

Shall Indonesia Consider to Participate in The Southeast Asia – Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM)?

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Abstract

The Southeast Asia – Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) is the first foundational year learning metric to generate reliable data and evidence for learning outcomes across and within ASEAN countries. With the novelty of the metrics, a study highlighting the socio-political discourse on the SEA – PLM metrics is necessary. This brief explores the argument using policy paper, report, and historical overview on related studies on SEA-PLM and Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) as similar educational metrics, focusing on its dynamics and debates while comparing it to similar international large-scale-assessments (ILSAs). Indonesia has yet to announce the political decision on SEA-PLM participation. This brief aims to provide a substantial contention on wherewith Indonesia's benefit or potential challenges arise upon participating in the SEA – PLM assessment existing national education policy landscape. The findings indicated polarization of political decisions observable since its first launch with six members committed to participation—different political decisions in SEA-PLM institutionalization including; (1) *participating* or (2) *normative emulation*. Interpreting from PISA as similar ISLAs in education, the debate on the educational metrics assessment sparks a range of discourse from socio-economical, political, and potentially entrepreneurial logic.

On Indonesia's national policy landscape, National Assessment (*Asesmen Nasional*) and The Minimum Competency Assessment (AKM) in Reading Literacy and Numeration stood in line with the SEA – PLM. Indonesia government, through the Ministry of Education (MoE), may benefit from SEA – PLM in two folds; (1) use the metric result to analyze Indonesia's primary education competitiveness in the ASEAN region; (2) *as an op-ed data in preparing the nationally conducted assessment in 6th Grade students*. The potential challenges including; (1) *a significantly larger demographic than other ASEAN countries*; (2) *maintain an uncontested influence as a national policymaker upon any result of the metrics*.

I. Introduction

a. ASEAN Cooperation for Education

The cooperation for education in ASEAN's regionalism spirit has been conducted in several forms; (1) The Initiative for [ASEAN Integration \(IAI\) Work Plan III](#) (2016-2020) comprising five strategic areas of food and agriculture, trade facilitation, MSMEs, education, health, and well-being¹; (2) The [ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework \(AQRF\)](#), enables comparisons of educational qualifications across participating ASEAN Members State (AMS), encouraging mobility in education and training sectors²; (3) [ASEAN Workplan on Education](#), focused on cross-sectoral initiatives and opportunities related to education³; (4) [ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025](#) with education specifically entails under the Equitable Access for All.⁴ The initiatives have since resulted in notable improvements, especially in narrowing the development gap among AMS.

¹ ASEAN Secretariat: Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Work Plan III.
<https://asean.org/storage/2016/09/09rev2Content-IAI-Work-Plan-III.pdf>

² ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) Referencing Guideline.
<https://asean.org/storage/2017/03/AQRF-Referencing-Guidelines-2020-Final.pdf>

³ *The ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2016 – 2020*
https://www.aseanrofund.com/lib/upload/files/resources/31_-_ASEAN_20Work_20Plan_20on_20Education_202016-2020.pdf

⁴ *ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025*.
<https://asean.org/storage/2016/01/ASCC-Blueprint-2025.pdf>

From the viewpoint of ASEAN as a region, SEA-PLM is "ASEAN Way" in handling regional affairs, with its ratification yet to be announced by several member states. According to Yukawa (2017), the term 'ASEAN Way' refers to a set of rules in the ASEAN. It encompasses various procedural and political norms on decision-making based on consultation, consensus, and the general code of conduct within the international community, such as the principle of non-interference, territorial integrity, and peaceful settlement of the conflict.⁵ The term, however, is yet to be openly expressed in the current SEA-PLM publication.

