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Developing Social Capital and Community Empowerment among the Malaysian Youth through International Youth Exchange Program with South Korea and Japan

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Received: 15 May 2023

Accepted: 29 September 2023

Abstract: Social capital development is indispensable to economic growth and well-being because it allows individuals to contribute meaningfully to a society or community. The density of social networks helps an individual take ownership of control over their community through shared trust, norms, and values. As a component to human capital, social capital needs to be developed with important skills and knowledge, such as leadership, communication, and networking to pursue community empowerment. This study examines the development of social capital and community empowerment at the international level through the international youth exchange program (IYEP) under the Look East Policy (LEP). LEP was implemented in 1982 to develop human capital and increase bilateral collaboration and socio-cultural exchange with East Asian countries, i.e., South Korea and Japan. Based on the secondary data obtained from the Ministry of Youth and Sports and reports from related agencies, this study examined the IYEP of the Malaysia–South Korea and Malaysia–Japan programs and compared their impact on social capital and youth community empowerment. The findings indicate that the IYEP with both countries is expected to strengthen the partnership among participants and help nurture leadership skills. The focus was similar to sociocultural exchange and regional knowledge despite the different scales. Activities such as exchange of knowledge, discussions, enjoying cultural activities, and local activities help the participants build their networking skills and empower the community at both individual and group levels. As the IYEP has benefited its participants, it should be diversified in many areas and collaborations.

Keywords: Social capital development; youth community development; international youth exchange program; community empowerment; look east policy

Introduction

Social capital is vital for both economic and human capital development as it encompasses the density of social networks, institutions and interpersonal interactions (Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2001). Generally, social capital elucidates interconnectedness of an individual with an organization and its access to resources through networks. The resources for social capital are relationships possessed by individuals, organizations, and communities based on mutual trust, civic norms, and social networks. The networking helps to support cooperation, mitigating opportunistic behavior, and reciprocity leads to desirable social and economic

outcomes (Chung, Lee, & Park, 2022). Social capital forms through shared experiences, trust, norms and values that establishes a connection of mutual care and generates positive externalities for group members. It helps to exchange socioemotional goods instead of physical goods such as assistance, counsel, consideration, empathy, support, celebration, and information (Glass & Gesing, 2018). Particularly, it can bring economic values through compensating for expensive formal structure in facilitating cooperation and trust; and improves the efficiency of social exchange (Gannon & Roberts, 2020). It also reduces transaction costs and offset the effects of malign externalities directly, and via indirect human capital interaction, physical investment and catch-up. These factors can result in a more substantial contribution to economic growth within a high-trust society (Whiteley, 2000) while establishing social capital as a pivotal determinant of a country's economic performance (Bakar & Ali, 2004).

As social capital is beneficial for individuals to generalize trust, emotional and material support, and norms of reciprocity (Choi & Kim, 2023), it is associated with higher levels of income, equality, higher education, lower crime rates, better community welfare and public health, and more responsive government due to the norms of reciprocity that arise from the connection among individuals and social networks (Clark, 2015). Noticeably, the notion of social capital is pervasive as the concept has been centralized to their theoretical ambitions by sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu and James S. Coleman, and it was embraced as a way to explain profound social variation and change by political scientists such as Robert Putnam and Francis Fukuyama. Meanwhile, from a policy perspective, policy-oriented institutions like the World Bank tried to encourage and document the social capital distribution and growth by identifying its benefits, especially when it is strongly associated with trust that is significant for economic activity (Son, 2020). It is evidenced that social capital development has a great potential to foster economic progress due to the presence of social connections, shared values, and trust (Analia, Syaukat, Fauzi, Rustiadi, 2020). Social capital is a significant determinant for empowering communities in achieving common goals such as business (Badaruddin et al., 2018) and sustainable agriculture (Ali et al., 2023). Youth exchange programs are a good platform to develop social capital as it is revealed that social capital indicates higher levels of well-being among youth (Tuominen & Haanpää, 2021). In this regard, this study is intended to explore the social capital development among the Malaysian youth by (i) examining the IYEP of the Malaysia–South Korea and Malaysia–Japan programs and (ii) comparing the impact of both programs on social capital and youth community empowerment. This study is significant in bringing a new perspective on social capital development and youth community empowerment while documenting IYEP as a significant niche area of collaboration under LEP.

