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## Internationalization of Higher Education in Southeast Asia: A Systematic Literature Review

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### Abstract

This study adopted the research method of systematic literature review to map out the landscape of existing academic resources about internationalization of higher education (IHE) within the geographical context of Southeast Asia (SEA), in order to contribute to higher education development in the region and encourage more contributions from future scholars and researchers. By conducting literature search via the online database of ERIC (EBSCOhost), 56 publications were qualitatively analysed which helped answer the four research questions set out in this research study. With the identification of the common themes covered by existing literature about IHE within SEA, specific directions can be provided for the academia in considering which areas about IHE within SEA need further study. With clearer directions on the area for further studies, the academia can then provide more specific support in both intellectual and practical dimensions to continue driving IHE in SEA.

**Keywords:** Internationalization in higher education, Southeast Asia, systematic review, systematic literature review, higher education research

### Introduction

Globalization affects every facet of our society, and the higher education sector cannot escape from this force which had and will continue to shape its landscape (Green, Marmolejo & Egron-Polak, 2012). It is under this context that higher education institutes (HEIs) around the world promote internationalization to maintain competitiveness and catch up with the rest of the world (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Williams et al., 2020). As HEIs are molded by the two mutually influencing forces of globalization and internationalization, internationalization of higher education (IHE) comes to play as a relevant topic to the development of higher education. Over the years, the process of IHE has been driven by actors such as international and regional organizations, such as the Asian Development Bank, and others (Chao, 2018), national policies including development in information technologies and funding in education (Chadee & Naidoo, 2009; Kosmutzky & Krucken, 2014) and changes in international relations such as decolonization, the fall of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the European Union (EU) (Chen & Barnett, 2000; de Wit & Merckx, 2012; de Wit et al., 2015). With IHE picking up more momentum in the late 1990s and early 2000s, interests towards the topic began to grow among academics in the North America and Europe (Teichler, 2003). Countries such as the United States and Australia rose to dominate the field in terms of publications about their own experiences and also on foreign soil including Asia-Pacific (Can & Hou, 2020; Gumus et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2019). Although the research community in Asia on this field is growing, it has been led by certain East Asian countries and the contributions from Southeast Asia (SEA) countries remain limited (Jung & Horta, 2013; Jung et al., 2018). While SEA countries such as Malaysia and Thailand are attempting to share a piece of the pie in IHE, it is important to understand more about the knowledge production on IHE in this region in order to facilitate further progress on internationalization (ASEAN SOM-ED, 2016; SHARE EU

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ASEAN, 2020; The ASEAN Post, 2019). This research is designed to contribute in this regard and by doing so, stimulate discussion among academia and encourage more contributions to support IHE in SEA.

This research aims at analysing existing literature on the topic of IHE within the contexts of SEA. It will be doing so, focusing on the following four research questions:

1. Which country(s)/which author(s) produced the most literature on IHE within SEA?
2. Which country(s) is/are targeted for research in the literature on IHE within SEA?
3. What are the research methods adopted in the literature on IHE within SEA?
4. What are the common themes covered by the literature on IHE within SEA?

By conducting a systematic review on these literature, this project will identify the themes about IHE in SEA that have already been studied on, and hence highlight the areas that are calling for more contributions from the academia in both theoretical and empirical dimensions. With clearer directions on the scope for further studies, the academia can provide more specific support intellectually and practically in driving IHE in SEA.

## **Literature Review**

### **Definitions and Trends of IHE**

IHE was described as “a broad umbrella term” which touched upon various areas and perspectives (de Wit et al., 2015, p. 45). The most mentioned definition of the term is from Knight (2004) in which she interpreted IHE as a process for higher education sector to embrace an “international, intercultural or global dimension” (p. 11). Hawawini (2016) further expanded the definition to acknowledge the dimension where HEIs were integrating into the “global knowledge economy” through the process of internationalization (p. 5). Summarizing both inward and outward ways of looking at IHE, Hudzik (2014) suggested the ideas of “comprehensive internationalization” which covered not only the internal changes within the HEIs during the process of internationalization, but also their external images and relationships with other institutes (p. 7). In general, the academia sees IHE as a concept that comprises different approaches and strategies, with an ever-changing landscape and is recognized as complex and volatile in nature (Cheng et al., 2016; de Wit & Merckx, 2012; Ennew & Greenaway, 2012).

Under the concept of IHE, there are two common elements that are always referred to, namely movement of students and academic staff, and reforms in curriculum or program structure. Through analyses of historical trends and the experiences of IHE across different countries, HEIs were seen to adhere to encourage student or staff mobility around the world and restructure curriculum in ways to increase students’ and staff’s international exposure or partnership with foreign HEIs (Altbach & Knight, 2016; Altbach & Teichler, 2001; de Wit & Merckx, 2012; Egron-Polak, 2012; Knight, 2004; Teichler, 2017). Regarding the reforms in curriculum, Enders (2004) also highlighted that IHE could trigger broader policy reforms in the national level for some countries. With these rationales in mind, HEIs can then translate them into various strategies that facilitate knowledge transfer across countries, including the provision of joint degrees and programs, designing development plans to create regional education hubs and the establishment of regional cooperation platforms (Cheng et al., 2016; Cheung et al., 2016; Egron-Polak, 2012; Rumbley, Altbach & Reisberg, 2012; Teichler, 2004; Teichler, 2009). In short, IHE can be summarized into the following three levels. First, in the level of human resources, HEIs encourage their students and academic staff to have exchange, to visit, study or work in HEIs located in other countries. Second, in the institutional level, HEIs provide cross-border programs or establish cross-border branch campuses. Third, in the national level, countries engage in transnational cooperation by opening dialogue, signing regional agreement or even launching transnational platforms to enable HEIs to work with other overseas peer institutions.

