

Exploring ASEAN Integration through the Knowledge of Generation Z in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

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ABSTRACT

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has played a vital role in Cambodia's economic, political, and social cooperation with its ASEAN member states. Cambodian Generation Z is a dynamic group building a future for Cambodia. This article assesses the level of knowledge about ASEAN integration among Generation Z in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, using a mixed-methods approach with a survey of 414 respondents and 8 key informant interviews. The findings reveal that while Generation Z in Phnom Penh demonstrates some awareness of ASEAN, their overall knowledge remains limited, with notable strengths in cultural awareness and digital engagement but significant gaps in political and economic understanding. Future research should explore factors contributing to knowledge gaps and the impact of digital platforms on awareness. It should also conduct comparative studies across ASEAN countries to understand generational knowledge disparities better.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a regional intergovernmental organization established on August 8, 1967, by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Over the years, it expanded to include Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia, creating a bloc of ten member states united by promoting economic growth, maintaining regional peace and stability, and enhancing socio-cultural collaboration. ASEAN has become a significant force in regional and global politics, representing a diverse community of nations with shared aspirations for progress and development [1].

ASEAN integration refers to deepening collaboration among its member states across multiple domains. Guided by frameworks such as the ASEAN Charter and the ASEAN Community Vision 2025. The integration process has established ASEAN as a dynamic region with a combined population of over 660 million and a GDP exceeding \$3 trillion. This growth has been facilitated by regional initiatives such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC), which aim to enhance trade, infrastructure, and digital connectivity [2].

However, ASEAN integration also faces challenges. The bloc's diversity in political systems, economic capacities, and cultural identities poses difficulties in achieving harmonization. Member states often prioritize national interests, which can hinder collective decision-making and the implementation of agreed-upon measures. These challenges necessitate ongoing efforts to strengthen regional cohesion and address inequalities within the bloc [3].

ASEAN's significance lies in its economic and geopolitical influence and its ability to foster a shared identity among its member states. Through its integration efforts, ASEAN seeks to create a people-centered community that is cohesive, resilient, and responsive to global challenges. This vision highlights the transformative potential of ASEAN integration in shaping the region's future and its citizens.

Cambodia formally joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on April 30, 1999, becoming the regional bloc's tenth and final member state. This accession marked a critical milestone in Cambodia's reintegration into the international community following decades of internal conflict and political isolation. Joining ASEAN symbolized Cambodia's commitment to regional peace, stability, and cooperation while providing a platform to rebuild its economy, strengthen its political institutions, and foster international partnerships [4].

Cambodia's inclusion into ASEAN was symbolic and demonstrated the bloc's commitment to unifying Southeast Asia under one regional framework. This unification solidified ASEAN's position as a regional entity capable of addressing shared challenges and opportunities. Cambodia's membership also underscored ASEAN's principles of inclusivity and non-interference, which were instrumental in fostering trust among diverse member states [5].

Cambodia's role in ASEAN is a testament to the opportunities and challenges of regional integration. While its journey has been marked by significant progress, ongoing efforts are needed to address systemic barriers and fully leverage the benefits of ASEAN membership. By continuing to engage in regional initiatives and fostering domestic development, Cambodia can further solidify its role within the ASEAN framework.

On a related note, Generation Z represents a pivotal demographic in shaping the trajectory of ASEAN integration. As the region's current and future leaders, professionals, and innovators, they are uniquely positioned to influence and drive regional development. Their engagement, skills, and values will shape the policies, practices, and cultural narratives determining ASEAN's future direction. By fostering an informed and engaged Generation

Z, ASEAN member states can nurture a generation that understands the complexities of regional cooperation and actively contributes to its success [6].

Generation Z is also critical in advancing the ASEAN vision of a people-centered community. Through social media, community activities, and youth-led initiatives, they can promote the principles of inclusivity, collaboration, and cultural exchange that underpin ASEAN integration. Their participation in digital forums, youth campaigns, and grassroots movements demonstrates their capacity to address regional challenges and propose innovative solutions, showcasing their importance as key stakeholders in the integration process [7].

ASEAN integration has significantly expanded opportunities for Generation Z across the region. Educational initiatives such as online learning programs, virtual exchanges, and regional youth workshops facilitate cross-border knowledge sharing, enabling them to gain exposure to diverse cultural and academic perspectives. These initiatives enhance their global competencies, intercultural understanding, and adaptability—skills essential in an increasingly interconnected world [8].

Understanding Generation Z's knowledge of ASEAN integration is essential for evaluating its effectiveness and societal impact. As direct beneficiaries of regional initiatives and opportunities, their perspectives provide valuable insights into how ASEAN policies resonate with younger generations. Their attitudes and expectations reflect broader societal sentiments, serving as a barometer for the success and acceptance of ASEAN initiatives.

Given the multifaceted nature of ASEAN integration and its impact on various sectors, understanding its implications at the individual level, particularly among Generation Z, is crucial. As a demographic is vital to shaping the future of regional cooperation, their levels of knowledge remain largely unexplored in the context of Phnom Penh despite Cambodia's active role in ASEAN. While the background discussion highlights ASEAN's significance and Cambodia's role within this framework, it also underscores gaps in the literature regarding how youth, as key stakeholders, think about these developments. This leads to the core inquiry of this study, which seeks to address those gaps by investigating the levels of knowledge of Generation Z in Phnom Penh.

In addition, this study fills the gap by looking at Gen Z's knowledge of ASEAN integration, therefore supporting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 16 (Peace and Strong Institutions). The research fits SDG 4.7's emphasis on global citizenship education and cultural awareness by evaluating young people's knowledge, enabling young Cambodians to interact with ASEAN's socio-economic and political aspects. Furthermore, identifying knowledge gaps can enable policymakers to create inclusive educational programs (SDG 16.7), guaranteeing Gen Z's meaningful involvement in regional governance. An informed youth is finally the key to achieving ASEAN's fair growth and sustainable development objectives, closing the gap between regional aspirations and grassroots awareness.

