



**ASEAN
University
Network**

Digitalisation in the ASEAN Higher Education Region

Initial inputs

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1. Policy Level: ASEAN Regional Frameworks, Masterplan & Policies

As the cauldron of rising economy and sociocultural development in Southeast Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In an era where life is deeply integrated with technology, regionwide digitalisation in different sectors of ASEAN is inevitable. The emphasis on digital technology and innovation development are included in several strategic outlooks and documents issued by the ASEAN Secretariat and endorsed by its member states. The four main frameworks driving digitalization and transformation in higher education across the region are the ASEAN Economic Community, Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025, and the ASEAN Data Management Framework.

Under the ASEAN Economic Community, the ASEAN Digital Sector covers cooperation of ICT infrastructure, ICT regulations, telecommunications, capacity building and other ICT-related developments under the purview of ASEAN ministries of ICT. For higher education, this means improved ICT infrastructure, standardized regulations, and increased capacity building efforts that benefit educational institutions.

Under the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, Digital Innovation covers topics ranging from open data and enhanced data management are counted among its five strategic pillars to promote interregional connectivity. The five pillars are sustainable infrastructure, digital innovation, seamless logistics, regulatory excellence, and people mobility. For higher education, this means more collaboration, better digital infrastructure, and increased student and academic exchanges.

Next, the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025, or ADM 2025, is a derivative of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 (MPAC 2025) which guides ASEAN's digital transformation by 2025 and entails the region's great strides towards digital becoming a significant and prosperous digital and economic bloc powered by secure digital services and transformative technology. It focuses on digital infrastructure, transforming industries, digital skills and literacy, and cybersecurity. This plan helps advance digital skills, integrate technology into curricula, and support digital platforms for education and research.

To promote interregional data connectivity, management and security, relevant frameworks such as the ASEAN Data Management Framework (2021) were developed to address challenges amidst the region's growing economy enhanced by data and innovations. This framework provides guidelines for data governance, protection, and cross-border flows. It enhances data management practices in higher education, promotes secure data sharing, and supports research and innovation.



These frameworks interlink to impact higher education in several ways:

Digital Infrastructure:

MPAC 2025 and ADM 2025 stress the importance of robust digital infrastructure. This infrastructure is vital for online learning, research collaboration, and access to digital resources.

Digital Skills and Literacy:

ADM 2025 and AEC highlight the need for digital skills. Higher education institutions are central to developing these skills among students and educators, preparing them for a digital economy.

Data Management:

The ADM Framework sets the foundation for secure and efficient data management, helping institutions handle data responsibly, support research, and enable international collaboration.

Collaboration and Mobility:

MPAC 2025 and AEC promote mobility and collaboration, allowing students and academics to move freely across the region, engage in collaborative projects, and enhance the quality and diversity of education.

Economic Integration:

The AEC supports higher education institutions in aligning their programs with industry needs, fostering partnerships, driving innovation, and promoting entrepreneurship.

Other forms of support by the ASEAN countries include funding of programmes and projects related to raising awareness and building the capacity of the region's governmental services, enterprises, educational institutions and other stakeholders to be digitally literate, secure and effective. The interplay among these frameworks creates a comprehensive environment for the digital transformation of higher education in ASEAN.

2. Implementation Level: AUN Secretariat & its Thematic Networks' Programmes, Projects & Activities

Among the key drivers in the frontline for digital transformation is the higher education sector. Through individual and combined efforts of universities through research, projects and developmental initiatives, ASEAN higher education serves as a pillar of knowledge, innovation and human development. Integrating digital technology and innovation in higher education holds a myriad of benefits and impacts both universities, their stakeholders and the society at large



stand to gain i.e. from increased efficiency in learning and teaching in a technology-enhanced ecosystem as well as more accessible online resources through open digital archives and online databases.

ASEAN University Network (AUN), as the leading university association in the region, acknowledges the important role of digital and communication technologies in higher education mission and delivery.

3. ASEAN University Network Technology-enhanced and Personalised Learning (AUN-TEPL)

In the areas of technology enhanced and personalised learning and resources powered by digital technology, the network has been working through collaborations, for example, through the ASEAN University Network Technology-enhanced and Personalised Learning (AUN-TEPL) which promotes personalised learning powered by artificial intelligence and digital innovation. The thematic network conducts collaborative projects in four fronts: Capacity Building and Faculty Development, Online Course Exchange, Digital Resource Sharing and Education Research. AUN-TEPL also signed an MoU with the Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT), providing the thematic network and its community with a platform to share and endorse digital resources. As of 15 June 2024, more than 400 faculties across ASEAN universities are on MERLOT, with more than forty-four materials already authored or submitted by AUN-TEPL members. The recent 4th AUN-TEPL Symposium Bangkok, Thailand bolstered the dialogue on how universities could leverage the powers of AI in optimising their education services and management.

4. Libraries of ASEAN University Network (AUNILO)

In the area of online resource and knowledge sharing, Libraries of ASEAN University Network (AUNILO) serves as a platform for academic resource sharing, information exchange, and networking among the academic libraries of AUN Member Universities and academic communities in the ASEAN region through an online resource sharing system. Projects conducted by AUNILO also include capability building and research projects to enhance the capacity of academic staff, libraries and institutions across the ASEAN region in utilising digital technologies in fostering interregional knowledge sharing and connectivity.



In terms of collaboration with external partners, the network has been engaging with the ASEAN Cyber University (ACU) project which works on creating a digital online learning and resources platform for academics and higher education institutions in Asia – currently with progress and contributions in the ASEAN region and the Republic of Korea.

