

MALAYSIAN YOUTH'S PERSPECTIVE TOWARDS ASEAN COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

This study is aimed at getting the reaction of Malaysian youth towards the implementation of the ASEAN Community. A survey was conducted between August and September 2015 to test four key variables of understanding, attitudes, awareness, and preparedness. A total of 5,032 Malaysian youths representing four zones, namely North, South East and West of Peninsular Malaysia and two zones covering Sabah, and Sarawak. For the purpose of collecting data and information, a semi-structured Focus Group Discussion interview instrument has been adopted. There are four interesting findings. Firstly, the knowledge and understanding of ASEAN Community among Malaysian youths is still minimal. Second, Malaysian youth have a good perception on the relevance and benefits of the ASEAN community. Although their level of awareness is still low, support for the formation of the Community is good. Third, Malaysian youths feel that they are not ready for the ASEAN Community. Finally, the findings suggest that the government needs to embark upon various youth-inclusive programmes. The aim is to provide a more sensitive and ready youth generation to the ideas and concept of the ASEAN Community integration.

Keywords: *Regional Community Establishment, ASEAN Community, Malaysian Youth, Survey Study*

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini bertujuan mendapatkan reaksi belia Malaysia terhadap pelaksanaan Komuniti ASEAN. Satu soal selidik telah dijalankan antara bulan Ogos dan September 2015 untuk menguji empat pembolehubah utama: kefahaman, sikap, kesedaran, dan kesiagaan. Seramai 5,032 orang informan yang terdiri daripada belia Malaysia mewakili empat zon iaitu zon utara, selatan, timur dan barat Semenanjung Malaysia serta dua zon meliputi Sabah dan Sarawak telah dijalankan. Bagi tujuan pengumpulan data dan maklumat, instrumen temubual Focus Group Discussion (FGD) secara semi berstruktur telah digunapakai. Terdapat empat dapatan yang menarik. Pertama, pengetahuan dan kefahaman belia Malaysia terhadap Komuniti ASEAN didapati masih lagi minimal. Kedua, belia Malaysia mempunyai persepsi yang baik terhadap kesesuaian dan faedah Komuniti ASEAN. Walaupun tahap kesedaran mereka masih rendah, sokongan kepada pembentukan komuniti tersebut adalah baik. Ketiga, belia Malaysia merasakan bahawa mereka tidak bersedia dengan Komuniti ASEAN. Akhir sekali, dapatan kajian ini mengesyorkan agar pihak kerajaan perlu melancarkan beberapa program inklusif untuk para belia. Tujuannya ialah untuk menyediakan generasi yang lebih peka dan

bersedia kepada idea dan konsep integrasi Komuniti ASEAN.

Kata Kunci: *Pembinaan Komuniti Serantau, Komuniti ASEAN, Kesedaran Belia, Survei*

INTRODUCTION

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has emerged as a leading regional groupings that promotes cooperation among the ten member countries in the region. ASEAN was founded in 1967 by five states, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Singapore in the backdrop of a Cold War setting – at a time when the world was experiencing ideological conflicts between the two superpowers – the Soviet Union and the United States. In fact, the initial motivation for the formation of this regional organization was to mitigate and manage the power play between these superpowers in the region. The Vietnam War, the instability in Cambodia, China's support for communist insurgency, and territorial disputes among neighbours indicate the possibility of a full-blown armed conflict in the region was imminent, leading to a prolonged tension in the region. After 45 years of its inception, ASEAN has emerged stronger in promoting regional cooperation. Adding its membership to the total of 10 countries, ASEAN become one of the most stable and successful regional groupings of the developing world, and a force of stability and cooperation in Asia. Having survived the Cold War, ASEAN has successfully built and embraced the coalition of 10 nations including those which were adversaries during the Cold War era. Some observers regarded ASEAN as a paragon of a successful regional cooperation (Moorthy & Benny, 2013).