1.1. Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to explore ASEAN integration awareness of Generation Z in Phnom Penh, focusing on their knowledge levels, which they have obtained

from their teachers and outsiders. Specifically, this study aims to assess Generation Z's level of knowledge about ASEAN integration in Phnom Penh in general.

1.2. Conceptual framework

Based on the literature review (Cognitive Learning [9], Planned Behaviour [10], Social Cognitive [11], Constructivist [12], Cognitive Dissonance [13]), the study could be interpreted as the framework showed.

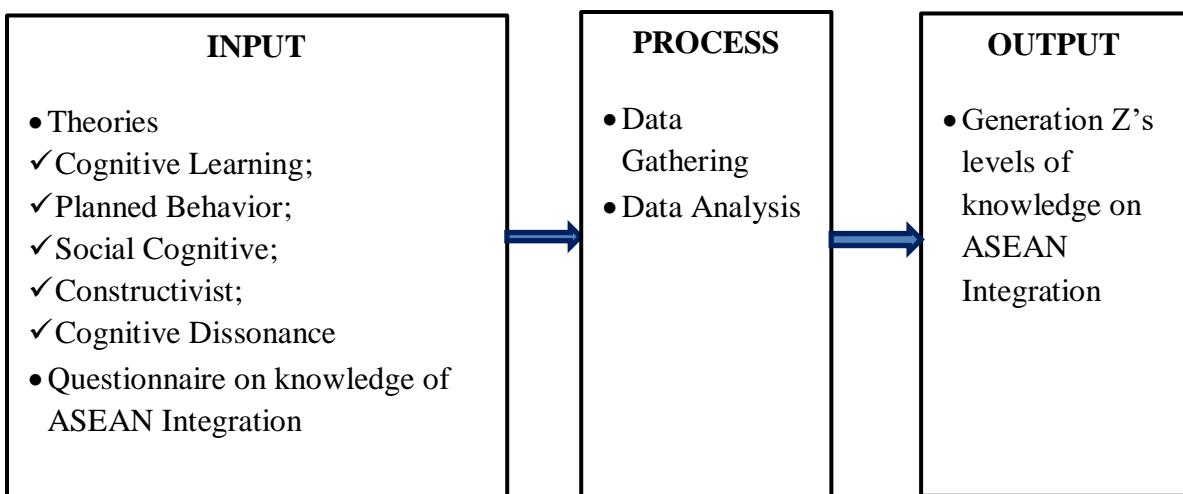


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

This article uses the input-process-output (I-P-O) framework to explore the level of Generation Z's knowledge of ASEAN integration.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively explore Generation Z's knowledge of ASEAN integration. This design allows for a richer and more nuanced understanding of the research problem by combining the breadth of quantitative data with the depth of qualitative insights [14].

The quantitative aspect of the study involves the use of a survey administered through a structured questionnaire. This component seeks to gather data from a larger group of participants, enabling the researcher to measure the levels of knowledge of ASEAN integration across a representative sample. The survey is designed with closed-ended questions that align with the research objective, allowing statistical analysis to identify trends and patterns related to knowledge of ASEAN integration.

Complementing the quantitative data, the qualitative component employs a Key Informant Interview (KII) method. Participants are selected to provide in-depth insights into their knowledge and interpretation of ASEAN integration. This qualitative approach enables the researcher to delve deeper into contextual factors and uncover the nuances behind the quantitative findings. The semi-structured interview format allows for flexibility while

maintaining focus on the research questions. This ensures a balance between guided exploration and the emergence of unexpected themes, enriching the overall analysis.

2.2. Types and Sources of the Data

This study utilizes both quantitative and qualitative data. Data were also gathered from primary and secondary sources.

2.2.1. Types of Data

Quantitative Data: The quantitative data were gathered through a structured survey instrument using a Likert scale to measure the levels of knowledge of ASEAN integration among the respondents. This data type provides measurable, numerical insights into the distribution and intensity of knowledge as a variable across the sample population. The numerical nature of this data facilitates descriptive statistical analysis.

A Cronbach's Alpha test was conducted to ensure the questionnaire's internal reliability. Fifteen Generation Z participants matching the required demographics of the target respondents completed the questionnaire. The data collected were subjected to Cronbach's alpha testing to measure the reliability of the items.

Qualitative Data: The qualitative data were collected through key informant interviews with selected Generation Zs. This narrative data delved deeper into participants' knowledge of ASEAN integration. Unlike the structured approach of surveys, these interviews allowed open-ended responses. These descriptive insights will complement the quantitative findings by providing context, depth, and a human dimension to the numerical data.

2.2.2. Sources of data

The data used in this study were collected from primary and secondary sources.

Primary data: Primary data is the cornerstone of this study, directly collected from the Generation Z population in Phnom Penh, which participates in surveys and key informant interviews. This firsthand data provides unique insights tailored to the article's objective and ensures that the findings are grounded in the lived realities of the target population.

Secondary data: Besides primary data, secondary data were used to support the analysis or provide a broader context for interpreting findings. Secondary sources include academic studies, government reports, and official ASEAN documents that outline the bloc's objectives, policies, and impacts. These resources offer valuable background information and enable the study to situate its findings within the broader discourse on regional integration. While not the study's primary focus, secondary data enhances its reliability and depth by providing additional reference and corroboration points for analysis.

2.2.3. Validity and Reliability

2.2.3.1. Pilot Test (Reliability)

To ensure the reliability of the data-gathering tool, a Cronbach's Alpha Test was conducted as part of the pilot study. This test was used to measure the internal consistency of the items in the questionnaire, which is crucial for ensuring the accuracy of the data

collected. The pilot study involved a sample of 15 Generation Zs from Phnom Penh who completed the questionnaire. This allowed for identifying any issues with the instrument, ensuring it was fit for the main data collection phase.