In recent years, there are some notable trends on IHE. Back in the early 2010s, Green, Marmolejo & Egron-Polak (2012) summarized three global trends that were likely to reshape IHE in the decades to come. These included the rise in population that increased the demand for higher education, privatizations for HEIs and the technological advancement that opened up more opportunities for implementing new internationalization strategies. After almost a decade, these trends are still evident

today as they continue to make an impact on IHE (de Wit & Altbach, 2021). The rising trend of online international teaching and learning, as acknowledged by de Wit et al. (2015), is also being intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of geographical focus, scholars have also noted the rising importance of developing countries in recent years. With an ascending demand for higher education and a growing capacity in research and development, countries in continents outside of North America, Europe and Australia are taking up more significant roles in the discourse of IHE around the world (de Wit & Merckx, 2012; Hudzik, 2014; Kehm & Teichler, 2007). In IAU's 5<sup>th</sup> global survey published last year, Asia-Pacific was considered the top and second priorities for North American and European HEIs in internationalization respectively, reflecting the weighty role taken up by the region in IHE (Marinoni, 2019).

### **Knowledge Production on IHE**

The field of IHE is one of the branches of higher education research, which saw a rapid growth in publications starting in the early 2000s, led predominantly by researchers from North and Central America and Europe (Horta, 2018). Despite being at a developing stage in terms of capacity and contributions compared to North America and Europe, studies revealed that the higher education research community, with certain East Asian countries such as Hong Kong, China and South Korea leading the way, was on the rise and had the potential to play an even bigger role in the academia (Jung & Horta, 2013; 2015).

Similarly, the field of IHE is also under the dominance of North American and European scholars. Emerging from Europe as early as the Middle Age, the concept of internationalization was spread to colonies around the world and until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the United States became the most popular destination for overseas exchange and study, the focus of IHE was almost fixed solely on both Europe and the US, resulting in the dominance of European and American researchers in this field (de Wit & Merckx, 2012). The "imbalances in international mobility", as argued by Egron-Polak (2012), explained the findings from various studies that Western powers, most notably the US, the United Kingdom, Canada and even Australia had dominated the knowledge production in one of the most significant elements of IHE (Gumus et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2020). Although Asian countries such as Hong Kong, China and Japan were following the Western countries as the next major contributors in this field, according to Can & Hou (2020)'s study, they only constituted 11% of the total research output in IHE within the period 2013-2018. Comparing to their counterparts in East Asia, countries in SEA were having an even smaller share of contributions to the field of IHE or as Kuzhabekova et al. (2015) referred to as having less intensive activity in research production on this topic. Therefore, understanding the current landscape of IHE among SEA countries is important for stimulating the knowledge production on IHE within SEA for the academia by recognizing the themes that need further contributions.

### **IHE in SEA Contexts**

Ever since its establishment in 1967, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been a regional representative body for SEA countries and the 10 member states are forming a clearer boundary for the area that is considered as SEA. Within this context, HEIs have been adopting strategies in internationalization that are in echo with those implemented worldwide. As early as the 2000s, countries in SEA had already become significant exporters and importers for international students and were organizing joint programs and degrees with HEIs from Australia, Europe and even Japan as a way to import scientific knowledge from the developed world and keep up with the international trends (Altbach & Teichler, 2001; Mok, 2007; UNESCO, 2006). In the 2010s, countries such as Malaysia and Singapore were further expanding their efforts in internationalization into national levels as they were signing agreements with other countries to facilitate student exchange and cooperation in teaching and learning, with the overarching goal of positioning themselves as regional education hubs (Cheung et al., 2016; de Wit et al., 2015). The rising importance of IHE in SEA also attracted the involvement of various actors such as the World Bank, UNESCO and WTO, as they contributed to policy making in the region (Chao, 2016). The continuous efforts from HEIs, governments and inter-governmental organizations across SEA in internationalization, together with an increasing demand and research capacity as mentioned above, have created a greater need for empirical evidence that can fuel further research (Cheng et al., 2016; de Wit et al., 2015). Nonetheless, most existing literature with the themes of IHE

within SEA have confined their scope on particular countries, notably Malaysia and Singapore, or borrowed the experiences from Western countries without giving enough considerations of the Asian contexts (Andersson & Mayer, 2014; Cheung et al., 2016; Knight & Morshidi, 2011; Lau & Lin, 2016). As Mok (2007) argued, the unique characteristics and cultures in Asia should call for scholars in developing their own paradigms for directing and understanding IHE. This broader vision will require the support from the academia in making more in-depth analysis on collected empirical evidence about IHE within SEA, which are still in paucity (Rumbley, Altbach & Reisberg, 2012; Phuong et al., 2015).