b. Overview of SEA-PLM

SEAMEO Secretariat and UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office launch The Southeast Asia – Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) Programme to succeed the SDG 4 (Education) and to promote knowledge and skills on global citizenship through reliable data and evidence for learning outcomes monitoring across and within AMS countries. SEA-PLM's focuses on three learning domains: *reading, writing, and mathematics*. The Australia Center for Educational Research (ACER), under the contract with SEAMEO Secretariat, launched the result from pilot assessment in 2020, which presented the "[SEA-PLM 2019 Main Regional Report, Children's learning in 6 Southeast Asian countries](#)" conducted on 31,187 5th Grade students from 1,193 schools coming from six ASEAN members joined the assessment; *Myanmar, Philippines, Lao PDR, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Malaysia*.⁶

II. Political Discourse, Trend, and Conflict in Education Learning Metrics

The roles of instruments in shaping governance are: (1) evidential support both in cognitive and normative frameworks for public policy decisions ([Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007](#))⁷; and (2) operationalize governmentality on measuring devices and intellectual and scientific technics, ways of thinking, and epistemologies ([Miller & Rose, 2008](#)).⁸ On education policy's spectacle, the influence of metrics on policy lies on two domains; rationalization upon adoption of particular learning metrics and how policymakers govern national response to metrics analysis.

[Normand \(2020\)](#) argues political discourse on metrics observable in; (1) metric's classification corresponds to social and political investment in global landscape; (2) metric's standardization itself is a policy by which, universe of practices is harmonized and subjected to standards or "best practices," denying cultural and contextual differences; (3) on socio-environment aspect, classification promotes a hierarchical society with both cognitive and social consequences on relationships and power within society. Suppose we connect this to education policy viewpoint, in that case, higher-lower rank in metrics potentially impacts international cooperation both in a social, economic, or political manner, and comparison between high-ranked to low-ranked in metrics automates hierarchical state mentioned.⁹

As one of the prominent international large-scale assessments (ILSAs), the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) influence to national policy are varied. [Khamisi & Waldow \(2018\)](#) argues growth of ILSAs has triggered an avalanche of publications on reasons for this growth and its impact

⁵ Yukawa, T. (2017). *The ASEAN Way as a symbol: an analysis of discourses on the ASEAN Norms*. *The Pacific Review*, 31(3), 298–314. doi:10.1080/09512748.2017.1371211.

⁶ UNICEF & SEAMEO. (2020). SEA-PLM 2019 Main Regional Report, Children's learning in 6 Southeast Asian countries. Bangkok, Thailand: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF & Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) – SEA-PLM Secretariat.

<https://www.seaplm.org/PUBLICATIONS/regional%20results/SEA-PLM%202019%20Main%20Regional%20Report.pdf>

⁷ LASCOUMES, P., & LE GALES, P. (2007). *Introduction: Understanding Public Policy through Its Instruments? From the Nature of Instruments to the Sociology of Public Policy Instrumentation*. *Governance*, 20(1), 1–21. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0491.2007.00342.x

⁸ Rose, Nikolas & Miller, Peter. (2008). *Governing the Present. Administering Economic, Social and Personal Life*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292002082_Governing_the_Present_Administering_Economic_Social_and_Personal_Life

⁹ Normand R. (2020) *The Politics of Metrics in Education: A Contribution to the History of the Present*. In: Fan G., Popkewitz T. (eds) *Handbook of Education Policy Studies*. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8347-2_16

on national school reforms.¹⁰ In contrary, study by [Lopo \(2020\)](#) on Portugal's political decision entry into PISA remarks position as normative emulation as following;

“..the decision to have Portugal participate in PISA was taken in a framework of normative emulation; in other words, a situation in which the government, through its spokesman, the minister of education, wanted to present itself before the international community as modern, committed to the country's development, and responsible, at the same time valuing the quality and the importance of externalizing, before its OECD peers, the priority given to education and, additionally, to the measurement of education quality, in which the external assessment of students' performance constituted an indicator already established in the national education policy agenda”¹¹

Portugal acknowledges the role of PISA in global educational landscape while maintaining a clear political position, both as an international and national political actor, to exercises their independence in governing national education agenda without intervention from external actor/presence.

