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Peace Education in ASEAN Higher Education: A Meta-Synthesis of Practices, Outcomes, and Lessons on Education for Peace in Post-Pandemic

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Abstract

This study aimed to synthesize scholarly works on peace education implementation in higher education, focusing on the practices, outcomes, and lessons in post-pandemic (2022–2025) in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region. Following the standard protocol outline in the PRISMA framework, meta-synthesis was systematically performed by reviewing empirical studies based on the criteria. The synthesized outcomes revealed three themes such as rethinking instructional design and educational planning, the associated challenges in the implementation of peace education, and the perceived strategies in overcoming some challenges. These outcomes were attributed to the practices of peace education being integrated into religious literacy and cross-cultural education. However, lessons such as the involvement of religion in peace education, redesigning the curriculum, and alliance formation of different stakeholders reflected the desire for a more inclusive society and sustainable education.

Keywords: Higher education, peace education, Southeast Asia, sustainability, sustainable education.

Introduction

Peace education is one of the initiatives by the Department of Education in many countries, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), in developing positive behaviors to combat conflict and violence (Ryan, 2014; Zaw, 2023). Peace education aims at honing human values and attitudes towards a peaceful and sustainable society (Adan, 2025). Peace education has a crucial role in quality education (Paudel, 2025). Peace education promotes safe learning environments (Rejekiningsih &

Hidayatulloh, 2025), teaches conflict-resolution skills and empathy (Özel & Sümer, 2025), and contributes to sustainable development (Tan & Vickers, 2024).

With the definition of peace as not only the absence of violence (negative peace) but also the presence of justice and positive human relations (positive peace) (Galtung, 1969), numerous studies have examined peace education in various aspects, such as peace education in the primary (Buchori et al., 2021; Khairuddin et al., 2019; Wahyuningsih et al., 2024) and secondary levels (Ahmad et al., 2024; Saleh et al., 2025; Zainal et al., 2021). However, there is limited research specifically devoted to peace research in higher education in Southeast Asia. In addition, there has been no known meta-synthesis of outcomes and lessons learned from peace education studies in higher education after the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the ASEAN context. We consider this a gap in the literature on studying peace education in higher education.

The current study aims at synthesizing themes from scholarly published articles between 2022 and 2025 to obtain new integrated results. The following research questions have been formulated:

1. What are the peace education practices in higher education and their outcomes in the post-pandemic era?
2. What are the challenges in the implementation of peace education in higher education in the post-pandemic era?
3. What are the lessons learned from peace education research in higher education in the post-pandemic era?

The Study Context

Why Focus on ASEAN?

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations consists of 10 countries. These countries are Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Indonesia, Philippines, Lao PDR, and Singapore. Each of these countries is very culturally and linguistically diverse, very rich in history, and very mixed in terms of religions. The ASEAN Charter (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, n.d.) encourages every nation to promote harmony, mutual respect, and global citizenship. This is also in support of the United Nation Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 to promote justice, strong institutions, and inclusive societies and SDG 4 to promote quality education (United Nations, n.d.). Peace education was introduced to prepare the next generations to become peacebuilders, active in peacebuilding initiatives and in building the nation's peace and development towards a sustainable society (Lee-Koo & Pruitt, 2025). With this in consideration, studying peace education in the ASEAN context could widen our understanding of how higher education from different member countries addresses issues on resolving conflict, tackles the importance of inclusive societies, and develops non-violent behaviors among students. Additionally, studying peace education in the region could provide lessons for teachers on the different practices and challenges in the implementation of peace education in a certain locality.

Why Focus on Post-Pandemic Times?

The COVID-19 pandemic put the whole world in chaos. The pandemic not only affected people's health, but it also affected different social relationships (Lenková et al., 2022). The pandemic created social tensions (He et al., 2023), economic inequalities (Gao et al., 2022), and social injustices during the lockdown period (Ranieri et al., 2024). In education, many students were left in isolation (Jekabsone & Gudele, 2023), which lessens their social interactions among their peers (González-Calvo et al., 2023). The pandemic created a new norm (Shahrill et al., 2021). Studying peace education after the madness and disorder from the pandemic times could contribute to our understanding of how different higher education institutions address the values-based approaches in learning, rebuild trust among teachers, rebuild resilience, encourage empathy and cooperation towards an inclusive, peaceful, and sustainable society.