### **Methodology**

In order to analyse the effort that the academia has put into the discussion of IHE in SEA, systematic literature review was adopted as the research method in this project. As suggested by scholars, systematic literature review allows researchers to grasp a comprehensive picture about what they already knew and had not known yet, and hence helps identify the areas that required further studies on (El Alfy et al., 2019; Mertens, 2005; Newman & Gough, 2020). Back in the 2000s, when IHE was beginning to attract attention within the higher education sector, Teichler (2003) had advised researchers to be “future-conscious” in order to accommodate newer ideas that the public might raise (p.181). Systematically reviewing literature on IHE in SEA is embracing and fueling this future-consciousness for researchers as it helps identify themes that need more contributions from the academia as a preparation for the looming issues facing the field in the future. This is also a response to the recommendations made by other researchers who had made contributions in reviewing higher education research publications in which more reviews on under-researched topics including internationalization and literature about higher education with the focus on SEA were encouraged in order to facilitate the development of higher education sector in the region (Phuong et al., 2015; Tight, 2019).

### **Data Collection**

This research project followed the four phases of data collection in systematic reviews proposed by Moher et al. (2009), namely identification, screening, eligibility and included. Similar strategies which saw researchers conducting data synthesis on data collected from online databases after rounds of screening and selection based on certain exclusion criteria were also observed in other research studies that used systematic literature reviews on investigating issues related to higher education development (Al-Kurdi et al., 2018; El Alfy et al., 2019; Manatos et al., 2017; Phuong et al., 2015; Roth et al., 2016; Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2017). For this research, Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC, EBSCOhost) was selected as the online database for searching literature because firstly, as one of the most widely used databases in education, it provides a comprehensive coverage of accessible educational literature (Phuong et al., 2015). Secondly, its links feature and improvements in controlled vocabulary searching facilitate researchers in accessing full-text items based on a search using a thesaurus of key terms which in the case of this research is essential (Othman & Sahlawaty Halim, 2004; Vinson & Welsh, 2014).

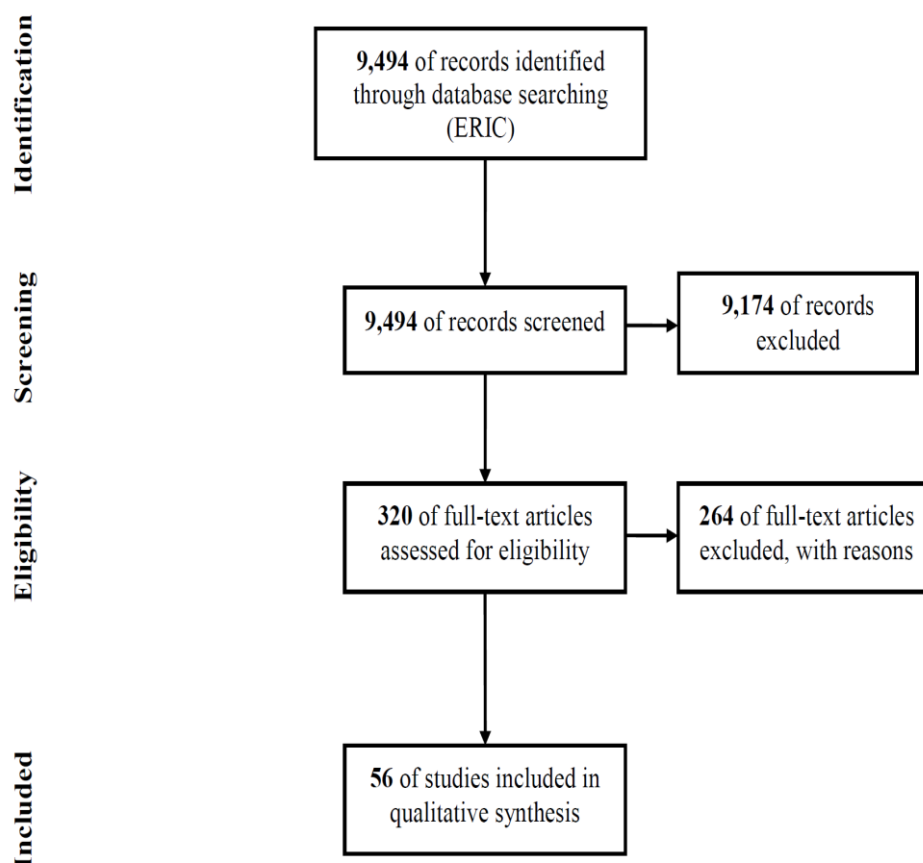
Based on the key components of IHE summarized in the previous section, the following terms were employed for the initial search in which all searchable fields were covered:

1. internationalization OR student movement OR student mobility OR academic staff movement OR academic staff mobility OR cross-border programs OR cross-border institutions OR branch campus  
AND
2. higher education OR post-secondary education OR higher education institutes OR post-secondary education institutes  
AND
3. Brunei OR Cambodia OR Indonesia OR Laos OR Malaysia OR Burma OR Myanmar OR Philippines OR Singapore OR Thailand OR Vietnam

Five extra selection criteria were also applied in the initial search, namely peer-reviewed, full text, English language, academic journal and within the time period from 2007 to 2020. It was confined to this period because in 2007, the ASEAN Charter which recognized ASEAN University Network (AUN) as one of the agencies in ASEAN socio-cultural community was signed by all 10 member states, and

thus regional effort in higher education development had begun to be organized within official structure (ASEAN, 2008; AUN, 2012). Truncation was not used in the initial search as the default thesaurus to searches offered by EBSCOhost already covered different forms, tenses or spelling alternates of a word (EBSCO, 2018).

