



**Towards a Framework for Analysing
Human Rights Awareness among
Undergraduate Students in Southeast
Asia/ASEAN**

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June 2019

Working Paper
SHAPE SEA Research Project

Abstract

Promoting human rights remains a major challenge in Southeast Asia/ASEAN. The core of the problem is not merely the state of rights, but the fact that the concept of human rights is still alien to most states in the region. Despite this, a recent study showed that human rights awareness appears to be positive among the people of the region. This is especially the case for university students who believe that human rights are inherent in all human beings, and they have the duty to defend those rights. While there have been studies of human rights awareness among undergraduates, there is no single approach or framework that can be used to examine such awareness that is shaped by students' diverse backgrounds and needs. A new approach or framework would essentially address this conundrum and assist initiatives focusing on human rights promotion in Southeast Asia/ASEAN.

Key words: Southeast Asia/ ASEAN, human rights, awareness, university

Introduction

Human rights continue to remain a challenging task in Southeast Asia/ASEAN. Much more needs to be done in promoting and protecting such rights in this culturally, geographically, historically, and politically diverse region. Despite continuous initiatives taken by the region's ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), such efforts are marred by divergent perceptions and treatments of human rights among commission member states. To aggravate matters, the commission's credibility comes under fire as a consequence of its selective policies on human rights that are created on the basis of preserving cultural-moral and spiritual values, and national security. There are many reasons for this: chief among them are a variety of human rights issues across the region that have resulted in the different positions and approaches of addressing them both locally and regionally. However the "crux of the problem", as Chachavalpongpun (2018) reminds us, "is not just the state of rights, but the fact that the very concept of human rights remains foreign to most of states in the region" (Chachavalpongpun, paragraph XVI, 2018). This raises a pertinent question of whether the people of ASEAN, characterized by diverse backgrounds and needs, are in fact aware of such concept, and to what extent.

However, human rights awareness appears to be positive among the people of the region, especially university students. The study presented in this article, which was conducted in two ASEAN universities (i.e. Universiti Malaysia Sarawak and Srinakharinwirot University), found that the level of human rights awareness among undergraduates was relatively high. The students believed that human rights are inherent

in all human beings and they had the duty to defend those rights. While there have been studies of human rights awareness among undergraduates, there is no single approach or framework that can be used to examine such awareness that is shaped by their diverse backgrounds and needs. More importantly, human rights awareness among undergraduates (and even the people of the region) is molded by the specificities and commonalities of their everyday lived experiences and material conditions. This is a gap in research and important to be addressed, given that existing approaches or frameworks for examining people's awareness of human rights have yet to capture the above mentioned specificities and commonalities. Thus, a new approach or framework would address this conundrum and assist initiatives focusing on human rights promotion and protection in Southeast Asia/ASEAN. Bearing all this in mind, along with the fact that undergraduate students as future leaders of our society are endowed with the will and capacity to bring about positive change for people's lives, the study presented in this article examined human rights awareness among university students in Southeast Asia/ASEAN. The study specifically aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the students' perceptions and knowledge about human rights?
2. What are the factors that might influence and shape these perceptions and knowledge?

This research was an exploratory case study conducted from a constructivist perspective; exploratory in its attempt to find answers to the questions of 'what', 'who' and so on in relation to human rights awareness among undergraduates through the use of quantitative and qualitative methods of collecting information (e.g. surveys and interviews); constructivist with the aim of understanding the phenomenon through the capturing of knowledge and meaning by both the researchers and participants involved. This eventually led to the co-creation of a new approach that guided the research process.

This article begins with a brief discussion of research methods, followed by a general overview of past studies on human rights awareness among undergraduates, and some information about the research sites. We then turn to the analysis in which we examined how students perceived human rights and demonstrated their knowledge of such rights. We also present the proposed framework and discuss the implications of our findings and recommendations for further research in our conclusion.

Research methods

The data for this article was drawn from a larger study that aimed to develop a framework for analyzing human rights awareness among university students Southeast Asia/ASEAN, drawing on the views of undergraduates from Malaysia and Thailand. The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative research methods to gather information about human rights awareness among undergraduates in the chosen sites of research, particularly their perception of and knowledge about human rights. A preliminary survey via informal face-to-face interviews was conducted to gather university students' ideas, beliefs, experiences, and attitudes towards human rights, particularly their rights as students on and beyond campus, and as citizens of their respective countries.

