

Philippine Quality Assurance Mechanisms in Higher Education towards Internationalization

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Abstract

Measuring one's capability to promote excellence is an enduring process to meet certain standards of evaluation wherein specific level of quality is determined to provide substantial information for the intended community and global market. This study on quality assurance of higher educational institutions explores the significance of local accreditations and certifications from government and private agencies to acquire international level of specialized accreditation and recognition from foreign regulation authorities. Any Quality Assurance mechanisms either locally or internationally recognized that is being utilized and adopted by the HEIs must reflect on the quality of their graduates which is one way of measuring the performance of an institution. HEIs of most developed countries are sustaining various program accreditations for strong collaboration among the academe and industries in their respective regions and to attract more foreign students as they adopted international standards and qualification frameworks for the graduates. It is nearly one (1) percent only of the market share of international students in the world chose to study in the Philippines. It is recommended that strengthening the degree program through QS World University Ranking by Subject must be the focus of the marketing strategy of the HEIs rather than promoting the institution as a whole. International recognition of the program by subject could somehow uplift the credibility of the institution in the world market. Introducing the degree programs in international arena is a little bit easier strategy to be recognized than bringing the entire university in the big picture which is quite difficult to assume good results. Achieving excellence is a never ending process of improving the quality of products and services which is bounded by measures of unobtainable goal of perfection.

Keywords: Quality Assurance, Accreditation, Higher Education, Philippines

1. Introduction

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 (Rosaroso, Yap & Gador, 2015). Internationalization of higher education is now characterized by a transition from technical assistance to the third world by developed countries to a growing global competition within some designated countries or areas to programs, degrees, diplomas, campuses, and quality assurance at a global level (Huang, 2007).

External monitoring of institutions (Jackson & Bohrer, 2010) through accreditation and certification (Cottrell et al., 2009) are forms of Quality Assurance (QA) mechanism being facilitated to assess the level of quality and compliance to identified local and international quality standards like the growing use of ISO 9001 which indicates that the concepts of quality being used are driven by the external requirements of the market (Jung, Wong & Belawati, 2013).

QA mechanisms undoubtedly fuel the passion in the hearts of organizational members to move towards higher levels of quality manifestations (Javier, 2015) and failure to acknowledge its different dimensions can diminish the institutional purpose (Jung, et al., 2013). It has slowly but steadily become an integral part of

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most higher education systems (Li, 2010). The U.S. approach to quality assurance comprises credentialing at the individual level, including certification, and at the institutional level, including regional and program-specific accreditation or approval of professional preparation degree programs (Cottrell et al., 2009).

Accreditation systems ensure high-level or good-practice standards to differentiate institutions enjoying high degree of autonomy or degree program with relatively equal levels of quality (Sanyal & Martin, 2007). It provides a culture of periodic evaluation and identification of areas for improvement; (Cueto et al., 2006).

Accreditation process (Cottrell et al., 2009; Roberts, 2001) and certifications from private and government agencies can measure and monitor the performance of various academic institutions. Developed countries are now reaping their benefits from the process of internationalization while the developing countries are forced to accept negotiations from them to get support in turn (Wadhwa & Jha, 2014).

There are some monitoring teams which oversee the international operations (Coleman, 2003) that require the colleges and universities to submit themselves for formal visit to confirm and verify some documents and reports as proofs that they are following the policies and guidelines set for them to ensure the delivery of quality education. The educational institutions allow the external evaluators to scrutinize their processes and outputs to identify some areas that would need further improvement and alignment to the national and international demands of the industries and neighboring countries.

In the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Commission (CHED) supports the initiatives of HEIs to undergo voluntary accreditation of self-regulation and peer evaluation through giving incentives and greater autonomy therefore, accreditation is now viewed as a means of promoting educational excellence (“CHED Accreditation in the Philippines”). CHED policy clearly benefits accrediting agencies, the amount of control it exerts is also a threat to the private voluntary nature of the accreditation system, which is one of its strengths (Pijano, 2010). Compliance to certain international standards and practices of most developed countries makes one organization from a third world country like the Philippines more trusted and regarded as forerunner in the field.

