

# Education and South Korea's New Southern Policy: Locus and Prospects

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## ABSTRACT

The implementation of South Korea's Southern Policy (NSP) has undoubtedly resulted in significant changes to the region's economic and political landscape. NSP may be viewed as a basis for Korea and a Southeast Asian nation to foster "co-prosperity and expand the scope for cooperation". This qualitative study makes use of policy document analysis as a methodology. The NSP serves as the primary source document for this research. The researchers evaluated the NSP in relation to the document's locus of education. Following that, these are examined in relation to the location and context. The locus of education analysis shows how NSP is typically moving southward in search of exchange. While education is included in certain requirements, it is viewed as restricted and insufficient in a variety of circumstances. The researchers have found other options to investigate in light of NSP's educational philosophy. Keywords: ASEAN, education, New Southern Policy, South Korea, policy

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## ABSTRAK

Penerapan Kebijakan Selatan (NSP) Korea Selatan tidak diragukan lagi telah menghasilkan perubahan signifikan pada lanskap ekonomi dan politik kawasan. NSP dapat dilihat sebagai dasar bagi Korea dan negara Asia Tenggara untuk mendorong "kemakmuran bersama dan memperluas cakupan kerja sama". Studi kualitatif ini menggunakan analisis dokumen kebijakan sebagai metodologi. NSP berfungsi sebagai dokumen sumber utama untuk penelitian ini. Para peneliti mengevaluasi NSP dalam kaitannya dengan lokus pendidikan dokumen. Setelah itu, ini diperiksa dalam kaitannya dengan lokasi dan konteks. Locus analisis pendidikan menunjukkan bagaimana NSP biasanya bergerak ke selatan untuk mencari pertukaran. Sementara pendidikan termasuk dalam persyaratan tertentu, itu dipandang terbatas dan tidak mencukupi dalam berbagai keadaan. Para peneliti telah menemukan pilihan lain untuk diselidiki berdasarkan filosofi pendidikan NSP.

Kata kunci: ASEAN, pendidikan, New Southern Policy, Korea Selatan, kebijakan

## INTRODUCTION

Education is seen as a vital element of international cooperation efforts and policy attempts. (Yoshida, 2019) suggested that it is vital to integrate vast "comparative education knowledge" in relation to education aid. Politics, policies, and education are crucial aspects that

exhibit strong and legitimate connections as these concepts are frequently explored by researchers in the field. A study by (Medianik, 2017) presented how China has advanced education opportunities through relations with countries via policy reforms. Regional cooperation when beefed up provides directions in advancing the global economy (Jiang and Shi, 2019).

(Ganyushina et al., 2019) in a study noted that providing “diverse training of young people” remains the prerequisite towards economic prosperity. In this case, education is deemed crucial and critical in the economic standards. As expected, these individuals are expected to be “highly qualified and professionally sought-after” experts (Moseikina, 2019), thus education is a significant agenda especially in developing countries.

According to (Postiglione, 2020), Asian knowledge systems” pivot on the various shifts in the nature of international cooperation. Regional cooperation and development assistance span infrastructure development support and other government-initiated efforts. In the education landscape, (Khalid et al., 2019) recognized how education institutions and various governments exert effort in exhausting mechanisms to maximize prospects and partnerships in other countries.