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha Test on 15 items about Generation Z's Knowledge of ASEAN Integration

Variables	Cronbach's	No. of Items	Reliability
<i>Knowledge of ASEAN Integration</i>	0.938	15	Excellent

2.2.3.2. Validity

The initial draft of the interview protocol was reviewed by subject matter and research experts, including the researcher's advisers and previous lecturers on the related subject matter, to ensure the validity of the qualitative data collection procedure. Their feedback was meticulously incorporated to develop a revised version of the tool. A pilot test was conducted with a participant matching the profile of the intended Key Informant Interview (KII) respondents to validate the instrument further. This process facilitated final adjustments and provided a practical evaluation of the updated interview methodology.

2.3. Sample Size and Sampling Method

2.3.1. Sample Size

The sample size for this study was calculated using Cochran's formula to ensure statistical reliability and representativeness of the findings. The calculation was based on the following parameters:

Population size: The estimated Generation Z population in Phnom Penh (unknown).

Confidence level: 95% (The common practice)

The margin of error: $\pm 4.82\%$ (Commonly set at 5%)

Response distribution: 50% (assumed for maximum variability, as the actual proportion is unknown)

Using these parameters, the computed sample size was 382 respondents. However, data was successfully collected from 414 respondents, further enhancing the reliability of the findings. This sample size provides a robust data set for analyzing Generation Z's knowledge regarding ASEAN integration in Phnom Penh.

2.3.2 Sampling Method

Research Survey Respondents: The study employed a non-probability convenience sampling technique to gather data. A Google Docs survey link was distributed to potential respondents through social media, email, and other online communication channels. This approach relied on voluntary participation, where individuals within the target population were invited to complete the survey at their convenience.

Key Informant Interview participants: The sampling method employed for the Key Informant Interviews (KII) is purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique widely used in qualitative research [15]. This method was selected to ensure that participants possess specific characteristics relevant to the study, namely, being members of Generation

Z residing in Phnom Penh. These individuals were chosen because their assumed knowledge of ASEAN integration is central to addressing the research objectives.

The decision to engage eight participants for the KIIs is grounded in qualitative research principles, emphasizing depth of inquiry over large sample sizes. In qualitative studies, sample size is typically determined by data saturation—at which additional data no longer yield new insights or themes [16].

2.4. Data Gathering Procedure for Questionnaire Survey

This study's data-gathering procedure involved quantitative and qualitative methods (Mixed method) to comprehensively analyze Generation Z's knowledge of ASEAN integration in Phnom Penh. The data collection process for the questionnaire survey in this study followed a structured and systematic approach to ensure the validity and reliability of the responses. The following steps were undertaken:

Preparation of the Survey Questionnaire: The questionnaire was adapted and customized from an existing, reliable, and validity-tested questionnaire based on the research objective, targeting Generation Z's knowledge of ASEAN integration in Phnom Penh.

Sample Selection: The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula, yielding 414 respondents. The target respondents were members of Generation Z residing in Phnom Penh, aged between 19 and 28 years, aligning with the commonly accepted generational definition for individuals born between 1995 and 2012 [17].

Online Survey Distribution: To reach the target demographic efficiently, the questionnaire was uploaded to Google Forms, a widely accessible online platform. The link to the survey was distributed through various online channels, including Social media platforms like Facebook and messaging apps like Telegram.

Response Collection and Monitoring: The survey was made available online for four weeks, providing ample time for respondents to participate. To encourage participation and ensure the required sample size was achieved, reminders were sent periodically through the same channels used for distribution. The researcher monitored responses daily to track progress and address any technical issues reported by participants.

Data Validation and Cleaning: The responses were downloaded and reviewed for completeness and accuracy once the data collection period concluded. The final data set excluded responses with missing data or inconsistencies to maintain data quality. Duplicate entries were also identified and removed.

2.5. Data Gathering Procedure for Key Informant Interviews

The Key Informant Interviews (KII) data collection involved a carefully planned and ethical process to gather qualitative insights from Generation Z participants in Phnom Penh. The steps followed are outlined below:

Selection and Recruitment of Key Informants: Eight (8) key informants were purposively selected based on their knowledge of ASEAN integration. The selection criteria included being a member of Generation Z (ages 19–28) residing in Phnom Penh, emphasizing individuals who had participated in ASEAN-related events, programs, or initiatives.

Scheduling and Consent: Key informants who expressed willingness to participate were given a formal invitation and a detailed information sheet explaining the study.

Participants were informed about The purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, measures to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, and the option to withdraw at any stage without consequences.

Development of the Interview Protocol: The interview guide addressed the study's objective, focusing on knowledge of ASEAN integration. The researcher's advisor validated the guide, and a pilot test was conducted with a participant with a similar profile to ensure clarity and effectiveness. Adjustments were made based on feedback from the pilot test.

Conducting the Interviews: The interviews were conducted via Zoom.

Synthesis and Analysis: The interview data were transcribed verbatim and coded for thematic analysis using online apps. The researcher ensured that the insights gathered aligned with the study's objectives and contributed to a deeper understanding of the topic.

2.6. Analysis Tools for Quantitative and Qualitative Data

2.6.1. Statistical Tools for Quantitative Data

Descriptive statistics were utilised to summarise and describe respondents' demographic data to analyze the quantitative data gathered through the questionnaire, presenting results as frequencies and percentages. The mean and standard deviation for Likert-scale items were calculated to assess central tendencies and the variability of respondents' opinions and experiences [18].

2.6.2 Statistical Tools for Qualitative Data

For the qualitative data gathered through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), the following tools and methods were employed:

Coding: Open and axial coding techniques were applied to categorize and organise the qualitative data into meaningful units systematically. Codes were derived inductively from the participants' responses and aligned with the research objective to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the data [19].

