to solve legal disputes | 4.07 |
| Each national language of 3.88ASEAN countries is declared as the formal language in ASEAN common time zone | 3.95 | The coordination of monetary and fiscal policy | 4.03 | The establishment of ASEAN in ASEAN | |
| The coordination of monetary and fiscal policy | 3.81 | The establishment of a single currency | 3.90 | Each national language of ASEAN countries is declared as formal languages in ASEAN | 3.78 |
| Freedom for ASEAN citizens to work within ASEAN without a working pass or permit | 3.74 | The abolition of passport requirements when visiting other ASEAN countries | 3.73 | The coordination of monetary and fiscal policy | 3.58 |
| The establishment of a single currency | 3.58 | Freedom for ASEAN citizens to work within ASEAN without a working pass or permit | 3.34 | The establishment of a single currency | 3.25 |

Comparative test showed that the preparedness among respondents in Malaysia (66% agree; mean = 3.90) is not significantly different with that in Thailand (72% agree; mean = 3.96).

Preparedness to do business in other ASEAN countries:

Majority respondents in two countries (61% agree; mean = 3.72) claimed that they have sufficient skills and knowledge. Comparative test showed that the preparedness among respondents in Malaysia (60% agree; mean = 3.72) is not significantly different with that in Thailand (61% agree; mean = 3.72).

Preparedness to communicate in other ASEAN languages (besides English):

Only 45% respondents (mean = 3.16) are ready to communicate in other ASEAN languages. Comparative test showed that the preparedness in Malaysia (45% agree; mean = 3.23) is not significantly different than that in Thailand (46% agree; mean = 3.10).

Aspiration for the future of ASEAN community: This variable examines the aspiration among the public for the future of Southeast Asian regional regionalism. The indicators were adapted from the study in ASEAN in 2010 by Benny *et al.* (2015a, b).

A great majority of Gen Y respondents aspired that ASEAN Community should be directed at stronger

integration as in the European Union (77% agree; mean = 4.16). Comparative test showed that the support for this aspiration in Malaysia (86%; mean = 4.41) is significantly higher than that in Thailand (67%; mean = 3.91). Table 2 ranks of Aspirations in Each Country >Nine issues were proposed and the agreement of the Gen Y public on whether the issues are among their aspiration was sought to project aspiration among the Gen Y public in two countries for the AEC beyond 2015. In general, the respondents showed their strong agreement on most of the nine aspirations under study. Table 2 shows the aspiration of the Gen Y respondents ranked based on the mean value of their answers to the indicators. In brief, the study found that around two-thirds of respondents claimed to be prepared for the ASEAN Community but they are not ready to communicate in other ASEAN languages beside English. The finding that only two-thirds respondents were prepared for the ASEAN regional integration show that government should conduct a greater and more serious effort in helping the public preparing for ASEAN regional integration in acquiring the knowledge, skills and picking up languages of other ASEAN countries. In addition, the respondents aspired for stronger regional integration as in European Union but with some unique characteristics in terms of freedom to work everywhere in ASEAN and the establishment of single ASEAN currency.

CONCLUSION

This opinion study among the Gen Y respondents analysed the data taken by surveying 734 Gen Y respondents (374 in Malaysia and 360 in Thailand). Firstly, the study discovered that the majority of Gen Y respondents in Malaysia and Thailand viewed of the ASEAN Community and its three pillars as highly relevant for them individually and also for their country. Moreover, they were also able to see the benefits of the ASEAN Community to them individually as well to their country and people. Finally, they exhibited great support for the ASEAN Community and its three pillars APSC, AEC and ASCC.

Secondly, the study reveals that the Gen Y public had strong sense of regional identities but they also exhibit strong nationalism sentiments. Strong economic nationalism and the attitude of maintaining economic protectionism among Malaysian public is a worrying tendency that it go against regional economic integration in ASEAN. Regarding challenges to the establishment of ASEAN Community, the study found that lack of proper understanding and preparation among people for regional integration, unequal education opportunities and institutional weaknesses and lack of political will in executing regional integration policies as the top three challenges for the establishment of ASEAN Community. This finding substantiates that government should play more concrete steps in socializing and preparing the public as they saw lack of political will among national government in executing policies in relation to ASEAN integration.