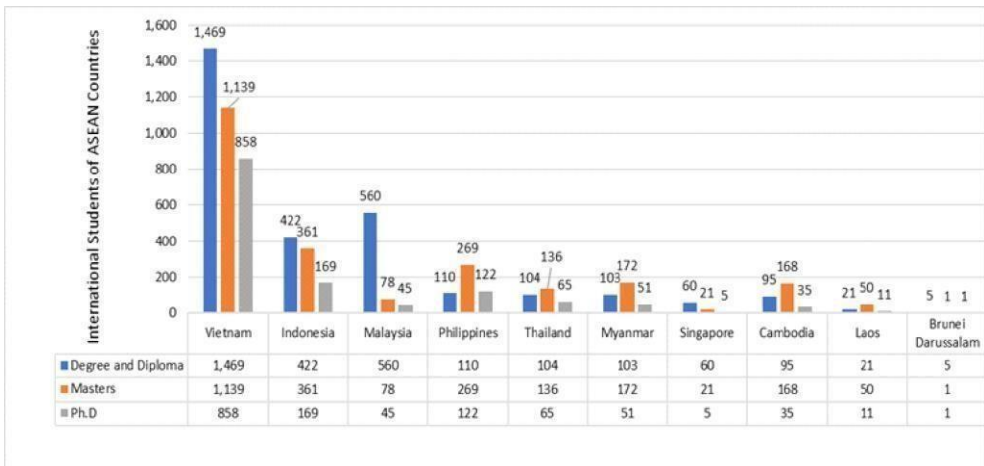
Aimed at promoting relationships with ASEAN and India, the New Southern Policy (NSP) was announced in November, 2017 (Hicap, 2018). The NSP is explicitly defined in the guide as:

*“... a new policy paradigm and ROK’s core diplomatic initiative. The NSP is aimed at realizing mutual prosperity and peace not only on the Korean Peninsula but in East Asia and the world. To this end, the policy seeks to elevate Korea’s relations with ASEAN member states and India in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres, among others, to the same level Korea maintains with the four major powers (the United States, China, Japan and Russia)”*

Source: Presidential Committee on New Southern Policy, Republic of Korea

**64** The dawn of South Korean President Moon Jae-in’s NSP has undeniably created drastic shifts in the region’s economic and political arena. It could be seen as South Korea’s effort to reach out to its neighboring countries in the south through various exchanges. One of the aspects involved in NSP is education aspect. The implementation of NSP is giving impact increasing the number of ASEAN students in South Korea. In 2017, the number of ASEAN students reached 6,706 students. Vietnam becomes the most country that has contributed ([Anantasirikiat, 2017](#)).

FIGURE 1. THE NUMBER OF ASEAN STUDENTS IN 2017



Source: ([Anantasirikiat, 2017](#))

A study by ([Butsaban, 2020](#)) concludes that NSP can be considered as a foundation for Korea and Thailand to promote “co-prosperity and open up a wider horizon for cooperation.” ([Pacheco Pardo, 2018](#)) investigates how NSP advances South Korea’s desire to beef up trade and investment efforts along with strengthening diplomatic relations. NSP’s vision dubbed as “People Centered Community of Peace and Prosperity,” highlights three main elements: people, peace, and prosperity to which the policy is anchored:

*People: a community that values and connects people*

*Prosperity: a community where people can share prosperity based on mutual benefits*

*Peace: a community which can contribute to maintaining and stabilizing or regional peace*

Source: Presidential Committee on New Southern Policy, Republic of Korea

This study looks at the locus of education in the context of NSP. It presents how education is positioned in the policy and how it is expected to contribute to the realization of the goals of NSP. What is the locus of education in South Korean President Moon Jae-in's NSP? How can the policy be enhanced by integrating education in its various aspects? This study is central to these two queries as the researchers conduct careful scrutiny of the study. The discussion section is divided into two parts: locus and prospects. The locus presents how NSP specifically identifies education as a vehicle in advancing the policy. The prospects section discusses inputs on how education can be further integrated in NSP given current contexts and trends as informed by the insights of the first section (locus).

This study places its significance as a timely input NSP goes full swing. The researchers attempt to look at education in the context of NSP since it has been frequently utilized as a mode of advancing policy agenda and international and regional cooperation attempts. It is high time to particularly pay attention to policy attempts towards the ASEAN region with respect to education perspectives since this aspect is seen as a promising landscape in the member states.

Nevertheless, with the realization of ASEAN community on the rise, there are some note that there still exists "simple and insufficient" mechanism regarding the awareness among many young people about the integration (Van Tuyen, 2020). Hence, forming "regional horizontal solidarity" have to achieve through engagement and education regarding various cultures and interests of ASEAN people (Siraprasiri and na Thalang, 2016).

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The process of learning by tapping essential skills and discovering the ASEAN community as explicitly mandated in the curriculum becomes the right decision to increase appreciation on ASEAN integration ([Niemted, 2016](#)).