Literature Review

1. Developing Social Capital through Community Empowerment

The importance of social capital development and networking expansion has been well discussed in various fields such as entrepreneurship, community development and organizational support (Clark et. al., 2018). In an environment with high-level social capital, regional mobility can be reduced (Choi & Kim, 2023), and the managers usually pursue and uphold civic norms of fairness. The dense of social networks facilitate more frequent communications and interactions to enhance information sharing. In fact, previous studies on the influence of the level of social capital in the local geographical area surrounding the corporate headquarters on corporate decision-making, in accounting and finance fields revealed that high social capital are associated with lesser problematic agency, enhancement in cooperation, and more efficient contracting (Chung, Lee, & Park, 2022). In the academic field, Chung, Lee, and Park (2022) highlighted that both Bourdieu and Coleman conceptualized social capital in a way that linked family and educational institutions for academic studies, and family influences can help dominant class students better understand norms and access in schools and eventually obtain desirable educational credentials to maintain their status. Thus, the reproduction process requires inputs from both family and school. The influence of social capital development will be varied depending on actors, area or field.

In Malaysia, social capital development is an important area that has been given priority and efforts to develop human capital. Internationalization of community empowerment is one of the efforts taken to develop

social capital. This platform helps individuals in the community develop their networking, skills and competencies. Theoretically, community empowerment refers to the process of engagement of participants in decision making by involving the community in a partnership that can be achieved informally and/or formally (Lawson & Kearns, 2010). It is a continuous dynamic process involving personal empowerment, development of small reciprocal groups, community organizations, partnerships, social and political actions that result in achieving the desired goals or changes. The involvement of the community will increase transparency and confidence with their authorities, and the authorities can gain rational insight into people's realities (reciprocity) (Ljunggren et. al., 2010). It involves community partnerships with external organizations to empower individuals or groups with knowledge and skills needed to enhance their standard of living (Zainoddin, Amran & Shaharudin, 2020). Empowerment demonstrates the individual or community actively seeking social and political transformation to renegotiate power, acquire more control and a desire to form alliances with other communities (Kruahong, Tankumpuan, Kelly, Davidson, & Kuntajak, 2023). Empowerment of wider communities requires democratic decision making and accountable feedback arrangements as community input is often made through selective or representative processes resulting in community sense of ownership (Lawson & Kearns, 2014). This is because community empowerment reflects the sum of the empowerment exists in the community and it must come from within that makes it cannot be transferred or given from one person or group to another (Cron Dahl & Eklund Karlsson, 2015). In other words, the individuals in the community need to be equipped with necessary knowledge and skills to bring about any transformation or action needed for the common goals.

Previous studies on community empowerment indicate that the support from the members of the community is significant to bring desirable results. For example, in a study conducted by Chen & Starobin, (2019), it is revealed that college social capital has a stronger direct effect on the community college students' enrolment compared to family social support. The students have a much stronger interaction within the other community college students including the sharing of knowledge indicates the support from family social capital resulted in lesser effects. Another study done by Choi and Kim (2023) shows that a high level of community empowerment exhibits the social connectedness with family, friends and neighbours. They would care more about the welfare of others and support the government in fights against COVID-19. Individuals in the community were open to receive suggestions and encouragement and took rigorous action to face the pandemics. In another study done by Zainoddin, Amran, and Shaharudin (2020), social capital has influenced the effectiveness of the farmer's development programme as it shows that relational and cognitive dimensions were positively and significantly related to the effectiveness of community development programmes. Relational dimension indicates a complete trust between social capital and community; cognitive dimension indicates both parties have the same mission for the program, which in this case, the corporate social responsibility (CSR) activity with farmers at paddy fields in Kedah and chilies fields in Kelantan. Both dimensions demonstrate how both parties trust each other to complete their mission in the CSR activity. These are among the studies that demonstrate a community is empowered through trust and shared norms in which individuals in the community would help and support each other.