Methodology

In this research, a qualitative meta-synthesis method was used to examine and integrate results from the included studies. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis (PRISMA) was used to systematically screen and extract data related to the study in question (Page et al., 2021). The next sections describe the step-by-step process from data collection to analysis and synthesis.

Data Collection

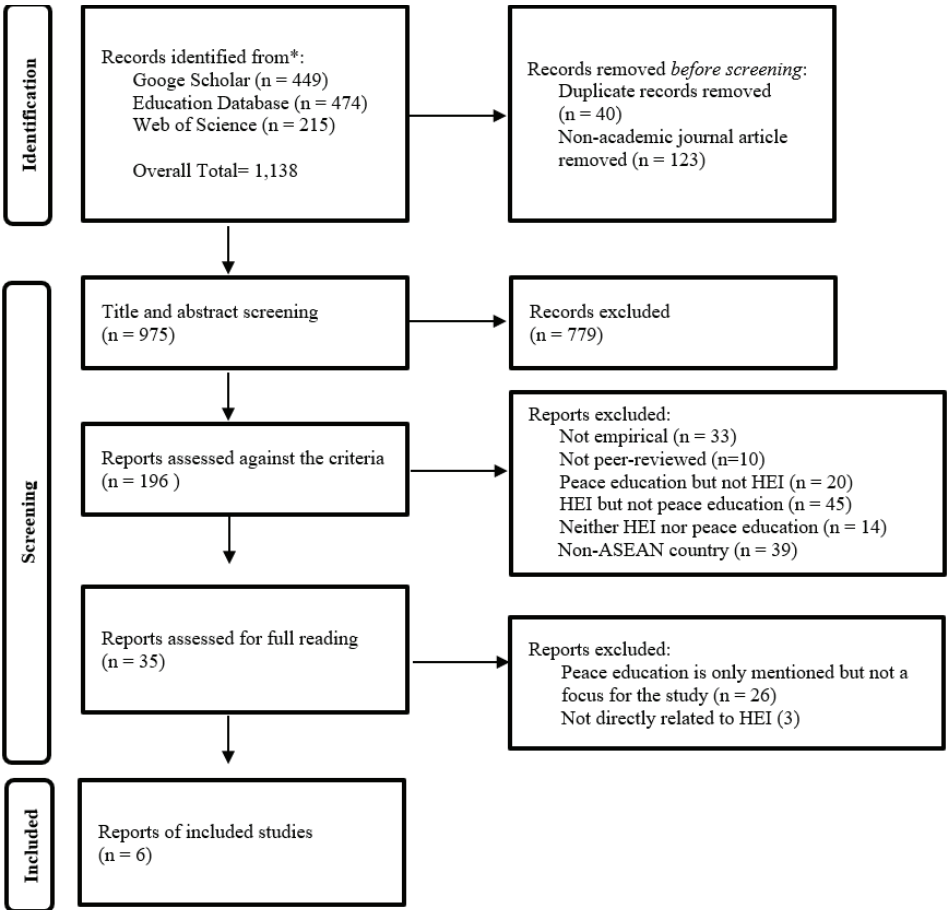
Data sources from Google Scholar, Education Database, and Web of Science were used. These data search engines are among the most comprehensive databases related to education. We searched scholarly articles from 2022 to 2025 to analyze outcomes and lessons from the peace education studies in the post-pandemic practice. We employed the search keywords using Boolean operators 'AND' and 'OR': "PEACE EDUCATION" AND "HIGHER EDUCATION" AND "ASEAN" OR "SOUTHEAST ASIA", which resulted in 1,138 publications.

