

From Ports to Partnerships: Blue Transportation as A Driver of Economic and Diplomatic Engagement in Asean

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ABSTRACT: Blue transportation has become a critical component of the Blue Economy by promoting sustainable maritime development, enhancing regional connectivity, and strengthening cooperation among coastal and archipelagic states. This study examined the role of blue transportation as a driver of economic integration, diplomatic engagement, and ASEAN regionalism through a comparative analysis of Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Employing a qualitative comparative case study design, the research utilized thematic document analysis of official ASEAN frameworks, national maritime strategies, and reports from international organizations published between 2010 and 2025. The analysis focused on identifying common patterns in maritime infrastructure development, logistics modernization, regional policy coordination, and diplomatic cooperation.

The findings revealed that blue transportation significantly contributes to ASEAN economic integration by strengthening maritime connectivity through port modernization, improving logistics efficiency and supply chain integration, and supporting coordinated regional development under ASEAN transport frameworks. The study also found that maritime transportation serves as an effective platform for diplomatic engagement by institutionalizing policy dialogue, encouraging cooperation in addressing shared maritime challenges, and strengthening partnerships with international organizations. Furthermore, the comparative analysis demonstrated that despite differences in maritime capacity and national priorities, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam collectively advance ASEAN regionalism by aligning national maritime strategies with regional initiatives. Overall, the study concludes that blue transportation is more than an economic sector or transport system; it is a strategic instrument that enhances regional connectivity, promotes sustainable development, strengthens diplomatic relations, and reinforces ASEAN's collective governance and integration. These findings highlight the importance of continued investment in maritime infrastructure, policy harmonization, and regional cooperation to build a more resilient, competitive, and interconnected ASEAN Community.

KEYWORDS: Blue transportation, Blue Economy, ASEAN, economic integration, diplomatic engagement, ASEAN regionalism, maritime connectivity, maritime logistics, regional cooperation, sustainable maritime development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Maritime transport is one of the most important sectors of the blue economy, which is regarded as one of the most effective approaches to sustainable economic growth, based on the responsible use of marine resources. Maritime transport is the lifeline of the world's trade, accounting for over 80% of the world's merchandise volume and playing a crucial role in the world's trade, international supply chains and economic development (UNCTAD, 2024). The recent global geopolitical instability and effects of climate change, along with supply chain impediments, have shown how vulnerable maritime routes are creating a need for resilient, durable, and integrated shipping systems. In response to this need, governments and international organizations have started stressing more on funding for green ports, digital logistics, and sustainable maritime infrastructure, all responsible components of the blue economy (UNCTAD, 2024; IMO, 2023).

Many countries in ASEAN are maritime nations thus having coastal states and have a high percentage of archipelagic countries, making maritime transportation very important within the ASEAN region. Maritime connectivity is essential to trade and economic integration in the region and for the transport of goods, services, investments and people. With this in mind, ASEAN has always made transport connectivity a focal point by supporting various initiatives aimed at achieving this goal, which include but are not limited to the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025 as well as more recently, the ASEAN Economic Community Strategic Plan 2026-2030; both of which identify the establishment of more connected transport networks, resilient supply chains and further regional integration as critical first steps toward maintaining and sustaining economic growth given the current state of uncertainty occurring on a global scale (ASEAN 2025, Reuters, 2025). Maritime transport is also an important instrument of regional

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cooperation and diplomacy, as it needs policy coordination, infrastructure cooperation and regulatory harmonization among member states, in addition to the economic gains.

Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam offer pertinent case studies of ASEAN Member States' use of blue transport to promote national development and regional connectivity. Singapore has developed into one of the top maritime hubs in the world because of its technologically advanced port system and its use of digital maritime services, whereas Indonesia is working to further improve inter-island connectivity as part of its maritime development agenda. The Philippines has placed a high priority on modernising its maritime transport system to better connect the multiple islands in its archipelago and to improve both domestic and regional connectivity and Vietnam has been pushing for the development of its seaports and logistics infrastructure to support its thriving export industry. The countries have progressed greatly in developing their maritime sectors, but the infrastructure, logistical capabilities and maritime governance differ, influencing their role in ASEAN integration. The examination of these four countries will enable a better understanding of how blue transportation serves as both a catalyst for economic development and as a mechanism for the strengthening of regional cooperation and, ultimately, ASEAN integration, under the blue economy.