The approaches of education in the light of contemporary ASEAN community must give emphasis on pressing issues like “cultural diversity, political, economic, social, conflict and peace, interdependence among nations in the world and others ([Arifin and Hermino, 2017](#)). Furthermore, looking into the bigger picture that impacts teaching and learning and academic achievement surely captures which approaches are deemed effective and efficient towards delivering quality education in the ASEAN region. The Developments in the Southeast Asian region that be anchored from public education can be bringing the developments in ASEAN region towards a more general international landscape which includes “innovation, urbanization, transparency, and social and economic issues ([Tay, 2017](#)).

### METHODS

This qualitative study employs policy document analysis as an approach. The NSP is utilized as the main document for this research. For gathered main document, researcher downloaded main document on the website of the Presidential Committee on the New Southern Policy, which has both English and Korean language options. According to ([Cardno, 2018](#)), it is imperative that leaders in the education sector possess the capacity to examine policies that aid in “developing, implementing, and reviewing organizational policy.” Through the ‘document as text’ mechanism, perspectives and discourses are considered to possess a “force of their own” ([Karppinen & Moe, 2012](#)). ([Stoffelen, 2019](#)) also noted the merit of policy document analysis being “systematic and reflexive.

For the data analysis, the researchers examined the NSP with respect to the locus of education as presented in the document. The initial analysis are anchored on related keywords such *stu-*

*dents, teachers, academic, schools, and other concepts.* The contents of the NSP in relation to the established goals of the study are highlighted and given emphasis which were then compiled. Themes are subsequently generated and discussed in relation to the setting and background. With these findings, the researchers identified prospects as avenues to further enhance NSP through the lens of education.

## DISCUSSION

This section presents a two-part discussion according to the objectives of the study. The first part deals with the locus of education in the context of NSP, followed by inputs towards the improvement of NSP.

### LOCUS OF EDUCATION IN NSP: SOUTHWARD EX-CHANGE

The entire NSP document is presented in a 34-page policy information material which is accessible and may be downloaded through the website of the Presidential Committee on the New Southern Policy, which has both English and Korean language options. The NSP website is a direct to the point portal which provides convenience for easy navigation.

As an initial step to identify the locus of education in NSP, related words and concepts are searched in the policy, which yields the following results:

TABLE 1. WORD COUNT OF EDUCATION AND OTHER RELATED CONCEPTS

| WORD/CONCEPT         | WORD COUNT |
|----------------------|------------|
| student              | 5          |
| education            | 4          |
| teacher/s            | 2          |
| scholarship/s        | 2          |
| technical/vocational | 2          |
| study                | 1          |
| research             | 1          |

Source: Author analyze, 2020

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As seen in Table 1, NSP presents very limited mention of concepts related to education. There was also no single mention of the following words in the NSP document: university, academic, learning, and school. It could be noted how the context of education is boxed on specific boundaries.

The word *student*, mentioned 5 times, has been stated in two particular areas, under the People domain. The first aspect is on *strengthening capacity building for students, teachers and public officials from the NSP target countries*, in which NSP is positioned to providing support through intensification of “student exchanges through scholarship programs.” Students (college) in higher education institutions may also benefit from “invitational programs” while training will be offered to public officials. According to (Rosland, 2020), education is seen as an innovative opportunity to explore between Korean and ASEAN countries since both parties have already been engaged in other areas such as economic, political, and socio-cultural. (Gill, 2018) has noted how South Korea is projecting as the main driver for “higher education regionalism.”

The second aspect is on *providing support to build human resources capacity*, which covers scholarship support to undertake study in Korea, enhancing “exchanges among public officials and experts,” and boosting programs related to training on technical and vocational education. It could be noted that student exchange program is projected as the forerunner of NSP’s agenda towards mobility and academic exchange efforts. It is not explicitly stated, however, if these activities carry the inbound and outbound component (South Korea to ASEAN countries and vice versa), or just simply an absolute one-way program: from ASEAN countries to South Korea. (Fajarwati and Suyanto, 2020) presented the Indonesian scenario by concluding that academic and scholarship and geographical and bilateral cooperation are the aspects considered in deciding the study abroad destination. The word *education* has been mentioned 4 times also under the People domain. The first statement to present this is listed