III. SEA – PLM Viewed From National Education Policy Landscape

Government Regulation (PP) 57/2021 concerning National Education Standards (SNP) acts as a reference in developing quality of education translated into eight standards.¹² SEA - PLM assessment potentially contributes to encouraging Competency Standards for Graduates with a comparative analysis to other AMS. For the primary level, The Literacy and Numeration National Assessment and Minimum Competition Assessment (AKM) policies reflect this in two competencies; *Reading Literacy and Numeration*.¹³By participating in SEA-PLM, Indonesia and each participating country are expected to develop and implement educational improvement policies and programs to improve student's learning outcomes that will benefit the national education strategic plan. Collectively, the goal of this regional assessment is to improve ASEAN education competitiveness globally.

IV. Policy Prospects

SEA-PLM share similarity to Indonesia's AKM (*Minimum Competency Assessment*) in Literacy and Numeracy skill assessment. In SEA-PLM institutionalization, following political decisions arise; *participating, or normative emulation* (in soft diplomacy language considered as non-participating decision). Interpreted from PISA as similar to ISLAs in education, debate on assessment sparks on wide range of discourse from socio-economical, political, to rising entrepreneurial logic behind the assessment.

Should Gol (Government of Indonesia) consider to participate in SEA-PLM, the following policy prospects may occur;

a. Participate in SEA-PLM

The role of Indonesia as ASEAN's natural leaders are heavily observable in economic cooperation but have yet to demonstrate prominent presence in leading educational cooperation in region yet. However, Indonesia has leadership potential in strengthening contributions for education in the ASCC Blueprint and ASEAN Workplan on Education. Indonesia's 20% state budget constitutional mandate secures a fiscal capacity to improve educational outcome. However, the Worldbank's (2013) study indicated unsatisfying learning results, especially in science and math. SEA-PLM output potentially encourages

¹⁰ Gita Steiner-Khamsi & Florian Waldow (2018) PISA for scandalisation, PISA for projection: the use of international large-scale assessments in education policy making – an introduction, *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 16:5, 557-565, DOI: [10.1080/14767724.2018.1531234](https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2018.1531234)

¹¹ Lopo, T. T. (2020). *The political decision on Portugal's entry into PISA: A research note. Policy Futures in Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210320971537>

¹² Government Regulation (PP) Number 57 Year of 2021 concerning the National Education Standards (SNP). <https://jdih.kemdikbud.go.id/arsip/Salinan%20PP%20Nomor%2057%20Tahun%202021.pdf>

¹³ Indonesia Ministry of Education. (2020). AKM dan Implikasinya pada Pembelajaran. ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING CENTER, Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia. Retrieved from: https://hasilun.puspendik.kemdikbud.go.id/akm/file_akm2_202101_1.pdf

improvement from shared metrics (literacy and numeracy skill). However, this participation is followed by several challenges:

- *Express a clear political position.* Adopting Portugal's practice, Gol must state that national education governance will remain unaffected by the result. Participating AMS, by any means of force, is prohibited from interfering with process due to institutionalization and Indonesia maintains an uncontested position and influence as a national policymaker.
- Population-wise, decentralizing SEA-PLM is challenging. With a larger demographic (25,2 million Primary Students in 2020 from 148,224 schools), data collection for SEA-PLM study in Indonesia could integrally draw a more significant proportion of efforts both in administrative and technicalities.
- Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Local Government has secured Gol joint effort in national agenda (cooperation between Central & Local Government). Acknowledging difference in readiness across regions, **Piloting the assessment** by choosing region with highest possibilities to conduct are suggested.

b. Additional Suggestion Related to SEA-PLM Adoption

Context-specific factors like education system, social and political landscape shape national education systems' development and individual path and performance of children from early grades to higher levels of education in AMS (UNICEF & SEAMEO, 2020). With this consideration, SEA-PLM inadequately act as sole framework in improving quality of primary education. This assessment's results however are useable as **additional consideration for national education strategic plan**. With sample in SEA-PLM coming from Grade 5, result of assessment will be useful for improving the quality of further education for students to grade 6 elementary schools, who will participate in National Assessment (AN) policy.