



RESEARCH ARTICLE

INTERNATIONALIZING HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN CEBU, TOWARDS CULTURAL PLURALISM

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ABSTRACT

Internationalization of Education has become one of the priorities in higher education, in order to produce people who could function in a diverse work environment with broad international culture. Internationalization of Philippine Higher Education Institution has become in a mantra as the country aims to be academically relevant in the network of interconnected global market. The study investigated the extent of the cultural pluralism of Higher Education Institutions in Cebu as means of internationalization of education. Specifically it sought to explore the learning styles of the international students, determine the adjustments made by the higher education institutions and identify the benefits of internationalization. Using Husserlian Phenomenology, the following was revealed: a) the students have specific learning styles which includes purposive and active learning to enhance the language and culture, take advantage in affordable education, and appreciate the schools' provision of modern facilities and equipment; b.) the schools adjustments include curriculum offerings and delivery, enrollment and other policies, leadership structures and benchmarking strategies, provision of enhanced facilities and equipment; c.) the benefits of internationalization include cultural awareness, improved instruction, peer teaching and language accommodation. It is concluded that internationalization creates opportunities for Higher Education Institution, which is beneficial for the international and local students as well as the school administration and the faculty. This propels HEIS towards better instructional delivery and better communication and cultural pluralism. To strengthen internationalization in Philippines, it is recommended that HEIs may offer short-term courses to cater international students. It is further recommended that benchmarking to international schools and faculty training for internationalization may be granted.

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INTRODUCTION

It has previously established in researches that internationalization creates an impact in higher education. In fact, one of the priorities of UNESCO for education 2030 is the internationalization of Higher Education Institutions through articulated institutional commitment, administrative leadership, curriculum, faculty policies and practices, student mobility and collaboration and practices (Wang, 2016). These make up the cultural contextualization through adjusted organizational practices, hence, "Culture has an essential role to play in realizing sustainable development" (UNESCO, 2017). Internationalization of HEIs produces a pluralistic cultural educational environment and minimizes cultural diversity. Needless to say, Internationalization of Higher Education Institutions has become one of the priorities in the higher education, in order to produce people who could

function in a diverse work environment with broad international culture. It has become in a mantra as the country aims to be academically relevant in the network of interconnected global market. In fact many of the state colleges and universities in the Philippines are believed to have set the process of internationalization in motion, banking on the idea that it creates better quality of learning and produces good, matured and harmonized global citizenry. In the Philippines, internationalizing HEIs opens opportunities for Filipino students to cope with the demands of the global academic environment (Bernardo, 2003; Altbach and Knight, 2007). Filipino students will become familiar with the different international cultures through communication and creation of international community. They also have a chance to become part of the student exchange program, whereby they will be exposed to different nationalities outside the country, this will help them to learn from the world. Although, Philippine Higher Educational Institutions have prepared through benchmarking and international university visits in relevance to the idea of internationalization, there is no identified update of the old curriculum and practices within

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the universities and colleges as to align and welcome the implementation of internationalization. In fact, during the HEI's conference conducted in September 2015, the commitment of HEI's on internationalizing the higher education in the Philippines was established and the need to undertake structural and cultural changes to effect academic excellence and relevance in a highly internationalized educational landscape. As indicated in the report of the UNESCO (2015) on the Internationalization of Philippine Higher Education in 2015, the data do not show and consider the internationalization of curricula, which as they noted "would have required a detailed assessment of individual HEIs' approaches." It also shows that among ASEAN comparator group, the country has the lowest number of international students, which indicated the less competitive advantage of the country. The HEIs in the country did not actively market themselves internationally and most have fewer than 10 per cent overseas students, which is well below the CHED limits (UNESCO, 2015). This puts questions on whether the Higher Education Institutions have the capacity to address to the growing demand of internationalization as well as in addressing the cultural deconstruction without compromising the cultural identity of the country. UNESCO (2015) highlighted that a favorable environment for the international enrollees will open other opportunities for the Philippines.