Research Questions

1. What role does blue transportation play in facilitating economic integration among ASEAN member-states?
2. How does blue transportation contribute to diplomatic engagement and cooperation within ASEAN?
3. How does blue transportation function as an instrument of ASEAN regionalism?

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative comparative case study design to understand how maritime transportation policies, regional frameworks, and institutional strategies shape patterns of cooperation among ASEAN member-states instead of simply measuring relationships through statistical methods. Exclusively relying on secondary documentary sources and utilizing thematic document analysis, this study seeks to examine the role of blue transportation in advancing economic integration, diplomatic engagement, and ASEAN regionalism. This study likewise focuses on interpreting policy and governance approaches as well as regional initiatives as reflected in official documents and institutional publications.

Particularly, this study adopts a multiple-case comparative design with Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines serving as the cases for analysis. These countries were selected purposively as they represent significant maritime states within ASEAN while having varying levels of maritime infrastructure development, blue economy implementation, and the likes. The chosen design is anchored on this study's objective in examining how national maritime strategies collectively contribute to ASEAN's regional cooperation, especially in promoting sustainable development under the Blue Economy framework. Comparing these countries allows this study to identify not only common regional patterns, but also country-specific approaches in utilizing blue transportation as a mechanism for economic development and diplomatic cooperation.

Data Sources

The study adopts secondary qualitative data that is derived from documentary analysis of 40 to 50 official documents that is published between the timeframe of 2010 and 2025, in order to assess the role of blue transportation in promoting economic integration, diplomatic engagement, and ASEAN regionalism. These data includes regional-level documents including the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025, ASEAN Economic Community

Blueprint 2025, ASEAN Economic Community Strategic Plan 2026-2030, ASEAN Transport

Strategic Plans, reports from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO), as well as national-level documents from Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Approximately 8-10 documents per country are examined during the conduct of the study, including national maritime transport policies, port development master plans, logistics strategies, blue economy frameworks, maritime infrastructure investment plans, shipping and trade reports, and official statistical publications that are issued by government agencies responsible for transport and maritime affairs. Additional data are gathered from peer-reviewed journal articles, policy papers, and reports from international development institutions, including the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to provide context. The documents used as reference for the findings of the data are based on four criteria: (1) published between the years 2010 and 2025; (2) issued by government agencies, ASEAN bodies, or international organizations; (3) addresses maritime transportation, port development, blue economy initiatives, regional connectivity, trade, or maritime cooperation; and (4) publicly accessible, containing sufficient information relevant to the research's objectives.

Analytical Framework

This study employs a qualitative comparative policy analysis using thematic document analysis as its primary analytical framework. The framework aims to study the role of blue transportation in the ASEAN economic integration, ASEAN diplomatic engagement

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and ASEAN regionalism by systematically analyzing policy documents, institutional reports, and national maritime strategies of Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam.

The analysis is guided by the principles of ASEAN regionalism and the Blue Economy framework. The analytical framework in this article to understand how ASEAN regionalism contributes to regional cooperation in the field of maritime transportation is by connecting, coordinating and collaborating through institutions among the ASEAN member countries. The Blue Economy approach highlights the sustainable use of marine resources and maritime facilities for economic growth, environmental sustainability and regional development. The study incorporates these viewpoints to analyze blue transportation both as an economic activity and as a tool of regional cooperation.

The documentary data will undergo thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The following is a brief description of the first step: All documents selected will be analyzed and the researchers will become familiar with their contents. The relevant information concerning maritime transport, port development, logistics system, regional connectivity, and maritime cooperation will then be collected and coded. The codes will then be clustered into larger analytical themes that correspond to the research questions in the study.

The analysis will focus on three major thematic dimensions:

- 1) Blue Transportation and Economic Integration, which includes indicators such as port infrastructure development, maritime logistics efficiency, shipping connectivity, trade facilitation, supply chain integration, and investment in maritime transport.
- 2) Blue Transportation and Diplomatic Engagement, which reviews and documents ASEAN member states' evidence of maritime collaboration, maritime policy harmonization, maritime bilateral and multilateral initiatives, maritime transport agreements, maritime institutional coordination and maritime infrastructure projects.
- 3) Blue Transportation as an Instrument of ASEAN Regionalism, combining the results of the first two dimensions to assess the role of maritime transportation in fostering regional integration via shared governance, collective development strategies and ASEAN connectivity initiatives.