Emulating the initial success of the European regionalism, ASEAN has set its objective to forge a closer integration among member countries and embarked upon the ambitious project of creating an ASEAN Community. The idea for a regional community identity was first discussed during the 1997 Informal ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur. The ASEAN community idea is also part of the ASEAN 2020 Vision. The ASEAN's Nineteenth Bali Summit signifies an important milestone for ASEAN since all member countries agreed to form a formal regional Community by 2015. The joint statement of the 2003 Summit emphasises the commitment of the ten-member countries by declaring “an ASEAN Community shall be established comprising three pillars, namely political and security cooperation, economic cooperation, and social-cultural cooperation...” (Declaration on ASEAN Concord II 2003). In 2015, Malaysia, as the chair of the twenty-sixth ASEAN Summit took the lead by formally declaring the formation of the regional community. The slogan, “One People, One Community, One Vision”, portrays ASEAN's confidence to build a sustainable regional identity in years to come.

Nonetheless, it has been argued that ASEAN is an elitist and a state-centric organization. It lacks public involvement in the process of regional identity formation. There is also a huge gap between the public and the elite in terms of

decision-making process especially in regards to the formation of ASEAN Community. (Benny, 2015; Abdullah & Benny, 2013; Benny & Abdullah, 2011; Moorthy & Benny, 2012, 2013; Collins, 2008; Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970; Hewstone, 1986) The European experience, for instance, has clearly shown that public opinions needs to be gauged and attended to for the success of the integration and for making effective decisions. Theories of regional integration have shown that the public opinions and participations determine the success of such efforts. Given the current plurality of political, economic and social systems in the region, Moorthy & Benny (2012) argued that it is difficult to determine the public opinion through a direct voting mechanism similar to that of the European. Thus, a more feasible measure needs to be used effectively. There is lack of comprehensive studies to measure people's understanding, opinion, attitude and aspiration on the ASEAN Community. It cannot be denied that some works have been carried out on the public opinion on ASEAN Community (Benny, 2015; Abdullah & Benny, 2013; Benny & Abdullah, 2011; Moorthy & Benny, 2012, 2013). However, there is a vacuum in terms of understanding the youth perception on establishing the regional community This is not to mention the absence of studies about public aspiration of the three pillars of the ASEAN Community.

THE STUDY

In the case of Malaysia, probably there is no attempt to seek the youth's opinion on the subject. Studies on the ASEAN community are numerous, yet these studies were conducted by government officials and academicians using an elite decision making approach to assess the establishment processes or social, political, and economic challenges of ASEAN (Acharya, 2003; Hew, Wah, & Lee, 2004; Hew, 2007; Guerrero, 2008), as well as the readiness of the business sector for AEC (Abidin, Loh, & Aziz, 2012; Mugjayani & Kartika, 2012). Studies on public opinion about ASEAN are very few. There have only been a number of studies involving public opinion about ASEAN (see Abdullah & Benny, 2013; Benny, 2014; Benny & Abdullah, 2011; Benny, Moorthy, Daud, & Othman, 2015a, 2015b; Benny, Rashila & Tham, 2014; Benny, Siew Yean, & Ramli, 2015; Moorthy & Benny, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Thompson & Thianthai, 2008), those studies were based on the public opinion surveys conducted between 2009 and 2010 and do not discuss the opinions, attitudes and aspirations for the ASEAN Community among Malaysian youths. Studies conducted by Benny (2015) examined the awareness and perceptions of the ASEAN Community relevancy among the public in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam. His analysis is limited to the study on ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) aspect only.

Therefore, this study is to fill those gaps. It is generally aimed to examine the Malaysian youths' opinion especially on their understanding, attitude, awareness, and preparedness to the establishment of ASEAN Community. The youth – those who are in the age between 15 and 40 years – is a very important segment of people not only in Malaysia but also to the whole ASEAN region. It is expected that the youth population in Southeast Asia will increase to 55% by 2020.

This study is different from the past studies in three ways: Firstly, none of past studies are focused on the opinion and attitude of Malaysian youths on the ASEAN Community. Secondly, the object of this study is different since it involves the data from six different zones in Malaysia– the central, northern, southern, and eastern part of Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah, and Sarawak. Thirdly, the study involves a large number of respondents where 5,032 Malaysian youth were interviewed.

RESEARCH VARIABLES AND INDICATORS

Research variables used in this study are organized based on the three specific research objectives. In order to achieve the first research objective - to examine the extent of which the Malaysian Youths know and understand about the ASEAN Community, we measure: firstly, the objective awareness of the ASEAN Community (four open-ended indicators); and secondly, the subjective awareness (measured with 6 six-scale Likert indicators). Most subjective awareness indicators were adapted from the public opinion study conducted by Abdullah, Benny, and Omar Din (2010) and Moorthy and Benny (2012b).