The results were then used to develop the actual survey, which comprised three main sections: (1) demographic information, (2) perceptions of human rights, and (3) knowledge about human rights. The survey was administered to 236 randomly selected undergraduate students from Malaysia and Thailand (i.e., 111 from University Malaysia Sarawak and 125 from Srinakharinwirot University). In-depth interviews were conducted with selected undergraduate students to gather information that were not captured by the survey. Codes of ethics and professional conduct were observed throughout both the preliminary and actual surveys, as well as the interviews in which participants' responses were kept confidential. The findings from both the survey and focus group interviews were analyzed and discussed in accordance with the study's objectives. Lastly, this was followed by the development of the proposed framework (and a web portal) with the input of undergraduates' views.

Due to the exploratory-constructivist nature of the study and the absence of an abundance of literature related to this specific topic, an analytical framework was developed to show the importance of continued research in this area. Elements of Grounded Theory (GT) were applied for this purpose (see Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1998). GT is a methodology that sets out to develop a theory or framework to analyze and understand relevant issues in people's lives. This is achieved through an inductive data collection and analysis processes where "the researcher has no preconceived ideas to prove or disprove" and allows issues pertinent to "emerge from the stories they tell about an area of interest that they have in common with the researcher" (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006, pp. 26-27). The researcher begins by collecting the participants' stories through a variety of methods (e.g. a question or a set of question). Subsequently, the data is then analyzed through various stages including coding (codes are identified from the data), conceptualizing (codes are grouped as concepts), categorizing (similar concepts

are grouped as categories that are used to generate a theory) and theorizing (final theorizing of participants' experiences based on their stories) (see Martin & Turner, 1986; Strauss & Juliet, 1994).

Studies on human rights awareness among undergraduate students

Studies have been widely conducted within specific contexts for explicit reasons (see Ahmed & Iftekhar, 2017; Dubey, 2015; Kingston, 2014; Singh & Singh, 2015). Payaslyodlu and Içduygu (1999), for instance, carried out a study on awareness and support for human rights among Turkish university students using a 20-item questionnaire that was developed based on the provisions on human rights in the Turkish Constitution. They found that the level of awareness about human rights as contained in the provision was low among Turkish undergraduates despite a high level of support for human rights as the result of their active involvement in the university's human rights activities. Padmavathy and Pallai (2015), on the other hand, conducted a study on human rights awareness of university students in Assam, India. Using a Standardized Human Rights Test developed by Sood and Anand (2012), they found that the level of awareness among Assam undergraduates was average irrespective of their gender, place of residence, faculty, and even family.

Dundar (2013) carried out a study on human rights perceptions and the differences in these perceptions among undergraduates. The "Taking the Human Rights Temperature Questionnaire" was adapted to gather inputs from 1,192 students studying at 41 departments in 10 faculties at Marmara University, Turkey. The results showed significant variations regarding human rights sensitivity between the different faculties' findings, with students from the Faculty of Theology and Faculty of Technical Education showing the highest sensitivity. The findings also show that students' gender had no significant influence on human rights sensitivity. Singh and Singh (2015) carried out a study on human rights awareness among students (i.e. teacher trainees) with respect to various aspects of human rights, including the rights to life, security, religion, expression, and education. The survey was administered to gather input from 100 B.Ed. students from four B.Ed. colleges randomly selected from the Fatehgarh Sahib district of Punjab state, revealing that only a small number of students exhibited a high level of awareness about human rights. Thus, the researchers recommended the urgent need to initiate human rights awareness-raising actions for students. This in contrast to a study conducted by Dubey (2015) on undergraduates' (i.e. prospective teachers) attitudes towards human rights. A total of 100 B.Ed. students of Allahad city took part in this study and the "Human Rights Attitude Scale" was used to gather data to show variations in attitudes based on the students' gender and program of study (i.e. Arts and Science streams). The results showed that students from both streams possessed similar positive attitudes towards human rights, although male

students demonstrated more favorable thinking compared to their female counterparts. Dubey (2015) suggested that more needs to be done to enhance or sensitize human rights attitudes among female undergraduates.

