

The Role of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) in Promoting the Internationalization of Higher Education and Strengthening Educational Cooperation in the ASEAN Region (2015-2025)

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This study analyzes the role of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) in promoting higher education internationalization and strengthening educational cooperation in the ASEAN region from 2015 to 2025. Using a qualitative method with a case study approach, this research collects data through documentation studies, in-depth interviews with key informants, and observation of SEAMEO activities. The findings indicate that SEAMEO has implemented various strategic programs including academic mobility, educational quality standardization, institutional capacity development, and facilitation of regional collaborative research. Significant achievements are evident from the increase in student participation in exchange programs from 15,000 to 45,000 students, development of over 200 joint degree programs, and increase in collaborative research publications reaching 500 international articles. Despite facing challenges of capacity gaps among countries, funding limitations, and institutional coordination complexity, SEAMEO demonstrates high adaptability in responding to global dynamics such as the COVID-19 pandemic and digital transformation. This study concludes that SEAMEO plays a vital role in creating an integrated regional higher education ecosystem, with positive prospects for developing more inclusive and sustainable cooperation in the future.

Keywords: Higher Education Internationalization, ASEAN Regional Cooperation, SEAMEO.

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1. Introduction

The era of globalization has brought about fundamental transformations across various sectors of life, including higher education, which has now become an arena of global competition. The internationalization of higher education is no longer merely a strategic option, but an urgent necessity for countries seeking to maintain relevance and competitiveness on the global stage. In Southeast Asia, this dynamic presents both challenges and unique opportunities, given the diversity of education systems, levels of economic development, and differing national policies among ASEAN member states. Within this context, the role of regional organizations becomes highly strategic in bridging gaps and facilitating mutually beneficial cooperation. The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) emerges as a regional organization established in 1965 with a specific mandate to advance cooperation in education, science, and culture in Southeast Asia. As an organization comprising eleven member countries, SEAMEO holds a strategic position in coordinating regional education policies and facilitating the exchange of knowledge and best practices among member states. The presence of SEAMEO has become increasingly relevant amid

the growing demand for higher education quality standardization, academic mobility, and mutual recognition of educational qualifications within an increasingly integrated ASEAN region [1].

The period from 2015 to 2025 marks a critical phase in the development of higher education in the ASEAN region, particularly following the implementation of the ASEAN Economic Community, which demands the harmonization of education systems and increased mobility of skilled labor. SEAMEO has responded to these dynamics by launching a range of programs and initiatives aimed at strengthening the internationalization of higher education, including the development of regional university networks, curriculum standardization, and the facilitation of student and faculty exchange programs. These efforts are intended not only to enhance the quality of higher education at the institutional level, but also to build a strong and competitive ASEAN educational identity on the global stage.

The internationalization of higher education in the ASEAN region faces a number of complex challenges that require a coordinated approach. Disparities in educational quality among member states remain a critical issue, as more developed countries such as Singapore and Malaysia have established higher education systems with strong international recognition, while developing countries such as Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar continue to struggle to strengthen their institutional capacities. Differences in languages of instruction, credit systems, and quality assurance mechanisms also create technical barriers to the implementation of academic mobility programs and the mutual recognition of educational qualifications. It is within this context that SEAMEO's role becomes vital as a facilitator and coordinator in bridging these gaps [2].

Educational cooperation facilitated by SEAMEO extends beyond bilateral or multilateral interactions among member states and involves a wide range of stakeholders, including universities, research institutions, the industrial sector, and international organizations. Through a network of regional centers of excellence located across member countries, SEAMEO has developed various training programs, collaborative research initiatives, and capacity-building activities that address multiple dimensions of higher education. Programs such as SEAMEO RIHED for higher education, SEAMEO RELC for language education, and other specialized centers have made significant contributions to advancing the quality of education and research across the region. Global geopolitical and economic dynamics also exert a substantial influence on the direction of higher education development in ASEAN. Competition for influence from major powers such as China, the United States, and the European Union in the higher education sector within the region requires ASEAN to adopt a strong and collective strategic approach. SEAMEO plays a key role in ensuring that regional educational cooperation is not only responsive to global trends but also remains grounded in ASEAN's values and development priorities. This is essential to maintaining a balance between openness to international collaboration and the preservation of regional identity and interests [3].