The study also attempts to examine support for the ASEAN Community among the youth. This objective is measured by using seven six-scale Likert indicators of support. Details of the questions are presented in the appendix.

Finally, this study is to assess Malaysian youth preparedness for the ASEAN Community. This variable is analysed using the five six-scale Likert indicators developed together by the research team through a series of focus group discussions (FGD) with experts in the Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

Survey Design

This study uses a survey method in collecting responses based on the three major objectives highlighted earlier. A set of Bahasa Malaysia structured self-administered questionnaires was used. The questions were tested during two pilot tests. Modifications were made after the pilot tests. Each pilot study involved 20 respondents. The pilot studies were conducted in Bangi, Selangor (representing urban area) and Changloun, Kedah (representing rural area).

The survey sampling utilized multi-stage purposive sampling method in twelve areas (six each in urban and rural areas) in six zones in Malaysia. The stages of sampling are as follows. Firstly, the survey was divided into six zones, where Peninsular Malaysia was divided into four zones – north, south, central, and east. Sabah and Sarawak are the remaining zones. Secondly, each zone was further divided into two areas – rural and urban. The study decided to select 60% of the respondents from urban areas and 40% respondents from rural areas: Kota

Bahru and Kuala Krai in Kelantan representing the peninsular's eastern zone; Johor Bahru and Pontian in Johor representing the southern zone; and Alor Setar and Kodiang in Kedah representing the northern zone; Bangi and Kuala Selangor in Selangor representing the central region of the Peninsular. In Sabah and Sarawak, Kota Kinabalu, Keningau, Kuching and Serian represent the two states respectively. Finally, in each of the twelve areas, the respondents were selected by quota sampling based on major ethnic groups which represents the Malaysian population (48% Malay, 24% Chinese, 12% Indian, 16% Sabahan and Sarawakian indigenous groups).

The survey was conducted between August and September 2015. The study targeted 500 respondents in each urban area and 330 in each rural area. Enumerators from each area with the assistance of the local Youth and Sport office were assigned to collect and compile the data from the survey. The enumerators directly met and interviewed respondents in each area or zone assigned to them.

Methods for Analysis

The study used univariate statistics procedures to obtain a descriptive statistical profile of the respondents. Whenever relevant, data were analysed using the univariate analysis statistics such as frequency, percentage, and mean. To simplify the analysis, the frequency distributions of 6-point scales were regrouped into three response categories – tend to agree, tend to disagree and undecided. Thus, those who disagree and completely disagree were combined into one group of “disagree”; those who agree and completely agree were combined into one group of “agree”; and those who somewhat agree and somewhat disagree were combined into one group of “undecided.”

RESPONDENT PROFILES

The respondents involved in this study consist of 5,032 Malaysian youths. About 3,009 respondents (59.8%) live in urban areas while 2,032 respondents (40.2%) live in rural areas. In term of gender, 54.6% of the respondents are male while 45.4% are female. In urban areas, 55.1% respondents are male and 44.9% are female. In rural areas, male respondents made up 53.8% of the respondents, while the remaining 46.2% are female.

In term of age group, 24.8% of the respondents came from 15-18 years old group, 20.8% in the 19-24 years old group, 16.8% were in 25-30 years old group and 37.6% were from 31-40 years old group. In urban areas, 24.6% of respondents were from 15-18 years old group, 22.1% were from 19-24 years old group, 16.0% were from 25-30 years old group and 37.3% were from 31-40 years old group. In rural areas, 25.0% of respondents were from 15-18 years old group, 18.8% were from 19-24 years old group, 17.9% were from 25-30 years old group and 38.3% were from 31-40 years old group.

In terms of marital status, majority of the respondents (59.6%) were single, while 39.3% were married. The remaining 1.2% was either widow or widower. In urban areas, 61.7% were single, 37.3% married, and 1.0% widow/widower. In rural areas, 56.5% single, 42.2% married, and 1.3% widow or widower.

On type of occupation, 22.7% of the respondents work in government sector, 25.3% in private sector, 23.0% doing business, 9.4% students, 5.2% university or college students, 12.9% housewives, 0.8% others and, 3.3% were not working. In urban areas, 21.6% of the respondents worked in government sector, 24.8% in private sector, 23.4% doing business, 7.6% students, 3.5% university or college students, 15.0% housewives, 0.8% others, and 3.2% were not working. In rural areas, 24.2% of the respondents worked in the government sector, 19.8% in private sector, 22.3% doing business, 12.2% students, 7.7% university or college students, 9.8% housewives, 0.7% others and, 3.3% were not working.