Following thematic coding, the study employs a cross-case comparative analysis of Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. The comparison showcases commonalities, parallels and contrasts in the transportation policy, infrastructure development, governance and regional engagement of each country. This comparative analysis enables the researchers to identify the impact of the different national strategies on the overall goals of ASEAN economic integration and diplomacy and to shed light on the different routes blue transportation can take to support regionalism.

The analytical process concludes by integrating the findings across all themes to develop an overall interpretation of blue transportation's role within ASEAN. The framework is not about assessing countries separately, but rather about how the various maritime programs contribute towards ASEAN countries' efforts to deepen regional connectivity, economic resilience and diplomacy through the ASEAN Blue Economy agenda.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Blue Transportation and Economic Integration

Three main themes has emerged in explaining the role of blue transportation in supporting the economic integration among countries in the Southeast Asia based on the thematic analysis conducted from the ASEAN policy documents, reports from international organizations and national maritime strategies of Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam: 1) strengthening regional maritime connectivity through port and shipping infrastructure; 2) enhancing trade and supply chain integration through logistics modernization; and 3) promoting coordinated economic development through ASEAN transport frameworks. Despite the varying degrees of maritime development and institutionalization among the four countries, documentary evidence shows that blue transportation is considered a universal means of achieving regional connectivity and attaining ASEAN integration goals.

Theme 1: Strengthening Regional Maritime Connectivity through Port and Shipping

Infrastructure

The study revealed that the four countries employed increasing maritime capabilities through expansion and modernization of maritime infrastructure as their key policy approach to regional connectivity improvement. The ASEAN documents state that the establishment of efficient ports, reliable shipping routes, and comprehensive maritime transport systems is crucial for promoting intra-regional trade and cutting down on logistics problems (ASEAN, 2020; ASEAN, 2025). Moreover, according to the UNCTAD (2024), strengthening maritime transportation leads to better trade competitiveness due to low transportation costs, which makes shipping operations cheaper and more efficient.

Across the four countries, documents show that they have different but compatible strategies for maritime transportation improvement. Singapore has committed significant resources into developing digital port technologies and the development of Tuas Mega Port, making Singapore the main transshipment and logistics hub in ASEAN (Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore, 2024). As Indonesia is the largest archipelagic country in the world, the maritime strategy is oriented to develop domestic and

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regional connectivity, such as the Sea Toll Program and port expansion (Ministry of Transportation Indonesia, 2023). The Philippines has identified port modernization and enhancement of inter-island shipping connectivity to address the geographical fragmentation and to allow the country in the regional markets (Department of Transportation, 2023; Philippine Ports Authority, 2024). Vietnam is also actively investing in the development of its international gateway ports and maritime logistics infrastructure to enhance export-oriented economic growth and strengthen its ASEAN and global value chains (Vietnam Maritime Administration, 2024).

Although there are differences in the approach to implementation, the analysis shows that infrastructure development acts as a common strategy in the region instead of a purely national initiative. These investments improve physical connectivity among ASEAN member countries, which means that goods travel more efficiently and markets become more integrated.

Theme 2: Enhancing Trade and Supply Chain Integration through Logistics Modernization

Additionally, document analysis showed that there is a growing importance of the logistics modernization as a means of enhancing economic integration of ASEAN. The digitalization of maritime transport and businesses, smart ports, multimodal transport systems and streamlined customs procedures are mentioned repeatedly in regional and national policy documents as key elements of competitive maritime transport systems (World Bank, 2023; UNCTAD, 2024). Besides building physical infrastructure, the member states of the ASEAN are also increasingly aware of the role of good logistics in achieving the effective implementation of maritime connectivity.

Singapore shows the highest degree of logistics integration through the use of automated port operations, electronic shipping platforms and integrated maritime services. At the same time, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam also adopted reforms which would improve the efficiency of cargo handling, port management and logistics coordination. The undertaken measures will help reduce transportation costs and enhance competitive capacity of the trade sector.

The results reveal that the role of blue transportation in supporting the economic integration process of the ASEAN is not only through the port-to-port connectivity but also by building efficient logistics networks that allows goods to be transported across borders. Regional production networks and cross border investments are enhanced with improved maritime logistics, which also boost ASEAN's competitiveness in global trade.