### Statement of Objectives

The goal of this research is to investigate the preparations and adjustment on the structural and organizational culture of the Higher Education Institutions in Cebu, as a response to the commitment of internationalizing higher education in the Philippines. Specifically it sought to:

- Explore the learning styles of the international students;
- Determine the adjustments made by HEIs;
- Identify the benefits of internationalization to both local and international students.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was a qualitative exploratory research in nature. The overall design was based on Husserlian phenomenology especially in collecting and interpreting data. This was designed to bracket and do away from prejudices and to maintain the fluidity of the interview process. The participants of the research were at least 10 international students and 1 staff or administrator from each identified research environment and at least 10 Filipino students with international classmates. The selection of research participants was random, based on the convenience and availability of the participants who agreed to be part of the research. The researchers employed a semi-structured 5 questions interview questionnaire which served as the initial point of the interview. Survey forms were utilized in order to provide a descriptive listing and evidences of the result.

### Data Analysis

The result of the survey was described and interpreted based on Husserlian descriptive phenomenological inquiry. Georgi's data analysis method was utilized whereby the researcher

described the structures of the experiences based on reflective analysis and interpretation of the research participants' account or story. When the final synthesis was made, the informants were asked to verify the meaning and analysis made as part of the triangulation process. The responses of the informants were used as vignettes as support to the analysis made. Justifications made were based on my epistemological view of the reality, from experiences, observed phenomenon and some readings. Knowledge is acquired through experiences or perceived experiences through observation. In a naturalist paradigm, knowledge is created when researchers interact with the subject or participants. Using the naturalistic inquiry, it is discovered that reality is multiple and socially constructed Creswell (1994).

### Research Ethics

The researchers observed ethics in the conduct of the study. All forms of communication were provided to the research participants and partner institutions to ensure consent of the conduct of the study. No familial or financial matters were involved between the researchers and the participants, nor involvement of the research sponsors during the conduct of the data collection. To protect the identity of the research participants, no mention of the names of the participants was observed, all interviews were coded, the participants may also not provide personal information if they desired. All data gathered were treated with utmost confidentiality. Tape recordings were only used for transcriptions and was destroyed right after. A letter of consent was provided to and by the participants, where details of the procedures of the data collection including the date and the location of the data collection procedures were written. Any change in the procedure of the data collection was informed to the research participants. The researchers assured that no minors were involved in this study. To protect the rights and interests of the study site institutions, no exhibits including confidential information that are privacy protected. The institutions were informed and provided a copy of the data where they are involved for transparency purposes, prior to finalization of data analysis and before publication.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *The Learning styles of the International Students in Cebu*

#### **Theme 1: Communicating to Understand, Adapt and Respect**

International students believe that communication is a way of understanding perspective and respecting people. According to them they communicate when necessary especially to the locals and they tend to be selective at what to say. They also communicate to know people, understand culture and practices and adjust easily. They respect opinion of other nationalities no matter how different they are. They learn the local language especially conversational phrases to talk, mingle and blend-in. They also join in activities to engage with other people. These are evident in the following lines:

*I learn so many things like about the language, but just a little so that I could also talk and able to communicate with other students (L20-22). Because we come here to study, we need to adjust in language, there are some that we don't understand that's why we really need to learn a little about the language (L15-17). (R01)*

In order to carry a fruitful communication, cultural competence is necessary (Kumagai, 1994). Culture is mostly learned in language learning. That, foreign students understand the importance of learning the language not only of the locals but of people they mingled with in order to adjust to the new environment they are in. International students understand that it is not easy for them to adjust to a new learning environment and doing so requires them to learn the language as well as the culture of not only the cultural majority but the of the diverse cultures of people they work with. This implies that international students have the learning culture of language and cultural adaptability to fit in without losing their cultural identity.

**Theme 2: Active Learning.** International students come to school to learn, getting good grades are not their first priority but to learn in every class. They come to class ready to explore and learn. They want to engage themselves in practical activities to experience and learn better. For them learning every day is an opportunity. They respond to the material and instruction positively, and appreciate teachers' enthusiasm in class. They also love to be given a lot of work to do in the classroom and at home. They appreciate teachers who deliver a practical approach to teaching and learning process. They are focused and tend to do away with distractions when learning. These are supported by the lines:

*I learned best when I am interested with the lesson (L20). Not only that we discuss the theory in class, we also have an avenue to practice them, and it's kinda nice (L26-27). (R08)*

Active learning is students' engagement with the material, participate actively in class and collaborate with each other. Participating in the learning process, whether it is through discussion, practice, review or application that students learn best at school. The active learning styles of international students implies that they take learning as their responsibility as students, they desire to learn and take their part actively.