2. International Youth Empowerment under Look East Policy

In practice, empowering a community is not limited to the local level but also to the international level through learning and expanding the networking. This demonstrates under the Look East Policy (LEP) in which human and cultural exchanges are among activities that help to strengthen the bilateral relations and partnership with East Asian countries. LEP was implemented in 1982 with the intention to elevate Malaysia's achievements in management and development and establish groups of Malaysians with positive values and work ethics to advance the country (*Dasar Pandang ke Timur*, 2009). LEP is known as a paradigm shift during the fourth prime minister's administration, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. Under this policy, Malaysians were encouraged to abandon traditional attitudes in favour of seeing South Korea and Japan as Asian models for excellent economic achievement. The policy has upgraded the government quality services and significantly improved efficiency in the administration (Ahmad Atory, 1998).

The International Youth Exchange Program (IYEP) is one of the activities that bring human exchanges to a different level by strengthening the bilateral partnership with both countries under LEP. Although IYEP

was established before the implementation LEP¹, the program has been continued ever since, especially LEP emphasizes the expansion of collaboration between Malaysia-South Korea and Malaysia-Japan in human capital development, economy and social cultural exchange. In fact, the IYEP is the most anticipated program among Malaysian youth as it provides opportunity in global networking, knowledge and skills (Zulkifli et. al., 2021). This would help individuals become equipped with various skills that lead to the development of social capital and act as an important asset for networking and collaboration for youth community empowerment. Hence, the objective of this study is to examine the IYEP of the Malaysia–South Korea and Malaysia-Japan programs and to compare the impact of both programs on social capital and youth community empowerment. This study is significant in bringing insight into social capital development and youth community empowerment while documenting IYEP as a significant niche area of collaboration under LEP.

Methodology

1. Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing a descriptive case study methodology to provide a comprehensive description of real-world phenomena (Priya, 2021).

2. Data Collection

To explore IYP, secondary data was collected from the Youth Development Department (YDD), Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS). The data requested from the YDD were (1) Malaysian Youth Exchange Program to Korea under MYS; (2) Korean Youth Exchange Program to Malaysia under the MYS; (3) Malaysian Youth Exchange Program to Japan under MYS; (4) Japan Youth Exchange Program to Malaysia under MYS. A Google Form was prepared for the department to fill in the information about the program, such as the objective of the program, the impacts of the program, the demographic background of the participants, and the duration of the program.

The data were obtained from the YDD only for 2018 and 2019 for the Malaysia–South Korea IYEP and for 2015–2020 for the Malaysia–Japan IYEP. Individual attributes such as education, race, and religion are scrutinized because they shape and provide values for individual participation (Clark, 2015). To explore the experiences of the participants of the IYEP, other secondary data were collected, including the Facebook page “Malaysia-Korea International Youth Exchange Programme 2019” for the Malaysia-Korea Youth Exchange Program, the website of the Japan Cabinet Office on the Ship for Southeast Asian and Japanese Youth Program (SSEAYP), and the official MYS YouTube channel. The obtained data were analyzed from the perspective of social capital development and community empowerment through the IYEP in strengthening the bilateral relationship with both South Korea and Japan under the LEP.

3. Data Analysis

The focus of data analysis on the objectives, activities, and participation of youth exchange programs in South Korea and Japan. Three factors, including interconnectedness, social support, and community participation (Clark et. al., 2018), were also examined to understand the process of community empowerment.

Findings and Discussion

The youth development program is a way to develop social capital as it helps the youth voice out their views in the community and positively influence their development (Iwasaki, 2016). This facilitates them to enhance their knowledge and skills in the community by expanding and leveraging networking. Based on this

¹ The Malaysian and Korean Youth Exchange Program is an international youth exchange program that is implemented annually on the basis of agreements made since 1979. The Malaysian and Japan Youth Exchange Program started since 1974 based on joint statements issued by Japan and five ASEAN countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand through the “the Ship for Southeast Asian Youth Program (SSEAYP)”. The other five countries joined chronologically, i.e., Brunei Darussalam (1985), VietNam (1996), Laos and Myanmar (1998), and Cambodia (2000).

perspective, this study examined the IYEP of the Malaysia–South Korea and Malaysia-Japan programs and compared their impact on social capital and youth community empowerment.