The development of digital technology and the transformation of online learning accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic have opened up new dimensions in the internationalization of higher education [4]. SEAMEO has sought to capitalize on this momentum by expanding access to quality education through regional digital learning platforms, the development of open educational resources, and the facilitation of virtual research collaboration. These innovations not only enhance the efficiency of educational cooperation but also create opportunities for higher education institutions in developing countries to participate more actively in regional and global academic networks without being constrained by limited physical infrastructure. Evaluating the effectiveness of SEAMEO's role in promoting the internationalization of higher education and strengthening educational cooperation during the 2015–2025 period is therefore essential to understanding its achievements, challenges, and future prospects. Despite the launch of numerous programs and initiatives, questions regarding their concrete impact, sustainability, and the equitable

distribution of benefits from regional cooperation still require in-depth examination. This study seeks to address this gap by comprehensively analyzing SEAMEO's role within the dynamics of regional and global higher education, while also providing recommendations for the development of more effective educational cooperation strategies in the future [5].

Based on the background outlined above, this study formulates several key research problems to be examined in depth. First, it seeks to explore the concrete role of SEAMEO in promoting the internationalization of higher education in the ASEAN region during the 2015–2025 period, including the strategic programs that have been implemented, coordination mechanisms among member states, and the challenges encountered in their execution. Second, the study examines the extent to which SEAMEO has been effective in strengthening educational cooperation within ASEAN, particularly in relation to academic mobility, quality standardization, mutual recognition of qualifications, and institutional capacity development. In addition, this research analyzes the factors influencing both the success and the constraints of SEAMEO program implementation, encompassing political, economic, socio-cultural, and technological dimensions that shape the regional higher education landscape. The study also investigates how SEAMEO responds to global and regional dynamics such as geopolitical competition, digital transformation, and evolving labor market demands in formulating adaptive and sustainable strategies for educational cooperation in the ASEAN region.

This research aims to comprehensively analyze and evaluate SEAMEO's role in advancing the internationalization of higher education and strengthening educational cooperation in the ASEAN region over the 2015–2025 period. Specifically, it seeks to identify the strategic programs that have been implemented, assess their effectiveness and impact on improving the quality of regional higher education, and analyze the challenges and opportunities encountered in the implementation of regional educational cooperation. The study further examines SEAMEO's coordination mechanisms and governance structures in facilitating cooperation among member states with varying levels of educational development. Ultimately, this research aims to provide strategic recommendations for the future development of higher education cooperation in the ASEAN region, drawing on lessons learned from the implementation of SEAMEO programs over the past decade. The findings are expected to offer valuable insights for stakeholders including national and regional policymakers, higher education institutions, and international organizations in formulating more effective strategies to enhance the global competitiveness of ASEAN higher education while ensuring inclusivity and an equitable distribution of benefits across all member states.

This study offers significant theoretical and practical contributions to the development of scholarship on regional higher education and international cooperation. From a theoretical perspective, it enriches the literature on the role of regional organizations in facilitating the internationalization of higher education, particularly within developing regions such as Southeast Asia, which are characterized by high levels of diversity. The study also contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of regional cooperation in responding to the challenges of globalization, using SEAMEO as a case study that provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of regional institutions in the education sector.

From a practical standpoint, this research provides concrete input for SEAMEO and education policymakers in ASEAN member states in designing and implementing cooperation programs that are more responsive to both regional and global needs. The resulting recommendations can be utilized to improve coordination mechanisms, enhance program effectiveness, and ensure the sustainability of higher education cooperation in the ASEAN region. Furthermore, the study is beneficial for higher education institutions in ASEAN by helping them better understand opportunities and mechanisms for more active participation in regional

cooperation networks, as well as for other international organizations interested in developing educational partnerships with the ASEAN region.

The internationalization of higher education is widely understood as a strategic process driven by globalization, knowledge exchange, and the demand for a competitive workforce. Contemporary theoretical perspectives emphasize that internationalization extends beyond student mobility to include curriculum harmonization, cross-border quality assurance, collaborative research, and institutional capacity development [6]. In regional contexts such as ASEAN, internationalization is closely associated with regional integration agendas and labor mobility frameworks, which require policy coordination and mutual recognition mechanisms. Empirical studies highlight that while ASEAN has made progress in promoting academic mobility and cooperation, structural disparities among member states particularly in institutional capacity, funding, and quality assurance systems continue to limit the effectiveness and inclusiveness of internationalization efforts [7].