Literature research methodology was used in this study to read through, analyze and sort literatures in order to identify the essential attribute of materials which is generally referred to as "non-contact method" (Lin, 2009). This literature review aims to determine the practices of several countries in implementing various standards to ensure the quality of their education. It explores different mechanisms that measure the extent of quality as evidence of their excellence in various fields. Internationalization of education is one of the trending topics among developing countries specifically in South East Asia, where they need to get along with the educational system of different nations to fulfill the requirements of ASEAN Integration. Stronger and bolder connections of open communication among member countries of ASEAN would be realized. Therefore, international recognition and certification (Laguador, Dotong & De Castro, 2014). would open new doors of opportunity for Philippines Higher Education Institutions having achieved various local accreditations and quality assurance which will serve as gateway to compete with other countries bearing similar set of standards recognized by Foreign Ministries of Education worldwide.

Objectives

This study on quality assurance of higher educational institutions explores the significance of local accreditations and certifications to acquire international level of specialized accreditation and recognition from foreign regulation authorities. It specifically provides an overview of local and international quality assurance mechanisms. The result of the study could provide substantial information on the implications of quality assurance towards internationalization.

2. Results and Discussion

The seal of quality is what people want to ensure to get from the goods and services they acquire from the providers and this assurance can only be certified by external bodies and agencies who already established greater reputation in assessing and evaluating the performance of the industries. As part of

modernisation process (Li, 2010), HEIs are expected to set up QA system for institutional performance and make themselves more relevant to both society and economy (Jung, Wong & Belawati, 2013). HEIs like manufacturing companies have already established quality assurance mechanisms to monitor their products in terms of the competitiveness of their graduates as major outputs. The external quality assurance system can be characterised through government's and non-government's supervision and monitoring of policy guidelines and evaluations of universities (Li, 2010). Within the framework of QA system consists of internal processes such as peer review of course materials to appraise inputs, processes and learning outcomes, incorporation of learner feedback, annual reviews and periodic internal and external academic audits, ensuring the involvement and ownership of the faculty (Jung et al., 2013) as being required in most accreditation visits.

The local voluntary program or institutional accreditations from the home country is one of the common measures being employed by HEIs to demonstrate their excellence in offering degree programs for both local and foreign students and good starting point towards world-class standards (Arcelo, 2003). This is where external examiners validated the educational processes, development programs, management practices, student services and learning outcomes using appropriate techniques and mechanisms (Sanyal & Martin, 2007) from elite institutions built with tradition and reputation (Roberts, 2001). Program accreditation monitors the implementation of educational practices to ensure high quality of learning outputs (Laguador, Villas, & Delgado, 2014). It improves the quality and performance of the institution through self-evaluation and self-policing based on certain set of criteria from the accrediting body. It verifies that the aims and learning outcomes of a degree programme and its constituent components are consistent with the standards expected of the professionals (Jaffar, Omar & Jaafar, 2009) and for affirmation of the quality of education, based on reliable information (Cueto et al., 2006).

The accreditation system in the Philippines started in 1957 through the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU) which is the oldest and largest accrediting agency in the country when they developed evaluation instruments, trained the accreditors and performed public information about the importance of voluntary accreditation (Arcelo, 2003; Pijano, 2010).

There are several accrediting agencies in the Philippines which are all under the umbrella of Federation of Accrediting Agency of the Philippines (FAAP) such as: Philippine Association of Accrediting Agencies of Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU), the Accrediting Association of Chartered Colleges and Universities of the Philippines (AACCUP), the Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities-Commission on Accreditation (PACU-COA), the Association of Christian Schools and Colleges (ACSC),.

PACUCOA has 150 member institutions and 1,067 accredited programs in various levels as of April 2013 while AACCUP is a non-profit, non-stock corporation now composed of 111 State Universities and Colleges (AACCUP Institutional Members, 2015).