Data Screening and Extraction

In the screening process, first, we eliminated duplicates and non-academic publications. Second, we thoroughly screened the title and abstract of each article, including the key words. Third, the remaining articles were screened against the inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria include: the article is empirical and peer-reviewed, related to peace education in higher education, the country of study is in the ASEAN region, and written in English. Fourth, we read the remaining articles for inclusion assessment. Despite the absence of formal appraisal, all the studies included in the review underwent rigorous peer-review as empirical investigations and were assessed for methodological transparency during the selection process. The specific PRISMA procedures are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

PRISMA Method



The six included studies are shown in Table 1. From these six included studies, one study with an asterisk (*) was considered partially related to peace education in higher education, but we still decided to include it and focus on the results related to peace education in higher education and possible margins.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

In analyzing and synthesizing the data, first, we repeatedly read the six included scholarly publications. Second, we extracted the author and year, location of the study, aim, methods, and findings (as shown in Table 1). Third, we familiarized ourselves with the significance of the findings. Fourth, we grouped similar results into categories. Fifth, the newly formed categories were then integrated, forming new integrated results. In total, we extracted 24 clear results, which were reduced into 12 categories, and finally scaled down to three integrated results. The summary of themes and sub-themes is shown in Figure 2.

Table 1*Description of the Included Studies (n=6)*

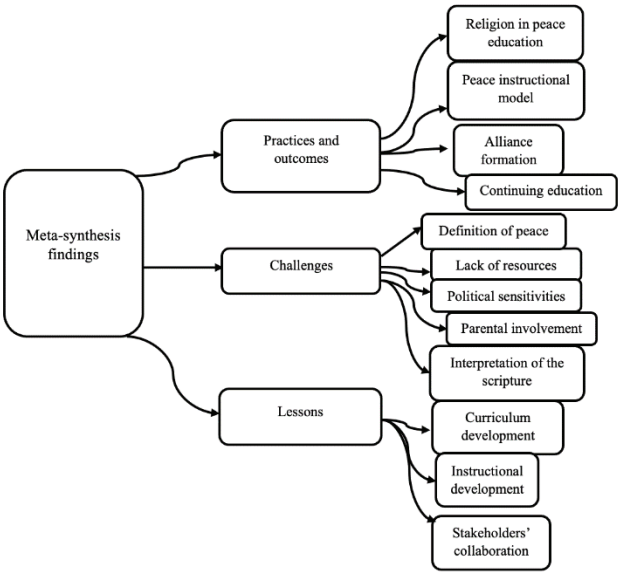
Author/s and year	Origin	Aim	Methodology	Results
Sy (2025)	Thailand	To investigate how peace education guided by Islamic ethical principles contributes to deradicalization, strengthens multicultural understanding, and promotes sustainable peacebuilding.	Qualitative thematic and content analysis, interviews, and observations	Three themes emerged: (1) peace education inclusion in the curricula (2) teachers' training and competence (3) barriers in implementing peace education
Supriyadi et al. (2025)	Indonesia	To address religious literacy and the promotion of tolerance	Design-based research approach, survey, focus group discussions	Five themes emerged: (1) religious literacy in inclusive and peaceful behaviors (2) importance of religious terminology (3) narrow interpretation and orientation of religion (4) limited digital literacy (5) FAITH (fostering awareness, inquiry, thinking, and harmony)
Chelong and Madeng (2025)	Thailand	To investigate the effect of experiential and digital e-learning in cross-cultural education to reduce conflict and violence	Training camp program, content analysis, statistical analysis	Two themes emerged: (1) youth's attitude and behavior (2) positive perception of cross-cultural learning and multi-cultural peaceful societies
Wong and Kareng (2024)	Myanmar	To investigate creativity in crisis in higher education	Qualitative, interview	Eight themes emerged: (1) change in teachers' role (2) forming alliances (3) studying together (4) ethnic language education (5) educational policy reform (6) re-designing of curriculum (7) resolving language issues (8) international collaboration
Qomusudin et al. (2025)	Indonesia	To analyze the level of religious moderation and identify the factors affecting their religious moderation values.	Quantitative, survey	Three themes emerged: (1) role of tolerance, anti-violence stance, and local culture accommodation (2) influences to religious moderation (3) importance of interreligious dialogue in social harmony

See next page for continuation of table

Continuation of Table 1

Author/s and year	Origin	Aim	Methodology	Results
*Rahmat et al. (2025)	Myanmar	To examine the effect of conflict on higher education educators	Case study, semi-structured interview, thematic analysis	Three themes emerged: (1) wellbeing (2) higher education educators' strategies (3) pedagogical aspirations

Figure 2
Themes and Sub-themes



RESULTS

Peace Education Practices and Outcomes

The available evidence from three countries in ASEAN regions indicates that the themes that emerged are in connection to creating effective and engaging lessons for the promotion of peace and the issues involving program implementation towards the delivery of peace-related concepts and lessons.