Regional organizations play a crucial role in addressing these disparities by acting as coordinators, facilitators, and norm-setters within higher education cooperation frameworks. Research on consortium-based mobility programs and regional governance models demonstrates that such organizations can enhance sustainability and equity in internationalization by standardizing procedures and fostering trust among participating institutions (Umemiya et al., 2026). In the ASEAN context, SEAMEO has been identified as a key regional actor capable of aligning national education systems with regional priorities while responding adaptively to global challenges such as digital transformation and the COVID-19 pandemic [8]. However, existing studies tend to focus on specific programs, short-term outcomes, or national-level perspectives, leaving a gap in comprehensive and longitudinal analyses of SEAMEO's role in advancing higher education internationalization and strengthening regional educational cooperation over an extended period.

Based on this research gap, this study formulates the research problem by examining how SEAMEO has concretely contributed to the internationalization of higher education and the strengthening of educational cooperation in the ASEAN region during the 2015–2025 period. Specifically, the study seeks to analyze the effectiveness of SEAMEO's strategic programs, coordination mechanisms, and adaptive responses to regional and global dynamics, as well as the factors that facilitate or hinder their implementation. By addressing these issues, this research aims to provide a systematic and evidence-based understanding of SEAMEO's role within the evolving landscape of regional higher education governance and to inform future strategies for more inclusive and sustainable cooperation in ASEAN.

2. Literature Review and Problem Statement

Historical Background of SEAMEO's Establishment

The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) was established in 1965 within the postcolonial context of Southeast Asia, when newly independent states faced limited institutional capacity and significant educational disparities resulting from fragmented colonial administrative systems. Under these conditions, cross-border cooperation in education was viewed as a crucial strategy for strengthening human resource development and building regional knowledge networks. Regionalist discourse in the early 1960s reflected a growing collective awareness that regional stability was closely linked to the quality of education, leading to the emergence of SEAMEO as a non-political regional response to postcolonial structural challenges (Salamanca, 1991).

Institutional Structure and Organizational Functions

SEAMEO's institutional structure integrates the political authority of its member states with the technical capacity of regional networks, enabling the organization to function both as a policy-making forum and a coordinating mechanism for educational initiatives. The SEAMEO Secretariat in Bangkok serves as the central administrative and coordination body that ensures policy continuity, while the SEAMEO Council comprising Ministers of Education from member states provides regional policy legitimacy through the representation of national interests (SEAMEO, 2010; 2012).

SEAMEO's Mandate within the ASEAN Context

SEAMEO's mandate positions education as a strategic instrument for regional development, in alignment with the commitment to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on inclusive and quality education. Rooted in its institutional legacy since 1965, this mandate is both normative and operational in promoting the harmonization of education policies across member states without undermining national diversity. In this sense, SEAMEO reflects the collective efforts of ASEAN countries to strengthen regional policy coherence in education as a foundation for broader social and economic integration (SEAMEO, 2015; 2025; Valenzuela et al., 2024).

3. Method

Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of SEAMEO's role in promoting the internationalization of higher education in the ASEAN region during the 2015–2025 period. The qualitative approach is selected because the research seeks to explore and analyze complex phenomena involving multiple actors, policies, and programs within the context of regional educational cooperation. Through this approach, the researcher is able to obtain a rich and contextualized understanding of the dynamics of educational cooperation in the ASEAN region.

The study adopts a descriptive analytical design that not only describes SEAMEO's programs and activities but also examines their effectiveness, challenges, and impacts on higher education internationalization. Qualitative methods enable the researcher to capture nuances and complexities that are difficult to measure quantitatively, while also providing space to understand the perspectives of various stakeholders involved in regional educational cooperation.

Type of Research

This study adopts a case study design, with SEAMEO as the primary focus of the research. The case study approach is selected because it enables an in-depth examination of a single organization within its real-world context, thereby generating a comprehensive understanding of its role and contributions to regional educational cooperation. SEAMEO serves as an information-rich case that is well suited to addressing the research questions. The study examines a ten-year period from 2015 to 2025 in order to capture the longitudinal development and changes in SEAMEO's role. This period is chosen because it encompasses critical phases of the implementation of the ASEAN Economic Community and various transformations in regional higher education, providing a more comprehensive picture of the dynamics of educational cooperation in the region.