Adinew, Worku and Mengesha (2013) conducted a study on knowledge about human rights in relation to reproductive and sexual rights as well as factors that shape this knowledge. They employed an institution-based cross-sectional survey to gather input from 642 randomly selected undergraduates from Wolaita Sado University in Ethiopia. The results showed that only half of the participants possessed knowledge about reproductive and sexual rights, and how factors such as place of residence (i.e. urban areas), the program of study (i.e. health sciences), and the involvement in rights-based activities (i.e. membership in reproductive health clubs) helped shape this. Zarina Mohd Zain (2010) carried out a study on human rights awareness among undergraduates in relation to gender-based violence. Both the questionnaire and structured question methods were used to gather data from 52 respondents from four different programs of study (i.e. administrative science, business administration, accountancy, international business) at the MARA University of Technology, Malaysia. The respondents were chosen using the stratified sampling technique. The results showed that students possessed awareness in relation to gender violence, particularly sexual harassment, rape, incest, and domestic violence - to name a few. Moreover, the results showed that students who were aware of gender violence have the potential to reduce the number of gender-based violence cases and help promote awareness among students and other individuals.

It should be mentioned that there is already extensive research on human rights awareness among university students, however most of the existing research examines students' level of awareness (in addition to their knowledge of and attitudes towards human rights) and factors that shape such awareness using a variety of research instruments (most of which are surveys). Mostly, the implications of these research findings are significant for the enhancement of awareness and knowledge about human rights among university students through various means and mechanisms. Payaslyođlu and Içduygu (1999), as well as Padmavathy and Pallai (2015), for instance, recommended that more needed to be done to educate university students about human rights through various programs so they can deepen their understanding and increase their level of awareness. Dundar (2013) also suggested that studies on human rights issues and perceptions within the tertiary learning context are important for developing an action plan and improving human rights. Allahad, Adinew, Worku and Mengesha (2013), on the other hand, suggested that, in the case of Ethiopia, the Ministry of Education has to incorporate reproductive and sexual rights in the

curricula of high schools and institutions of higher learning in response to the low awareness levels of students about reproductive and sexual rights.

Further commonalities of existing research about human rights awareness among undergraduates were linked to the focus on specific contexts (i.e. university, country, setting) and specific reasons (i.e. measuring levels of human rights awareness in relation to human rights as contained in a country's constitution). This is the gap in research that the current study seeks to address given that much more work needs to be done to understand human rights awareness among undergraduates across a variety of contexts (e.g. borders and environments) and reasons. There are indeed commonalities and specificities that characterize human rights awareness as experienced by undergraduates in different geo-cultural, geo-political and geo-economic settings and set-ups. Such differences account for the creation of a framework that can be used to analyze human rights awareness among undergraduates in these locations. The literature reviewed in this section shows a number of models of and frameworks for human rights, but none of them specifically address human rights awareness among individuals or groups of people (in this case undergraduate students) in different settings and set-ups. Bearing all this in mind, the study presented in this article examined human rights awareness among undergraduates in Southeast Asia/ASEAN universities, particularly those from Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Malaysia and Srinakharinwirot University, Thailand.

The findings and the outputs (i.e. the framework and website) are important as there are many challenges in understanding and promoting human rights awareness among undergraduates in the politically and culturally diverse Southeast Asia/ASEAN. The findings and outputs will enable higher education institutions in Southeast Asia as well as policy makers and stakeholders to think of more appropriate and meaningful ways to enhance common understanding about human rights among undergraduates who are the future leaders of this region. Before proceeding further, it is important to provide some information on the chosen research sites and the rationale for choosing them.

Sites of research

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) is located in Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia, about 25 km from the city of Kuching, the capital city of Sarawak. It is Sarawak's first public university and Malaysia's eighth public university which was officially incorporated on 24 December 1992. With about 30 academic staff, the university opened its door to the first batch of 118 students on 8 August 1993. The students were registered in the two pioneering faculties, the Faculty of Social Science and the Faculty of Resource Science and Technology. Two academic centers were also established: the Centre for Applied Learning and

Multimedia, and the Centre for Academic Information Services. Today, UNIMAS offers 43 undergraduate programs, more than 60 postgraduate programs (research and coursework) at Masters and PhD levels, and two pre-university programs. The current enrolment stands at 15,487. A university that is contemporary in character and forward-looking in outlook, it is committed in providing the nation with leaders, managers, scientists and technical specialists as well as thoughtful citizens who are capable of handling complex challenges. UNIMAS is committed to democratize education by making it available on a mass basis and to ensure quality teaching and innovative delivery performance by promoting and pursuing innovative developments in teaching and learning with the aim to equip students with significant depth of specialization and relevant soft skills.