1. Youth Exchange Program between Malaysia and Korea

The IYEP of Malaysia-South Korea under the bilateral relationship between Malaysia and South Korea, YDD has played an important role in a program called the Youth Exchange Malaysia-Korea (YEMK). The objectives of this program are (1) to produce Malaysian youth who have extensive knowledge of regional and global developments through the process of interaction and integration; (2) to strengthen the youths’ understanding of the importance of preserving the country’s cultural heritage; and (3) to cultivate the spirit of youth who love the country among the younger generation. The duration of the program is less than a month, with 30 participants in 2018 and 2019. The participants were aged 18–30 years old.

Bar Chart 1 shows the demographic profile of MKYEP for 2018 and 2019. For both years, the male and female participants had the same number, eight and seven, respectively. The number of Malay participants increased by three participants in 2019 from six participants in 2018. However, the number of Chinese and Indian participants remained the same for both years, with a total of two participants; and there were two participants from different races who joined in 2018. The number of non-professional participants was higher in 2018, with 12 participants compared with nine participants in 2019. However, the number of professional participants was higher in 2019, with nine participants compared with six participants in 2018. All respondents in 2018 had a degree; however, one participant had different levels of education.

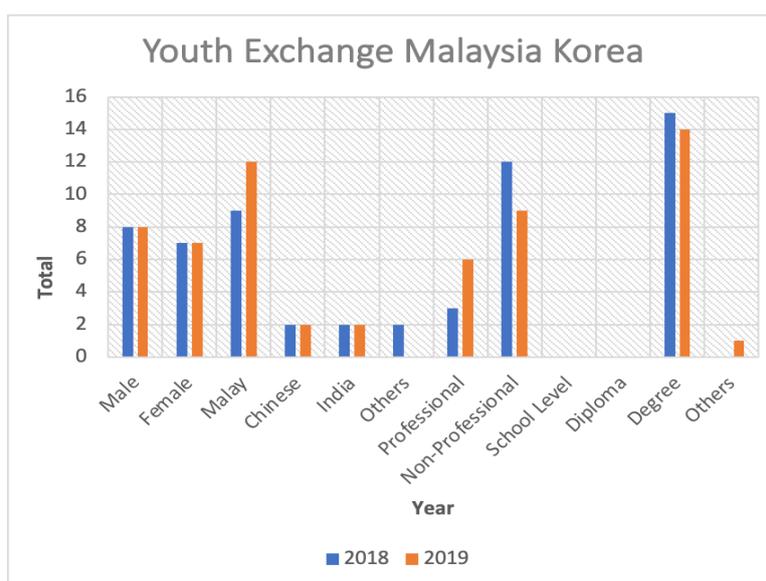


Figure 1. Demographic profile of MKYEP for the year 2018 and 2019

One of the main activities of this program is to develop networking with South Korean counterparts. Figure 2 shows the preparation of participants’ networking for MYEK in 2019. The business cards were prepared along with the name tag and picture on it for the people to easily recognize them. The name was written in both Malay and *Hangul* to facilitate interaction and communication with the Korean participants during the program. Exchanging business cards is significant to Korean society because it signifies professionalism (Lee, 2012) and it helped the participants embrace Korean culture.



Figure 2. Networking preparation for YEMK 2019
Source: Malaysia-Korea International Youth Exchange Programme (2019)

Pursuant to the second objective of the program, which is the importance of the country’s cultural heritage, a painting was presented to the Ministry of Gender Equality & Family in Korea as a souvenir, as shown in Figure 3. The painting depicts boats on the shore, which is symbolic of traditional Malaysian economic activities through fisheries. This showcases Malaysia’s rich cultural heritage to South Korea, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the nation.



Figure 3. Souvenir Gifted to the Ministry of Gender Equality & Family in Korea
Source: Malaysia-Korea International Youth Exchange Programme (2019)

Figure 4 shows handmade *songket* passport covers and steel book marks as souvenirs sponsored by *Pusat Kraftangan Malaysia* to be handed out to Korean delegates. The delicate *songket* weavings and carefully etched engravings on these bookmarks capture the essence of Malaysia’s rich artistic traditions and its enduring cultural identity. These artworks provide a wonderful opportunity for outsiders to truly embrace and meaningfully get to know Malaysia.



