

Current Initiatives on Internationalization of Education in Selected Higher Education Institutions in the Philippines

Rufina C. Rosaroso¹, Cherile Yap², Sunliegh Gador³

¹Cebu Normal University, ²University of San Carlos, ³University of San Carlos
Cebu City, Philippines

raffycoronel@yahoo.com¹, cheryap2057@yahoo.com², sunliegh@gmail.com³

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Abstract –*This study intended to describe the institutional initiatives of the selected Higher Education Institutions’ (HEIs) key informants in preparation for the internationalization of education. Further, it would provide insights and baseline data to HEIs in line with implementation of this academic endeavour.*

In-depth interviews were conducted to the key informants such as university presidents, deans, department chairs for pertinent data collection. Aside from in-depth interviews, researchers’ observations and naturalistic inquiries served as instruments for data gathering. Further, documents such as articles and newspaper clips served as additional sources of data.

Triangulation was used in the study to cross-check the researchers’ observations, key informants’ interview responses and articles/documents from newspaper clippings. Findings indicated that there were some HEI administrators who were proactive, reactive and passive towards internationalization of education. Among the three core functions of HEIs, instruction had relatively more international initiatives to include invitations of resource speakers on current trends and pedagogies, faculty and student mobility and curriculum realignment based on international frameworks. Research initiatives were geared towards international publication, capability building and involvement in international conferences and fora for some faculty researchers. On community service, HEIs’ initiatives were yet into local community service but slowly building up partnerships through international linkages.

Keywords – *content analysis, institutional initiatives, internationalization of education, triangulation,*

INTRODUCTION

The quest for internationalization of education has been a primordial concern among higher education institutions. Such academic endeavour serves as the ultimate goal of any higher education institution not only in the pursuit for accreditation but also for global recognition as well.

As posited by Soderqvist, internationalization of education is “a change process from a national to an international higher education institution leading to the inclusion of an international dimension in all aspects of its holistic management to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in the achievement of desired competencies” [1]. These competencies are expected to be developed among students for an outcome-based learning based on significant factors such as effective instructional delivery, state-of-the-art facilities and appropriate teaching strategies geared towards greatness and excellence.

Further, the international dimensions of HEIs embrace practices such as global movement of teachers and researchers, the diversification of the curriculum, educational programs offered across national borders using new technologies, bilateral and multilateral agreements between universities and the commercial export of education. These international dimensions play as contributory factors to internationalization of education which provides opportunities for educators to become global travellers, makers of difference, effectors of personal change and facilitators of social progress (Ninnes & Hellsten) [2].

Internationalization of education through the creation of European Higher Education Area (EHEA), guided by the Bologna Process is an essential factor in the success of European integration [3]. This significant development in Europe has motivated the Asian countries to form its own regional community. In Southeast Asia, the

ASEAN leaders have agreed to get involved in ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in the year 2015 (ASEAN Secretariat Jakarta [4]. One of its aims is to strengthen the competitiveness of the region's human resources for the global market [3]. Through AEC, ASEAN will be transformed into a region with free movement of goods, services, investments, skilled labour and capital. This provision includes the free movement of professional services and education.[4]. The fact that internationalization of higher education is fundamental to the success of European integration, it is expected to be fundamental to the ASEAN integration as well. Along this stimulus, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) crafted the ASEAN 2015 Action Plan for Philippine Higher Education. The action plan included the development of ASEAN 2015 Roadmap for higher education, the inclusion of more HEIs in the ASEAN University network, adoption of University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific Credit Transfer Scheme, and a framework for typology-based quality assurance system for Philippine higher education, among others [5]. But, apart from the action plan, Licuanan believes more has to be addressed like a policy framework for the internationalization of higher education," the inclusion of more Philippine universities in the ASEAN University Network (AUN), participation in the ASEAN International Mobility of Students (AIMS) Program, and the development of a better credit transfer system and "Diploma Supplement which will enable the comparability of Philippine higher education with those of other countries." [6]

In addition to the inevitable ASEAN integration, the Department of Education (DepEd) launched the K to 12 Basic Education Program in response to globalization, internationalization of education. HEIs on the other hand, must undertake essential measures as a response to these educational reforms. Along this notion, this empirical study was conducted to uncover pertinent insights and relevant initiative undertaken by selected HEI's stakeholders.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research sought to describe the institutional initiatives of the selected Higher Education Institutions' (HEIs) key informants in preparation for

the internationalization of education on curricular reforms.