Thematic Analysis: A thematic analysis approach was used to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes within the qualitative data. This method ensured that the participants' narratives were interpreted in-depth, providing valuable insights into their knowledge, perceptions, and experiences of ASEAN integration [20].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings inferred from the survey questionnaires answered by 414 respondents who are Generation Z Cambodians, as well as the findings inferred from the Key Informant Interviews conducted by eight Generation Z Cambodians who had youth leadership experiences.

3.1. Demographic Profile

3.1.1. Respondents' General Demographic Profile

This section shows the respondents' general demographic information, including age, gender, educational attainment, current work status, and social media usage.

Table 2. Respondents' Profile by Age

Age Bracket	Frequency	Percentage
25-28	54	23.89
22-24	73	32.30
19-21	82	36.28
Total	414	100

Table 2 provides insights into age distribution among the respondents. The largest group falls within the 19-21 age range, followed by those in the 22-24 age group, while a smaller proportion is in the 25-28 age range.

Table 3. Respondents' Profile by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	133	32.13
Female	281	67.87
Total	414	100%

Table 3 shows the demographic profile of the respondents, reflecting a diverse group of Generation Z in Phnom Penh engaged with ASEAN integration. Most respondents are female, with a significant portion identifying as male.

Table 4. Respondents' Profile by Educational Attainment

Educational Attainment	Frequency	Percentage
Completed Graduate School (GS) Studies	17	4.10
Currently Attending GS Studies	80	19.32
Completed Bachelor's Degree	97	23.44
Currently Taking a Bachelor's Degree	206	49.76
Completed High School	11	2.66
Did Not Complete High School	1	0.24
Others	2	0.49
Total	414	100

In terms of education, Table 4 reflects that most respondents are pursuing a Bachelor's degree, with a notable number already having completed their undergraduate studies. A smaller percentage is enrolled in graduate studies. As shown in Table 5, over half of the respondents are employed in some capacity, while a significant portion remains in education.

Table 5. Respondents' Profile by Current Work Status

Work Status	Frequency	Percentage
Employed (Full-time, part-time, Self-employed)	239	57.72
Unemployed (Not studying)	8	1.93
Student (Not Currently Working)	157	37.93
Others (working and studying)	10	2.41
Total	414	100

Table 6. Respondents' Profile by Social Media Usage

Social Media Usage	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	258	62.32
Weekly	41	9.90
Occasionally	107	55.84
Never	8	1.94
Total	414	100

Table 6 shows that social media usage is high, with most respondents using social media daily, indicating a strong influence of digital platforms on their views about ASEAN integration.

3.1.2. KII Participants General Demographic Profile

Likewise, this section describes KII participant information in terms of age, gender, educational status, work status, and frequency of social media usage to get regional news.

Table 7. KII Participants Profile

KII Participant	Age	Gender	Currently Studying	Currently Working	Frequency of Using Social Media to Get Some Regional News Updates
(P1)	22	Female	No	Yes	Almost everyday
(P2)	21	Female	Yes	No	Usually
(P3)	20	Female	Yes	Yes	Occasionally
(P4)	20	Female	Yes	No	Everyday
(P5)	22	Female	Yes	No	Everyday
(P6)	24	Female	No	Yes	Usually
(P7)	23	Male	Yes	No	Everyday
(P8)	23	Male	No	Yes	Everyday

Total: 8 KII Participants

The eight Key Informant Interview (KII) participants are primarily young adults, mostly female, and include a mix of students and working individuals. They use social media to stay updated on regional news, with varying levels of engagement, ranging from occasional to daily use. Most participants, particularly students, engage with digital platforms regularly, with many accessing daily regional news updates. Their profiles show that social media is essential for staying informed about regional developments, reflecting the growing influence of digital platforms among this demographic.

3.2. Research Findings

3.2.1. Knowledge of Generation Z in Phnom Penh about ASEAN integration: Results from the survey

Table 8 presents the findings on Generation Z's knowledge levels in Phnom Penh regarding ASEAN integration based on a quantitative survey conducted.

With a standard deviation of 0.79, the General Weighted Average of respondents' knowledge regarding ASEAN integration is 2.62, under "Limited Knowledge." This implies that, on average, Generation Z in Phnom Penh is aware of ASEAN integration but may not fully comprehend its important elements.

Among the particular knowledge domains, the highest average score (2.84) is found in "Knowledge about how to appreciate and respect the diversity and commonality of ASEAN countries and cultures," classified as "Limited Knowledge" with a standard deviation of 1.04. This suggests that although some respondents are aware of ASEAN's cultural variety, their degree of knowledge may differ, as seen by the large standard deviation. Similarly, relatively higher mean scores are seen in "Knowledge about how to use technological tools to facilitate the acquisition and sharing of information on ASEAN integration" (2.82, SD = 1.01) and "Knowledge about how to adapt and adjust to different ASEAN countries and cultures when traveling, studying, or working in the region" (2.81, SD = 1.01). These results imply that participants in the ASEAN setting acknowledge technology's role in cultural adaptation and information-sharing.

Conversely, the lowest average score (2.42) is found in "Knowledge about the sources and types of information related to ASEAN integration, such as official documents, reports, statistics, news, and academic publications," which is classified as "Basic Knowledge" with a standard deviation of 0.97. This implies that those polled might not know reliable ASEAN integration information sources. "Basic Knowledge" includes other things as well, including "Knowledge about how to select and evaluate relevant and reliable information on ASEAN integration" (2.52, SD = 1.00) and "Knowledge about how to summarise and synthesize information on ASEAN integration" (2.43, SD = 0.97).