Figure 4. Handmade *songket* passport covers and steel book marks as sponsorship souvenirs
Source: Malaysia-Korea International Youth Exchange Programme (2019)

From the Korean counterpart, the program, also known as the Intergovernmental Youth Exchange Program for Korean counterpart which has been occurring annually since 1979 and helps to lay cooperation for 32 nations of the world. The main activities include visiting youth organizations, cultural exchanges, homestays, and discussions (*Youth Capacity Development, 2004*). Korean youth visited Malaysia to gain knowledge, education, and cultural exchange. Figure 5 and Figure 6 show some activities of Korean youth visiting Malaysia under this program in 2019. Figure 5 shows educational visits to the Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (MARDI), Serdang. Participants were afforded the opportunity to explore the MARDI exhibition space, engage in insightful research finding exchanges and agricultural products, and enjoy a tour of the herbal gardens. Through this visit, the participants had the opportunity to cultivate knowledge on the diversity of Malaysian plants and herbs.

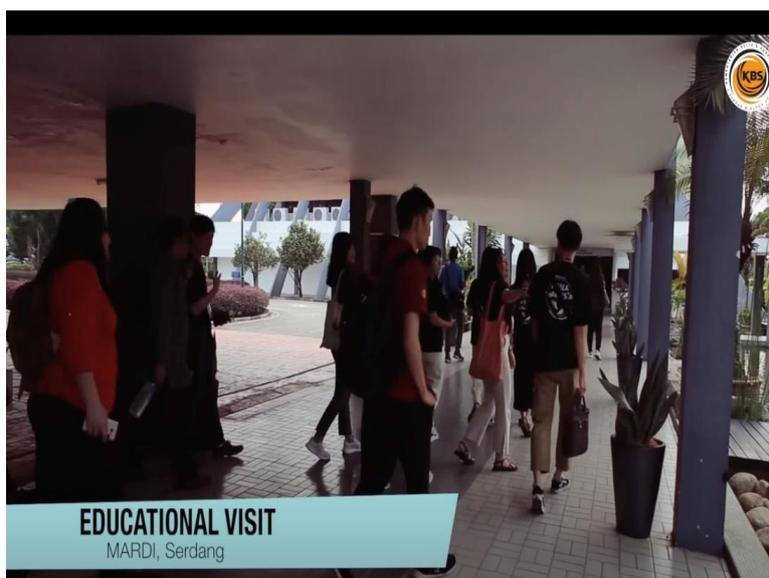


Figure 5. Educational visit to MARDI
Source: Malaysia-Korea International Youth Exchange Programme (2019)

Figure 6 shows the homestay matching ceremony in Sepang was held to help participants gain profound insights and immerse themselves in the vibrant culture of Malaysia.



Figure 6. Homestay Matching Ceremony
Source: Malaysia-Korea International Youth Exchange Programme (2019)

The participants had the wonderful opportunity to delight in a range of experiences such as connecting with local communities, indulging in delectable Malaysian cuisine, engaging in local economic activities, and strolling through night markets. The participants also had a heartfelt opportunity to showcase traditional Korean dances to the local community to introduce and promote Korean culture. These activities were intended to exchange information and understand both Malaysian and Korean culture for future collaboration.

2. The Ship for Southeast Asian and Japanese Youth Program

In comparison with Japan, YDD was responsible for the selection of candidates for the program called The Ship for Southeast Asian and Japanese Youth Program (SSEAYP). SSEAYP is a program that has been carried out by the Government of Japan (through the Office for International Youth Exchange of the Cabinet Office) with the active participation and cooperation of these ten Southeast Asian countries, including the Republic of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Republic of the Philippines, the Republic of Singapore, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia. The objectives of this program are (1) to increase understanding and cooperation between the youth of ASEAN countries and Japan aged between 18 and 30 years in preparation to become national leaders in the future; (2) to understand and appreciate the economic, political, and social facts among the younger generation, especially in Asian countries, in preparation for comprehensive cooperation in all fields comprehensively in the future; and (3) to exchange opinions and views as well as introduce cultural customs and learn to respect the differences and similarities among the younger generation of Asia to form a consensus among ASEAN countries and Japan.

