

Student Mobility in the Philippines*

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INTRODUCTION

Student mobility is not at all new to many of us. Students and scholars leaving their homes on a quest for education and knowledge is not a new phenomenon. Student mobility even dates back to the medieval times in European nations when a few scholars are sent out of their country to pursue knowledge simply because there were no institutions of learning located in their country. However, the number of international students had boomed over the years even if we consider the institutions of higher learning have blossomed and massified across these nations, still students and their families continue to support the expansion of student mobility for myriads of reasons.

One of the main and important reasons for the staggering number of foreign students across borders is globalization. Globalization, in general, is the flow of technology, knowledge, people, values, ideas, capital, goods, and services across national borders, and affects each country in a different way due to the nations individual history, tradition, culture and priorities (Knight, 2004). Economists define globalization more specifically as the integration of commodity, capital and labor markets.

While globalization has immensely affected the production of knowledge, it has likewise given greater role to higher education as it plays a pivotal role. Higher education plays a dual role as the key component of both the education and training system and the research and development system of a national economy. Its contributions to developing human resources and knowledge creation are vital.

International student mobility is one of the key strategic components of the internationalization of Philippine higher education, which we also call transnational or cross-border higher education.

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COUNTRY PROFILE

Because of our natural geographic disposition, of which our country accounts for the second largest archipelago composed of 7,107 islands, the Filipinos are innately mobile as students. With a population as large as eighty-eight million (as of 2007 census), and most of our higher education institutions of quality and prominence are located in key cities, predominantly situated in the National Capital Region in the Island of Luzon.

BRIEF BACKGROUND ON STATE OF PHILIPPINE HIGHER EDUCATION

Filipinos in general have an intense desire for the advancement of higher education. This had led to the enactment of the Republic Act No. 7722 creating the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), otherwise known as the Higher Education Act of 1994. Among other mandates of the Commission are:

- formulate and recommend development plans, policies, priorities and programs on higher education and research;
- set minimum standards for programs and institutions of higher learning recommended by panels of experts in the field;
- monitor and evaluate the performance of programs and institutions of higher learning for appropriate incentives as well as the imposition of sanctions;
- identify, support and develop potential centers of excellence in program areas needed for the development of world-class scholarship, nation building and national development.

At this juncture, allow me to briefly walk you through the current state of the higher education in the Philippines.

As stated in the monograph produced by the Presidential Task Force for Education, created by our dear President, Her Excellency Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, titled “The Philippine Main Education Highway: towards a Knowledge-Based Economy,” the Philippine education system includes formal and non-formal education with English as the primary medium of instruction in all levels, both in public and private learning institutions.

The formal education is a sequential progression of academic schooling at three levels: namely, elementary, secondary, and tertiary higher education.

The first level, elementary or primary education, consists of compulsory six grades (Grades 1-6) for age group of 6 to 12. However, some learning institutions are offering until Grade 7 to comprise the first level of high school. In addition, there is pre-school education which consists of kindergarten schooling. Secondary education, which is at the second level of the system corresponds to four years of high school for age group 13 to 17. The third level is tertiary or higher education. Higher education consists of collegiate, Master's and Doctorate degree programs in various fields or disciplines including the post-secondary schooling leading to one-, two- or three-year non-degree technical or vocational courses.

Alternative Learning System (ALS) or no-formal education (NFE) is an organized learning activity aimed at attaining a set of objectives outside the established formal system intended for a particular clientele, especially the out-of-school youth or adult illiterates who cannot avail themselves of formal education.

Currently, the administration of the education system in the country is trifocalized as three different agencies man the three education levels of the system. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) is the agency responsible for higher education, while the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) administers the post-secondary middle-level manpower training and development. The Department of Education (DepEd) focuses on basic education which covers elementary, secondary and non-formal basic education.

Higher education institutions in the Philippines are typified into two general categories - public and private. As of August 2009, private higher education institutions accounts for the largest share with 88% or a total of 1,538 HEIs. On the other hand, public institutions include: a) 110 state universities and colleges (SUCs) which account for the meager 6%, b) 77 local universities and colleges (LUCs) or 4% of the total HEIs and c) 16 (or 1%) Other government schools (OGS). The OGS institutions include the Philippine Military Academy,

National Defense College, Philippine National Police Academy, Development Academy of the Philippines, Philippine Public Safety College, etc.

Large College Student and Graduate Population

Our system has a large college student population with a total of about 2,619,795 students as of Academic Year 2008-2009. Of this number, more than 1.6 million is accounted for the private sector while more than 820,000 comes from state universities and colleges. LUCs, on the other hand, has a total of 96,000 student population and the rest comes from other government HEIs.