Table 8. Generation Zs in Phnom Penh's Knowledge about ASEAN Integration

Knowledge Items	Mean	Description	SD	Rank
1. Knowledge about the objectives and benefits of ASEAN integration.	2.65	Limited Knowledge	0.97	6
2. Knowledge about the main features and mechanisms of ASEAN integration, such as the ASEAN Economic Community, the ASEAN Political-Security Community, and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community.	2.57	Limited Knowledge	0.98	
3. Knowledge about how ASEAN integration affects Cambodia's economic development and foreign policy.	2.54	Limited Knowledge	0.93	9
4. Knowledge about the opportunities and challenges of ASEAN integration for Cambodia and the region.	2.61	Limited Knowledge	0.96	7
5. Knowledge about the sources and types of information related to ASEAN integration, such as official documents, reports, statistics, news, and academic publications.	2.42	Basic Knowledge	0.97	14
6. Knowledge about how to select and evaluate the relevant and reliable information on ASEAN integration from the internet and other sources.	2.52	Limited Knowledge	1.00	11
7. Knowledge about summarising and synthesizing the information on ASEAN integration that one has acquired.	2.43	Basic Knowledge	0.97	13
8. Knowledge about relating the information on ASEAN integration to previous knowledge and experience.	2.47	Basic Knowledge	0.97	12
9. Knowledge of how to apply the information on ASEAN integration to academic tasks and assignments.	2.54	Limited Knowledge	0.97	9
10. Knowledge about how to share the information on ASEAN integration with peers and instructors.	2.61	Limited Knowledge	0.96	7
11. Knowledge about how to use technological tools, such as online platforms, social media, and digital devices, to facilitate the acquisition and sharing of information on ASEAN integration.	2.82	Limited Knowledge	1.01	2
12. Knowledge about communicating effectively and respectfully with people from different ASEAN countries and cultures.	2.79	Limited Knowledge	0.99	4
13. Knowledge about appreciating and respecting the diversity and commonality of ASEAN countries and cultures.	2.84	Limited Knowledge	1.04	1
14. Knowledge about how to adapt and adjust to different ASEAN countries and cultures when traveling, studying, or working in the region.	2.81	Limited Knowledge	1.01	3
15. Knowledge about how to contribute to the development and integration of ASEAN as a Cambodian citizen and a part of Generation Z.	2.72	Limited Knowledge	1.04	5
General Weighted Average	2.62	Limited Knowledge	0.79	

From 0.79 to 1.04, the standard deviation values across knowledge questions show different degrees of respondent agreement. While lower standard deviations, like 0.79 for the general weighted average, point to a more consistent degree of knowledge among respondents, higher standard deviations, such as 1.04 for "Knowledge about how to appreciate and respect the diversity and commonality of ASEAN countries and cultures," imply more variability in replies. The findings indicate that Generation Zs in Phnom Penh possess limited knowledge of ASEAN integration, with some strengths in cultural awareness and the use of technology but gaps in accessing and critically evaluating information.

3.2.2. Knowledge of Generation Z in Phnom Penh about ASEAN integration: Findings from the interviews

To further validate survey results on knowledge of Gen Zs in Phnom Penh, Key Informant Interviews were conducted among eight KII participants who bear similar demographics to that of the survey respondents but with a homogenous characteristic of having experienced being a youth leader. Table 9 reveals how the key informant interviews (KII) offered insightful analysis of participants' knowledge of ASEAN integration. Their answers show a wide but different understanding of the idea, its objectives, and its effect on the area.

Among the eight Key Informant Interview (KII) participants, ASEAN integration knowledge demonstrates a general awareness of the organization's fundamental goals and objectives. Thematic analysis conducted as part of the thematic study revealed numerous important topics, emphasizing both conventional and changing areas of concentration in ASEAN's integration activities.

Political and Economic Integration: The political and economic integration of ASEAN member nations was the most constant topic throughout the answer from the participants, and it is the core of ASEAN's vision. Almost all P1–P8 underlined ASEAN's involvement in promoting political collaboration and economic expansion. The three pillars of ASEAN integration were political security, economic, and socio-cultural communities, as the participants noted. Many participants—P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8—viewed the economic integration objective, especially developing a single market and manufacturing base within the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) framework. This aim is meant to promote labor mobility, investment, and commerce within the area. Reflecting good knowledge of ASEAN's economic integration initiatives, participants noted ASEAN's attempts to enable the free movement of products, services, and investment among member nations.

Table 9. Thematic Summary Matrix of KII Participants' Knowledge about ASEAN Integration

Theme	Description	Participants Mentioning Theme
Political Security Community	Participants recognize ASEAN's role in promoting regional peace and stability, aiming to enhance political cooperation among the member states.	P1, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8
Economic Integration	The goal of fostering economic cooperation through the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) is to create a single market and production base, easing trade, investment, and labor movement.	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8
Socio-Cultural Integration	Emphasis on cultural exchanges, social cooperation, and people-to-people connections across ASEAN member states.	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8
Single Market and Production Base	Mentioned as a key goal, especially through establishing AEC, focusing on trade and market integration among the ASEAN countries.	P1, P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8
Trade and Investment Flow	The free flow of goods, services, and investment across ASEAN member countries is expected to boost regional economic cooperation.	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8
Regional Cooperation	The general idea is to promote collaboration across various political, economic, and social sectors for mutual benefit.	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8
Regional Peace and Stability	Refers to ASEAN's objective of preventing conflicts and ensuring peace within the Southeast Asian region.	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8
People-Centered Community	The focus is on creating inclusive communities through cultural, educational, and social cooperation to benefit the people of ASEAN countries.	P1, P3, P7, P8
Economic Growth and Development	ASEAN integration aims to foster economic development and improved living standards, driving the growth of member countries.	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8
Cultural Development	Strengthening cultural exchanges and developing mutual understanding among ASEAN member states.	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8
Climate Action	ASEAN addresses environmental concerns and promotes sustainable development, climate action, and green finance.	P6, P8
Sustainable Growth and Consensus	Emphasizes the importance of reaching agreements and promoting long-term, sustainable development for all ASEAN members.	P2, P5, P6, P8
Youth Empowerment & Policy Development	Specific initiatives like empowering youth to be involved in policy development, governance, and leadership, especially in the environmental and policy sectors.	P6

Participant 1:

"I have known that ASEAN is a community that seeks to foster regional cooperation and integration among its 10 member nations... The first [pillar] is like a political-security community, meant to improve regional peace and stability. The second is similar to the economic community in that it would establish a unified manufacturing foundation and market."