Srinakharinwirot University is a public university in Bangkok, Thailand. Founded in 1949, it was named by King Bhumipol Adulyadej after his mother Princess Srinagarindra. Srinakharinwirot University was developed from two institutions: The Advanced Teacher Training School, founded in 1949, and the College of Education, founded in 1953. Before it was named Srinakharinwirot University in 1974, the university's staff, students and civil servants lobbied the Thai government to raise the status of the College of Education to university level and transferred it from the administration of the Ministry of Education to that of the Bureau of University Affairs. Despite the constraints of the then-military government, the college made its structure, administration, and limited learning and teaching more flexible and became a university with diverse professions. The university soon began to follow a multiple-campus administration system for 16 years. After 1990, each campus became an independent university with its own budget and administration. In the past, Srinakharinwirot University consisted of six faculties: the Faculty of Education, the Faculty of Humanities and Science, the Faculty of Social Science, the Faculty of Science, the Faculty of Physical Education, and the Graduate School. Later, in Phase 5 of the Higher Education Development Plan (1982-1986), the Faculty of Medicine was set up, followed by the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Fine Arts, the Faculty of Dentistry, and the Faculty of Pharmacy in Phase 7 (1992-1996). Lastly, Phase 8 (1997-2001) saw the establishment of the Faculty of Health Science and Nursing.

The rationales for choosing these universities as the sites of research are as follows: both universities are active in promoting human rights awareness and implanting human rights values among students through various means, such as subject courses, workshops and trainings. Srinakharinwirot University, for example, offers courses such as Ethics and Society, and Men and Power as part of the general education program. Also, courses such as Human Rights and Good Governance, and Ethnic Relations are available to students at the Department of Sociology. Students in UNIMAS are thus exposed to human rights values through

faculties and university courses. Another course (Ethnic Relationship in Malaysia) examines ethnic relationships in Malaysia covering historical, political, economic and socio-political issues, and discusses steps to be taken to create a nation-state based on Malaysia's own formula. UNIMAS also regularly organizes human rights talks and workshops for students and staff in collaboration with various organizations including Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia (SUHAKAM) or the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia.

Moreover, both universities encourage student and staff participation in human rights advocacy and activism. Srinakharinwirot University, for example, is active in supporting human rights activities of students and staff through various initiatives, including the Wikigender Community Programme and the Asean Socio-Cultural Community. The Wikigender is an online platform that works closely with the School of Economics and Public Policy and other universities in the world to carry out the Wikigender University Programme with the aim to (1) actively engage student in the development of this gender equality platform; (2) bring together a range of universities to foster networking possibilities among students and academics, thereby extending network of Wikigender users; and (3) enhance opportunities for building capacity in gender research, information sharing, social networking, IT and editorial skills. In 2014, students from Srinakharinwirot contributed in many areas related to gender issues and equality including gender wage gap, feminization of poverty, and HIV/AIDS impact on working women and men in Thailand etc. UNIMAS students and staff, on the other hand, use designated platforms to discuss issues concerning their rights with the university management to find mutually acceptable solutions. These platforms include Majlis Perwakilan Pelajar (Student Representative Council), Persatuan Peagwai Akademik UNIMAS (PPAU), Kesatuan Kakitangan Am Unimas (PPAU), and Persatuan Wanita Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (MASNITA).

Both universities are also active in promoting and generating research on human rights both within the university and in collaboration with other institutions of higher learning as well as governmental and non-governmental bodies. Srinakharinwirot University, for example, has been working closely with various non-governmental organizations to address issues that concern youth, women and LGBT groups. UNIMAS has been working closely with Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia (SUHAKAM) to instill human rights values through education. In 2009, the Commission and the Ministry of Education (MOE) embarked on a Human Rights Best Practices Programme (HRBPS) to encourage students and staff alike to be aware of and adopt human and children's rights, to cultivate an attitude of respect and responsibility regarding human and children's rights as well as practicing it in everyday life, and to increase understanding and

practice of human and children's rights for their well-being. The number of schools involved in this program increased from five in 2009 to 17 in 2011. As of 2016, there are 222 participating schools throughout Malaysia including Sabah and Sarawak. The Commission is currently working on implementing the same initiative for higher institutions of learning in Malaysia.

To sum up, both universities are clearly active in promoting human rights awareness. This certainly has a significant impact on human rights awareness among undergraduate students. Hence, it makes sense for this issue to be investigated more closely in terms of how both universities can learn from each other to further enhance their efforts at inculcating human rights values.

Results and discussion

The findings are presented in three parts: (1) demographic background, (2) perceptions about human rights, and (3) knowledge about human rights.