The Philippine Government through CHED has various initiatives to strengthen the educational system in higher education through introducing the Center of Excellence and Center of Development as another assessment tool for ensuring quality in offering tertiary degree programs. CHED defines Center of Excellence that “refers to a department within a higher education institution, which continuously demonstrates excellent performance in the areas of instruction, research and publication, extension and linkages and institutional qualifications” in pursuant to the Higher Education Act of 1994.

Many governments have implemented, or are considering, policies of concentration within national systems to lift the performance of selected universities (Marginson, 2009). Granting recognitions as centers of excellence and development to tertiary institutions is a great initiative from the Philippine Government but the issue on how this program can really uplift the entire educational system of the country is still in question. Because out of 2,299, there are only 97 Philippine HEIs or nearly 4 percent have either COE or COD recognition from CHED as of September 20, 2012 with expiration on May 31, 2014. And most of them are those already high performing HEIs in the country who are voluntarily applying for this recognition but those low performing HEIs still remain unresponsive to the call for application.

Another possible assurance mechanism that HEIs can acquire is the Philippine Quality Award which is a national quality award comparable with the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) of the US and those in Europe and Asia (“Background of PQA”). There are 6 HEIs recognized for their Commitment to Quality Management and 2 for Proficiency in Quality Management. The most recent recipients from the academic sector in 2015 are the Colegio de San Juan Letran Manila and the Lyceum of the Philippines Laguna.

Table 1: Recipients of Philippine Quality Award from Academic Sector

Commitment to Quality Management		Year Awarded
1.	J.B. Lacson Colleges Foundation-Arevalo, Inc.	2005, 2009
2.	Lyceum of the Philippines University-Batangas	2012
3.	Don Bosco Technical College	2012
4.	Lyceum of the Philippines University-Manila	2013
5.	Colegio de San Juan Letran Manila	2015
6.	Lyceum of the Philippines Laguna	2015
Proficiency in Quality Management		
1.	University of Santo Tomas	2005
2.	Centro Escolar University, Manila	2005

Source: PQA Awardees and Recipients

The PQA aims “to promote standards in organizational performance comparable to those of leading business abroad, pursuant to the country's effort to be globally competitive; to establish a national system for assessing quality and productivity performance, thus providing local organizations regardless of size, sector and maturity with criteria and guidelines for self-assessment to guide their quality and productivity improvement efforts; and to recognize organizations in both the private and public sector which excel in quality management and overall organizational performance, thus providing Philippine industries with benchmarks and models to emulate” (“PQA Objectives”).

Significant part on the criteria of accreditation is the membership, networks and linkages of the academic institutions to various industries and other members of HEIs locally and internationally to share both similarities and differences on their practices of providing quality education and services to their customers. Based on the criterion 6 of PACUCOA for undergraduate and graduate level programs includes an assessment on “a working network with prestigious local and international institutions/organizations”. This partnership between the HEI and the industry is being strengthened by the performance of the students during internship (Bernardo et al., 2014) period that demonstrates their ability to manage the challenges of the diverse and dynamic working environment. There are designated offices and departments in the universities that work intensely to establish International Memorandum of Understanding (IMOU) with foreign industries and HEIs to deploy their students for training and exchange programs.

Linkages are vital components of innovation to deliver great performance and output from collaboration. Well-established institutions with strong history of alliance in various disciplines could easily get involved in joint ventures with industries for mutual benefits. It is indeed necessary for Philippine HEIs to offer something distinctive and exceptional from their programs and services to get the interest of international industries to partner with them. Azanza (2014) made it clear that “the relationship should be more of “symbiosis” with partners almost of equal “footing”/level or “gaining” something vital from each other; or a “mutualism” where each partner has “strength/s” to share with the other. The relationship should be assessed so that one should not become a “predator nor a “prey” to the other”.

The strength of relationship and its duration can be defined and described on how both parties deliver improvements in meeting their goals. Therefore obtaining higher level of accreditation based on set of standards could possibly help in revealing the strong capacity of an institution to be considered high performing to provide shared reward of partnerships.

Having established quality assurance mechanisms is one of the many and the most evident measures of ensuring and promoting quality. There are also high performing universities in terms of board examinations and student achievements which cannot afford to pay expensive costs of accreditation process and membership dues to national and international affiliations and organizations.