As per data obtained from the ministry, the program duration for 2015–2019 was 1–3 months, whereas for 2020 took less than a month. For this program, the Government of Japan chartered a vessel from the Nippon Maru and entrusted its operation to Mitsui O.S.K. Passenger Line. The vessel is equipped with a complete facility and amenities such as cabins, a hall, a lounge, a theatre, a library, a Japanese tea room, a swimming pool, a clinic, laundry rooms, a dining room, and a grand bath. All activities under this program were conducted on this vessel while cruising to the visited countries, which varied year by year (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan. 2015). Figure 7 shows the demographic profile of the SSEAYP for 2015-2020. In terms of gender, the total number of male and female participants from 2015 to 2020 was 56 and 74, respectively. In terms of race, the total number of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and other participants from 2015 to 2020 was 106, 16, 12, and 5, respectively. In terms of field, the total number of professional and non-professional participants from 2015 to 2020 was 25 and 30, respectively. In terms of education background, the total number of diploma and degree participants from 2015 to 2020 was 10 and 43, respectively.

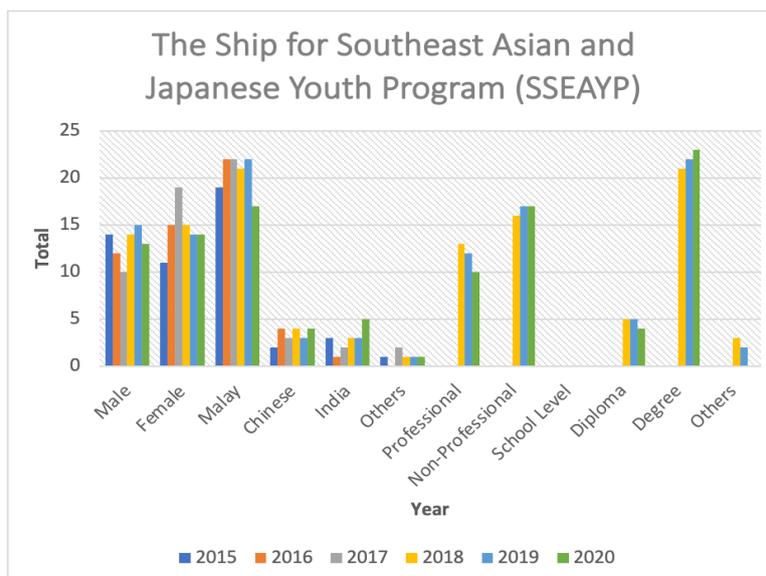


Figure 7. Demographic Profile of SSEAYP from the year 2015 to 2020

Figure 8 shows the Malaysia contingent at the 45th SSEAYP 2018 in the presence of YB Syed Saddiq bin Syed Abdul Rahman, Minister of Youth and Sports during that time and Ambassador Miyagawa on October 17, 2018. This indicates that the SSEAYP is a program with a focus and support from both governments of Malaysia and Japan. This is because, it is expected to yield several significant outcomes, i.e., bolstering and deepening the friendship and networking among the youth of Japan and the ASEAN member nations; and the involvement of Malaysian youths in this global initiative to establish cross-border networks with their international counterparts and provide them with valuable knowledge and skills related to culture and current life trends of youths in the countries visited.



Figure 8. The Malaysia contingent 45th SSEAYP 2018
Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (2018)

Among the main activities of SSEAYP during the cruise on board are discussion programs, national presentations, solidarity group activities, seminars, and post-programme sessions. The discussion program theme is related to the current issue with the group consisting of nearly the same number of participants from different contingents. As an example, among the topics for discussion for SSEAYP 2018 were Good and Bad Aspects of Globalization, Information and Media, International Relations (ASEAN-Japan Cooperation),

Living in the Longevity Society, Quality Education, and others. Figure 9 shows that the group discussion consists of members from different countries sharing ideas on a given topic. This discussion encouraged the *esprit de corps* among members and improved communication and collaboration skills among the participants.



Figure 9. Discussion Group during SSEAYP 2018
Source: Cabinet Office Home Page (2018)

Other activities, such as solidarity groups and seminars, helped deepen mutual understanding, promoted friendship among participants, and shared knowledge and experiences with a relatively small number of participants in a peer learning style (Cabinet Office Home Page, 2018). In the countries visited, the participants had the opportunity to enjoy homestay, courtesy calls from high-ranking government officials, interaction with local youth, and institutional visits to industrial, educational, cultural, and social welfare facilities (Cabinet Office Home Page, 2019). They were also provided with program post-program sessions that helped deepen their understanding of SSEAYP's mission, objectives, and activities and encouraged them to actively participate or organize post-program activities (Cabinet Office Home Page, 2016).