Demographic background

A total of 235 participants took part in the survey, with 110 from Malaysia and 125 from Thailand. In terms of gender, 161 (68.5%) of them were female while 74 were male (31.4%)

In terms of age, 156 (66.3%) were aged between 17-20 years, followed by 76 (32.7%) aged between 21-24 years. 2 (0.8%) participants were aged 24 and above while 1 (0.4%) was aged 16 and below.

In terms of year of study, 111 (47.2%) participants were in their 1st year, followed by 106 (45.1%) in their 2nd year, 16 (6.8%) in their 3rd year, 2 (0.8%) in their 4th year, and 1 (0.4%) in the 5th year. Many of them came from Humanities and Sciences (i.e. education, linguistics, cognitive sciences and human development, medical and pharmaceutical).

In terms of religion, 130 (55.3%) were Buddhists, followed by 67 (28.9%) professed the religion of Islam, 30 (12.7%) were Christians, 4 (1.7%) professed Hinduism while 4 (1.7%) professed other beliefs.

In terms of family household income, 79 (33.6%) participants came from low income families, followed by 63 (26.8%) from the middle income and 53 (22.5%) from upper income families. Only 40 (17%) participants came from high income families.

In terms of current place of residence, 172 (73.1%) resided in urban area, followed by 63 (26.8%) dwelled in the rural areas.

In terms of highest level of education, 125 (53.1%) obtained M6 qualification (Thai), followed by 65 (27.6%) obtained STPM or Form Six qualification and 45 (19.1%) matriculation qualification (Malaysia).

In terms of years of involvement with human rights activities, 176 (74.8%) participants had no experience, 43 (18.2%) participants possessed less than a year of experience, 10 (4.2%) with 1-2 years of experience, 4 (1.7%) with 3-4 years of experience, and 2 (0.8%) with more than 5 years of experience. As some of the participants pointed out:

I participated in an exchange program for 6 weeks in China where better understanding of educational rights among the students of both urban and rural areas are emphasized and instilled in students.

I joined Aman Palestine for the freedom of Gaza.

Volunteering for dyslexia children activity.

The above findings reveal some important insights into the participants' diverse backgrounds and the ways in which this diversity influenced or shaped their awareness about human rights.

1. However, despite the diversity in backgrounds, the participants shared some similarities particularly in terms of their year of study (many were in their first year of study), family income (many came from middle and low income families) and current places of residence (many resided in urban areas) as well as the highest level of education (M6 for Thais and STPM for Malaysians). As these undergraduates explained:

UG#1: Yes, it [the factors] does influence my knowledge about human rights, for example regarding religious issues in West Malaysia about restricting the distribution of the Bible in Malay language in Peninsular Malaysia whereas the constitution provides freedom of religion ("Everyone has the rights to practice his or her religion" in article 11.2).

UG#2: It really influences me: Age because we become mature to get to know about this [thing]. Religion because the way it taught us to behave, who we are today, and what makes us have a different perspective in discussing such matters. To help people and to share the same safe space with anyone that needs to be treated fairly.

Although many participants had little or no experience of or exposure to human rights activities (mainly because many of them just started their study), they were able to explain what human rights meant by drawing upon their own knowledge and observations of and exposure to human rights prior their entry into the university. As these undergraduates explained:

UG#3: Yes, I started to search more about human rights as it was triggered by news involving cases of human rights issues.

UG#4: I think we can learn about human rights from everything that we see. It will teach me from experience.

2. Despite coming from institutions with different ways of promoting human rights awareness, a number of participants who had been involved in human rights activities were able to explain how these activities enhanced their understanding about human rights:

UG#5: Yes, it does. Because it directly involved human rights. And I have seen some violations of human rights, which helped me clarify human rights more. Such as being Asian; sometimes we are marked to have fewer abilities and hence get less respect from foreigners.

UG#6: Yes. Because through them I learned that people are differentiated and classified. Some went to the extent when they can't voice out their opinion and are mistreated just because they are not from a qualified social status and social background.

Perceptions about human rights

In terms of basic definition of human rights, 145 (61.7%) participants claimed that human rights referred to basic rights and freedoms that belonged to every person in the world, from birth until death. This was followed by 74 (31.4%) participants who claimed that these rights were inherent to all human beings,

whatever nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, color of skin, religion, language, or any other status. 16 (6.8%) participants gave miscellaneous responses.

In terms of what human rights meant to them, 60 (25.5%) participants claimed that it meant equality, followed by 43 (18.2%) of mutual respect for others, 36 (15.3%) freedom, 31 (13.1%) justice, and 30 (12.7%) fairness. 35 (14.8%) participants gave miscellaneous responses. Some participants claimed:

. . . Whatever your nationality, sex or dignity - you can do everything you want to do if it doesn't create problem for others. It is EQUALITY.