Majority of the respondents were SPM/SPMV school leavers; 20% have either Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), Sijil Tinggi Agama Malaysia (STAM), other certificates or diplomas; 13.5% have bachelor degrees, 3.6% master degrees and 0.8% doctoral degrees. However, there are also 22.6% of the respondent who hold Sijil Rendah Pelajaran Malaysia (SRP) or Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) certificates; 1.2% hold Ujian Penilaian Sekolah rendah (UPSR); and 1.6% does not have formal education.

In term of ethnicity, 47.6% respondents are Malay, 23.1% are Chinese, 11.9% Indian, 10.9% Sabahan, 4.7% Sarawakian, and 1.8% are other ethnicities. In the cities, 46.8% respondents are Malay, 24.5% are Chinese, 12.7% Indian, 10.2% Sabahan, 4.4% Sarawakian, and 1.4% are other ethnicities. In the rural, 48.8% respondents were Malay, 21.2% were Chinese, 10.7% Indian, 11.8% Sabahan, 5.2% Sarawakian, and 2.4% from other ethnicities.

In addition, majority of the respondents (56.6%) are Muslims, 19.1% Buddhists, 10.5% Hindus, 13.8% Christians, and 0.1% others. In the urban areas, 56.3% of respondents were Muslims, 21.1% Buddhists, 16.3% Hindus, 11.1% Christians, and 0.2% others. In the rural areas, 57.0% of respondents are Muslims, 16.1% Buddhists, 9.2% and Hindus, 17.7% Christians.

AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE ASEAN COMMUNITY

Subjective Awareness of the ASEAN Community

To measure the subjective awareness of the Malaysian youths on the ASEAN Community, four (4) six-scale Likert indicators were posed to the respondents (see Figure 2). The study found that majority of the respondents (59.8%: 59.9% in urban areas, 59.7% in rural areas) claimed that they have heard or read about ASEAN Community. Only 7.0% (7.2% in urban areas and 6.6% in rural areas) were not

aware of the ASEAN Community. However, nearly one-third of the respondents (33.2%: 33.0% in urban areas, and 33.7% in rural areas) were not sure whether they have heard or read about the regional integration initiative.

While the study found that awareness of the ASEAN Community among Malaysian youth is high, it seems that it is superficial since they admitted that they do not know the details. Through the FGD exercise, the study found that only a fraction of the respondents have awareness about each of the three pillars of the ASEAN Community.

The study also found that only slightly more than one-fourth of the respondents (27.4%: 27.6% in urban areas and 27.2% in rural areas) were aware of the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC). The largest number of respondents (49.6%: 46.5% in urban areas and 54.3% in rural areas) were not sure if they are aware of the APSC.

Similar findings can also be found in the exposure of respondents to the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). The study found that only less than a third of the respondents (29.4%: 30.9% in urban areas and 27.2% in rural areas) were aware of the AEC. Majority of the respondents (50.6%: 47.6% in urban areas and 55.0% in rural areas) were not sure if they are aware of the AEC.

On ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), the study found that less than a quarter of the respondents (20.9%: 22.6% in urban areas and 18.3% in rural areas) were fully aware. Majority of the respondents (50.9%: 48.4% in urban areas and 54.6% in rural areas) were not sure if they are aware of the AEC. Among the three pillars of the ASEAN Community, the unawareness of ASCC is the weakest among the Malaysian youth.

The study further analysed to find out whether there is a significant difference on the awareness of youth living in urban areas and rural areas. Therefore, the study uses the two-independent samples Mann-Whitney Test. This test, shown in Table 1, found that the awareness of urban youths is significantly higher than those in rural areas. However, there is no significant difference on the awareness of APSC, AEC or ASCC.