As illustrated in Figure 1, 9,494 publications were identified in the initial search conducted on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2021. These publications were then screened in phase two according to the thematic and geographical focuses reflected in either the title or the abstract. Some of the publications screened in this phase were having the thematic focus on IHE, but without a specific geographical focus. These publications were still included as their full texts needed to be further examined in the next phase in order to determine whether they were relevant to the research focus or not. During this phase, 9,174 publications were excluded based on irrelevance or inaccessibility to their full texts. In phase three, 320 selected publications were examined according to their full texts so as to see whether they were first, geographically focused on countries in SEA and second, thematically centred on the three components of IHE (student/academic staff movement, cross border programs/campuses, national/regional cooperation) and third, able to provide answers to the four research questions. There were some publications that mentioned the experiences of countries in SEA while addressing broader issues about IHE, but they were either cited briefly as one of the examples or the main objectives of the articles were directed towards countries outside of SEA. In order to explore findings specifically on IHE within SEA, these publications were not included. Eventually, 264 publications were excluded and the rest of them (56 that were fit for analysis) were included to be further analysed in the data synthesis stage.



**Figure 1.** Four phases of data collection (adapted from Moher et al. 2009)

### Data Synthesis

In this stage, the data collected was qualitatively analysed by adopting the strategy being described as “mapping” (Newman & Gough, 2020, p.16). The full texts of the selected publications were examined

in details to provide answers for the four research questions this project sets out to address. The answers to each question were gathered and presented in the forms of figures and tables which depicted the scope of coverage of existing literature on IHE within SEA. With this, researchers can be informed of the areas about IHE in SEA on which are calling for further studies.

### Concerns over Validity

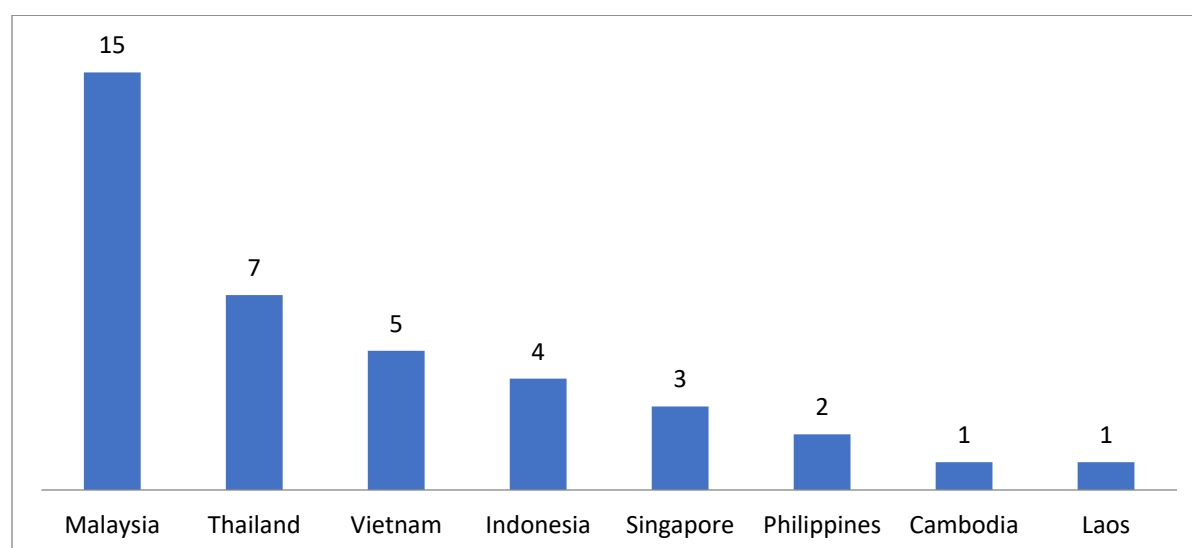
The validity of systematic literature review rests on the transparency of the research process being presented. However, according to Hammersley (2020), having total transparency in the review process was an “unattainable ideal” in systematic review (p.30). Therefore, a more pragmatic way to settle concerns over validity in this research project is to present all the specific procedures of the research as presented in the above sections in order to be as transparent as possible for audience to follow the research process as closely and detailed as possible, which, as reiterated by Papaioannou et al. (2010), should be regarded as the requirement for systematic review.

As the sole researcher in this project, it is observed through reflections that subjectivity was a significant factor influencing the objectivity of the research, especially during the literature screening process which lasted for over a month given the many publications identified. From the experience in this research, in order to maintain the objectivity during the screening process and not to miss out any publications for data synthesis, researchers should always refer back to the criteria for selection and screen ambiguous publications more than once if needed.