Religious Teachings as an Anchor of Peace Education

In the included studies from Thailand, Indonesia, and Myanmar, peace education in higher education is anchored on the teachings of religions like Islam. This practice aimed at inculcating peace education and cross-cultural understanding among students through religious doctrines. The ethical principles of religion are a foundation in teaching and

promoting sustainable peacebuilding. Through religious literacy, students were seen to have developed positive peaceful behavior and an understanding of diversity. In this aspect, teachings from a certain religion could have a significant impact on developing positive human values and attitudes (Kondrila, 2023). However, this kind of situation may also be taken with caution. A strong religious influence may also be a source of conflict due to different beliefs and isms from each of the different religious understandings (Ngugi, 2023). Consequently, religion emerged as both a resource and a potential challenge for peace education. While religious principles may foster positive human values and promote tolerance, rigid interpretations may reinforce social divisions. Thus, teachers and educational planners may need to carefully draft lessons that may suit different groups of students so that lessons do not appear a religious propaganda. Teachers may consider the suggestion of previous study on transformative style of education for students to learn global citizenship and live more sustainably (Bell, 2016).

In general, the findings from the three mentioned countries suggest that not all institutions include peace education in the curriculum but rather integrated it into other subjects. This relates to past studies where peace education subject is integrated in religious education (Mahayanti et al., 2025) or intercultural education (Litaay et al., 2025). This could also explain why religion is one of the bases for learning ethical principles and human values (as mentioned above). In connection, the findings suggest that implementing changes to the curriculum could potentially enhance the incorporation of peace education in higher education.

Peace Education is a Platform for the Development of Critical Thinking Skills and Management of Multicultural Group Dynamics

Peace education in higher education institutions is a platform for the development of critical thinking and the promotion of a peaceful and harmonious society. One of the instructional models is called the model of Fostering Awareness, Inquiry, Thinking, and Harmony (FAITH) (Supriyadi et al., 2025). This aims to integrate the cognitive, affective, and socio-cultural aspects in learning. This kind of model encourages reflective thinking and questioning, and in practice, learning to manage multicultural group dynamics. This model allows students to reflect on their own experiences, create arguments on the intertwined relationship between religion and society, learn to work in different groups, and develop mutual trust, tolerance, and respect.

Ethnic Language in Peace Education

In the current world situation that is full of complexities where war from different regions exists, peace education may become an exemplary tool for educating young minds on the value of a peaceful and sustainable society (Tanyel & Şahin Kıralp, 2021). In times of conflict in Myanmar, for instance, ethnic language education navigates conflict resolution and encourages togetherness. The findings suggest that re-designing the curriculum with the inclusion of ethnic language may strengthen peace education. Curriculum planners in other ASEAN countries may learn from the Myanmar situation

and ponder the importance of learning the community's ethnic language towards multicultural understanding and collaboration. Additionally, the findings calls for a need for training for language instructors to base their lessons on the specific context (Emadian et al., 2018).

Alliance Formation

Based on the findings, strengthening the alliances among political leaders, religious teachers and leaders, classroom teachers, institution leaders, parents, and students may enhance peace education. This connects with previous research about the need for different actors in the community to work together to achieve peace (Nesterova et al., 2024). Previous studies also emphasized the importance of considering different indicators and actors towards a sustainable school (Kalaitzidis, 2012). This, however, required a deeper commitment to involvement in peace initiatives for the promotion of peace to be successful. This kind of alliance formation, though, may sound easy, but in reality, it requires a lot of effort from all the actors involved.