as a provision to immigrants and migrant workers as a mechanism to uphold their rights. Along with it are other programs such as medical services which could be beneficial to them to “help them settle in Korean society.” (Lee and Cho, 2019) recognized the need to revisit the employment permit systems and the manner to which occupational and health standards are observed. As immigrants and migrant workers become essential contributors of the Korean society, NSP brings forth their welfare through “enhanced protection.” This section clearly states not just providing assistance as they adjust to Korean life but also reintegration once they decide to go back to their own countries. There is a need to improve healthy activities that are “physical-leisure-based” for the betterment of the life quality of foreign workers (Lee & Lee, 2020).

With the growing attention given to multiculturalism, education is also seen by NSP as an avenue to offer support to “women and children of vulnerable multicultural families.” Medical care is also stated as assistance. (Kim, 2018) concluded that a “wider and demand-oriented social policy” is essential in providing assistance to immigrants, as this includes Korean language and support for social assimilation. Multicultural children have been labelled as marginalized (Shin, 2019).

The inbound-outbound flow is evident in NSP through “two-way cultural exchanges.” The following activities make up the mutual efforts and benefits: expanding infrastructure to promote culture, designating official cultural exchange years to mark the anniversaries of diplomatic ties, intensifying content exchanges with ASEAN member states, promoting the Korean people’s awareness and understanding of ASEAN’s cultures, and expanding Korean language education. One evidence from that policy is the foreign exchange of culture pursued by the Moon Jae-in Government at the Inter-Korean Summit and at cultural exchange activities organized in connection with the 2018 summit. Another evidence two-way cultural exchange by the Moon Jae-in Government with ASEAN country is the 2018 meeting



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of Korea-Thai Foreign Ministers in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of Korea-Thailand diplomatic links addressed how the two countries should improve cooperation and collaborate on issues such as the political situation on the Korean Peninsula, Korea ASEAN relations and the Mekong River construction project ([Butsaban, 2020](#)).

A study by ([Azzwan & Azhar, 2017](#)) has recognized how language issues among those who participate in study abroad programs create problems because of interaction failure. Lastly, one of the tasks under the People domain concerning education is the needed boost to programs related to technical and vocational education.

The word *teacher*, mentioned 2 times in the NSP document, comes in under the implementation strategies of the People domain, which captures the “capacity building” for teachers coming from NSP target nations. These activities are done through exchanges and training programs. The word *scholarship*, mentioned 2 times also fall under this category, as students will be invited to study in Korea through scholarship awards. Korea is projected as a “host” not only for ASEAN students, but also from other parts of the world with the contemporary attention on internationalization of education ([Jonetal., 2014](#)).

Lastly, the word *research*, is mentioned only once in the context of the establishment of the ASEAN-Korea Standardization Joint Research Center, aligned under the policy task of *Enhancing the capacity for innovative growth through cooperation in “smart” technologies and new industries*. It is classified in the Prosperity domain. ([Dobrzanski and Bobowski, 2020](#)) have recognized how the ASEAN community has tried to formulate policies that could foster the region as a center for innovation. This promising attempt is indeed an opportunity that should not be missed in terms of regional cooperation and development.

It is interesting to note that the word *exchange* has been mentioned 34 times encompassing various contexts and backgrounds. Education is also aligned in this setting which reflects how NSP

puts effort in advancing mutual benefits and mobility.

The locus of education in NSP can be seen as a limited avenue exhausted when in fact it is one of the promising areas to explore given the nature of ASEAN perspectives. Education can be mainly and generally captured on the concept of exchange towards the South. As good and favourable as it is, education still has a lot to offer considering NSP's core policy tasks and implementation strategies.

True to its very mission, NSP highlights efforts that could enhance Korea – ASEAN ties. NSP has anchored education, though in a limited and compact manner, towards the realization of “community for the people that connects people to people and minds to minds; a community of peace that can contribute to peace across Asia; and, lastly, a community with shared prosperity.”