In 2020, the department also organized the selection of another program called SSEAYP Youth Conference. The objectives are (1) to strengthen friendship and relations between Japanese youth and ASEAN member countries on an ongoing basis even in the COVID-19 pandemic situation; and (2) to increase understanding and cooperation between the youth of ASEAN countries and Japan aged between 18 and 30 years in preparation to become national leaders in the future. The impacts of the program are (1) continuously strengthening and enhancing the friendship and relationship between the youth of Japan and ASEAN member countries even in the COVID-19 pandemic situation; and (2) providing exposure and opportunities for Malaysian youths to share opinions with the youths of Japan and ASEAN countries in adapting to the situation of COVID-19 addicts with their life routines. Figure 10 shows the demographic profile for the SSEAYP Youth Conference 2020. In terms of gender, the total number of male and female participants from the year was 13 and 14, respectively. In terms of race, the total number of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and other participants were 12, four, five, and one respectively. In terms of field, the total number of professional and non-professional participants was 10 and 12 respectively. In terms of education of background, the total number of diploma and degree participants was four and 23 respectively.

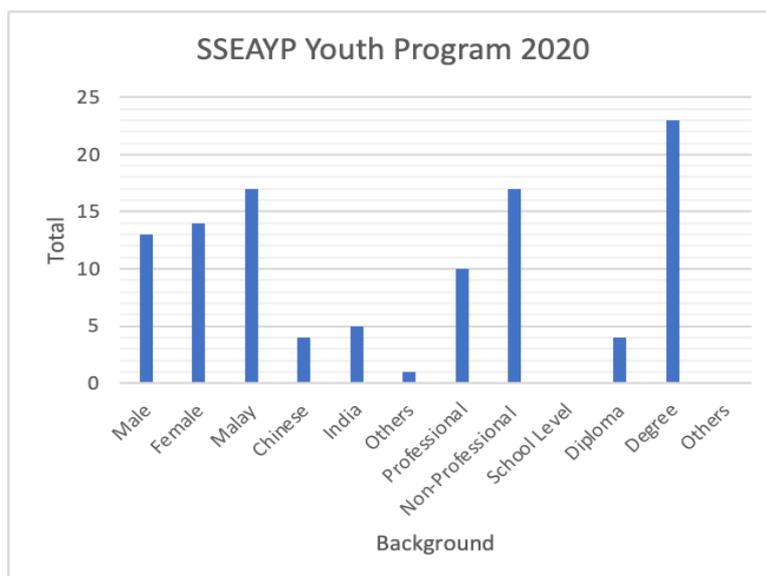


Figure 10. Demographic profile for SSEAYP Youth Conference 2020

Overall, both countries played a significant role in building the youth community among the selected participants (youth). To compare the impact of both programs on social capital and youth community empowerment, many aspects can be considered, including (1) objectives of the program, (2) structure of the program; (3) number of participants; (4) activities; (5) impacts of the program. In terms of objectives, the objectives of MKYEP are more direct and specific to increase the regional and global knowledge and preservation of natural heritage, which could strengthen the regionalism between both countries. Meanwhile, the objective of SSEAYP is broadened as the program involves 10 ASEAN countries at one time, and the priority objective is to nurture leadership among the youth while creating a platform to celebrate the similarities and differences among the younger generation to form a consensus among ASEAN countries and Japan. Second, the participants in SSEAYP enjoyed well-structured activities that varied every year compared with the more relaxed activities in MKYEP. As MKYEP enjoyed cultural activities in the host countries, SSEAYP provided a more extensive program to its participants, especially on establishing solidarity groups within 10 countries and a post-programme program. The SSEAYP could be more intense because of its broader target group compared with the MKYEP, which was more specific. However, as observed in their activities, they were able to capture the density of social networks by engaging with social, civic business organizations, political organizations, and professional organizations. These engagements provide opportunities for participants to socialize with a broad audience, repeat interactions, and share information (Chung, Lee & Park, 2022).