### Results

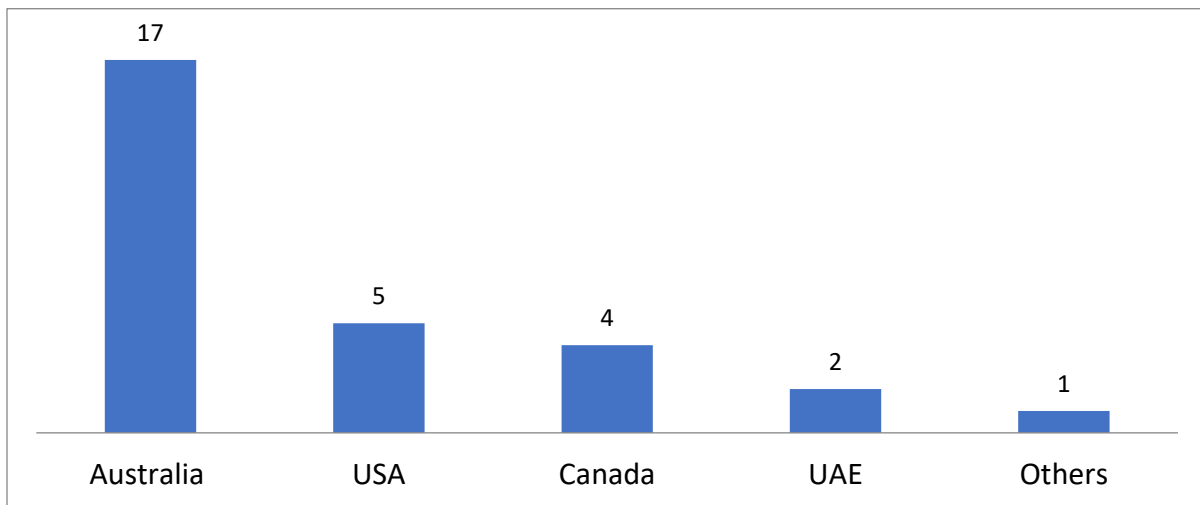
The design for the first research question (Which country(s)/which author(s) produced the most literature on IHE within SEA?) is meant to help locate the sources of literature on IHE within SEA based on their authors and countries of publishing. From the analysis, the selected publications were written by different scholars coming from a wide range of background and no particular authors were identified for producing literature on IHE within SEA in a consistent way. There were only a handful of authors who published or co-published at most two articles on this topic. Thus, no significant findings could be drawn concerning the authors who produced the most literature on IHE within SEA.

The countries of publishing were categorized into SEA countries and non-SEA countries since there was duplication as some literature were co-published by authors coming from institutes located in different countries. As reflected in Figure 2, Malaysia is the SEA country that published the most literature on IHE within SEA (15), exceeding the number of publications from Thailand (7) and Vietnam (5) combined (second and third place). Other SEA countries who have a low level of publication contributions to the literature on IHE within SEA are Indonesia (4), Singapore (3), the Philippines (2), Cambodia (1) and Laos (1).



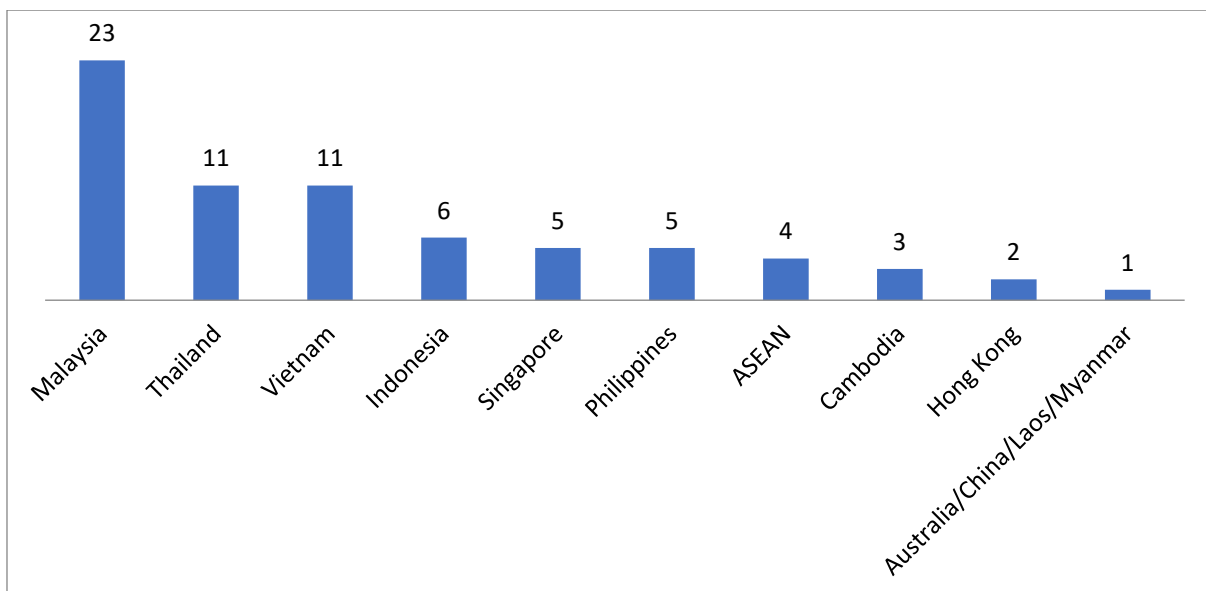
**Figure 2.** Number of publications on IHE within SEA published by SEA countries

As for non-SEA countries, as observed in Figure 3, Australia is the country that published the most literature on the topic (17), far exceeding other countries including the USA (5), Canada (4), UAE (2) and some other countries including Bangladesh, Belgium, Japan, New Zealand, Pakistan, UK and the UNESCO (1 each).