Theme 3: Promoting Coordinated Economic Development through ASEAN Maritime Cooperation

Lastly, the analysis highlights ASEAN's role in the coordination of national maritime development through a regional transport framework. All of the documents reviewed show that blue transportation is not supported by stand-alone national policies, but by collective regional initiatives. The ASEAN Transport Strategic Plan, the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025, and the ASEAN Economic Community Strategic Plan 2026-2030 promote policy coordination, infrastructure interoperability, and joint investment between the member states (ASEAN, 2020; ASEAN, 2025).

The comparative analysis shows that even though Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam follow different national maritime objectives, their strategies support ASEAN's connectivity agenda. Singapore provides technological leadership and innovation in logistics, Indonesia strengthens maritime accessibility in the region by developing the shipping network, the Philippines enhances connectivity within the archipelago thereby reinforcing regional transport, and Vietnam assists the formation of regional networks of production and export through port expansion.

The overall thematic findings indicate that blue transportation is a powerful tool for ASEAN economic integration as it facilitates regional maritime connectivity, enhances logistics and supply chain efficiency, and helps in coordinated development of transport in the region through common regional frameworks. Blue transportation is a regional economic system that connects national development strategies and ASEAN's regional goals on connectivity, competitiveness and sustainable economic growth, instead of being just transport infrastructure.

Blue Transportation and ASEAN Diplomatic Engagement

The thematic analysis of ASEAN policy documents, reports from international organizations, and national maritime strategies of Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam revealed three major themes explaining how blue transportation contributes to diplomatic engagement within ASEAN: 1) institutionalizing maritime policy dialogue and regional coordination; 2) promoting cooperation in addressing shared maritime challenges; and 3) strengthening ASEAN's engagement with external partners through maritime cooperation. Results indicate that maritime transportation is not only an economic tool, but also a vehicle to facilitate regular diplomatic communication between the ASEAN Member States. Cooperation in the development and operation of maritime transport systems is needed for regulations, infrastructure, safety, sustainability and cross-border movement, so there are opportunities for ASEAN countries to coordinate their policies and develop common regional approaches.

Theme 1: Institutionalizing Maritime Policy Dialogue and Regional Coordination

The documentary analysis revealed that blue transportation provides a formal platform for continuous policy dialogue among ASEAN Member States. The coordination between governments is necessary in maritime transport, as shipping routes, port operations, customs procedures, maritime safety regulations cover more than one country, and logistics are coupled to these.

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Accordingly, ASEAN has developed regional mechanisms to facilitate regular consultation and discussion on maritime transport matters among the ASEAN Member States.

The ASEAN Transport Strategic Plan, the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025, and other ASEAN transport-related frameworks demonstrate that maritime connectivity is addressed through institutionalized regional cooperation rather than through isolated national policies. These include the promotion of coordinated transport policies, enhanced maritime connectivity, harmonization of procedures, and the building of more efficient regional transport networks (ASEAN, 2020; ASEAN, 2025). The mechanisms in turn add maritime transportation to a new space of regular intergovernmental engagement.

The four country cases demonstrate different forms of participation in this regional policy dialogue. Singapore is contributing through its role as a key maritime and logistics hub and its knowledge and expertise in port management, digitalization and maritime innovation. Indonesia's large archipelago geographic region has become an important component in the development of maritime connectivity and shipping cooperation with other ASEAN MSOs. The Philippines is actively engaged in regional maritime cooperation and in tackling the problem of its scattered islands. Vietnam continues to expand its role in regional maritime and logistics cooperation, which is directly driven by the development and growth of its port and shipping industry.

Although the four countries have different national maritime priorities, the analysis shows that their participation in ASEAN maritime frameworks creates opportunities for regular communication and policy coordination. This means that blue transportation serves as a diplomatic platform that gathers national interests together via the same concerns of transportation. Maritime cooperation thus fosters collaboration between the ASEAN governments and helps build up common regional priorities.

Theme 2: Promoting Cooperation in Addressing Shared Maritime Challenges

The second theme emerging from the documentary analysis is the use of blue transportation as a means of fostering cooperation in addressing common maritime challenges. Issues such as maritime safety, maritime pollution, climate change, greenhouse gas emissions, environmental sustainability, and the resilience of supply chains are some of the issues that are not properly addressed by a single country in the development of maritime transportation. These common issues enable ASEAN Member States to share knowledge and coordinate policies and plan joint solutions.