Cruz (2014) mentioned in one of the UP Forums regarding the readiness of Philippine HEIs for ASEAN 2015 that there is a “need to strengthen and strictly implement policies on accreditation and monitoring of HEIs and programs to insure quality and competitiveness and a need to create a policy to facilitate the accreditation of HEIs and programs by international bodies.”

Rosaroso, Dakay and Sarmiento (2015) suggested a Higher Education Institutions’ (HEIs) Strategy Formulation Framework which is composed of three key factors that serve as mechanism for internationalization of education namely: reformed organizational programs through policies and mission-vision; active/strong linkages through student and faculty exchange, visiting professors; and responsiveness to global needs through accreditation to international standards.

3. International Accreditation and Certification of Philippine HEIs

To fully recognize the strength of a local academic institution from its home country, it is part of the marketing strategy to obtain international accreditations from reputable accrediting and certifying bodies. Jaffar, Omar and Jaafar (2009) noted that international accreditation built around internal quality assurance mechanisms has proven to be an effective tool in enhancing the quality of the programs.

Jung, Wong and Belawati (2013) cited the different aspect of quality, which is reflected in the respective cases like ‘Approaches to Quality Assurance’; ‘Quality Management System’; ‘Pedagogy’; ‘Learner Support and Assessment’; and ‘Outcome-based Performance’. This is where the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) comes in as an international accreditation non-government body with focus on student outcomes.

ABET is very specific on its criteria of Program Educational Objectives, Student Outcomes and Continuous Improvement which are sometimes only part of the criteria of local accreditation within instruction and student services wherein full implementation of Outcomes-Based Education is being required. In the Philippines, only Mapua Institute of Technology and Technological Institute of the Philippines have ABET Accreditation as of October 1, 2015 where ABET is known for its accreditation standard in engineering and technology by ABET. OBE is one of the main thrusts of most Higher Education Institutions in the Philippines in order to follow the standards and practices of world class academic institutions (Laguador & Dotong, 2014).

Meanwhile, the World Certification Institute (WCI) “provides a structured assessment system to assess and certify globally accepted experiential work practices, skills, competencies and professional management”. In the Philippines, the four universities included in the QS University World Rankings are the only recognized institutions by the WCI namely: UST, DLSU, UP and ADMU. When a course is successfully accredited, graduates of the accredited course will meet the qualification criteria for WCI Certified Credential Awards. An accredited course is valid for a three (3) year period and thereafter will require re-accreditation to maintain the continuing status of the accredited course (“WCI-Organization Seeking Course Accreditation”).

Likewise, the Asian Institute of Management has accreditation from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) which is a global, nonprofit membership organization of educational institutions, businesses, and other entities devoted to the advancement of management education with four (4) major criteria that include 15 standards.

Furthermore, Lyceum of the Philippines University is the first and only school in the Philippines with Full International Accreditation for Hotel & Restaurant Management and Tourism programs by The International Centre of Excellence in Tourism and Hospitality Education (THE-ICE) for 5 years while Far

Eastern University is pre-accredited for a 3-year period. There are seven (7) Full member institutions from Australia and four (4) from Switzerland.

There are three sub-categories available to institutions which add to the accreditation and quality assurance of the programs with differing levels of additional global strategic initiatives THE-ICE offers: Full Members, Associates and Observers.

Lyceum of the Philippines University is the only academic organization accredited by the Investors in People (IiP) in the Philippines. IiP is an international quality standard and Framework for good practice in managing people. It is outcomes based rather than prescriptive, and assesses the effectiveness of people management practices in helping to achieve business objectives. It is first and foremost a framework for improving performance and maintaining continuous improvement (“About Iip”).

Another international quality assurance mechanism being embraced by the Philippine HEIs is the ISO 9001 Certification which is a highly standardized approach and disregards the dimension or the type of activity being carried out in an organization such as a university (Jung, Wong & Belawati, 2013). The focus of ISO is on the process and provision of logistics for continuous improvement of excellence, which is not simply a destination but a journey. It would be lot easier for institutions to prepare certain documents required for international accreditation if there is already defined process like in QMS on how to perform certain tasks and what output and deliverables are expected of the process owners to provide for the organization.