**Figure 3.** Number of publications on IHE within SEA published by non-SEA countries

Regarding the second research question (Which country(s) is/are targeted for research in the literature on IHE within SEA?), the analysis revealed that almost all of them are countries within SEA whereas certain non-SEA countries are also being targeted in a handful of literature. As shown in Figure 4, Malaysia is the most targeted country as it appeared in 23 publications, followed by Thailand (11), Vietnam (11), Indonesia (6), Singapore (5), the Philippines (5), Cambodia (3), Laos (1) and Myanmar (1). Four of the publications took a broader and more institutional perspective and targeted at ASEAN in addressing IHE within SEA. Other non-SEA countries that are also being targeted at in the analysed literature are Hong Kong (2), Australia (1) and China (1).



**Figure 4.** Frequency of countries as the targets for studies in publications on IHE within SEA

For the third research question (What are the research methods adopted in the literature on IHE within SEA?), the majority of them were qualitative in nature. As illustrated in Table 1, 38 publications adopted qualitative methods while quantitative methods and mixed methods were only used in 10 publications and 8 publications respectively. Some of the common research methods employed in these publications

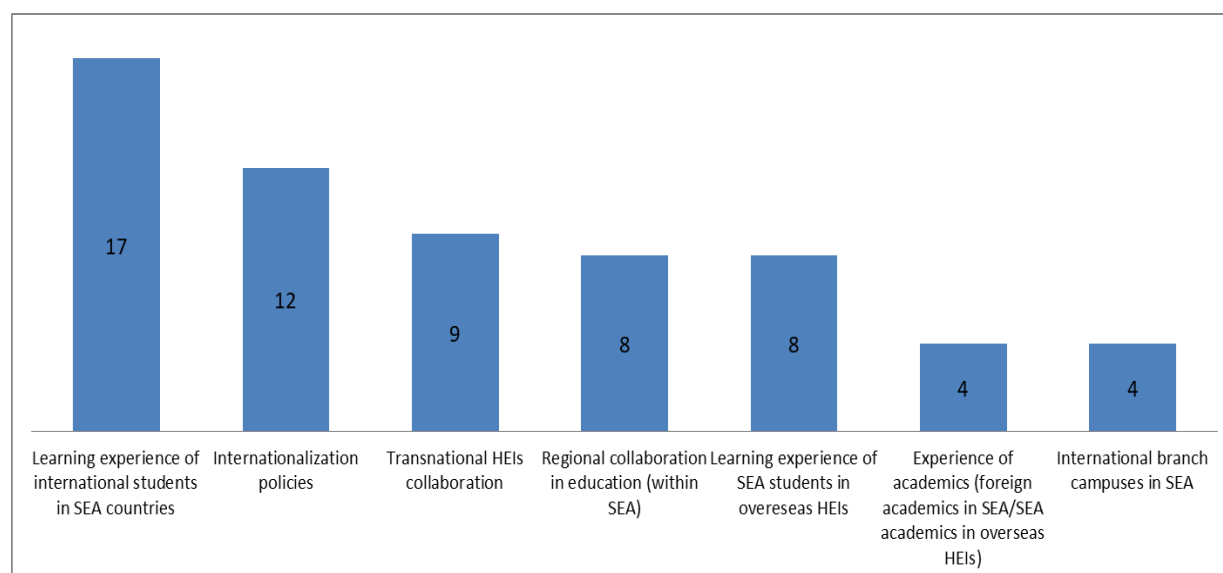


include interview and document and data analysis for qualitative research, questionnaire and survey for quantitative research, as well as interview, questionnaire and survey for mixed method research.

**Table 1.** Frequency of research methods adopted in publications on IHE within SEA

Research methods	Frequency
Qualitative	38
Quantitative	10
Mixed method	8

For the last research question (What are the common themes covered by the literature on IHE within SEA?), the thematic focuses of the selected publications are classified into seven categories in accordance with the key components of IHE summarized in the previous section. The results of the analysis are summarized and shown in Figure 5 below. As reflected in Figure 5, the most popular topic on IHE within SEA is about the learning experience of international students in SEA countries (17), followed by internationalization policies from either the government's perspective or HEIs' perspective (12), transnational HEIs collaboration (9), regional collaboration in education (both higher education and education in general) within SEA (8) and learning experience of SEA students in overseas HEIs (8). Two other thematic focuses that are drawing less attention but are still being covered among literature on IHE within SEA are experience of academics (either foreign academics working in SEA or SEA academics working in overseas HEIs) (4) and international branch campuses in SEA (4).



**Figure 5.** Frequency of thematic focuses in publications on IHE within SEA

### Discussion and Conclusion

The findings reported above lead to four observations. Firstly, Malaysia is considered as the main driver behind the trend of IHE within SEA. Malaysia is the country in SEA with the most publications on IHE in the region and it is also the country being targeted at the most by literature on IHE within SEA. As explained in Tham's (2013) article, Malaysia began to explore the possibility of improving its human capital by encouraging the development of private education institutes and increasing collaboration with foreign HEIs as early as 1991. Later in 2004, as different contextual factors bred a growing interest in higher education research, the Malaysian government founded the Ministry of Higher Education which spearheaded a number of reforms in higher education (Azman & Sirat, 2018). By pouring in economic investment and providing motivations through favourable policies, higher education development in Malaysia was able to bear fruits over the years as it has become a regional student hub with a growing number of international students and an attractive site for foreign universities to establish their branch campuses (Aziz & Abdullah, 2014). With such a huge influence on education development in SEA, the experience of IHE in Malaysia has drawn the attention of different scholars as reflected by the research findings.