Data Collection Techniques

This research employs three primary data collection techniques. First, a documentation study is conducted to analyze official SEAMEO documents, including annual reports, strategic plans, policy documents, academic publications, and program evaluation reports. Documents from related organizations, such as ASEAN and the ministries of education of member states, are also reviewed to provide a broader perspective on the regional context. Second, in-depth interviews are carried out with key informants, including SEAMEO officials, representatives of education ministries from ASEAN member states, higher education leaders, and academics involved in regional educational cooperation programs. Third, observation of SEAMEO activities such as conferences, seminars, and exchange programs is undertaken to gain direct insight into program implementation and to observe interactions among stakeholders.

Data Sources

The primary data sources for this study consist of in-depth interviews with key informants and direct observations of SEAMEO activities. Informants are selected purposively based on their knowledge and involvement in SEAMEO programs, including representatives from various ASEAN member states to ensure balanced representation. The number of informants is determined according to the principle of data saturation, whereby data collection ceases when additional information no longer provides significant new insights. Secondary data are obtained from written sources such as official SEAMEO reports, academic publications, media coverage, and higher education policy documents in the ASEAN region. These secondary sources are used to complement and validate the primary data, as well as to provide a more complete historical and situational context. The combination of primary and secondary data ensures data triangulation, thereby strengthening the validity and reliability of the research findings.

Analysis Techniques

Data analysis is conducted using thematic analysis, which involves the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns or themes within the collected data. The analysis process begins with the transcription of interviews and the organization of documents, followed by data coding to identify emerging key concepts. These codes are then grouped into broader categories and subsequently developed into main themes that address the research questions. The analysis is carried out iteratively through repeated reading of the data to ensure that no important information is overlooked. An inductive approach is employed, whereby themes emerge from the data itself rather than from a predetermined theoretical framework. To ensure the rigor of the analysis, data triangulation is conducted by comparing information from multiple sources, and member checking is performed by seeking confirmation from informants regarding the researcher's interpretations.

Data Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the data in this study is ensured through several strategies. First, source triangulation is applied by collecting information from diverse sources, including documents, interviews, and observations, to ensure data consistency and completeness. Second, methodological triangulation is implemented by using multiple data collection techniques that complement and validate findings from each method. Third, peer debriefing is conducted through discussions with other researchers or academics who possess expertise in higher education and regional cooperation. Research credibility is further strengthened through prolonged engagement with the research context to gain an in-depth understanding, as well as transparency in the research process by documenting each step of data collection and analysis. Member checking is also employed by inviting informants to review and validate interview transcripts and preliminary interpretations of the data. In addition, researcher reflexivity is maintained by acknowledging and documenting potential biases or assumptions that may influence the research process.

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4. Results and Discussion

SEAMEO's Strategic Programs in the Internationalization of Higher Education

SEAMEO has implemented a range of strategic programs to promote the internationalization of higher education in the ASEAN region during the 2015–2025 period. A key initiative has been the development of regional university networks through the SEAMEO Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (RIHED), which facilitates collaboration among higher education institutions across Southeast Asia. These programs include joint curriculum development, collaborative research, and academic exchange activities involving dozens of universities from various member states. SEAMEO has also launched initiatives to harmonize regional credit systems, aiming to facilitate student mobility and the mutual recognition of courses completed at partner universities within the region.

In addition, SEAMEO has developed regional digital learning platforms that provide students and faculty throughout ASEAN with access to high-quality online courses offered by leading institutions. SEAMEO's regional scholarship programs have also been expanded to create greater opportunities for students and academics from developing ASEAN countries to pursue study or conduct research in other member states. The implementation of these programs reflects SEAMEO's commitment to building an integrated and mutually supportive regional higher education ecosystem. The effectiveness of these initiatives is evidenced by the increase in student participation in academic mobility programs, from approximately 15,000 students in 2015 to more than 45,000 students by 2024. University partnerships have also grown significantly, with over 200 joint degree and collaborative programs developed through SEAMEO's facilitation. These data indicate that SEAMEO has successfully generated positive momentum in the internationalization of higher education, although challenges remain in ensuring equitable participation among all member states [9].

Quality Standardization and Regional Quality Assurance Systems

SEAMEO plays a significant role in developing a regional framework for the standardization of higher education quality in the ASEAN region. In collaboration with the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network, SEAMEO has facilitated the development of regional quality standards that draw on international best practices while remaining responsive to the specific context and needs of Southeast Asia. This framework encompasses quality assurance criteria for academic programs, teaching and learning processes, research activities, and community engagement, which can be adopted by national accreditation agencies across member states.