Continuing Education

Learning is a lifelong process (Laal, 2011). The findings suggest that teachers are recommended to take a journey for their continuing professional development to develop competence and understand their role in teaching peace education. The teacher's role in peace education is essential for the delivery of peace lessons and in understanding the importance of peace in a world full of complexities (Ahmad et al., 2025). This continuing education for teachers, however, is heavily dependent on the part of the teacher and their institution. As suggested by previous research, for sustainability to be in fruition, institutions need to support their teachers through collaboration and mentoring (Sachs et al., 2011). Full support for teachers and teachers' motivation is necessary to be able to create meaningful lessons for peace and innovate peace initiatives in the classroom.

Challenges of Peace Education in ASEAN Higher Education

The included studies from Indonesia, Thailand, and Myanmar revealed that barriers in the implementation of peace education were related to the definition of peace, lack of resources in teaching, the political climate of conflict-prone areas, parental involvement in learning, differing views of religious doctrines, and biases in the leadership of peace initiatives.

Dilemma of Understanding Peace in Violent Contexts

Teaching peace in a violent context is a paradox. In many situations, the difficulty of understanding peace is brought about by conflict exposure. It is challenging to teach the meaning of peace when conflict and violence are present in everyday life among some

of the students or students living in the conflict-area regions (Sy, 2025). This creates a gap in understanding positive peace, where the meaning of peace is not a total absence of violence. It is undeniably valid when students from these areas define peace as the absence of conflict and violence. This connects to previous study on the difficulty of defining positive peace. In the past study, the gap in understanding positive peace is not only evident among students but also with religious leaders. The positive peace definition among religious leaders remains conceptual, but the empathetic actions towards interfaith understanding for peace are minimal (Geovasky, 2024). However, this discrepancy must be taken into account when conceptualizing peace and teaching it to students. As posited by Galtung (1969), peace can be perceived not only as the absence of violence and hostilities (negative peace) but also as the presence of justice, inclusion, and positive human interactions (positive peace). Furthermore, an ill-defined and unjustified definition of peace could potentially engender confusion, disorder and conflict (Jabor, 2024).

Limited Resources to Support the Implementation of Peace Education

Peace education implementation in the mentioned three countries has limited support in terms of funding for their teaching materials and training resources. For instance, in Thailand, teachers were unable to conduct interactive activities due to a lack of resources (Sy, 2025). Without enough funds, it is challenging for teachers to create innovative and meaningful lessons for the class. This means that teachers need to be creative and resourceful in their teaching despite the lack of funding. This gives a strong emphasis on the teacher's role in the classroom and on how to deliver the lessons in spite of resource difficulties. This connects to previous study stressing the role of teacher in integrating education for sustainability (Mohammadnia & Moghadam, 2019).

Political Climate Sensitivities

In conflict-prone areas, the findings revealed that discussions on peace education must be framed in a way that it will not create political turmoil. The sensitive political climate could create divisions and mistrust. This situation highlights a big challenge for peace educators in balancing teachings about peace against any political entanglements. This connects to previous study where respondents agreed that structural component of peacebuilding can be one of the challenges (Sotto & Pantao, 2025). Additionally, the findings suggest that a conflict-sensitive approach and peace teaching need to be carefully crafted to successfully implement peace education in the conflict-prone areas (Kester, 2024).

Participation of Parents in Peace Education at Home

Home reinforces the values learned in peace education at school. However, based on the findings, parents were less involved in implementing these positive values themselves.

Some parents resort to violence as a means of disciplining their children. Peace lessons learned from the classroom would not be meaningful if parents at home exercise violent methods for punishment (Harber & Sakade, 2009). Parents' involvement is essential in students' education (Maimad et al., 2023). This implies a need for parents to participate in peace education to learn a non-violent approach to imposing discipline (Kester, 2023).

Differing Interpretations of the Scriptures and Ethical Principles

As peace education is integrated in religious literacy (as mentioned in the practices), religious leaders teaching the subject play a significant role in educating peaceful behaviors and other positive values. However, religious leaders were found to have different interpretations of the religious doctrines, which creates divisions and challenges towards interreligious engagements to nurture a sense of community. Thus, these narrow and differing interpretations of the scriptures and the religion's ethical principles could create misunderstanding and conflict among students and constituents in the community (Al Qurtuby, 2023).