## **TOWARDS THE ENHANCEMENT OF NSP: ASEAN NEEDS-RESPONSIVE EDUCATION AGENDA**

With the identified locus of education in NSP, the researchers provided inputs towards the enhancement of the policy by identifying key avenues for improvement in relation to various education aspects. A great emphasis is given on the current state of the ASEAN community, thus pertinent needs are aligned in these inputs. (Babel, 2106), stated that ASEAN, in the face of disasters, requires a heightened engagement of international cooperation in order to address its needs. With the support provided by respective partners of the ASEAN region, (Nishimura, 2017) is affirmative that challenges will be addressed accordingly.

Geopolitical stability is a critical discourse among majority of ASEAN member states and the concerns related to political and geographic disputes may be strategically addressed through education efforts. (Mahbubani, 2016) has recognized how the ASEAN members have been actively upholding being a “critical catalyst of peace,” and this proves how the region is advancing

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in this aspect. Similarly, the ASEAN region has underscored “dialogue over duel” in its approach with struggling forces (Bhattacharya, 2019). Mutual training, research, and academic programs may be specifically launched as well as awareness on these study fields (political science and diplomacy and others) so Koreans as well as citizens of ASEAN member states develop conscious mind-set on the political matters not limited on their own boundaries and territories, but even in ASEAN region and beyond.

Efforts to also be anchored on allied fields of study such as peace studies, conflict management and resolution, and regional cooperation. Projecting NSP as a vehicle towards genuine understanding in the cause of geopolitical stability addresses the timely need as ASEAN member states achieve “one vision, one identity, and one community.”

The dynamic characteristic of the ASEAN populace is seen as a unique feature of the community that even NSP recognizes this fact. The opportunity is left for NSP to act as an agent in promoting lifelong learning in the ASEAN region. By doing so, individuals will be equipped with the proactive mind-set of nurturing one’s capacity to contribute to the nation’s and the region’s growth and development. It may initially spark individual motivation and aspiration, but it encompasses active citizenship in the long run, synergy effect is expected.

(Cabauatan and Manalo, 2018) have recognized how education becomes crucially significant towards economic growth amid the ASEAN integration. Lifelong learning is a promising area that could be nurtured. It bridges personal and professional desires which could eventually be anchored on being sustainable and competent. A professionally competent ASEAN individual is a member of the dynamic population that contributes to the realization of ASEAN being a “community of opportunities for all.” According to (Gunawan and Stoffers, 2017), the interest on ASEAN market community lies on the population which characterizes the growing interest for “higher standards of living.”

Similarly, ([Arisman, 2018](#)) in a study concluded that in the ASEAN context, population and income growth rate impact human development index.

Technology transfer in terms of research and training in the context of ASEAN's digital economy landscape is also a promising niche for NSP. have noted As ASEAN as one of the "fastest growing regional economic communities," ([Soedjana and Priyanti, 2017](#)), the contemporary times have seen development in consumerism and business growth and the ASEAN region carries the potential to advance sustainable growth and prosperity once infrastructures are in place. Providing assistance in terms of technical capacity and know-how through education programs and research would surely an impact on ASEAN's productivity and economic growth.

## CONCLUSIONS

The dawn of NSP signals an opportunity for ASEAN to accelerate growth and development in the region. The nature and characteristics of ASEAN as a community presents promising opportunities in various aspects, particularly education. This study has analysed how NSP presents education in its agenda towards its target nations.

Analysis of the locus of education reveals how NSP is generally heading southwards in pursuit of exchange. While education is present in some mandates, these are seen to be limited and insufficient in various contexts, mainly aimed at academic exchange and training.

The researchers have identified further avenues to explore in the light of NSP's approach to education. These include education and geopolitical stability, the increasing ASEAN populace, lifelong learning, and technology transfer. These are seen to be the pressing issues faced by the ASEAN region, to which growing needs merit immediate attention.

Advancing policy efforts through education reveals how the education can be explored and utilized as a vehicle towards re-

gional peace and prosperity. People mobility and capacity build- ing can also be made possible as education is considered as a mechanism in transforming individuals as productive profession- als, not just for themselves, but for the country, and the ASEAN region and beyond.

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