**Theme 3: Communicating to enhance English language skills.** Hence, many of them are non-native English speakers, one of the reasons of acquiring a degree in the universities in Cebu is to master English communication. They believe that Filipinos are better at communicating in English especially the university students. For them studying in the universities in Cebu is an advantage for them to communicate outside their native tongues and improve their level of English competence. These are shown in the following lines:

*Studying here is an advantage especially because of the English. In our country we are not taught English too much that's why (L12-13). I learn to improve my way of speaking English and the people here had helped us a lot to improve because everyone is friendly (L20-23). (R04)*

An increasing number of foreign students flock to the Philippines in the desire to learn English language (gmanetwork.com). These include the number of foreign students in the universities and ESL schools. This desire to master English communication is due to the demand of the globally competent graduates. This proves that international students learn by engaging themselves at realistic situation in order to hone their skills and acquire mastery of the skills they want to polish.

**Theme 4: Practicality in terms of financial advantage:** Enrolling in the universities in Cebu economical for the students. Although the schools offer higher tuition fees for the international students than the locals, the fees are still lesser compared to other universities outside the country. International students feel that they acquire quality education in Cebu at a low cost. Aside from the low cost of education, the low cost of living is also appealing to the international students. These are evident in the lines below:

*Actually we came here to study for the MD because in our country is actually high price, here in Philippines is very affordable. (R01, L7-9)*

College education is comparably lower in the Philippines in terms of cost. Gonzales (2018) quoted that an approximate average cost of 50,000.00 Php which includes meals and accommodation a single international student spends for a month in the Philippines. This figure is comparably lower compared to the fees in schools and universities abroad. This implies that international students have a culture of obtaining quality education at an affordable cost.

**Theme 5: The provision of facilities and equipment:** International students see the need for quality facilities and equipment for practical learning. They are happy to have accessed these in the universities that they are enrolled in. They feel closer to home when they were able to use the convenience that their country offers. They believe that the availability of tools, facilities and equipment is an advantage for them for practical learning and better exposure.

*Schools were able to cater my learning needs through good facilities and equipment, I like it. I could also use technology to communicate with my parents at home (R01, L34-36)*

Because the internal educational sphere has become 21<sup>st</sup> century adjusted, the international students expect universities to have equipped in tools and facilities that are 21<sup>st</sup> century aligned. The availability of these facilities, equipment and tools in schools offers greater advantage to students not only those who come from different corners of the world but also for the locals. This implies that international students have become 21<sup>st</sup> century learners with 21<sup>st</sup> century learning needs.

#### **The Adjustments Made by the Schools**

International students constitute an increasingly relevant and important source of diversity on college campuses as stated in the study of Wu, Garza and Guzman (2015). The foreign students have the same curriculum with the Filipinos. The foreign students were amazed of the Filipino teachers because they usually hold classes' face-to-face. Some of them explained the topics in vernacular. It is said that "language is considered one of the greatest academic issues hindering smooth adjustment for international students" according to Galloway and Jenkins (2005) as cited in Wu, Garza and Guzman (2015). Although international students are enrolled to the same curriculum that Filipino students take in a particular course, universities few adjustments in curriculum offerings and delivery includes:

**Foreign Language Studies:** Language is one of the difficulties that international students face during their first

few months of enrolment in the universities. This is attested by the school administrators, thus, offering foreign language courses is one of the adjustments that the schools made. Mr. M stated, *“Some teachers and students use Cebuano in the classroom, the foreign students could hardly understand or communicate to both local students and teachers, thus we offer Cebuano Language Studies as a course necessary to be taken by international students so they will not be left out.”* Offering Cebuano language studies to international students not only gives them a chance to communicate with the locals, this will also help them adjust to the culture and practices of the locals. Becoming proficient in the language is learning the both societal and academic rules that allowed an international student to function within the culture (Bacon, 2008).

Aside from offering Cebuano language, the universities also offer elective foreign language courses such as study on Japanese language, Chinese language, Korean language, the Language of the Middle East and other foreign language course offerings. Further, the universities strengthened the teaching of English not only to foreign students but also to Filipinos. Using of English as a medium of instruction is strictly implemented in order to cater both international and Filipino students in one classroom.