The implementation of quality standardization faces complex challenges due to substantial differences in higher education systems among ASEAN member countries. Nations such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand have well-established quality assurance systems that are internationally recognized, whereas countries such as Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia are still in the process of strengthening their institutional capacities for quality assurance. SEAMEO has responded to these challenges by developing technical assistance and training programs for accreditation agencies and higher education institutions in countries requiring capacity support. The outcomes of these standardization efforts indicate positive progress, reflected in the growing number of higher education institutions in ASEAN obtaining international accreditation and regional recognition. By 2025, more than 150 higher education institutions in the ASEAN region had received accreditation from leading international accreditation bodies, a significant increase from only 80 institutions in 2015. Nevertheless, quality disparities among member states remain an ongoing concern, as the majority of internationally accredited institutions continue to be concentrated in the more developed countries of the region [10].

Academic Mobility and Regional Exchange Programs

Academic mobility programs constitute a central pillar of SEAMEO's strategy to strengthen regional higher education integration. SEAMEO has developed various student and faculty exchange schemes, ranging from short-term programs and semester exchanges to joint and dual degree programs involving two or more universities from different countries. The SEAMEO Student Exchange Programme, launched in 2016, has facilitated thousands of students to pursue studies at partner universities across the ASEAN region, with particular emphasis on priority fields such as science, technology, education, and sustainable development.

Faculty and researcher mobility has also received significant attention through the SEAMEO Faculty Exchange and Research Collaboration program, which provides support for academics to conduct collaborative research, teach at partner universities, and share expertise with regional peers. These initiatives not only enhance the quality of teaching and research but also strengthen regional academic networks that serve as a foundation for long-term cooperation. In addition, SEAMEO has developed regional information systems that enable students and faculty to more easily access information on exchange opportunities, scholarships, and available cooperation programs. Evaluations of academic mobility programs indicate positive impacts on students' global competencies and regional research capacity. Surveys of exchange program alumni reveal that more than 85 percent of respondents reported improved intercultural skills, broader professional networks, and stronger global perspectives. Nevertheless, participation in mobility programs remains uneven, with students from more developed countries tending to be more active than those from developing countries, largely due to financial constraints, language barriers, and limited access to information [11].

Institutional Capacity and Human Resource Development

SEAMEO implements comprehensive capacity-building programs to strengthen higher education institutions across the ASEAN region, particularly in countries that continue to require support in developing high-quality higher education systems. These programs include training for university leaders in strategic management, institutional governance, and transformational leadership aligned with the demands of contemporary higher education. SEAMEO also develops faculty capacity-building initiatives focused on innovative teaching methodologies, competency-based curriculum development, and the integration of technology into teaching and learning processes.

Research capacity development constitutes a major focus through regular training programs in research methodology, academic writing for scientific publications, and research management, which are conducted across various SEAMEO centers of excellence. These initiatives also include mentoring for early-career researchers to support the development of competitive research proposals and the establishment of regional and international research collaborations. SEAMEO further facilitates the formation of regional research consortia that connect researchers with similar expertise from different countries to undertake collaborative studies on regional priority issues such as climate change, food security, and sustainable development. The impact of these capacity-building programs is reflected in a significant increase in the number of scholarly publications from the ASEAN region in reputable international journals, which rose by more than 60 percent during the 2015–2025 period. Institutional management quality has also improved markedly, as an increasing number of higher education institutions adopt modern and transparent governance systems. Nevertheless, the sustainability of capacity-building initiatives continues to face challenges related to funding constraints and the need for ongoing support to ensure that the transformations initiated can be maintained and further developed [12].

Regional Research and Innovation Collaboration

SEAMEO has facilitated the development of a regional research and innovation ecosystem through the establishment of researcher networks and centers of excellence that focus on strategic fields critical to ASEAN development. SEAMEO's collaborative research programs connect researchers from different countries to undertake joint projects addressing regional challenges such as food security, renewable energy, public health, and climate change adaptation. Competitive research funding schemes managed by SEAMEO provide financial support for multidisciplinary and multinational research teams to conduct high-quality studies that generate innovative solutions to regional problems.

Regional research collaboration is further strengthened through the development of shared research infrastructure and access to advanced research facilities hosted by leading institutions across the region. SEAMEO facilitates open access to laboratories and research centers in various member countries, enabling researchers from institutions with limited facilities to engage in high-quality research. Regional platforms for data sharing and dissemination of research outputs have also been developed to accelerate knowledge diffusion and prevent unnecessary duplication of research efforts. Regional research productivity has increased significantly, with more than 500 collaborative research publications published in reputable international journals during the 2015–2025 period. Several innovations resulting from SEAMEO-facilitated collaborative research have also been commercialized, generating economic benefits for the region. Nevertheless, challenges related to disparities in research capacity among countries, limited access to adequate research funding, and the need for more effective knowledge transfer mechanisms remain critical issues that require sustained attention to ensure equitable participation of all member states in the regional research ecosystem [13].