Secondly, apart from Malaysia, other countries in the region are making contributions to the topic in proportion to their respective progress in IHE. Among them, Thailand and Vietnam stand out to be garnering more interests from the academia to study their experiences. For Thailand, the process of IHE began as early as 1990 when the government was motivated by economic motives to push for it. In 2009, Thailand made clear its vision of becoming an educational hub in the region and since then, had implemented various initiatives such as “Thailand 4.0” with the aims of increasing investment on universities to increase their international rankings and ultimately, develop into a knowledge-based economy (Lavankura, 2013; Prompilai, 2018). For Vietnam, intentional effort on IHE started in 2005 when the government encouraged Vietnamese students to study overseas and advocated strategies that attracted foreign HEIs to set up branch campuses in Vietnam which could benefit local HEIs in their internationalization development and help establish global networks in higher education development (Harman et al., 2010; Welch, 2010). The efforts that both Thailand and Vietnam put in IHE were displayed by their higher frequency of publishing relevant literature on the topic and being the targets for studies by literature comparing to other countries in the region.

As for Indonesia, Singapore and the Philippines, they are also offering data on their experiences in different themes of IHE. In Indonesia and the Philippines, a set of contextual push and pull factors accelerated the process of IHE since the 2000s, but issues such as unsatisfactory quality of teaching and lack of support in the broader institutional level confined the scale of internationalization compared to other countries in the region (Albia & Chan, 2017; Idrus, 1999; Wicaksono & Friawan, 2011). For Singapore, reforms in higher education which promoted internationalization were carried out in the late 1990s as a response to the growing trend of globalization (Mok & Lee, 2003). Since then, the Singaporean government had implemented various strategies in internationalizing curriculum, encouraging student mobility and even put forth the “Global Schoolhouse” initiative to develop itself into a regional educational hub and enjoy the economic benefits that came with it (Daquila, 2013; Lee, 2018). Surprisingly, despite all these efforts and having a relatively well-established and reputable higher education sector in the region, not a lot of synthesized publications are produced by or targeting at Singapore. The experience of Singapore in promoting IHE and its lack of publication on this topic might be an interesting area for researchers to study more on in order to draw up a more in-depth explanation.

Thirdly, findings revealed the importance of Australia as a partner with SEA countries in promoting higher education development in the region, as it did not only publish the most literature on IHE within SEA among non-SEA countries, but also published more literature than Malaysia or any other SEA countries. The close partnership between Australia and SEA in higher education development can be traced back to 1950 when the Colombo Plan was initiated by Commonwealth countries with the objective of enhancing social and economic development in SEA in order that the spread of communism in the region could be contained (Auletta, 2000). Not only had the Colombo Plan paved the way for the convergence of Australia and SEA countries to be a regional force, but also rendered Australia an attractive location for SEA students to pursue higher education (Oakman, 2000). According to Weiss & Ford (2011), Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia accounted for the majority of SEA students enrolled in Australian HEIs and hence, they became a “core component” of Australian international education (p. 235). Since 1974, when Australia became the first dialogue partner for ASEAN, the two have also been engaging in bilateral cooperation in a wide range of areas, including trading, security and most importantly, education (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2021). Then in 2014, the Australian government launched the New Colombo Plan which intended to deepen engagement with the Indo-Pacific region by sending Australian students to pursue higher education in the region, with Singapore and Indonesia among the earliest suggested destinations (Byrne, 2016; Lowe, 2015). As revealed by Tran & Vu (2018)’s studies on the experience of Australian students in Asia, this new plan of reversing student mobility helped Australian students to be more “Asia-aware” and accumulate capital essential for their future engagement in the region (p. 204). In short, as suggested by Welch (2016), the desire for ASEAN member states to keep improving their higher education sector, increasing interests for SEA students to pursue higher education in Australia, and the expansion of ASEAN migrant communities in Australia all helped create favourable conditions for Australia and ASEAN to continue and deepen their

cooperation in higher education development up till now. Thus, Australia has become an indispensable partner with SEA in IHE, which justified the research findings.

Fourthly, regarding the themes of interests in IHE within SEA, the analysis of the selected literature showed that the majority of their thematic focuses are either on “learning experience of international students in SEA” or “IHE policies”. While learning experience is a broad idea that embraces various aspects of students’ learning, some of the examples of study focus are “academic adjustment issues for ASEAN postgraduate students in Malaysia”, “quality learning environment for international students in Malaysia” and “perceptions of service quality for international business students in Thailand”. For IHE policies, researchers were interested in both the government’s and HEIs’ perspectives, as examples of study focus include “IHE policies initiated by governments in Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong” and “IHE strategies in an Indonesian/a Filipino university”. As a whole, despite the difference in specific topics and study focuses, the themes in IHE within SEA that have drawn the most interest and contributions from the academia are the learning experience of international students in the region and policies on IHE. Based on the research findings, the areas that need more contributions from researchers can be summarized as the followings:

Firstly, there is a lack of information about some SEA countries. Out of the 10 ASEAN member states, only five of them (Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore and Indonesia) have consistent publications on IHE in the region and based on the research data on their IHE experiences, researchers and policymakers are able to understand the higher education development in these countries. The Philippines was publishing literature in a limited amount, but together with a small number of publications targeting at IHE in the Philippines, we can still have a glimpse of the situation there. For other ASEAN countries, namely Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, there are not much research evidence on their experiences in IHE.