Dr. H stated, *“Although some students are good at communicating in English, many students foreign and locals are non-English natives, and because some students study in the Philippines to improve their English communication, teachers need to communicate in English and must avoid code switching as much as possible”*. Another student said *“The curriculum in the Philippines is amazing. We had learning experiences that are very useful in our profession. We were able to adapt culture and practices”*. *“The teachers are very diligent in holding classes. We are encouraged and motivated to learn because we are not left out. Instead we are given attention like other students. The treatment is fare”*. This means that international students have learned how to adopt and adapt new and different relationships with teachers, classmates and peers. *“Academic systems may be similar across cultures, yet they are not completely identical since they are often adapted to the local realities of each country”* according to Tsay (2013).

Some challenges of international students are also sociocultural. Since they came from a different country, international students may face many difficulties in their daily life Wu, Garza and Guzman (2015). For the foreign students the Philippine curriculum is comparable to curriculum abroad. *Practical Education*. In terms of curricular delivery, the universities highly implemented peer learning, self-directed learning and collaborative learning, which allow the students to teach and learn from each other, to work together, experiment, innovate and collaborate. Mr. B. confirmed, *“We need to expose the students to practical approach in learning through collaborative work . . . .”* Cultural change in the academe, which includes self-directed learning, peer learning, open to change attitude have been perceived by both leaders and teachers to be effective learning strategies (Duong & Chua, 2014). According to Verbik and Lasanowski (2007) the *“international student mobility is changing the global higher education landscape, with an increasing number of students going abroad for tertiary studies”*. Internationalization is one of the major trends in higher education institutions. This study found-out that the international students enjoyed the

same policy with the Filipinos. But the international students follow the Department of Foreign Affairs rules and policies of foreign students. Each higher education institution has its own enrolment policy as stipulated in the student manual. The following are taken into consideration:

**Requirements for Enrolment:** Foreign students in the Philippines are subject to the requirement of the Department of Foreign Affairs on student visa. Upon enrolment, the students are required to comply the requirements for student visa application for them to be granted of study in the country. They are also required to pay 50% - 75% higher compared to the tuition fees of the Filipino students. *“Foreign students need to submit requirements for student visa upon enrolment as well as a consent from the parents if they are below 18 years old. They also need to show bank statement”* (Mr. M).

**Rules and Policies:** There are no special policies and rules for foreign students except if it is necessary. All students whether foreign or local are subject to obey the same rules in schools. There is however a stricter implementation of rules against drinking and smoking in schools when foreign students arrived.

In terms of tuition fees, the university has its rules and policies on this matter. Mr. Y said, *“The tuition fee is higher than Filipino students. But this is still cheaper compared to the tuition fees in our country. We were given the student manual as our guide”*. This implies that Philippine curriculum is still attractive for foreign students because of our low tuition fee and quality instruction. According to Dotong and Laguador (2015), quality assurance 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). This means that instruction in the Philippines is monitored through accreditation. This is one of the reasons why foreign students enrolled in Philippine schools. In the same study of Dotong and Laguador (2015) found out that periodic evaluation would be required to ensure that everything in the process is being implemented, improved and applied for better service and curricular offerings.

**Student Mobility:** Student mobility is not a priority of the universities for now, hence, according to the administrators students came as individuals and do not represent a certain university abroad or are not under student exchange policies. Although the administrators welcome the idea of student exchange, which might be done in the future. The mobility of Student and Faculty members is still essential in learning to adapt certain behavior in a cooperative environment (Chavez et al., 2014) with diverse culture, customs and tradition as cited in Dotong and Laguador (2015). On the other hand, leadership and faculty organizational structure play an important role in the delivery of instruction. The administration supports faculty development through international travel and capacity building. Filipino teachers are competitive because they study abroad or took online course in internationalization in order to meet the foreign students' expectations.

**Faculty Structuring:** The universities have employed Filipino faculty to teach both Filipino and foreign students. Employing foreign teachers is very rare in the universities. The

administrators have shown trust on Filipino teaching force, that they could deliver the quality education for both international and Filipino students. However, the universities took the initiative of providing training to the teachers and sending them abroad to get immersed in the international culture and educational practices of the teachers all over the world for benchmarking purposes.