4. Implications of Academic Quality Assurance to Internationalization

There also appears to be a growing belief among policy makers, that while various forms of academic quality assurance may be needed to assure academic standards, the provision of relevant information about universities to student consumers is an especially important component of this effort (Dill & Soo, 2005). China makes use of quality assurance schemes to balance the conflicts and challenges arising from the changes in its higher education sector and the process of integrating it into the global higher education arena (Li, 2010).

The comments and suggestions of external evaluators serve as the turning point to see what still needs to be developed and improved in the implementation of current processes to make another milestone of building success for the students. Learning and integrating such progress would promote certain level of credibility and sincerity on valuing perfection and innovation as excellent providers of graduates with appropriate knowledge, skills and attitude (Bacay et al., 2015; Flores et al., 2015; Agena et al., 2015) who could make a difference in their respective fields of specialization to achieve the objectives of ASEAN Integration.

The trust of the community and industry-partners would be intensified to deepen the relationship and commitment of the institution to create more national and international networks and linkages. This would also somehow attract more enrolment of foreign students due to international accreditation that sets equal standards, opportunities and qualifications of graduates recognized by foreign countries within or outside the region.

The recognition provided by any accreditation and certification bodies after thorough evaluation on various criteria would make people believe of the capability of certain institution to bring excellence and value to the professional career (Laguador, 2014) of the current and future generations. Periodic evaluation would be required to ensure from time to time that everything in the process is being implemented, improved and applied for better service and curricular offerings.

Making the standard of education in international level provides a wider perspective of social and cultural diversity into one learning environment (Laguador, Villas & Delgado, 2014) and enhanced teaching performance (Aguado et al., 2015; Laguador et al., 2015) Formulation of policies based on accreditation standards and recommendations could enhance the development of institutional resources to support any

internationalization programs and initiatives. QA can be seen, as a policy instrument supporting (Jung et al., 2013) like findings of scientific researches.

The driving forces, policies, and practices concerning internationalization of higher education in individual nations are not only affected by their national policy, character, and identity, but also are influenced by calls and pressures from international, regional, or global organizations (Huang, 2007) like ASEAN Integration before the end of 2015. Macabangun-Milla (2014) noted that QA is important in the achievement of a regional higher education space and thus, the importance of a regional QA framework is on the spotlight.

5. Conclusion

Quality is the core of any business model to gain reputation and credibility from the local and international community. Recognition from various accrediting and certifying bodies and agencies provides better opportunity for the organizations to prove their worth and claim of excellence. For Higher Education Institutions, internationalization is the name of the game to get keep their fire burning and to take the lead in giving great value to the society. High cost, large size, diversity and globalization are forces that have combined to draw attention to tertiary education quality and the need for formal quality assurance systems (Roberts, 2001).

Student, staff and teacher development, academic standards and quality assurance and international research collaboration are ranked as the 3 most important benefits of internationalization according to Flores (2012). Mobility of Student and Faculty members is still essential in learning to adapt certain behaviour in a cooperative environment (Chavez et al., 2014) with diverse culture, customs and tradition. Most especially to the students, they would be able to grasp the different practices of other nationalities on how people work in different manner with deep relation and engagement to their beliefs and religion. Through exchange student program, they would be able to learn how to adjust their behaviour in a workplace where there is a need to follow certain rules, regulations and policies. Keeping these in mind would help them communicate and relate with people in their future employment (Orence & Laguador, 2013; Laguador, 2013; Laguador & Dotong, 2013) in ASEAN community or beyond.

The products and services of the academic institutions should be marked with quality to qualify for certain accreditation and certification with proper documentation of evidence of assessments and evaluation on the effectiveness of the program educational objectives is required to prove that the graduates are really equipped with essential knowledge, values (behaviour) and skills that can contribute to the development of the community (Laguador & Dotong, 2014). Meeting the local standards of accreditation from the home country could be able to prepare the institution to provide higher requirements of international quality assurance.