ASEAN and international maritime documents increasingly emphasize sustainable ports, green shipping, maritime environmental protection, and the digital transformation of maritime transport as areas requiring regional cooperation (ASEAN, 2020; IMO, 2023; UNCTAD, 2024). The documentary data shows that the cooperation in the shipping and port sector has grown to a new level, going beyond the narrow task of developing shipping and port infrastructure. It has also incorporated actions encouraging sustainable maritime transport and mitigating adverse environmental effects of maritime transport.

The four countries demonstrate how different national circumstances can create common areas for cooperation. Singapore's advanced maritime and port systems offer experience in maritime digitalization, port efficiency and sustainable maritime development. The archipelagic geographical location poses significant challenges for Indonesia and the Philippines, such as the need to ensure maritime connectivity and marine environment protection in wide areas. Vietnam's shipping and port development is in development, and thus the need for more collaboration to address environmental and operational effects of maritime development.

The analysis shows that these differences do not necessarily prevent cooperation. Rather, they provide opportunities for transfer of technical knowledge, policy experiences and institutional practices. Developed maritime system countries can share their technical experience, and those facing different geographical and developmental challenges can share their experiences and policy perspectives. Blue transportation consequently provides a practical area for cooperation because ASEAN Member States share common maritime challenges despite their differences in national capacity.

Theme 3: Strengthening ASEAN's Engagement with External Partners through Maritime Cooperation

The third theme highlights the role of blue transportation in expanding ASEAN's diplomatic engagement beyond its Member States. The analysis indicates that maritime transportation has become an important area for ASEAN's cooperation with external partners, including international organizations, development institutions, and dialogue partners. Typical cooperation areas of such partnerships include port development, maritime safety, digitalization, environmental sustainability, technical assistance and capacity building.

The involvement of organizations such as the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) demonstrates the international character of maritime transportation. These institutions offer technical knowledge, policy suggestions, funding and capacity building for maritime development. The cooperation of ASEAN in the sea, as a result, provides more opportunities for diplomatic engagement and regional development with external parties.

The four countries also serve as important participants in this broader network of maritime cooperation. Singapore's status as a global maritime hub means that it has ample opportunities to interact with international maritime institutions and be involved in the development of maritime standards and practices. Indonesia and the Philippines, with their vast water space, serve as significant

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partners in cooperation related to maritime connectivity, environmental protection, and sustainable shipping. Vietnam's growing role in international trade and maritime logistics also strengthens its participation in international maritime cooperation.

The findings show that external maritime partnerships provide ASEAN Member States with opportunities to obtain technical expertise, develop institutional capacity, and address challenges that require international cooperation. Concurrently, the partnerships enable ASEAN to enhance its diplomatic footprint and build ties with key external stakeholders. As such, blue transportation can serve as a diplomatic catalyst to link ASEAN to the wider international maritime community.

Overall, the thematic findings indicate that blue transportation contributes to ASEAN diplomatic engagement through institutionalized policy dialogue, cooperation in addressing shared maritime challenges, and partnerships with external actors. Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam have all shown that maritime transport generates overlapping areas of interest which lead to frequent interaction and cooperation between the member states of the

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). While the countries differ in their maritime capabilities, geographical conditions, and national priorities, their shared dependence on maritime connectivity provides a foundation for diplomatic engagement.

Therefore, blue transportation should not be viewed solely as a mechanism for moving goods and supporting economic integration. It also serves as a space for policy coordination, technical collaboration, and international cooperation. By maritime cooperation, ASEAN Member States can translate their common interests into opportunities for dialogue and collaboration. These findings support the broader argument that blue transportation serves as an important instrument of ASEAN regionalism by strengthening the institutional and cooperative relationships that connect the Member States.

Blue Transportation as an Instrument of ASEAN Regionalism

The thematic findings demonstrate that blue transportation functions as more than an economic sector, as it also operates as an instrument of ASEAN regionalism by linking national maritime strategies with regional cooperation and collective development objectives. The comparative analysis of ASEAN countries, in this study, Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines revealed three major themes that explain how blue transportation advances ASEAN regionalism. The themes enumerated in the thematic analysis indicate that maritime transportation serves as one of the practical mechanisms wherein ASEAN transforms maritime interests to regional cooperation.