Integration of technology in the sector is not limited to teaching-learning and online resources; there are still other dimensions where data and digital innovations can improve the overall scope of higher education and its stakeholders to the other level. As evident by the network's long standing pursuit of cooperation and knowledge building in different thematic areas, AUN and its brilliant universities never stop in venturing into new horizons and look for new priority areas to cooperate with one another.

5. ASEAN University Network – Digital Transformation (AUN Dx)

The ASEAN University Network – Digital Transformation Thematic Network (AUN Dx) operates with a mission to nurture the ICT capabilities of ASEAN universities. By actively engaging with AUN Dx's integrative framework, member universities ensure they stay abreast of the latest advancements in the field. This involvement allows them to benefit from collective knowledge and expertise, fostering a robust community dedicated to enhancing institutional ICT management and quality.

Through collaboration, universities share unique insights and experiences, fostering a unified approach to ICT management and quality standardization across member universities. The AUN Dx framework, developed collaboratively with inputs from universities across ASEAN, serves as a catalyst for continuous improvement and excellence in ICT. It encourages the adoption of best practices, addresses common challenges, and promotes innovation collectively.

The establishment of the AUN Dx Thematic Network serves as an enabling mechanism for deeper cooperation among higher education institutions in ASEAN, specifically targeting ICT capability and standardization. By uniting efforts under this network, HEIs in ASEAN achieve greater cohesion, share resources effectively, and collectively drive advancements in ICT. This fosters a robust community dedicated to enhancing institutional ICT management and quality, supporting regional socio-economic development and ensuring universities remain competitive in the evolving technological landscape.



6. Contribution of the projects under AUN to the Existing ASEAN Frameworks/ Master Plans

a) ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF)

The AQRF is a broader framework that facilitates the recognition of qualifications across ASEAN, whereas AUN-ACTS focuses specifically on credit transfers between ASEAN universities. While AUN-ACTS deals with the practical aspect of student mobility, AQRF addresses the wider issue of qualification recognition. Another project that is related is CALOHEA which promotes transparency in higher education qualifications, and supporting mobility across the region, thus enhancing mutual recognition of degrees and credits.

b) ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2021–2025

The ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2021–2025 emphasizes quality assurance, education harmonization, and the recognition of qualifications. CALOHEA's focus on these areas directly supports the objectives of the Work Plan by promoting regional cooperation, ensuring that education standards are consistent, and making qualifications more transparent and comparable across ASEAN. This helps foster integration and collaboration within the region's higher education systems.

c) Roadmap on the ASEAN Higher Education Space 2025 and its Implementation Plan

The Roadmap will establish programme areas for the digital transformation of ASEAN higher education to bolster online learning which includes: Virtual Exchange / Collaborative Online International Education (COIL), and Digital Credentials / Digitalised Credit Transfer System.



It contains 5 Key Areas and various AUN projects align as the followings:

- AUN-TEPL, AUN Dx, AUNILO, AUN-QA, CALOHEA, ACU and all other AUN projects align with Key Area 1 (Promote awareness and support for the development of an ASEAN Higher Education Space)
- AUN-QA aligns with Key Area 2 (Strengthen the awareness and implementation of regional Quality Assurance).
- For Key Area 3 (Support and enhance implementation of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework) and Key Area 5 (Promote and implement mutual recognition on ASEAN Higher Education Qualifications, and professions, if possible), ASEAN Credit Transfer System (AUN-ACTS) and CALOHEA complement both of them.
- AUN-ACTS and AUN Internship Program aligns with Key Area 4 (Promote and strengthen regional cooperation for Higher Education Mobility).
- Key Area 6 (Design and set the foundation that ensures sustainability (technical/human and financial resources) of the ASEAN Higher Education Space) = AUN-BE, AUN/SEED-Net, AUN-HRE, AUN-USR&S, AUN-HPN, AUN-AEC, AUN-DPPnet, AUN-SCUD, AUN-CA, AUN-ADERA, AUN-UIE, AUN-TEPL.

d) Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025

The Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 outlines five strategic objectives, including sustainable infrastructure, digital innovation, seamless logistics, regulatory excellence, and people mobility. In the space of digital innovation, strategic objectives of the Master Plan include the following:

1. Support the adoption of technology for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME)
2. Support financial access through digital technologies
3. Improve open data use in ASEAN Member States
4. Support enhanced data management in ASEAN Member States

AUN programs like the AUN Summer Camp and AUN Internship Program specifically address the goal of enhancing people mobility, while projects such as AUN-TEPL and AUNILO contribute to digital innovation within ASEAN higher education.



e) ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025

The ASEAN Digital Masterplan (ADM) 2025 focuses on fostering digital innovation within ASEAN. The desired outcomes and enabling actions which make up ADM 2025 are shaped by global digital trends and their impact on the way digital services are delivered in future. The use of Big Data and AI is rapidly delivering new capabilities and certainly followed by ever more intelligent devices and rapid innovation in applications and over-the-top services. It is necessary to have education for citizens, consumers and businesses to ensure they stay up-to-date in a world of rapidly changing digital services

AUN programs like AUN-TEPL, AUNILO, and AUN Dx align with this plan as they promote digital transformation in ASEAN higher education by enhancing teaching, learning, and research, contributing to the broader goal of digital integration in the region.

7. Reference

- AUN Dx Framework: <https://aundx.psu.ac.th/aun-news/aundx-psu-20082567-1>