Participant 2:

"The first objective is economic integration... It is called AEC, right... It produces a single market for manufacturing or the free movement of commodities in any nation. They facilitate trade among ASEAN nations."

Participant 3:

"ASEAN integration is the economic, political, and social culture collaboration among the 10 ASEAN member nations... It aims to promote economic development and improve stability in the areas."

Participant 4:

"ASEAN pertains to integrating ten nations, emphasizing economic, political, educational, and cultural dimensions. In politics and security, we experience a heightened sense of protection with the backing of ASEAN countries."

Participant 5:

"ASEAN is widely recognized for the member nations from 11 states who emphasize the socio-economic, cultural, and political integration... when the country wants to progress or have sustainable growth, they must create consensus across states to stabilize each country into advanced improvement."

Participant 6:

"We integrate through policy and economic modifications, such as facilitating trade and commerce throughout Southeast Asia... We also focus on green transition, climate resilience, and circular economy—essential objectives matching ASEAN's economic and environmental aspirations."

Participant 7:

"Key areas of ASEAN integration are economic, political, and socio-cultural integration... ASEAN formed the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) to create a single market and manufacturing base for economic integration... They want to provide regional peace and stability for a political union."

Participant 8:

"ASEAN evolved as an international body concentrating on fostering regional economic cooperation and social welfare among member countries following the fall of the USSR. Integration among the ten members can have beneficial effects for Southeast Asia."

Political security community: an important element highlighted by most participants (P1, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8), which seeks to guarantee regional peace and stability. This topic highlighted ASEAN's vital part in fostering diplomatic engagement and conflict prevention to preserve Southeast Asian peace. All participants (P1–P8) underlined regional cooperation,

showing a common awareness of ASEAN's goal to operate jointly across political, economic, and social domains for the mutual benefit of all its members.

Participant 1:

"The first pillar is meant to improve regional peace and stability, much like the political-security community."

Participant 3:

"ASEAN integration is the collaboration among the 10 nations... in economy, politics, and social-cultural aspects, and it aims to improve regional stability."

Participant 4:

"Regarding politics and security, we need not be concerned about our protection since other ASEAN members shield us from detrimental deeds."

Participant 5: "ASEAN emphasizes... political integration, particularly when nations require agreement to stabilize and enhance..." For instance, I said ASEAN should rely less on the non-interference policy to settle disputes collectively in the South China Sea issue.

Participant 7:

"ASEAN wishes to provide regional peace and stability for political integration... Nevertheless, difficulties like the Myanmar crisis reveal how the non-interference idea may delay prompt solutions."

Participant 8:

"ASEAN transformed into an organization promoting regional cooperation after the Cold War... It helps small states like Cambodia gain political security through collective frameworks today."

Socio-Cultural Integration: Fostering a People-Centred Community. In addition to political and economic concerns, participants also acknowledged the importance of socio-cultural integration in ASEAN's goals. This element emphasizes building people-centered communities and promoting cultural interactions to enhance the relationships between ASEAN member countries. Participants (P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8) who underlined that cultural development and education are basic to ASEAN's integration process, especially highlighted this topic. Long-term collaboration and solidarity depend on strengthening people-to-people connections and mutual understanding.

Participant 1:

"Aiming to promote identity and collaboration among member nations, the socio-cultural community constitutes the third pillar of ASEAN integration."

Participant 2:

"Cambodian students can develop cultural ties and regional solidarity with other member countries through scholarship and exchange opportunities under ASEAN youth programs."

Participant 3:

"ASEAN integration allows for cultural exchanges between countries... It helps us learn about Indonesian culture through student collaborations."

Participant 4:

"ASEAN allows Cambodia to promote our culture to the area and globally..." "Programs in education, such as scholarships, enable students to acquire knowledge to improve our nation."

Participant 5:

"Being a member of ASEAN, Cambodia strengthens its social development and education system... 'One Community' encourages nations to develop together culturally."

Participant 6:

"Programs like Plastic Chain Maker help us work together across ASEAN on environmental awareness... Young people from all around share ideas, hence building people-to-people links."

Participant 7:

"People-centred development is the emphasis of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) framework, which seeks to strengthen ties among member countries by means of education and cultural exchanges."

Participant 8:

"ASEAN advances minority rights and education, among other social welfare issues. These initiatives help Cambodians create a regional identity."

Climate Action: Emerging Focus Areas. Two participants (P6, P8) also noted that ASEAN is giving green financing, climate action, and sustainability more and more importance. These answers show how ASEAN's integration plan is changing to prioritize environmental governance and sustainable development. Specifically, those cited ASEAN's involvement in combating climate change, supporting circular economies, and supporting green financing projects to reduce environmental effects. This emphasis underlines ASEAN's dedication to environmental responsibility and economic and political objectives that align with global sustainability trends.

Participant 2:

"For agricultural industries crucial to Cambodia's economy, ASEAN's economic integration should strike a balance between trade expansion and environmental conservation."

Participant 6:

"At the moment, we are focusing on youth empowerment programs to improve environmental governance across ASEAN," said Participant 6. In areas like trade, we are fighting for new policies that will help combat climate change and facilitate a green transition. We are currently concentrating on getting the UN SDGs accomplished by 2030 via advocating for a circular economy, climate resilience, and green financing."

Youth Empowerment and Policy Development: A Growing Area of Focus. The empowerment of youth and their participation in policy-making, particularly within the environmental governance framework (P6), was another developing subject, albeit less often emphasized. This remark highlights a fresh facet of ASEAN's integration: the belief that young people's participation in leadership and governance positions is critical to developing

long-term, creative policies. This shows that laying the groundwork for future generations of ASEAN leaders is just as important as integrating the political and economic spheres.

