Innovations in Philippine Higher Education: A Timely Response to ASEAN Economic Cooperation 2015

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

The ASEAN Economic Cooperation (AEC) 2015 is an agreement among ASEAN countries to form a single common market among its 10 member countries with a total population of around 600 million people. The member countries include: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (PDR), Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. At the start, it will allow the free flow of services, investment capital, goods, and skilled labor.

The Philippines is a key player in the AEC. In the area of education, the basic education K-12 Law was signed in May 2013, adding two years to the previously practiced K-10 basic education programme. This inevitably called for urgent innovations in the country’s higher education academic curricular programmes inasmuch as general education courses will now be removed. However, it is now seen as an overhaul of the tertiary education system and not just a sector change. The transition calls for major changes and innovative moves in its framework and operations.

Objectives of the Study

The study intends to:

1. Highlight innovations in higher education using the CHED¹ Memorandum Order No. 46 s. 2012, otherwise known as the Policy Standard to Enhance Quality Assurance (QA) in Philippine Higher Education through an Outcomes-based and Typology-based QA;

2. Pinpoint the nexus between internationally agreed upon frameworks/mechanisms vis-à-vis efforts towards innovations in curriculum design;

3. Cite the status of “Mutual Recognition Agreement” as a case example of alignment between labour mobility and curriculum standards, particularly for the Philippines.

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Background

The Philippine education landscape is currently undergoing a massive and tectonic change. The Republic Act No. 10533, the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 or the K to 12 Law will increase the number of years of basic education for all children from ages 10 to 12 years. The law is now in full force and the first batch of K-12 graduates are expected to enter college, for those who qualify, by the year 2018. Among the many reasons why this is happening is the ASEAN Economic Cooperation (AEC) 2015.

The change will bring about a wave of reforms and innovations that will affect all the stakeholders with implications to organisational, infrastructure, employment, enrolment and curriculum changes. For the past two years, the Philippine Commission on Higher Education (CHED), the highest governing body that promulgates policies and standards relative to Higher Education in the country and has oversight of over 2,299 higher education institutions (HEIs), of which 656 are public and 1,643 are private HEIs, has been conducting a series of regional consultations. By December of 2012, the CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 46 s. 2012 was inked for implementation. The CMO is entitled “Policy Standard to Enhance Quality Assurance in Philippine Higher Education through an Outcomes-based and Typology-based Quality Assurance.”

Specifically, what are these innovations? Two major areas are elucidated in the succeeding paragraphs. The first is that for once, “quality” is premised on the (1) alignment and consistency of the learning environment with the HEIs’ Vision-Mission-Goals (VMG); (2) demonstration of exceptional learning and service outcomes, and (3) development of a culture of quality (Commission on Higher Education, 2012, p. 12). It is now mandated that from 2013 onwards, all private and public HEIs are to begin their journey towards outcomes-based education. The shift from input-based or teacher-centred to outcomes-based or learner-centred is strongly advocated by CHED. At the programme level, a direct assessment of educational outcomes whereby the programme outcomes are measured against policies, standards, and guidelines of the discipline. On the other hand, at the institutional level, an audit of the quality systems is conducted to determine whether these are effective and robust; whether programmes are well-designed and deliver appropriate outcomes. Similarly, it considers the VMG of the institution being audited.

Another area of change and innovation is subjecting all HEIs to typologies: vertical and horizontal. The horizontal type is a differentiation in the following: (1) qualifications and corresponding competencies of programmes (2) nature of degree programmes offered; (3) qualifications of faculty members; (4) types of available learning resources and the support structures available; and, (5) nature of linkages and community outreach activities. Henceforth, Philippine HEIs may be differentiated horizontally as any one of the three: Professional Institutions, Colleges, or Universities. The different horizontal types have different roles to play in the national development of the Philippines. Likewise, the vertical typology refers to the classification of HEIs according to three elements of quality: (1) alignment and consistency of the learning environment with the institution’s VMG; (2) demonstration of exceptional learning and service outcomes; and, (3) development of a culture of quality. Thus, an HEI may be classified as “autonomous”, “regulated”, or “deregulated”. The typologies are indicated by sets of criteria with a corresponding total number of points, and a set of maximum number of points that can be garnered.
The Revised CHED Program Standards and Guidelines (PSGs) designed by the Technical Committees and Panels, considers that for disciplines such as engineering, information technology and computing, maritime education, accounting, and nursing, the learning outcomes should be aligned with international frameworks and mechanisms. Aside from this, there are still other internationally related considerations.

The Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) is part of the ASEAN cooperation trade in services. It is stipulated in the MRA that the qualifications of identified professional groups are to be mutually recognised. The Philippines has signed seven MRAs in the following professional services: engineering services (2005), nursing services (2006), architecture (2007), land surveying (2007), medical practice (2009), dental practice (2009), accountancy (2009).

There are two important questions to ask: Firstly, what is the current status of the MRA among the ASEAN member states? Secondly, are the standards of the curricular programmes among the ASEAN member countries sufficiently aligned to cover the requirements of the MRAs? The answer lies in Quality Assurance (QA) and membership in accreditation bodies within ASEAN.

This paper does not intend to go into the details of the various QA systems and accreditation bodies. Instead, it just wants to show, as a case example, how AEC 2015 is among the primary drivers of innovations in Philippine HEIs.

**Methodology, Data Sources and Related Literature**

This paper is primarily a documentation and description of the changes taking place in the sphere of education, particularly among private and public HEIs in the Philippines in preparation for AEC 2015. It involves the question of quality assurance and approaches such as outcomes-based education. In so doing, secondary literature is the main source of data and information to showcase what is happening.

**Endnote**

1. CHED, or the Philippine Commission on Higher Education, is an attached agency to the Office of the President of the country for administrative purposes relating to higher education of the country.
References