Lessons Learned

The available evidence from Indonesia, Thailand, and Myanmar in the post-pandemic era strongly suggests that curriculum development is necessary, with peace education to be clearly integrated into the curriculum. With peace education not clearly integrated into the curriculum, the focus of teaching may divert to a more religious education rather than peace education. The studies under examination indicate positive outcomes of religious educational methodologies in fostering tolerance and enhancing dialogue skills. However, it is crucial to note that this does not inherently imply that religion as a whole inherently promotes peace. In addition, religion may bind people together, but with strong religious beliefs and belonging, this may also become a source of intra- and inter-religious conflict (Mana et al., 2021). This is significant to consider, especially when religious leaders involved in teaching peace education had gaps in understanding the religious doctrine themselves (Geovasky, 2024).

Moreover, the findings revealed evidence on the gap in understanding peace among students coming from conflict-prone areas. The presence of conflict and violence in their daily lives affects their perception of positive peace as merely not an absence of hostilities. The findings indicated that negative peace was predominantly understood by students in conflict-prone regions. Although this situation may already exist prior or during the pandemic, the findings in the post-pandemic era suggest that instructional development could enhance peace education. Peace education teachers may explore innovative instructional designs for these students to reflect on the meaning of peace either as the positive peace or negative peace definitions. The FAITH model (Supriyadi et al., 2025), for instance, could be a good guide in exploring the meaning of peace through awareness and critical inquiry supported by evidence from published research. Teachers could also explore other local wisdom, or proverbial phrases present in their own communities (Payong, 2023). In this way, peace education should not solely be reliant on religious

teachings and principles. It should aim at inclusivity of all learners from different cultural and religious backgrounds (Abdellah & Gubair, 2025).

Lastly, the findings of this study also indicate that the implementation of peace education may not be successful without available resources and support from different stakeholders in society. It is found to be an important lesson that peace education for a sustainable future needs involvement not only with teachers and students but also with political leaders, religious leaders, and parents. Despite the potential for collaboration and efforts existing prior to or during the pandemic, the need for sustainable education in the post-pandemic era necessitates a sustained, unified effort from all community stakeholders. Thus, this requires pondering into the basic pillars of peacebuilding such as moral capacity, dialogue, critical reflection, and socio-political participation (Ramirez-Hurtado & Comins-Mingol, 2021).

Conclusion

This meta-synthesis of scholarly publications of peace education research in higher education in the ASEAN region in the post-pandemic times (2022–2025) offers a valuable insight into the evolving discourse of sustaining peace through education. The study highlights the emerging themes in studying peace education after the pandemic, emphasizing the importance of peace definitions and innovative ways of teaching peace in the classroom, the challenges in implementing peace education, and the perceived solutions in achieving sustainable peace. The outcomes from previous research could serve as a guide for curriculum planners and teachers on how to integrate peace education in the curriculum or in other subjects, such as religious education or intercultural education. The incorporation of local languages, indigenous knowledge, and culturally rooted methodologies could potentially facilitate the decolonization of prevailing peace education paradigms. In addition, the findings could also serve as the basis for further collaboration with different internal and external stakeholders of the educational institution in crafting peace education initiatives towards sustainable education.

Limitations

Though this study could be beneficial in drawing conclusions on the outcomes and the lessons learned from peace education research in higher education in the ASEAN region after the pandemic, the study also bears limitations. First, the study may serve as an exploratory overview of the current state of peace education in higher education within Southeast Asia. Given its limited scope, the research is based on a small sample, encompassing three countries among the 10 ASEAN official member countries. Moreover, due to the scarcity of existing studies, the themes may not fully encapsulate the diverse practices of peace education across the ASEAN region. Consequently, it is strongly advised that future research should expand to include other ASEAN member countries to gain a more comprehensive understanding of peace education in higher education. Second, the study is limited to empirical research and three data search engines – Google Scholar, Education Database, and Web of Science. Future research could expand data sources

to provide more integrated results of previous studies. Furthermore, the research did not incorporate formal evaluations to assess potential biases, quality, and heterogeneity within the included studies. It is recommended that future research endeavors should incorporate these assessments to enhance methodological transparency and robustness.

Disclosure Statement

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The authors utilized already published articles that are available and accessible online.

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