. . . Everybody should respect each other because people spend the time to create their work... Some work is very difficult so we should give credit to them.

In terms of who has human rights, 141 (60%) participants claimed that many individuals possessed human rights, followed by women (according to 36 or 15.3% participants) and children (according to 34 or 14.4% participants). 24 (10.2%) participants gave miscellaneous responses.

In terms of who looks after or protects human rights, 67 (28.5%) participants believed that the government was doing this, followed by the judicial system (according to 48 or 20.4% participants), public organizations (according to 47 or 20% participants), and non-governmental organizations (according to 23 or 9.7% participants). 50 (21.2%) participants claimed that other institutions looked after or protected human rights.

In terms of how human rights can be defended, 116 (49.3%) participants claimed that human rights can be defended through laws and legislation while 71 (30.2%) believed that human rights can be defended through education. 48 (20.4%) participants gave miscellaneous responses.

In terms of whether they have the duty to defend human rights, a majority of 212 respondents (90.2%) believed that they had the duty to do so. As some participants claimed:

. . . Everyone has to protect their human right. If they don't who will do it?

. . . The only person who can stand for me is myself. Not others, not even my family or my closest friends, but I myself have the duty to protect my rights.

However, a small minority of 23 persons (9.7%) claimed otherwise for several reasons such as age barrier/level of maturity (i.e. “I’m too young”), lack of experience or exposure to the outside world (i.e. “I haven’t got a job yet”) and the drawback of laws (i.e. “I think the law limits human rights”).

In terms of ways to defend human rights, 83 (35.3%) participants claimed they can defend human rights by respecting others, followed by 62 (26.3%) of participants who believed they can do so by knowing and following the law. 36 (15.3%) participants were of the opinion that they could defend human rights by expressing their own thoughts, opinions and beliefs while another 36 (15.3%) believed they defend human rights by doing all the above activities. 18 (7.6%) participants gave miscellaneous responses. As some participants claimed:

. . . Because knowing the law made no one violating your rights.

. . . If you have knowledge about the law of human right you can use this to defend it.

. . . Because law is a tool that rules the society, so if we follow it we will know what we can do and what we can't.

The findings revealed some important insights into the participants’ perceptions of human rights. Although the undergraduates came from two different countries that practice and promote human rights in their own ways, participants shared many similarities. For example, they:

1. thought of human rights in terms of equality and mutual respect for others;
2. said that everyone possesses human rights regardless of age and gender;
3. found that the government looks after human rights, and how these rights can be defended through laws and legislation;
4. said that they had the duty to protect their rights and would defend it by respecting others.

These findings challenged those of Payaslyođlu and Içduygu (1999) as well as of Padmavathy and Pallai (2015): the level of human rights awareness among undergraduates in Thailand and Malaysia was relatively high, as well as their support for promoting human rights. This was partly contributed by (1) human rights

awareness activities organized by respective universities and (2) students' involvement in those activities and also activities organized by other agencies.

Knowledge about human rights

In terms of their knowledge about human rights as declared by the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 144(61.2%) participants were not aware of it in contrast to 91 (38.7%) who knew about such declaration. Some participants claimed:

. . . I don't follow this part of the United Nations.

. . . I don't follow the United Nations, hence I don't know about the Declaration.

. . . I have never seen it before.

In terms of fundamental human rights as contained in the constitution of their own country, 146 (62.1%) participants were aware of it as opposed to 89 (37.8%) who did not know about such rights. Some participants said:

. . . I know that in my country we are protected by human rights laws in the constitution. As a university student, I think we can do everything we want as long as it is not against the law.

. . . It is in the 1997 Constitution of Thailand. It is important because it is a law everyone has to follow. If you do anything against it you will be punished and it will affect you when you have a job interview.

. . . While it forbids citizens to be discriminated based on sex, religion and race, there are special positions and treatments to Bumiputeras in terms of education, employment, etc. University students should learn more about this constitution in their effort to understand human rights so they are more aware of the needs of the country's citizens.

In terms of the rights (and freedom) to speech, 165 (70.2%) participants reported that they were aware of such rights, in contrast to 70 (29.8%) who were not aware of it. As some participants claimed:

. . . According to the constitution, everyone has the right to speak or show his/her opinion, including students at university.