In particular, this study answered the following question:

What initiatives were considered by selected HEIs in the internationalization of education, in the areas of instruction, research, and, ommunity service/extension?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study utilized triangulation in comparing and analyzing the researchers' observations, key informants' interview responses and articles/documents from newspaper clippings. According to Bell, triangulation is used to validate and confirm the findings of one method with those of another [47]; a form of confirmation and validation to see important multiple meanings (Stake) to maximize the validity of the study (Major & Baden) [8], [9]. As posited by McMillan & Schumacher, triangulation is the cross-validation among data sources, data collection strategies, time periods and theoretical schemes and supporting conclusions using evidence from different sources (Slavin, [10], [11]. These multiple methods were used to facilitate deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Further, content analysis was used in the study to analyze the selected key informants' verbatim accounts on current initiatives towards internationalization of education where their unique responses were noted. Krippendorff as cited in Bell explained that content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context [12].

Purposive sampling was used in choosing the identified key informants. 17 administrative informants who were top level and middle managers such as university presidents, deans and department chairs from four selected higher education institutions in Cebu City, Philippines and two significant key authorities of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and K-12 Task Force participated in the study. The HEI's were selected because they were either a state university or a catholic university and they were of equal rank in terms of their accreditation status.

An interview guide was used as research instrument for data collection. In-depth interviews were administered to elicit pertinent data relevant in the study. Aside from in-depth interviews, researchers' observations by way of conducting

ocular inspections to their facilities and readily-available documents and naturalistic inquiries served as additional instruments for data gathering. Further, documents such as articles and newspaper clips served as additional sources of data.

Each researcher in the team was assigned to seek entry to the site. Schedules of interviews convenient to the identified key informants were set prior to the entry of the research team. Mechanical tools such as videotapes and cameras were used to capture the verbatim accounts and other utterances of the key informants.

In line with ethical considerations in the conduct of research, key informants' confidentiality was observed. Aliases were used to identify the key informants' responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Internationalization of education as understood by some key informants of the study includes attendance to international conferences and benchmarking through study tours. Such attendance includes research presentations where faculty and staff served as presenters and session chairs.

When asked how HEIs achieve internationalization of education, one key informant revealed:

Internationalization is more of being able to implement seamlessly the K to 12 program, a good kick off towards meeting international standards from the perspective of basic education cycle (KI 3A).

Such utterance significantly indicates that internationalization is effective implementation of K to 12 Program in conformity with Mutual Recognition Agreements.

Another key informant claimed:

Internationalization is mobility of 20 – 30% faculty from other countries, 20% foreign students from World University Ranking. Moreover, curriculum should be benchmarked against best universities. HEIs should use the Business Processing Association Model and the best move is think BIG (KI – 1).

These utterances provide a notion that thinking BIG is the best leap towards internationalization. A greater number of exchange faculty and students

should be sent to best universities abroad. Thus, many institutions opt to engage globally through off-shore programs and increased recruitment of international students.

Moreover, another key informant verbalized that:

Internationalization is coming up with international standards and agreements. With this, internationalization of programs is likewise feasible where faculty and student exchange can be possible. Another thing is the involvement and participation of international delegates from Malaysia and Singapore in the university's strategic planning. The institution is also planning to venture on teaching practicum abroad (KI – 3D).

Mobility is equated with internationalization of education. For internationalization of education to be effective, it has to conform and comply with international standards set by Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs).