**Leadership styles:** School leadership is a very important indicator of a successful academic institutions. There is an evident provision of a student affairs office for foreign students and expert personnel such as Student Affairs Director for foreign students and a separate Director for Foreign Studies. These people are expected to take care of the foreign students, to map-out the curriculum and conduct researches and innovations for foreign studies.

**Improved Classrooms, Dormitories and other School Facilities:** The physical and emotional health of the students, students' engagement on learning depend on the quality of the school, its facilities and learning tools. The universities, that accept international students, have improved their facilities, which includes the size of the classroom in relevance to the number of students in each class, the laboratories, the library and even the dormitory for foreign students. These adjustments are made not only to cater foreign students but also to give the Filipino students 21<sup>st</sup> century learning experiences.

### **The Benefits of Internationalization**

**Cultural Awareness:** The existence of international students enhances cultural awareness to both local and international students. Because of the exposure to foreign culture, Filipino students develop deeper understanding and appreciation of one's culture, roots, orientation and practices. This is evident in the lines below:

*I see the differences of foreign students from us in terms of study habits, orientation and such. I was able to appreciate how my parents raised me as God fearing, family-oriented individual, although foreign students have the same concept of respect, Filipinos respect out of love. (R104, L45-47)*

The presence of international students, if fostered, promotes intercultural interactions, understanding, and friendships (Ward & Victoria, 2001). Cultural awareness brought human development through cross-cultural understanding and respect.

**Improved Instruction:** One of the benefits of internationalization is improved program delivery and instruction. According to the Filipino students, having foreign learners in the classroom makes the teachers strive harder to implement a curriculum that is responsive to the learning needs of both foreign and local students. Bringing international perspective in the classroom is a good way, which makes pluralistic interaction between students and teachers and among students themselves. These are evident in the following lines: *I feel that our professor is challenged more to teach better with the presence of international students. I think they want the foreigners to be impressed with how Filipinos are taught here. (R108, L30-32)* Internationalization is a means of bringing benefits to institutions through building internal capacity which enhances

productivity and improved instruction. Internationalization is a way integrating intercultural dimensions into the teaching and service of the institutions (Sankat, 2015).

**Peer Teaching:** Peer teaching is a method by which one student instructs another. It is an advantage according to the students hence they shared strategies on how to learn better and they could instruct each other. Learning from peers develops social competence team building and communication among students. According to the students: *There is no competition among students, we teach and learn from each other. Our foreign classmates . . . if they have experienced something, they could share better about the concept, we do too. (R105, L4-6)*. Briggs (2013) identifies the benefits of peer teaching, which include individualized learning, direct interaction between student promotes active learning, similar discourse shared among students allow greater understanding and retention, and teachers receive more time to focus on the next lesson.

**Language Accommodation:** In linguistics, language accommodation is the process of adjusting one's language according to the style of speaking of the other participant. According to the students, language accommodation is a benefit of having international students in class. Both foreign and local students learn each other's native tongues, adjusted, articulated and communicated. Aside from learning other languages, they were able to enhance their English communication by trying to adjusting their accent and style of speaking when talking to each other. These are supported by the lines below:

### **Conclusion**

Based on the scope of the study and the summary of findings, it is concluded that internationalization creates opportunities for Higher Education Institution, which is beneficial for the international and local students as well as the school administration and the faculty. Internationalization, therefore, propels HEIs towards better instructional delivery and better communication and cultural pluralism.

### **Recommendations**

In lieu of the conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

If the Board of Regents approved, the university will offer programs related to international studies, such as:

- a. Bachelor of Science in International Studies
  - b. Bachelor of Science in International Culture Studies
- If the Board of Regents approved, the university will offer programs related to international studies, such as:
    - c. Bachelor of Science in International Studies
    - d. Bachelor of Science in International Culture Studies
  - Strengthen internationalization of HEIs through accepting international students;
  - Improve curriculum and program delivery by adjusting practices to cater to both international and Filipino students;
  - Offer short-term courses to international students;

- If budget warrant, the university may support faculty training for internationalization;
- If funds available, benchmarking to different international schools.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest in this research. Although this research is CHED funded, the faculty members are allowed to publish this research in a high indexed and reputable journal.

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