The Role of SEAMEO in Addressing Global and Regional Challenges

SEAMEO demonstrated a high level of responsiveness in addressing various global and regional challenges that affected higher education during the 2015–2025 period. The COVID-19 pandemic represented a major test that required SEAMEO to rapidly transform its approach to facilitating regional educational cooperation. SEAMEO took the lead in developing regional online learning platforms, disseminating best practices in hybrid learning, and facilitating faculty training programs in digital pedagogy. This swift response enabled higher education institutions across ASEAN to sustain teaching and research activities despite restrictions on physical mobility.

Geopolitical challenges and intensifying competition for influence among major global powers were also addressed by SEAMEO through efforts to strengthen a shared ASEAN identity and collective regional interests in educational cooperation. SEAMEO positioned itself as a neutral platform that facilitates collaboration with a wide range of international partners, including the European Union, Japan, South Korea, and Australia, while ensuring alignment with ASEAN's regional development priorities. Through education diplomacy, SEAMEO contributed to strengthening ASEAN's bargaining position in international cooperation negotiations and safeguarding the interests of its member states. Contemporary issues such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, climate change, and sustainable development challenges also became central to SEAMEO's higher education cooperation agenda. SEAMEO supported the development of forward-looking curricula, strengthened education in digital technologies, and integrated sustainability perspectives across higher education initiatives. This adaptive capacity demonstrates SEAMEO's continued relevance and its value-added role in supporting ASEAN member states in navigating an increasingly complex and dynamic global environment [14].

Challenges and Prospects for the Development of Higher Education Cooperation

Despite the significant achievements attained, SEAMEO continues to face substantial challenges in realizing an inclusive and high-quality vision of regional higher education integration. Capacity disparities among member states remain a major obstacle, as developing countries such as Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar still require considerable support to participate on an equal footing in regional cooperation. Financial constraints also limit the scale and scope of SEAMEO's programs, given that funding largely depends on contributions from member states with limited fiscal capacity, as well as support from international development partners that is not always reliable in the long term. Institutional challenges further arise in the form of complex coordination among multiple stakeholders, including national ministries of education, higher education institutions, the private sector, and international organizations, each with distinct agendas and priorities. Decision-making mechanisms involving eleven member states with diverse political systems and development priorities often require lengthy negotiations, which can hinder rapid responses to emerging needs. Variations in national ownership and commitment to the regional agenda also persist, with some countries demonstrating active engagement while others remain relatively passive in implementing cooperative initiatives.

Nevertheless, the prospects for the future development of higher education cooperation remain positive, supported by several strategic opportunities. Digital transformation offers new possibilities to expand access to quality education without being constrained by geographical barriers or limitations in physical infrastructure. Growing recognition of the importance of regional cooperation in addressing global challenges such as climate change and pandemics has also generated political momentum to strengthen commitment to higher education integration. To capitalize on these opportunities, SEAMEO must continue to adapt by developing more flexible, inclusive, and responsive cooperation models that address diverse needs across the region. At the same time, strengthening sustainable funding mechanisms and effective governance frameworks will be essential to ensure the long-term sustainability and impact of higher education cooperation initiatives in the ASEAN region [15].

5. Conclusion

SEAMEO has played a strategic and significant role in promoting the internationalization of higher education and strengthening educational cooperation in the ASEAN region during the period 2015-2025. Through the implementation of academic mobility programs, education quality standardization, institutional capacity building, and facilitation of regional collaborative research, SEAMEO has succeeded in creating a more integrated higher education ecosystem with an increase in student participation in exchange programs from 15,000 to 45,000 students and collaborative research publications reaching more than 500 international articles. Despite facing challenges such as capacity gaps between member countries, funding constraints, and the complexity of institutional coordination, SEAMEO has demonstrated high adaptability in responding to global dynamics such as the COVID-19 pandemic and digital transformation. The prospects for regional higher education cooperation remain positive with opportunities to leverage digital technology and increasing awareness of the importance of regional collaboration in addressing global challenges, which requires the continued commitment of all stakeholders to realize inclusive and quality ASEAN higher education integration.

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