Further, Knight defined internationalization of education in terms of incorporating international or intercultural elements into teaching, research and community service. The integration of intercultural elements to the institutional thrusts are significant parameters of internationalization [13].

Van den Wende claimed that in internationalization, higher education is responsive to the requirements and challenges related to globalization of societies, economy and labour markets [14]. It is internationalization which serves as an important avenue in the development of higher education towards a system in line with international standards and being responsive to its global environment.

On the other hand, internationalization of education has its drawbacks. Due to increasing workload demands, varied teaching methods and ethical dilemmas, internationalization of education encountered inevitable problems. Many programs are simply sustained by academic goodwill and passion for teaching. Such scenario depicts how program implementation is reflected in line with the university's image and reputation. Thus, there is a great need to review, renew and focus on critical insights with regard to the current practices of internationalization of education.

Current Level State in Terms of the Core Functions of an HEI

Notable of its challenges and drawbacks, the Philippines intends to go international, nevertheless. In the transformation to internationalized education, involvement in activities is considered as national and institutional levels. The national influences may include formulations of policy, funding, programs and regulatory frameworks. In the context of the Philippines going international, the basic education's current shift to the K to 12 will inevitably affect higher education.

The institutional level where the real process of transforming to internationalized education takes place is the level that this research is specifically interested in. The following sections account for the current state of HEI's research, instruction and community extension/services as indicated by the views and initiatives of HEIs' key informants. It is believed that the current state can be a good input for the future direction of internationalization of education at the national level.

In the context of the on-going internationalization of education around, Philippine Higher Education Institutions may inevitably have to face the challenge of preserving and strengthening their core functions: teaching, research and community extension/service in the same light that their leading counterparts might have gone through. The current state of these HEIs in carrying out their core functions are indicated below:

Research

Consistent among the different key informants, there is a recognition that the research function of the selected Philippine HEI's is yet much of a challenge especially as they venture into going international. In line with research as one core function of a university, one key informant claimed:

"Within the region, our university is a force to reckon with on research. Beyond its comfort zone is a different story" (KI 3A)

Research is considered as one of the thrusts of every institution. Such utterance reflectively connotes that their university has its own research culture since they have been provided by international funding along this area. Another key informant revealed:

We have just started but into national category of our institutional journal, paper presentations in international and national levels for some faculty members; funding is available but faculty are not given deloading, thus some faculty researchers have less motivation to conduct research projects (KI3D).

The conduct of research in Philippine HEIs started as institutional projects before. As faculty researchers continue to improve and uplift their research skills and competencies, their involvement improved as far as national and international levels are concerned. With this initiative, faculty researchers enjoy the conduct of research projects with funding but no deloading in terms of teaching loads. This scheme motivated others but for some it did not work.

In terms of international research recognition this might have to be interpreted rather as minimal. This further concurs that research culture in Philippine HEI's is yet to be developed since the current research initiatives are effective within the regional level.

As revealed from the key informants' verbatim accounts, it is common among them that current initiatives merely include plans for international publication, research capability building and enhancement as well as involvement in international research conferences and fora.

Instruction

Instruction is the process in which a classroom teacher executes the written curriculum. It is a two-way process where both the teacher and the student exchange ideas during class engagement/s.

In terms of rating the selected HEIs' performance in line with instruction, one key informant said:

Instruction involves pedagogical strategies. The best gauge perhaps is the training centers the university has established and obviously the consistent performance in professional board examinations (KI-3)

The university's performance with regard to licensure examinations is a parameter of excellence. Thus, instruction should involve not only competent and qualified faculty utilizing varied pedagogical strategies and approaches but also the institution's provision of state of the art facilities.

Another respondent revealed:

As of the moment, we are locally recognized as a university in terms of instruction.

The chosen HEI was seen as locally recognized in terms of instruction. The university has started benchmarking with other international institutions as initial step to internationalization of education. The respondent had a strong belief, highly motivated and possessed positive attitudes towards internationalization of education (KI-3).