In fact, these countries had made their effort in IHE, but due to different limitations, their experiences are not sufficiently disclosed and shared with the rest of the world. In Brunei, HEIs such as the Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) have put in place various internationalization policies that are bearing some fruits, but there is a lack of research in analysing their experiences (Tibok & Hiew, 2020). For the adjoining countries of Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar, Hill et al. (2021) identified barriers such as funding, lack of concrete strategies, language barriers and institutional issues which hindered the progress of IHE despite the governments’ intentions to promote it. In order to facilitate IHE within SEA, more data from these less-studied ASEAN countries in IHE or higher education development in general need to be extracted. Only then can researchers have more in-depth understanding of the situations in these countries and conduct further analysis to diagnose the progress of IHE there.

Secondly, comparative analyses are rarely seen among the screened literature. The majority of the selected literature on IHE within SEA concerned the experience in one country only, with a small number of them citing experiences from multiple countries as case studies. While understanding more about the work on IHE of each of the 10 SEA countries is essential for grasping a full picture of IHE in the region, more comparative analysis of SEA countries can offer another dimension in diagnosing the progress of IHE in the region. As echoed by scholars, comparative analysis on IHE in various countries was much more time-and-resources-consuming which rendered a general scarcity of materials in this nature (Kehm & Teichler, 2007; Teichler, 2017). In order to yield new discoveries on IHE within SEA, researchers may consider conducting more comparative analysis between SEA countries.

Lastly, the above findings identified a number of topics on IHE within SEA that need researchers to pay more attention to. First, more studies focusing solely on the mobility of both students and academic staff in the region are needed. As highlighted by Teichler (2017), the number of mobile students was the most frequently used indicator to reflect the progress of internationalization. However, among the literature on IHE within SEA, not much attention had been paid to analyse the mobility of students in the region, needless to say the mobility of academic staff. Offering concrete data and the corresponding quantitative analysis can produce resources that are helpful for gauging the progress of IHE across SEA.

Second, more work must be done on exploring the experiences of academic staff in IHE in SEA. Out of the analysed literature, although four of them were about experiences of academics, including both international academics working in SEA and SEA academics working overseas, studies on academics were receiving much less attention than the experiences of students. In fact, the difficulty to define what constitutes international academics was argued as the main reason behind the under-explored issue of academic staff mobility (de Wit & Altbach, 2021). Despite the hurdle in coining a definition, researchers need to produce more findings on not only the mobility of academics in SEA, but also their experiences in IHE in general in order to visualize a more complete picture of IHE within the region.

Third, there is a lack of contributions on governments' or HEI's efforts in IHE at home. As scholars pointed out, national or institutional policies that aim at promoting internationalization at home such as internationalizing curriculum and the cultivation of global citizenship were receiving growing interest as a crucial component of IHE (de Wit & Altbach, 2021; Kehm & Teichler, 2007). Nonetheless, among the 12 publications analysed that had a study focus on IHE policies, only one of them mentioned internationalization at home which targeted at HEIs in Vietnam. While almost all researchers had been outward-looking in studying IHE within SEA, it might be worth spending more effort in looking inward to explore new findings from the work of IHE at home.

Fourth, researchers should look more into the roles of e-learning/online learning in the process of IHE within SEA. As mentioned earlier, future-consciousness of researchers is essential to prepare for what's coming in the future. In his article, Teichler (2017) also reiterated that "virtual border-crossing" was becoming a popular trend which would be drawing more researchers in the field to reflect on related issues (p.209). Together with the outbreak of COVID-19, virtual learning will likely be a central component to IHE going forward and hence, researchers interested in IHE within SEA should expand the scope of focus and put more effort into studying this area.

#### **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Studies**

There are a couple limitations for this research that are worth mentioning. First, the data analysis in this research did not cover the academic journals in which the literature on IHE within SEA were published. As an analysis on that can be helpful in illustrating the dynamics of research communities that are interested in IHE within SEA, it may go beyond the objective of this study (i.e., to map out the thematic landscape of existing publications on IHE within SEA) and is able to produce information rich enough for analysis in a separate study. Second, there is a lack of specific suggestions on policymaking for education institutes or authorities within SEA on IHE. By identifying general observations about academic contributions on IHE within SEA, this research can offer directions for scholars in conducting future studies, but not much concrete suggestion on policy-practice for various actors involved in the process of IHE.

Apart from the suggestions made in the previous section, scholars are recommended to consider the followings as they are set to contribute further on this topic. First of all, analysis focusing on the academic journals that publish articles on IHE within SEA is encouraged as it might reveal information on the relationships amongst research communities interested in SEA or based in SEA. This information can complement the findings in this research to deduce more observations on higher education development in the region in. Moreover, scholars can focus on the practice of specific institutes or governments in IHE within SEA in order to draw on their experiences and produce more policy-oriented analysis which can be instrumental in supporting other institutes or governments in further promoting IHE.

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