Participant 6:

"We educate eco-leaders to promote green policies by connecting local initiatives to ASEAN's SDG objectives."

Generalization: A Balanced Integration Strategy with Changing Needs. Therefore, the participants' answers show a clear awareness of ASEAN's historical and continuous integration objectives. Important to the purpose of ASEAN is the integration of its member nations in political, economic, and socio-cultural domains. While traditional goals of economic cooperation, peace, and regional stability remain at the core, newer themes like sustainability and youth empowerment are emerging as important facets of ASEAN's integration process.

This narrative presentation illustrates the evolving complexity of ASEAN integration, where core principles of regional cooperation continue to evolve alongside the organization's response to new challenges and opportunities. The KIIs' thoughts show a common dedication to the objectives of ASEAN integration and areas where ASEAN is changing to fit worldwide and regional dynamics.

3.2.3. Complementary perceptions from quantitative and qualitative data

Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Findings on Generation Z's Comprehension of ASEAN Integration. The quantitative survey and qualitative Key Informant Interviews (KII) results offer valuable insights into Generation Z's understanding of ASEAN integration in Phnom Penh, although each reveals different layers of knowledge that complement one another in meaningful ways.

The quantitative data, taken from a poll of a broader sample of respondents, gives a general picture of Generation Z's awareness of ASEAN integration. The average of 2.62, which falls under "Limited Knowledge," indicates that although these young people know about ASEAN integration, their knowledge is somewhat shallow. This result aligns with the survey's finding that respondents have higher knowledge in some areas, such as the appreciation of cultural diversity within ASEAN and the use of technology to share information (mean scores of 2.84 and 2.82, respectively)—but still face challenges in understanding core aspects of ASEAN integration. The lowest average scores, for instance, 2.42 and 2.43, indicate a lack of understanding of reliable sources of ASEAN-related information and the capacity to assess or combine such data. These disparities imply that Generation Z in Phnom Penh may be conscious of ASEAN's cultural and technical components, but they have not completely understood the more complicated sides of ASEAN integration, including its economic and political consequences.

In contrast, the qualitative data from the Key Informant Interviews (KII) adds nuance to these findings. The KII participants, who have experience as youth leaders, exhibited a deeper and more detailed understanding of ASEAN integration, particularly its political, economic, and socio-cultural dimensions. These delegates stressed the organization's role in promoting regional peace and stability via the Political Security Community and its

initiatives towards economic integration via the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), clearly expressing ASEAN's aims. Although the poll findings showed little awareness of the political and economic characteristics of ASEAN integration, the KII answers underlined a more thorough grasp of these elements. The KII members' stronger involvement and leadership experience may explain this difference; they were able to investigate ASEAN integration more thoroughly than the survey respondents' broader understanding.

Some KII participants (P6 and P8) indicated growing areas of concentration inside ASEAN, including sustainability and youth empowerment, which the KII highlighted. While people expressed little knowledge of such developing issues, the survey results contrast with the topic of sustainability and the increasing awareness of climate action as part of ASEAN's future path. Survey participants' youth and lack of exposure to ASEAN's more modern and future-oriented objectives, like environmental governance and green financing, may explain this discrepancy.

Despite these differences, the survey and the KII findings ultimately complement each other in illustrating the broader picture of Generation Z's knowledge of ASEAN integration. The survey quantifies the gaps in knowledge and identifies specific areas, like cultural appreciation and the use of technology, where the younger generation has a greater understanding. The KII offers background by exploring these themes more fully and elaborating on the issues that are influencing ASEAN's integration initiatives. These data sources, taken together, show the depth of Generation Z's awareness and provide a complete picture of how they view ASEAN integration, including its strengths and shortcomings.

The quantitative data suggests a generation with basic but scattered awareness of ASEAN integration; the KII's qualitative analysis uncovers a more knowledgeable, albeit more specialized, understanding. Combining these findings reveals how Generation Z's knowledge of ASEAN integration is evolving—strong cultural and technological familiarity but growing awareness of its political, economic, and burgeoning sustainability components.

4. DISCUSSION

The research objective is to assess Generation Z's level of knowledge about ASEAN integration in Phnom Penh. In relation to this, it can be said that Generation Z's level of knowledge about ASEAN integration in Phnom Penh is generally limited, with some strengths in cultural awareness and technology use but significant gaps in understanding the political and economic aspects. With an aggregate knowledge score of 2.62, this group falls under "Limited Knowledge," indicating their superficial awareness rather than profound understanding of the complexity of ASEAN integration.

The statistical results imply that although Generation Z in Phnom Penh is somewhat conscious of ASEAN integration, their knowledge is still basic. The younger generation is more familiar with the social and technological aspects of ASEAN integration than its economic or political structures, as indicated by the higher mean scores connected to cultural variety appreciation and the usage of technology tools. Low scores in assessing trustworthy material and synthesizing knowledge regarding ASEAN integration suggest a lack of involvement with dependable sources or critical thinking abilities required for deeper knowledge.

Recent research on young people's awareness of ASEAN integration indicates that they usually lack a grasp of the whole association, typically emphasizing cultural elements over its more complex political or economic ones [21]. Like these results, the findings of this survey show that although Generation Z in Phnom Penh has some awareness of ASEAN's cultural variety, their knowledge of its economic and political integration remains shallow. Furthermore, research by Khoo [22] underlines that young people's interaction with ASEAN integration ideas is usually influenced by official and informal education channels, which might differ between generations and settings. Theories of young people participating in regional cooperation, such as those promoted by Choi [23], also indicate that experience learning and exposure to regional projects shape knowledge of regional integration; both seem lacking for Phnom Penh's young people. These latest studies highlight the importance of focused education and involvement plans to close the knowledge gaps in ASEAN's political and economic spheres.