. . . I think this is still a world that has different classes. We as students do not possess the power to speak freely even though there are some organizations that stand for the students such as the Students' Council. But the truth is: we still cannot voice out opinions freely as we do not know the consequences.

. . . I exercised such freedom by giving constructive opinion in the club's activities or meetings. During lectures, I practiced such freedom by voicing my opinion and concerns with my studies or lecture of the day.

The findings again challenged previous studies: undergraduates in Thailand and Malaysia were aware of provisions on human rights contained in the constitution of their respective countries. This explains why the majority claimed that the government can help defend human rights through laws and legislation. However, their limited or lacking knowledge about universal human rights as declared by the United Nations calls into question whether such knowledge is required in enhancing human rights awareness among undergraduates in Southeast Asia/ASEAN.

To sum up, data proved that human rights awareness was strongly present among all undergraduates with a majority defining human rights as basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world and are based on respect, equality, dignity and independence. The findings also show that undergraduates knew about the *5W1H* (*what, who, where, why, when, how*) of human rights awareness and demonstrated varying degrees of knowledge about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as human rights as part of their respective countries' constitution.

The proposed framework

Figure 1 below presents the framework we developed for analyzing human rights awareness among university undergraduates. The framework comprised of three main components: factors, key domains, and awareness about human rights. One key point concerning the framework is that all components are interdependent and thus support each other towards revealing insights into undergraduates' awareness about human rights - be it in relation to the level, ideas, knowledge, perception and even experience of and about human rights.



Figure 1. Framework for analyzing human rights awareness among undergraduates developed by the researchers

There are three modifying factors that influence students' views: personal, experiential, and contextual.

- Personal Factor (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, origin, family background)
- Experiential Factor (e.g. personal experiences, involvement with/exposure to human rights activities)
- Contextual Factor (e.g. setting, environment, social cultural milieu, material conditions, lived realities)

These factors shape the two key domains to study (1) undergraduates' perceptions and (2) their knowledge of human rights.

Domain 1: Perceptions about human rights

- Basic definition of human rights
- Individual/s who has/have human rights
- Individual/s who look/s after or protect/s human rights
- Way/s that human rights can be defended

- What the term human rights means to you
- Where this meaning comes from
- Duty(ies) to protect one's human rights
- Way/s that one can defend one's human rights

Domain 2: Knowledge about human rights declaration and human rights in the Constitution

- Knowledge about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as declared by the United Nations (What one knows about it and why this declaration is important to raise human rights awareness among university students)
- Knowledge about fundamental human rights as contained in the constitution of one's own country (what one knows about it and why this constitution is important to raise human rights awareness among university students)
- Knowledge about freedom of speech as a university student in one's own country (how one exercises freedom of speech as a university student)

The interaction between factors and domains contributes to the plethora of perceptions, knowledge, and sources of human rights among undergraduate students.

Conclusion

This article presented the results of a larger study that aimed to investigate human rights awareness among university students in Malaysia and Thailand, and developed an analytical framework based on their views for further-related research in the field. The results show that undergraduates in both countries (particularly at the universities where this study was conducted) showed a relatively high level of awareness about human rights due to a variety of reasons, including their involvement in subjects, courses and activities within and outside the university that either integrated or focused on human rights issues.

A majority of undergraduates defined human rights as basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world and are based on respect, equality, dignity and independence. In addition, many participants were aware of the *5W1H* (what, who, where, why, when, how) of human rights awareness and demonstrated varying degrees of knowledge about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as human rights in the constitution of their respective countries. Such knowledge, in addition to the

undergraduates' personal involvement with human rights work or activities, influenced the way human rights awareness among university students had been commonly perceived. Students acknowledged their lack of knowledge regarding human rights, and asked for more programs to deepen their understanding.

It is hoped that this study not only creates a better understanding of human awareness among undergraduates (particularly those in the Southeast Asian/ASEAN context), but also advances the development of a framework appropriate for this purpose. The framework, however, is not set in stone as it can be adopted and adapted for future use by researchers who are interested in examining human rights awareness among undergraduates in various contexts. Moreover, the findings of this study can add value to ways to improve human rights education from preschool to tertiary education levels. Moreover, this report's findings can also assist the development more impactful programs relating to human rights at local, regional and international levels.