It is not exactly being stated in the major criteria or standards of some international accreditations like ABET, AACSB and THE-ICE to have an international community in the campus but to operate like an international HEI beyond the national requirements. The four Philippine HEIs included in the QS WU Rankings actually do not have any of these cited program-based international accreditations but rather they have strengthened international networks, linkages and collaborations for the internship (Martinez et al., 2014) of their students and industry immersion (Laguador, 2015; Laguador & Ramos, 2014) for faculty members. Howe (2009) emphasized that teachers need to look beyond the confines of their classrooms to gain a broader international perspective, in order to achieve a deeper cross-cultural understanding of their niche within the global village.

Accreditations and discipline rankings are important criteria in the QS Stars Methodology which provides HEIs to be assessed differently apart from QS World University Rankings. QS Stars Ratings give opportunity for HEIs to recognize their internationalization initiatives through submitting themselves to separate assessment. Those universities not included in the WU Rankings can still be recognized by QS

through this methodology wherein Indonesia has the highest number of HEIs with QS Stars Ratings not included in the QS WU Rankings in Asia.

Any Quality Assurance mechanisms either locally or internationally recognized that is being utilized and adopted by the HEIs must reflect on the quality of their graduates which is one way of measuring the performance of an institution. Achieving excellence is a never ending process of improving the quality of products and services which is bounded by measures of unobtainable goal of perfection.

6. Recommendation

Accreditation bodies in the Philippines may include and identify some aspects of internationalization in their instruments to really set some initiatives of the HEIs towards that direction and not only as part of innovation or add on activities but as part of the assessment criteria. Research area is being required to have international publication and presentation but collaboration with foreign authors is another concern might be considered. The accrediting bodies might also look into consideration if the papers of the faculty members were published in ISI/Scopus indexed journals. Maintaining university research journals in accordance with the prescribed accreditation from CHED is another strategy which is necessary to publish quality papers that could someday be submitted for Scopus and ISI Evaluation. Due to expensive publication fees from Scopus Indexed Journals, it is good to have one from the university.

In the globalized economy, accreditation is important for the mutual recognition of credentials, which allows institutional, regional, national and international mobility among students, depending upon the scope of the accreditation (Sanyal & Martin, 2007). Student and Faculty Mobility have only shared 10 percent on the QS WU Ranking and those HEIs with only few international students can also climb in the higher ranks. Since Philippine HEIs cannot afford to hire more international faculty members due to high demand in compensation of paying their professional qualifications and experience, they just strengthen the profile of their local academic workforce to have more publications in the Scopus indexed journals as it is one of the requirements of QS WU Rankings in rating the Citation per paper and paper per faculty.

Degree Programs with Level IV accreditation from any Philippine accrediting bodies may submit applications for QS WU Ranking by Subject to elevate into international level the recognition of the institutions' capacity to demonstrate excellence in various disciplines. This recognition would also help the HEI to increase their chances to obtain higher rating when apply to QS Stars in the criterion of Specialist Rating along with the accreditations. On this way the marketing strategy of the university may focus on selling the strength of the degree program rather than of the institution (Hobsons, 2014). To become a member organization of the World Certification Institute can also be considered by the Philippine HEIs to apply.

The impact of various accreditations to the enrolment of HEIs is still impalpable to the school administrators especially from the Private institutions as to the attractiveness of the school to prospective students and their parents (Cueto et al., 2006). Further studies in terms of its translation of prospective students to become actual clients as a result of accreditation could be investigated.

Customer Satisfaction is always an important part of the ISO – QMS for continual improvement (Bay et al., 2014; Mendoza et al., 2014). Therefore, the accreditation process must ensure that every single foreign student must be given enough attention and reasonable satisfaction because as Howe (2009) noted that “internationalization can have unforeseen consequences if returnees spread their stories of isolation, misery and discontent”. Foreign students may enjoy the same benefits on what the local students are taking pleasure from the school activities. On this way, Filipino students would be able to learn how to live with diverse culture from their home country.

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