This result supports other studies, which have often shown young people's inconsistent knowledge of ASEAN [24]. On the other hand, earlier studies ascribed knowledge gaps mostly to a lack of formal education on ASEAN [25]; this study indicates that digital exposure via social media, online learning platforms, and regional pop culture now plays a major role in forming young people's perspectives. This change emphasizes the changing character of ASEAN awareness, as informal digital sources complement (or perhaps replace) conventional educational outlets.

One important finding from the qualitative data is that certain Generation Z individuals have profound yet specialized knowledge, especially in digital innovation and sustainability fields. Earlier studies that characterized ASEAN awareness among young people as broad but shallow show this difference [26]. The greater specialization shown in this study could reflect ASEAN's increasing focus on sustainability and digital transformation [27] and the inclination of younger generations to interact more thoroughly with subjects that speak to their personal interests or professional goals. Still, despite these developments, political and economic integration remains poorly understood—a pattern in line with previous studies [28]. Although recent research emphasizes media's influence on ASEAN awareness among digital natives [29], the results indicate that rival digital distractions, such as entertainment material and algorithm-driven social media feeds, may further diminish involvement with complicated geopolitical issues. This change emphasizes a paradox: Generation Z has more access to ASEAN-related information than other generations, so their focus is becoming more dispersed across digital channels.

4.1. Summary of Main Findings

Gen Z in Phnom Penh lacks a general understanding of ASEAN integration. There are, however, strengths in cultural awareness and technology use. Political and economic knowledge also shows notable voids. The results imply that Generation Z in Phnom Penh has a rudimentary but superficial grasp of ASEAN integration, with especially strong cultural awareness and digital involvement but major knowledge deficits in political and economic aspects. This limited knowledge may completely influence their ability to engage with and benefit from ASEAN-related opportunities.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on the main findings from the discussion and conclusions, the study comes up with the following recommendations:

First, more thorough educational materials on ASEAN's political, economic, and cultural integration into the university and school curriculum should be included to offer a more balanced and in-depth knowledge. Secondly, engage Generation Z in learning about ASEAN's complexity via interactive tools and digital platforms. Use webinars, online courses, and social media to make education more interesting and accessible. Thirdly, expert panel discussions, seminars, and workshops should be arranged to raise knowledge of ASEAN's political and economic aspects so students may question and participate in active debates. Lastly, work with ASEAN institutions to offer instructional materials, outreach initiatives, and practical illustrations of ASEAN's advantages and obstacles.

4.3. Recommendations for Future Studies

Based on the main findings and conclusions presented, the following are the recommended future studies:

Future research could examine the particular elements causing the knowledge deficits in ASEAN integration's political and economic spheres. These studies could investigate if the lack of understanding is connected to educational inequalities, media coverage, or inadequate exposure to ASEAN-related subjects.

Future research could investigate how a broader knowledge of ASEAN integration affects career decisions, especially in relation to employment inside ASEAN markets, cross-border company prospects, or regional policy-making.

Given their great technology usage, future research might investigate how digital platforms and social media affect Generation Z's awareness of ASEAN integration. This study could emphasize how online conversations, influencers, and content generation can support or impede the understanding of ASEAN concerns.

Comparative research, including Gen Z populations from other ASEAN nations, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, might offer insightful analysis of how Generation Z in Phnom Penh compares with their regional counterparts regarding awareness of ASEAN integration.

Longitudinal research might investigate how the rising understanding of ASEAN integration shapes the long-term attitudes and behaviors of people moving into adulthood and into the labor market.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings have some theoretical Implications. Specifically, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how young people in Cambodia conceptualize regional integration, specifically how they engage with ASEAN's cultural, political, and economic dimensions. They suggest a need for more comprehensive educational frameworks that integrate cultural diversity and the economic and political aspects of regional integration.

The findings also have some implications for policymakers and educators. Results underscore the need to enhance educational programs about ASEAN integration, particularly

those targeting younger generations. There should be a focus on providing accessible, engaging content that links ASEAN's theoretical concepts with practical applications, such as how ASEAN integration affects Cambodia's development and foreign policy.

Still, the findings have some policy-related implications. The limited knowledge among Generation Z points to the need for ASEAN member states, including Cambodia, to invest more in public awareness campaigns and regional cooperation programs that specifically target youth. Additionally, policies should foster youth leadership and participation in ASEAN-related initiatives, helping them understand ASEAN's full potential as a regional cooperation platform.

Worth highlighting is an unexpected result with a higher-than-expected knowledge of the technology used for sharing information on ASEAN integration, as reflected in the relatively high mean score of 2.82. This may be due to Generation Z's strong digital literacy, which could lead them to rely on social media and online platforms for information, even if they are not critically assessing the quality of such sources. The discrepancy between their use of technology and their understanding of reliable sources for ASEAN-related information points to a need for better media literacy education in the context of regional integration.

Another noteworthy point is the relatively low awareness of emerging ASEAN issues like sustainability and climate action, which the KII participants emphasized. Given that youth often engage with global environmental concerns, it was surprising that these issues did not appear more prominently in the survey. This may reflect the respondents' limited exposure to the evolving priorities of ASEAN and their focus on more traditional integration aspects, such as trade and cultural exchanges.

One limitation of the study is its reliance on self-reported data from a survey, which may be subject to social desirability bias or inaccurate self-assessment. Additionally, the sample size, while representative, may not fully capture the diversity of experiences within Generation Z in Phnom Penh. The KII participants, being youth leaders, may have a more developed understanding of ASEAN integration compared to the broader population of Generation Z, which could skew the findings.

While Generation Z in Phnom Penh displays some awareness of ASEAN integration, their overall knowledge remains limited, particularly in political and economic integration. This highlights the importance of educational reforms and policy initiatives to increase youth engagement with ASEAN's broader goals.

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