Theme 1's analysis revealed that blue transportation contributes to ASEAN regionalism by institutionalizing regional cooperation through common governance frameworks and maritime policies that are coordinated among ASEAN countries. Instead of developing maritime independently, the member-states align their transport strategies with regional initiatives, such as the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025, ASEAN Transport Strategic Plan, and the ASEAN Economic Community Strategic Plan 2026-2030.

Across the four countries, documentary evidence demonstrates that national maritime priorities complement broader ASEAN objectives despite differences in economic capacity and geographic conditions. Singapore's maritime innovation and digital logistics contributes regional expertise in port management and shipping efficiency. Indonesia on the other hand strengthens regional maritime accessibility through its Sea Toll Program, improving connectivity across one of the world's largest archipelagic states. The Philippines reinforces regional maritime integration by modernizing domestic ports and enhancing inter-island shipping, while Vietnam expands international gateway ports that integrate ASEAN production networks with global trade. The findings suggest that maritime governance within ASEAN is increasingly characterized by institutional coordination rather than fragmented national policymaking. Blue transportation therefore becomes a governance mechanism that strengthens regional institutions while preserving national sovereignty, consistent with ASEAN's principle of cooperative regionalism.

The second theme highlights the role of blue transportation in fostering regional identity by increasing economic and functional interdependence among ASEAN member-states. The documentary evidence indicates that maritime connectivity creates networks of trade, logistics, and investment that reduce isolation among member-states. Although Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines possess varying levels of maritime development, each country's investments contribute to regional connectivity rather than solely domestic objectives. Singapore functions as a regional logistics hub linking global shipping routes with Southeast Asia.

Indonesia facilitates movement across the maritime heart of ASEAN through expanded shipping networks. The Philippines improves connectivity across its archipelagic geography while strengthening links with neighboring economies, and Vietnam enhances regional production chains through continuous port expansion and export-oriented logistics. The findings suggest that blue transportation supports the realization of the ASEAN Community by translating the principles of connectivity into tangible infrastructure and operational cooperation. Maritime transportation not only facilitates the movement of goods and services but also strengthens regional cohesion by linking diverse economies within a common maritime space.

The third theme demonstrates that blue transportation reinforces ASEAN centrality by providing a practical platform through which the organization coordinates both intra-regional and external maritime cooperation. Documentary analysis shows that maritime transportation increasingly serves as an area where ASEAN collectively engages international organizations and dialogue partners. These partnerships support port modernization, digital transformation, sustainable shipping, maritime safety, and capacity-building initiatives across the region.

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The four countries' cases illustrate how national maritime development contributes to ASEAN's collective external engagement. Singapore's internationally recognized maritime sector enables ASEAN to participate in global discussions on maritime standards and innovation. Indonesia and the Philippines contribute significantly to regional initiatives on maritime connectivity, environmental sustainability, and maritime governance due to their extensive coastlines and archipelagic characteristics. Vietnam's expanding logistics and port sectors strengthen ASEAN's participation in regional and global production networks. The findings indicate that ASEAN's engagement with external partners is strengthened when Member States coordinate their maritime priorities under regional frameworks. Rather than negotiating independently, ASEAN increasingly presents maritime development as a collective regional agenda, enhancing its credibility and bargaining capacity in international maritime governance.

The integration of the findings from the three research dimensions demonstrates that blue transportation serves as a comprehensive instrument of ASEAN regionalism by simultaneously advancing economic integration, diplomatic engagement, and regional institutional development. Economically, maritime transportation strengthens connectivity through port modernization, logistics integration, and coordinated infrastructure investment. Diplomatically, it creates continuous opportunities for policy dialogue, technical cooperation, and engagement with international partners. Institutionally, it reinforces ASEAN regionalism by aligning national maritime strategies with common regional frameworks and strengthening collective governance.

The comparative analysis further shows that differences in maritime capacity among Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam do not hinder regional cooperation. Instead, these differences generate complementary strengths that contribute to ASEAN's collective maritime development. Overall, the findings support the argument that blue transportation should be understood not merely as maritime infrastructure or an economic sector but as a strategic instrument that enables ASEAN to operationalize regional integration. Through shared governance, coordinated development strategies, strengthened diplomatic engagement, and expanded maritime connectivity, blue transportation contributes directly to building a more connected, resilient, and integrated ASEAN Community. As maritime trade, sustainability, and regional connectivity become increasingly important in the Indo-Pacific, blue transportation is likely to remain a central pillar of ASEAN regionalism and a key driver of the region's long-term economic and political cooperation.