Table 1: Mann-Whitney Test Result of Awareness among Youth based on the Location of Residence (Urban versus Rural Areas)

	Location	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney Test Results
I have heard or read about ASEAN Community	Urban	3001	2537.71	7615673.0	Mann Whitney Z = -2.36
	Rural	1997	2442.08	4876828.0	Asymp Sig (2 tailed) = 0.02
	Total	4998			Result: Youths in the urban areas are more aware of the ASEAN Community than those in rural areas.
I have heard or read about ASEAN Political Security Community	Urban	3002	2478.25	7439712.5	Mann Whitney Z = -1.37
	Rural	1998	2533.93	5062787.5	Asymp Sig (2 tailed) = 0.17
	Total	5000			Result: No significant differenece in urban and rural areas.
I have heard or read about ASEAN Economic Community	Urban	3001	2524.72	7576685.0	Mann Whitney Z = -1.53
	Rural	1998	2462.87	4920815.0	Asymp Sig (2 tailed) = 0.13
	Total	4999			Result: No significant differenece in urban and rural areas.
I have heard or read about ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community	Urban	2995	2497.87	7481123.5	Mann Whitney Z = -0.24
	Rural	1992	2488.18	4956454.5	Asymp Sig (2 tailed) = 0.81
	Total	4987			Result: No significant differenece in urban and rural areas.

Objective Knowledge of the ASEAN Community

To measure the objective knowledge of Malaysian youths on the ASEAN Community, six open-ended objective questions were asked. The level of awareness was measured by the number of correct answers. If a respondent could not correctly answer the question or did not answer a question, they are categorized as the unaware respondents. The answers and level of awareness are displayed in Table 2.

The study also assessed the extent of objective knowledge by analysing the number of correct answers for the six objective questions. The study found that majority of the respondents (70%: 68% in urban areas and 73% in rural areas) were weak in their objective knowledge that they could only answer a maximum of two correct answers. Only 16% (18% in urban areas and 15% in rural areas) were able to answer three to four questions correctly, thus, they can be categorized of having a moderate knowledge. Finally, there were only 13% (14% in urban areas and 13% in rural areas) who are able to answer five to six questions correctly.

Table 2. Objective Knowledge of the ASEAN Community

	Urban	Rural	Overall
Aware that ASEAN Community will be declared as effective in 2015.	25.9%	20.7%	23.8%
Aware that Timor Leste not yet a member of ASEAN.	25.5%	21.9%	24.1%
Aware that Malaysia is chairing ASEAN in 2015.	38.9%	41.6%	40.0%
Aware that ASEAN Secretariat is located in Jakarta.	24.3%	20.2%	22.7%
Aware that ASEAN was founded in 1967.	24.4%	20.2%	22.7%
Aware that ASEAN has 10 member countries.	35.2%	39.2%	36.8%

The study further analysed to find out whether the level of objective knowledge relates to the respondents' place of residence using 2-independent samples Mann-Whitney Tests. The statistical test as shown in Table 3 found that the objective knowledge of those living in urban areas were significantly higher than that in rural areas.

The study also analysed the correlation between the level of education and the level of objective knowledge using the Pearson's Correlation Test. The statistical tests, as shown in Table 3 found the existence of positive but rather weak correlation between the level of current education and objective knowledge among Malaysian youths. This finding means that youths with higher education tend to answer the objective questions more correctly.

Table 3: Mann-Whitney Test Result of Objective Knowledge among Youth based on the Place of Residence and Level of Education

Mann-Whitney Test of difference of Level of objective knowledge based on Place of Residence (Rural versus Urban)	Location	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney Test Results
	Urban	3001	2558.31	7695397.5	Mann Whitney Z = -3.173
	Rural	1997	2451.81	4957567.5	Asymp Sig (2 tailed) = 0.02
	Total	4998			
	Result: Youths in the urban areas are having more objective knowledge of the ASEAN Community than those in rural areas.				
Pearson Test of significant correlation between 'Current Education' and 'Numbers of Correct Answers'	Pearson Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.000				
	Pearson correlation = 0.154				
	Result: There is a significant positive but rather weak correlation between level of current education and numbers of correct answers.				

SUPPORT FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ASEAN COMMUNITY

The third variable of attitude - supports for the establishment of ASEAN Community is measured using seven (7) six-scale Likert indicators. In general, the respondents showed their supports for the ASEAN Community and its major pillars. However, many of them were not sure whether to support the regional integration initiatives.

In many cases, the percentage that was unsure about the statement is quite high.