Understanding human rights awareness among undergraduates can be a daunting task, given the complex nature of human rights and how these rights impact our lives. Given the preliminary nature of this study, the findings do not represent the overall population of undergraduates in Thailand and Malaysia and were gathered using two main instruments involving only undergraduates. Therefore, future researchers may consider the following recommendations for continued research in this area:

1. focus on investigating the key human rights values as espoused by the participants in this study, namely, respect, tolerance and understanding;
2. broaden the scope and context of research (e.g. inter- and intra-universities, inter- and intra-regional);
3. utilize a variety of research instruments (e.g. ethnographies, triangulation, test);
4. involve the participation of various respondents (e.g. lecturers, administrators) from public and private universities, as well as other forms of higher level education (e.g. polytechnics, community colleges);
5. mobilize more like-minded researchers from various disciplines to generate more research on this area;
6. organize talks, seminars, workshops etc as avenues to gather first-hand accounts of participants' experiences of human rights while simultaneously promoting awareness of these rights;
7. adopt/adapt the proposed framework and utilize the proposed website to meet the future researchers' specific needs in conducting research on this area

With these recommendations in mind, we envision future research on human rights awareness among Southeast Asian/ASEAN undergraduates in four critical phases, namely, **ENGAGE**, **EDUCATE**, **ADVOCATE**, and **SUSTAIN** as outlined in Figure 2.

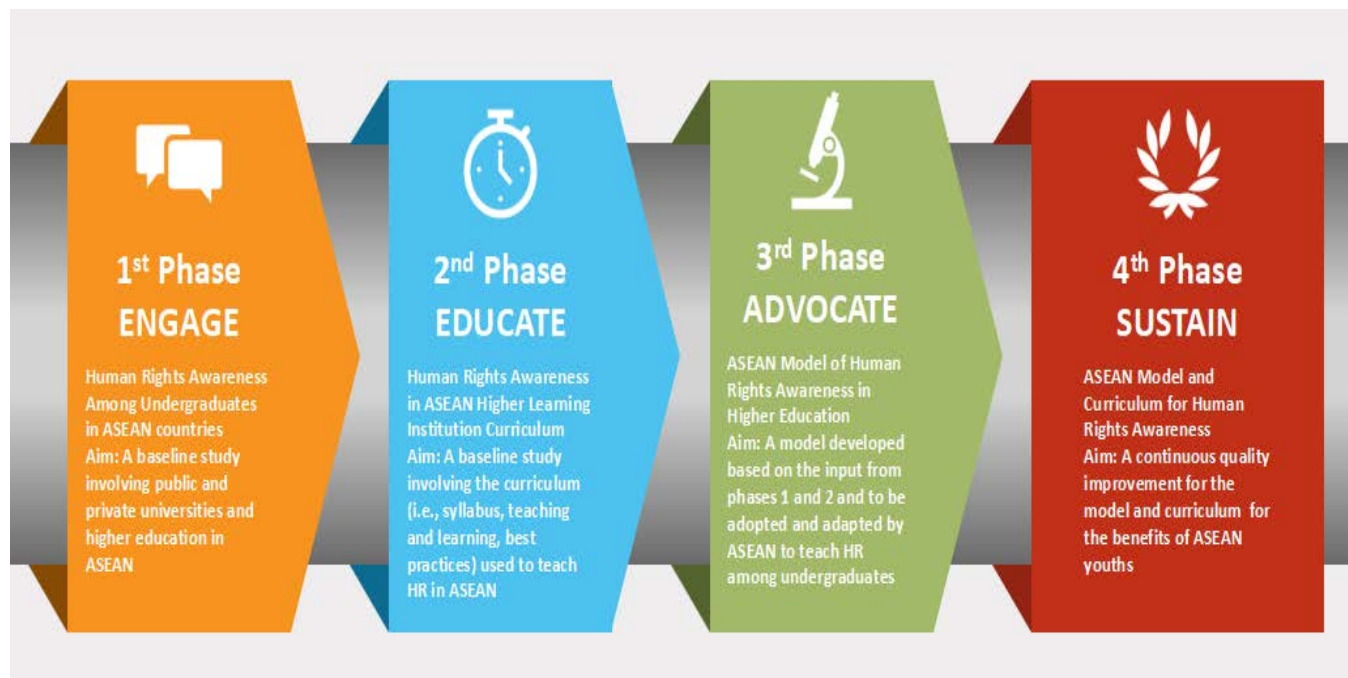


Figure 2. Phases for future research on human rights awareness among undergraduates in Southeast Asian/ASEAN

We hope this study, along with the proposed framework and web portal, will lay the groundwork for this exciting and challenging task.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Acknowledgement

This research was fully supported by the SHAPE SEA Research Grants Programme.

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