One key informant stated:

Instruction is a lifelong learning. It involves independent learning where students are learning how to learn (KI-3).

The key informant verbally stated that instruction is a never ending teaching-learning process. With the application of appropriate pedagogical strategies, students become independent learners in the construction of meaning. With this, metacognition is developed among them.

For another respondent, instruction was described as:

Best practices utilization (KI-School B).

Observance of best (proven) practices is one parameter of internationalization. Further, sharing of expertise, research-based pedagogical approaches and qualified human resources are likewise considered as mechanics of best practices utilization.

One key informant reiterated:

Instruction involves an integration of international standards and frameworks (KI-School A).

To align with internationalization of education, instructional delivery should be in accordance with international standards and frameworks. On the average, HEIs are striving with quality instruction. Along with CHED's directive, internationalization requires all HEIs to strengthen their quality assurance. The pursuit for quality assurance is competency-based standards together with quality instruction.

One initiative of CHED through The Higher Education Reform Agenda 2011-2016 is the establishment of a quality assurance system for the Philippine Qualifications Framework. In effect, all HEIs are compelled to develop outcomes based syllabus and learning plan [16].

Examples of international frameworks would be that of Bologna or Washington Accord. The Bologna Accord is an agreement among signatory countries mostly in Europe, while the Washington Accord is an agreement between international bodies responsible for accrediting professional engineering degree programs.

Instruction, however, is dependent on the university's curricular programs. Curricular programs are prescribed course of studies offered in the university which students need to complete to earn a degree.

In line with the chosen HEIs curricular programs, one key informant uttered:

With a scale of 1 to 10, let me rate the University's alignment with MRAs and international standards as 6 (KI-3).

This rating significantly shows that the University is not yet globally recognized in terms of accredited curricular programs. Internationalization of education should be in its full swing to meet this ultimate goal.

On the other hand, one key informant further stated:

Our teacher education and nursing program are still on the planning stage (KI-3).

Unlike other HEIs, this University is still in its planning stage in terms of curriculum programs' alignment with international standards. They are still in their initial stage on internationalization of education, but definitely moving towards this academic endeavor.

Another respondent said:

To be internationally recognized, there must be a curriculum realignment where there is a shortening of GEC and BS in curricular programs. There must be updating of curriculum contents to be comparable with international standards (KI-2).

These utterances suggest that curriculum updating and realignment are indeed essential moves for curriculum programs to be internationally recognized. Such academic initiatives should be done to meet global standards.

One key informant posited:

To be internationally recognized, alignment on board examination and curricular programs should be done which is patterned to international standards (KI-School A and B).

These key informants perceived internationalization of education in terms of alignment of licensure examinations and curriculum to international standards. These are fundamental factors for internationalization of education.

A. Faculty

Mobility of faculty is another indicator of internationalization of education. Global engagements through off-shore programs are currently done by HEIs for best practices benchmarking.

With regard to the rating of faculty performance such as visiting professors, publications, field of expertise and peer reviewers, one key informant pointed out:

Our University is on the upper hand when it comes to this aspect. In a scale of 1 to 10, let me rate her performance as 8 (KI-3). One respondent added, we have good faculty qualified with degrees (KI-1).

In terms of international recognition, HEI faculty is known for global mobility. Still alignment of accredited degrees is needed for internationalization of education to be in its full force.

On the other hand, one respondent revealed:

In line with faculty exchange, we are still on the planning stage (KI-3).

While some selected HEIs are highly recognized in terms of faculty exchange, others are still in their initial stage. This only shows that some HEIs are optimistic into internationalization of education. For HEIs to meet this global goal, continuing education and faculty qualifications are deemed necessary.

Another respondent claimed:

Mobility program is facilitated through study visit (KI-School D). The University works for faculty exchange (KI-School A, B).

Among the responses, faculty exchange was seen as a common answer in terms of international recognition of faculty. This only suggests that qualified visiting professors are into the practice of internationalization of education prior to the conduct of the study.