Firstly, the establishment of the ASEAN Community was supported by about 47.5% respondents (49.4% in urban areas and 44.7% in rural areas). However, the number of respondents who were not sure about their support are quite substantial (42.7%: 43.2% in urban areas and 41.9% in rural areas). Those who did not support were 9.8%: 7.4% in urban areas and 13.4% in rural areas.

Secondly, majority of the respondents were not sure whether they should support the free trade component of AEC (48.6%: 49.5% in urban areas and 47.3% in rural areas). Only 38.3% respondents (39.3% in urban areas and 36.7% in rural areas) showed their support for the free trade. These figures are almost three times higher than those who did not support (13.1%: 11.2% in urban areas and 16.0% in rural areas).

Thirdly, there are a significant percentage of respondents who were unsure about the free movement of skilled professional workers in AEC (48.3%: 47.5% in urban areas and 48.9% in rural areas). Only 36.9% respondents (39.0% in urban areas and 33.7% in rural areas) showed their support. These figures are more than double of those who did not support (14.8%: 12.1% in urban and 18.8% in rural areas).

Fourthly, majority of the respondents were not sure regarding their support on the ASEAN principle of non-interference of internal affairs of member states (46.2%: 46.2% in urban areas and 46.4% in rural areas). The concept was supported by only 39.7% respondents (41.0% in urban areas and 37.6% in rural areas). Only 14.1%: 16.0% in urban areas, and 12.8% in rural areas did not support.

Fifthly, there is almost an equal percentage for those who agreed with those who were with no opinion on the role of ASEAN to be more active in managing conflicts between member countries.. In general respondents who agreed to the statement were 44.9% (46.1% in urban areas, and 43.3% in rural areas), while those who did not have any opinion were 44.6% in general (46.0% in urban areas and 42.3% in rural areas). Only 10.5% in general (7.9% in urban areas and 14.4% in rural areas) did not support.

Sixth, the role of ASEAN to conserve cultural heritage was supported by majority of the respondents (50.7%: 52.0% in urban areas, and 48.7% in rural areas). These figures are more than five times of those who did not support (9.5%: 7.7% in urban and 12.4% in rural areas). However, many of respondents were also not sure about their support (39.8%: 40.3% in urban and 38.9% in rural areas).

Finally, majority of the respondents supported the promotion of ASEAN cultural heritage (49.0%: 49.9% in urban areas and 47.8% in rural areas). However, there are considerable number of respondents who were not sure about their support

(41.1%: 41.9% in urban areas and 39.8% in rural areas). These figures are almost five times of those who did not support (9.9%: 8.2% in urban areas, and 12.4% in rural areas).

The study further analysed to find out whether there is any significant difference between Malaysian youths living in urban areas and rural areas in terms of their supports by conducting two-independent samples Mann-Whitney Tests. The tests, shown in Table 4, found that the support is significantly higher in urban areas than that in rural areas

Table 4: Mann-Whitney Test Result of Support among Youth based on the Location of Residence (Urban versus Rural Areas)

	Location	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney Test Results
I support the establishment of ASEAN Community.	Urban	3003	2560.42	7688937.50	Mann Whitney Z = -3.639
	Rural	2000	2414.28	4828568.50	Asymp Sig (2 tailed) = 0.000
	Total	5003			Result: The support is significantly higher in urban areas than that in rural areas.
I support the free trade aspect of the ASEAN Economic Community.	Urban	3006	2599.20	7813184.00	Mann Whitney Z = -5.962
	Rural	1999	2358.34	4714331.00	Asymp Sig (2 tailed) = 0.000
	Total	5005			Result: The support is significantly higher in urban areas than that in rural areas.
I support the free movement of skilled professional workers in ASEAN.	Urban	3005	2554.23	7675466.50	Mann Whitney Z = -3.201
	Rural	1999	2424.73	4847043.50	Asymp Sig (2 tailed) = 0.001
	Total	5004			Result: The support is significantly higher in urban areas than that in rural areas.
I support the ASEAN principle of non-interference in internal affairs of member states.	Urban	3004	2572.60	7728104.00	Mann Whitney Z = -4.406
	Rural	1999	2395.90	4789402.00	Asymp Sig (2 tailed) = 0.000
	Total	5003			Result: The support is significantly higher in urban areas than that in rural areas.
I support that ASEAN should be more active in managing conflicts among member countries.	Urban	3002	2575.16	7730625.50	Mann Whitney Z = -4.603
	Rural	2000	2390.94	4781877.50	Asymp Sig (2 tailed) = 0.000
	Total	5002			Result: The support is significantly higher in urban areas than that in rural areas.
I support the conservation of ASEAN cultural heritage	Urban	3001	2576.31	7731499.00	Mann Whitney Z = -4.682
	Rural	2000	2388.00	4776002.00	Asymp Sig (2 tailed) = 0.000
	Total	5001			Result: The support is significantly higher in urban areas than that in rural areas.