In terms of the number of participants, the SSEAYP had a greater number of participants with a longer duration than the MKYEP. Hence, there were more activities in SSEAYP than in MKYEP. However, basic activities such as discussion, information and knowledge exchange, and cultural exchange were demonstrated in both programs. These activities reflect the process of community empowerment through interconnectedness, social support, and community participation (Clark et. al., 2018). The participants were open to sharing their perspectives and enjoying each other's culture to enhance understanding. These have made the impacts of the program(s) in both countries expected to strengthen and enhance friendships as well as relations between South Korea and Japan with Malaysia, provide opportunities for the Malaysian youths to build networks with youths from foreign countries and expose them to knowledge and skills related to culture and current life trends of youths in the countries visited. Specifically, MKYEP focused more on the development of cultural heritage for the next generation while SSEAYP focused more on nurturing leadership, regionalism, and youth development. The comparison of two programs is outlined as in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison between MKYEP and SSEAYP

Aspect	MKYEP	SSEAYP
Number of participants	15 people per year	22 (average) people per year
Duration	Less than a month	1-3 months
Objective/Focus	To empower the youth by fostering their awareness of both regional and global advancements while nurturing a deep appreciation for our natural heritage and instilling a profound love for the country.	To cultivate the next generation of ASEAN youth leaders by enhancing their understanding of economic, political, and social realities, fostering consensus-building between ASEAN and Japan.
Basic Activities	Discussion, information and knowledge exchange, and cultural exchange	Cruise activities and visit the ASEAN countries which vary year by year.
Mechanism	Bilateral visit of Malaysia-South Korea and South Korea-Malaysia	

Regardless of these differences and similarities, both MKYEP and SSEAYP were beneficial to the participants in developing skills and expertise in the relevant areas and building important networking (relationship). Exposures to different cultures and customs among the participants could become a solid foundation and communication platform to appreciate the similarities and differences among the younger generation, which enable to build a bond and form a consensus not only among ASEAN countries but also Malaysian, Japanese and Korean youths. The finding is supported as in the previous study done by Maximova et al. (2018), in which the youth exchange program benefits its participants by helping them develop knowledge and sociocultural competences such as practice of foreign language and ethnocultural competences. The participants in the youth exchange program were exposed to intercultural interaction, international cooperation, appreciation of their own culture and values, and the ability to make complex decisions that involve various parties and stakeholders.

From the perspective of social network theory in which emphasizes that social relationships among a collection of nodes have important consequences, social capital facilitates both individual and group levels. At the individual-level, it facilitates an individual action in which actors can use their social ties to access or control resources, including information or financial capital that they do not possess. Meanwhile, at the group level, it focuses on how networks facilitate collective action and cohesiveness that enables it to effectively pursue collective goals (McGee & Warms, 2013). This perspective is reflected in the program's impact, which helps participants build networking, enhance friendships, and upgrade knowledge and skills through the program. The internationalization of community empowerment through youth exchange is likely to influence the development of social capital under LEP. This finding supports the findings of Jarrett, Sullivan, and Watkins (2005), in which youth programs provide access, resources, and information to facilitate social capital development. Thus, the IYEP is beneficial to participants in developing them as social capital while empowering the youth community through sharing resources, knowledge, information, experiences, and networking.

Conclusion

Social capital development is an essential factor of economic and social well-being. From the perspective of LEP, the youth exchange programs that are conducted with both South Korea and Japan have been contributing to development of social capital and community empowerment. This program has enabled the participants to be empowered with communication and leadership skills, and other essential skills in international networking while strengthening friendships. The knowledge and skills obtained through this program will inspire the participants to become a change maker in their own communities. The participants were exposed to various social exchange activities while nurturing leadership. The youth exchange program helps them to develop as a social capital while achieving well-being and provide them with added value for their future endeavours. As a recommendation, the youth exchange program should offer the participants with diversification of program and opportunities through international collaboration. This will be a great platform for the future participants to broaden their horizons and enhance socio economic development. Future studies should focus on collecting primary data by assessing their experiences through the dimensions of social capital on community empowerment.

Acknowledgement: The authors would like to express appreciation for the support of the sponsor Ministry of Education Malaysia under Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS/1/2019/SS06/UM/02/7).

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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