B. Students

Students play significant roles in the teaching-learning process. Student exchange is also seen as an essential component in internationalization of education.

As shown from the respondents' verbatim accounts, almost all of them are into student exchange. Few of them are still on their planning stage in terms of admission of international students and exchange students as well.

One key informant verbalized:

To have a strong student exchange, there must be a streamlined admission, some to tech-voc, some to college which would prepare students for global needs (KI-2).

This utterance significantly revealed that a streamlined admission for student exchange should be properly observed in preparation for globalization, thinking global but utilizing local resources.

Community Extension

HEIs are inextricably linked with the communities they serve. Thus, service to the community is another core function of the university. Transfer of technology is best facilitated to the identified community in terms of appropriate utilization of research results. Integration of research outputs with extension projects is carried out to answer the identified needs and demands of the community.

Further, international linkages serve as instruments for funding allocation in instruction, research and community service/extension. Sharing of best practices with other universities abroad is effectively done through international linkages.

With regard to community service/extension, one key informant said:

Our community extension is locally recognized that's why we have only few linkages (KI-3).

Extension programs are not yet internationally recognized for reason that the selected HEIs are not yet actively involved in this endeavor. These extension programs are known only in their locality, but not globally, thus less international linkages.

On the other hand, linkages in terms of research and instruction are seen to be evident for some selected HEIs. One respondent claimed:

Let me rate our international linkages as 9 because we have several professional associations and linkages which provide us international funding for research and instruction (KI-3).

These verbatim accounts provide an indication that linkages are seen as contributory factors for instruction and research. Sustainability of research projects is seen as a significant motivating factor for faculty members to conduct and engage in research projects.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The current initiatives done by the selected HEIs' key informants in preparation for internationalization of education were geared towards the effective implementation and sustainability of the institutional thrusts namely; research, instruction and community extension/service. Results revealed that so far, instruction was somehow internationally accredited due to some initiatives such as international study tours, alignment of curricula with international frameworks. and exchange of best practices through study tours/visits to best universities abroad. Future instructional initiatives are geared towards alignment of curricular programs with international standards. For faculty and students, initiatives include faculty exchange, visiting professors, inviting international speakers, and student exchange.

Initiatives for research include international publications, research capability building, enhancement and involvement in international research conferences and fora, dissemination of research results, and sharing of best practices through international networks and communication systems,

such as international reviews and publications, databases, conferences, seminars, workshops and colloquia on discipline and specialization related research. With regard to international recognition on research, findings revealed that it was still minimal since research culture in Philippine HEIs is yet to be developed and the current research initiatives are effective within the regional level.

In terms of community extension/service, one HEIs' initiative was recognized internationally while the rest had only done locally. This further revealed that community service/extension was not fully implemented internationally, but with future plans of going global. Most of the initiatives are yet developing in the context of their local community and no international linkages have been forged yet. Perhaps, HEIs must have to work on finding the right linkages for research collaborations and community extension/services.

Based on the findings of the study, three concluding insights can be offered. Firstly, local HEIs are undertaking initiatives which are indicative in the existence of international dimensions for the areas of instruction and research. Secondly, research-related initiatives are fewer than instruction-related initiatives. Among the three HEI functions (instruction, research and community extension/service), more initiatives on instruction were undertaken compared with research and community service/extension. The underlying reason could be the lack of standard operating procedures, policies and strategies in the conduct of research, as contended by Clemena and Acosta [15]. Such dilemma does not sustain the faculty researchers' motivation to engage in empirical studies. Similarly, engagement in community service/extension was found to be minimal.

In as much as internationalization of education is the ultimate goal of this study, the following recommendations are put forth for future courses of action:

1. Implementation of current initiatives on HEIs core functions should be religiously observed for international accreditation.
2. Future study on this undertaking is further recommended to validate its usability in policy formulation and academic reforms.

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