I support the promotion of ASEAN cultural heritage	Urban	3006	2548.17	7659806.00	Mann Whitney Z = -1.059
	Rural	1999	2435.07	4867709.00	Asymp Sig (2 tailed) = 0.289
	Total	5005			Result: No significant difference between the perceptions of youth in urban areas and rural areas.

MALAYSIAN YOUTH PREPAREDNESS

The Malaysian Youths’ preparedness on challenges posed by the establishment of the ASEAN Community was assessed using five (5) six-scale Likert indicators. In general, it is found that the respondents were not optimistic regarding their preparedness. Approximately, only one-third of the respondents claimed that they are prepared or have made sufficient preparation. The largest group of respondents in fact were not sure of their preparedness.

Firstly, majority of the respondents were not sure whether they are prepared for the challenges posed by the formation of ASEAN Community (52.2%: 53.7% in urban areas and 49.9% in rural areas). The study found that there are only less than one-third of the respondents who confirmed that they are prepared for the ASEAN Community, while about 15.3% respondents (13.8%: and 17.6% in rural areas) are not prepared for it.

Secondly, majority of the respondents were unsure whether they are prepared to compete with other ASEAN citizens for professional jobs, (54.6%: 56.7% in urban areas and 51.3% in rural areas). The study found that there were only 26.7% respondents (16.9% in urban areas, and 21.2% in rural areas) confirmed that they are prepared to compete, while the remaining 18.7% respondents (16.9% in urban areas, and 21.2% in rural areas) are not prepared.

Thirdly, majority of the respondents were unsure whether they have sufficient skills to work or do business in other ASEAN countries, (52.4%: 54.6% in urban areas, and 49.4% in rural areas). There were only 27.8% respondents (27.3% in urban areas, and 28.4% in rural areas) who confirmed that they are prepared to compete, while about 19.8% respondents (18.1% in urban areas, and 22.2% in rural areas) contended that they are not prepared for it.

Fourthly, the study found that majority of the respondents were unsure whether they had made sufficient preparation to face the challenges of ASEAN Economic Community (51.6%: 53.4% in urban areas and 49.0% in rural areas). Nearly one-quarter of the respondents (33.9%: 33.5% in urban areas, and 34.3% in rural areas) confirmed that they had made sufficient preparation to compete, while about 14.5% respondents (13.1% in urban areas, and 16.7% in rural areas) contended that they did not.

Finally, the study found that most Malaysian youths were not confident

enough with their English communication skill. Almost half of the respondents were not sure whether they have the advantage in English communication compared to those in the region (48.5%: 49.4% in urban and 47.3% in rural areas). It is also found that nearly one-quarter of the respondents (35.2%: 36.2% in urban areas and 33.6% in rural areas) agreed to the communication advantages, while 16.3% respondents (14.4% in urban areas, and 19.1% in rural areas) who disagree..

Table 5: Mann-Whitney Test Result of Preparedness among Youth Based on the Location of Residence (Urban versus Rural Areas)

	Location of residence	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney Test Results
I am prepared to face the ASEAN Community.	Urban areas	3003	2534.28	7610443.50	Mann Whitney Z = -1.998
	Rural areas	2000	2453.53	4907062.50	Asymp Sig (2 tailed) = 0.046
	Total	5003			Result: The preparedness is significantly higher in urban areas than that in rural areas.
I am prepared to compete with other ASEAN citizens for professional jobs.	Urban areas	3003	2524.76	7581860.00	Mann Whitney Z = -1.409
	Rural areas	2000	2467.82	4935646.00	Asymp Sig (2 tailed) = 0.159
	Total	5003			Result: No significant difference between the preparedness in urban areas and rural areas.
I have sufficient skills to work / do business in other ASEAN member Countries.	Urban areas	3004	2549.43	7658482.00	Mann Whitney Z = -2.923
	Rural areas	1999	2430.73	4859024.00	Asymp Sig (2 tailed) = 0.003
	Total	5003			Result: The preparedness is significantly higher in urban areas than that in rural areas.
I have made sufficient preparation to face the challenges from ASEAN Economic Community.	Urban areas	3005	2528.73	7598823.50	Mann Whitney Z = -1.615
	Rural areas	1999	2463.07	4923686.50	Asymp Sig (2 tailed) = 0.106
	Total	5004			Result: No significant difference between the preparedness in urban areas and rural areas.
I have the advantage communicating in English.	Urban areas	3003	2576.76	7738022.50	Mann Whitney Z = -4.605
	Rural areas	2000	2389.74	4779483.50	Asymp Sig (2 tailed) = 0.000
	Total	5003			Result: The preparedness is significantly higher in urban areas than that in rural areas.