Finally, the study found that around two-thirds of respondents claimed to be prepared for the ASEAN Community but they are not ready to communicate in other ASEAN languages beside English. In addition, the respondents aspired for stronger regional integration as in European Union but with some unique characteristics in terms of freedom to work everywhere in ASEAN and the establishment of single ASEAN currency.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We express our deep gratitude to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Chanintira Na Thalang for helping in the management of process of data collection. The research was funded by a UKM-Thai window research grant. The publication was made possible by UKM Research University Grant No. GUP-2015-026.

REFERENCES

- Abdullah, K. and G. Benny, 2013. Regional public opinion towards the formation of political security community in southeast Asia. *Asian J. Sci. Res.*, 6: 650-665.
- Acharya, A., 2003. Democratisation and the prospects for participatory regionalism in Southeast Asia. *Third World Q.*, 24: 375-390.
- Benny, G., 2015. Is the ASEAN economic community relevant to gen Y professionals? A comparative study on attitudes and participation of young professionals in Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam on ASEAN economic integration. *Asian J. Public Opin. Res.*, 3: 40-62.
- Benny, G., T.S. Yean and R. Ramli, 2015a. Public opinion on the formation of the ASEAN economic community: An exploratory study in three ASEAN countries. *Int. J. Asia Pac. Stud.*, 11: 85-114.
- Benny, G., R. Moorthy, S. Daud and Z. Othman, 2015b. Impact of nationalist sentiments and commitment for prioritising the ASEAN economic community: Empirical analysis from survey in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. *Mediterr. J. Social Sci.*, 6: 188-199.
- Benny, G., R. Ramli and T.S. Yean, 2014. Nationalist sentiments and perceived threats: Public opinion in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore and Implications to the Establishment of ASEAN community. *Tamkang J. Int. Affairs*, 18: 59-107.
- Christin, T. and A.H. Trechsel, 2002. Joining the EU? Explaining public opinion in Switzerland. *Eur. Union Politics*, 3: 415-443.
- Collins, A., 2008. A people-oriented ASEAN: A door ajar or closed for civil society organizations?. *J. Int. Strategic Affairs*, 30: 313-331.
- European Commission, 2013a. Standard Eurobarometer 79: Public Opinion in the European Union. Spring, Brussels, Belgium,.
- European Commission, 2013b. Standard Eurobarometer 80: Public Opinion in the European Union. Spring, Brussels, Belgium,.
- Guido, B. and K. Abdullah, 2011. Indonesian perceptions and attitudes toward the ASEAN community. *J. Curr. Southeast Asian Affairs*, 30: 39-67.
- Hewstone, M., 2011. Understanding Attitudes to the European Community: A Social-Psychological Study in Four Member States. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England, Pages: 313.
- Hooghe, L. and G. Marks, 2005. Calculation, community and cues public opinion on European integration. *Eur. Union Politics*, 6: 419-443.

- Lindberg, L.N. and S.A. Scheingold, 1970. *Europe's Would-Be Polity: Patterns of Change in the European Community*. Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey,.
- McLaren, L., 2007. Explaining mass-level Euroscepticism: Identity, interests and institutional distrust. *Acta Politica*, 42: 233-251.
- Moorthy, R. and G. Benny, 2012a. Attitude towards community building in association of southeast Asian nations: A public opinion survey. *Am. J. Appl. Sci.*, 9: 557-562.
- Moorthy, R. and G. Benny, 2012b. Is an Asean community achievable?. *Asian Surv.*, 52: 1043-1066.
- Moorthy, R. and G. Benny, 2013. Does public opinion count? Knowledge and support for an ASEAN community in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. *Int. Relations Asia-Pac.*, 13: 399-423.
- Shore, C., 1993. Inventing the peoples Europe: Critical approaches to European Community' cultural policy. *Man*, 28: 779-800.
- Smith, A.D., 1992. National identity and the idea of European unity. *Int. Affairs Royal Inst. Int. Affairs*, 68: 55-76.