Key Findings

The findings of the study reveal blue transportation serves as strategic driver of ASEAN economic integration through strengthening regional maritime connectivity, modernizing logistics systems, and promoting coordinated transport development through regional frameworks. Across the cases in Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam, investments in port modernization, shipping infrastructure, and maritime logistics have enhanced trade efficiency, reduced transportation costs, and improved supply chain resilience. Despite having differences in their maritime capacity and national priorities, the aforementioned countries align their maritime development strategies with ASEAN connectivity initiatives, demonstrating that blue transportation contributes significantly to regional economic integration, rather than merely supporting domestic development. The findings are consistent with the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025, the ASEAN Economic Community Strategic Plan 2026–2030, and UNCTAD (2024), emphasizing maritime connectivity and logistics efficiency as the fundamental drivers of regional competitiveness and sustainable economic growth.

Furthermore, the study revealed blue transportation functioning as an important platform for ASEAN diplomatic engagement through the institutionalization of the maritime policy dialogue, encouraging cooperation in addressing shared maritime challenges, and strengthening partnerships with international organizations. Evidences obtained from documents revealed that maritime governance requires a continuous coordination among the members of ASEAN on issues — such as maritime safety, environmental sustainability, digital transformation, and regulatory harmonization.

Moreover, collaboration with several organizations such as International Maritime Organization (IMO), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), World Bank, and Asian Development Bank (ADB) has enhanced ASEAN's technical capacity, policy development, and maritime governance. Collectively, these findings reinforce existing literature that argues maritime cooperation extends beyond its economic functions through serving as a mechanism for regional diplomacy, confidence-building, and collective problem solving (IMO, 2023; World Bank, 2023; UNCTAD, 2024).

In conclusion, the study reinforces that blue transportation serves as an effective instrument of ASEAN regionalism through linking national maritime strategies with the collective regional objectives. Through the comparative analysis, it demonstrates the differences in the maritime capabilities of Vietnam does not hinder regional cooperation; rather, they create a complementary strength reinforcing ASEAN's shared governance, institutional coordination, and regional identity. Blue transportation enables ASEAN to operationalize regional integration through coordination of development, common maritime policies, strengthened diplomatic cooperation, and collective engagement with external partners.

Consequently, maritime transportation should be understood as a strategic governance mechanism that enhances ASEAN centrality, resilience, and long-term regional cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. The findings of the study then supports the principles of ASEAN regionalism and aligning with the regional integration objectives that is outlined in the ASEAN Transport Strategic Plan, MPAC 2025, and the ASEAN Economic Community Strategic Plan 2026–2030.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study imply that blue transportation serves as a strategic instrument for advancing ASEAN's economic integration, diplomatic engagement, and regional cooperation, extending beyond its conventional role as a means of moving goods and people. The results demonstrate that investments in port modernization, maritime logistics, and shipping connectivity contribute to improved trade efficiency and supply chain resilience and allow for stronger regional connectivity through coordinated transport frameworks. Furthermore, the comparative analysis of the cases in Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam suggests that differences in maritime capacity can be transformed into complementary regional strengths when supported by shared policies and institutional cooperation. These findings underscore the pertinence of sustained investments in maritime infrastructure, digitalization, and policy harmonization to promote inclusive and sustainable economic development across ASEAN.

The study also implies that blue transportation has become an effective platform for strengthening diplomacy and reinforcing ASEAN regionalism. Blue transportation has enabled

ASEAN member states—particularly in the cases of Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam—to translate common maritime interests into practical regional cooperation by institutionalizing maritime policy dialogue, encouraging collaboration in addressing shared maritime challenges, and expanding partnerships with international organizations. The findings further suggest that continued alignment of national maritime strategies with ASEAN frameworks can enhance the region's collective capacity to respond to emerging economic, environmental, and geopolitical challenges. Consequently, policymakers should recognize and credit blue transportation as a long-term strategic asset that promotes resilience, sustainable development, and a more integrated and influential ASEAN Community within the broader Indo-Pacific region.

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