The study analysed further to find out if there is any significant difference in the preparedness among Malaysian youth living in urban areas and rural areas by conducting a few 2-independent samples Mann-Whitney Test. The tests, shown in Table 5, found that the preparedness is significantly higher in urban areas than that in rural areas with regards of preparedness to face the ASEAN Community challenges; preparedness to work / do business in other ASEAN member countries; and the advantage to communicate in English.

ANALYSIS

Based on the data presented above, it can be argued that Malaysian youths exhibit weak awareness of the ASEAN Community and understanding of its three pillars. Majority of them did not have a clear picture of the ASEAN regionalism initiatives. To test whether the hypothesis is correct or otherwise, the study analysed the data using Pearson correlation study by asserting the relations between awareness, attitudes and preparedness (refer to Table 6). The tests show the existence of a significant positive but rather weak relationship which exists between the awareness of ASEAN Community and perceived relevancy, perceived benefits, support, and preparedness. Hence, the study implies:

- The more Malaysian youths are aware about ASEAN Community, the more they show their support for the regionalism.
- The more Malaysian youths are aware about the ASEAN Community, the more they prepare for the regionalism initiative and its three pillars.

Table 6: Pearson’s Correlation Test Result of Awareness and Attitude and Preparedness

Dependent variables:	Correlation with Awareness of the ASEAN Community		
	Sig.(2 tailed)	Pearson Correlation	Conclusion
(1) Support			
I support the establishment of ASEAN Community.	0.000	0.355	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
I support the free trade aspect of the ASEAN Economic Community.	0.000	0.368	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
I support the free movement of skilled professional workers in ASEAN.	0.000	0.327	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
I support the ASEAN principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states.	0.000	0.276	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
I support that ASEAN should be more active in managing conflicts among member countries.	0.000	0.325	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
I support the conservation of ASEAN cultural heritage	0.000	0.334	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
I support the promotion of ASEAN cultural heritage	0.000	0.340	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.

(2) Preparedness			
I am prepared to face the ASEAN Community.	0.000	0.340	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
I am prepared to compete with other ASEAN citizens in professional jobs.	0.000	0.298	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
I have sufficient skills to work / do business in other ASEAN member countries.	0.000	0.289	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
I have made sufficient preparation to face challenges from ASEAN Economic Community.	0.000	0.302	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.
I have the ability to communicate in English.	0.000	0.302	A significant positive but rather weak relationship exists among two variables.

The study also found that awareness, attitude, and preparedness are generally higher in urban areas compared to that of rural areas. Having found that the level of objective awareness of the respondents in urban areas is higher than that in rural areas, it can be concluded that the differences in support and preparedness can be attributed to the different level of awareness between Malaysian youths in urban areas and rural areas.

CONCLUSION

The Malaysian youths generally have a good impression and thought on the ASEAN Community. They perceived that the regional community concept is highly relevant, beneficial, and thus support for further integration. However, there was a high percentage of those who do not have any opinion on the subject. The analysis shows that there is a significant relationship between awareness and perceived relevancy, benefits, and supports. Hence, the study concludes that Malaysian youths are not ready to face the challenges posed by the formation of the ASEAN Community. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the government particularly the responsible ministry to undertake necessary strategies in ensuring the Malaysian youths' readiness and preparedness to the regional community establishment. More inclusive programmes for the youth need to be planned and execute to give them the exposure to the challenges and opportunities of the ASEAN Community. Information should be continuously disseminate through various means of information services, such as electronic and social media as part of the socializing process of the ASEAN Community among Malaysian youths.

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