

Foreword

AsTEN Journal of Teacher Education Special Issue, SEAMEO-RIHED

This Special Issue, themed '*Empowering Educators: Transforming Higher Education for Sustainable Development*', brings together contributions from the 2024 Inter-Regional Research Symposium - Transforming Higher Education: Towards Sustainable Development, organized by SEAMEO-RIHED. It showcases important studies that reflect emerging priorities in higher education and offers critical insights into how ASEAN education systems can strengthen regional cooperation and increase resilience, sustainability, and inclusivity. These studies are relevant and timely given the rapidly evolving higher education landscape across Southeast Asia and the complexities of digital innovation, climate change, shifting pedagogical paradigms, and teacher education.

It begins with a study of Japan's international exchange initiatives, focusing on the increasing use of digital platforms to expand access to quality education and lifelong learning. The study illustrates how the use of online modalities, such as MOOCs and hybrid exchange programmes, can advance ASEAN teacher education and intensify ASEAN-Japan collaboration, thereby advancing SDG4.

The next two papers focus on pedagogical implications of digital learning and its challenges. One examines ethical and pedagogical risks associated with AI chatbot misuse and highlights how unregulated adoption can erode academic integrity and diminish critical thinking. It

recommends ASEAN collaboration on policies and frameworks on advanced pedagogical strategies and comprehensive AI-use policies in education to ensure equity in higher education. The other examines online course anxiety, illustrating how digital learning environments influence student participation styles and emotional engagement. Both these papers highlight the urgent need for support for digital learning and teaching strategies and for ASEAN-wide digital literacy frameworks.

The next two contributions address the growing adoption of generative AI in higher education. A qualitative study of students' use of AI tools for academic tasks reveals attitudinal and social-behavioural factors that influence AI adoption, as well as ethical concerns, reliability, and overreliance. Another study examines ChatGPT integration among faculty members at a major ASEAN university and offers strategies for using generative AI to enhance teacher education quality while mitigating ethical and pedagogical risks.

A large-scale study of technology acceptance among in-service teachers in Myanmar demonstrates that readiness to embrace digital innovation is influenced by demographics, experience, and contextual variables. These findings have important implications not only for national but also for regional policy reforms in professional development and support for learner-centered and blended pedagogies.

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The final article moves beyond digital innovation to another pressing global challenge, climate change mitigation, and the role of teacher education in advancing environmental literacy. Using case studies from ASEAN countries, it evaluates how higher education institutions integrate climate change education within pre-service and in-service teacher training. It highlights successful practices and systemic gaps, and calls for multi-stakeholder collaboration to build climate-resilient and sustainable education systems.

The articles in this Special Issue all highlight the importance of balancing digital and technological advancements with ethical considerations, strengthening regional cooperation, addressing learner well-being, and investing in teacher capacity. They propose strategies and collaborations that reflect the region's aspirations for an equitable, innovative, and sustainable educational future. We hope this Special Issue serves as a catalyst for deeper dialogue and engagement among educators, researchers, and policymakers to shape the next generation of teaching and learning across ASEAN and beyond.

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Transforming Higher Education for
Sustainable Development*