For the past three consecutive school years, the private sector has produced more graduates than the public higher education institutions. The number of graduates from private sector consistently yet slowly increased reaching up to almost 350,000 last year. Meanwhile, the number of graduates from public institutions remained to be at bay with the private sector.

Faculty in Higher Education

Improvement in faculty qualification in the country has been constantly addressed. By Academic Year (AY) 2011-2012, nobody will be allowed to teach in higher education courses unless he or she has an earned Master's degree.

Higher education faculty population records a total of 129,979 based on Academic Year 2008-2009 data. It reflects an increase of more than 3% from the previous academic year or an annual average increase of 4% in the last five years.

INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

The internationalization of higher education institutions in our country is but a natural and inevitable consequence of the continued globalization of economies. Globalization has demanded for the improvement in the quality of education, increases in the quantity of graduates, efficiency in the way institutions are managed and producing graduates and professionals ready to be hired by internationalized economies and have a global outlook.

Our country has come to recognize international higher education's role in augmenting national capacity with focus on a country's development as it relates with other countries. Survey and analysis of developments of last few decades indicates – globalization, transformation from industrial into global knowledge economy, and international student mobility are mutually reinforcing one another and changing higher education landscape worldwide.

Considering all the weaknesses and strengths of Philippine higher education system, the Philippines has benefited much on international education and mobility of students in terms of improving the quality of our programs and resources. Student mobility, as part and parcel of internationalization, where students cross borders to receive foreign education, has great implications on our socioeconomic, cultural and political milieu.

Thus, the Philippines had long supported the student mobility as a strategic component of our internationalization initiatives. To date, there are fifty (50) private HEIs granted autonomous and deregulated status by the Commission on Higher Education who accept foreign students and scholars. Foreign students are also accommodated by 229 private HEIs that offer a total of 1,207 accredited programs and courses. This only shows that foreign students in the country have the opportunity to choose from wide array of programs and courses where they can enroll in. For the part of the SUCs, there are 172 of them, including their satellite campuses, who offer 1,265 accredited programs and courses.

We in CHED ensure that these higher education institutions do not fail to pass our policies, standards and guidelines that are crafted by Philippine experts who themselves have been exposed to international higher education. These HEIs can boast of 147 Centers of Excellence and Centers of Development (COEs/CODs) in the different priority fields, namely: agriculture, business related programs, criminology, IT, health related, education, science and math. The list of identified COEs/CODs for engineering, architecture and nursing will soon be released while identification of COEs/CODs for other disciplines is ongoing.

Our maritime courses, which is touted to be one of the best in the region and in the world, have also been gaining credence among foreign students. To date, we have 160 maritime programs that are compliant with the 1995 International Maritime Organization – Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW '95). Our maritime graduates are all over the world manning foreign vessels and contributing to the foreign exchange reserve of our country.

Our research capabilities also reflects how the Philippines has been considered to be an attractive to students who are inclined on research, we have 13 Zonal Research Centers (ZRCs) to provide the needed boost to higher education institutions in the different parts of the country in terms of upgrading research facilities and research outputs. These ZRCs have flagship research disciplines such as biodiversity, biotechnology, agriculture, fisheries, marine biology, etc.

PHILIPPINE FOREIGN STUDENT POLICY

As early as the year 2000, the Philippine government has issued Executive Order No. 285 which governs the guidelines on the entry and stay of foreign students in the Philippines and the establishment of an inter-agency committee on foreign students. As globalization has made countries more interdependent so was higher education made more open among nations. The issuance of EO 285 was an initial step in promoting the Philippines as a center for education in the Asia Pacific Region through the following:

- encouraging foreign students to study in the Philippines;
- developing awareness of the Philippine educational system to neighboring countries; and
- allowing duly accepted foreign students to avail of the facilities of the Philippine educational system.

Foreign Student Enrollment in the Philippines

The Exchange Program with other countries is one of the outcomes of globalization and liberalization of higher education services upon the initiatives of the various HEIs. Philippine CHED policies on Linkages provide the impetus for the growth of mobility of

students, faculty and researchers around the world. The Exchange Program has also been an important factor in recruiting and retaining foreign students. It enables the exchange scholar to possess multicultural skills, knowledge and competency in specific fields not usually found in the country of origin. Philippine universities and colleges have vibrant exchanges with universities in Korea, Japan, Australia, United States, Canada, Thailand and other European countries, among others.

The top 3 foreign students that are currently enrolled in the Philippines include Koreans with a total of 1,305 students or 29.51% of the total foreign student population. Chinese students number to about 937 (21%) while Iranians number to 596 or 13%. Others include Indians with 369, Americans 173, and Indonesians with 147 students sent to the Philippines to study.

Foreign students in the Philippines usually enroll in the following top 10 higher education programs: business administration, dental medicine, nursing, hotel and restaurant management, medicine, and others. It can be gleaned that more than 12% of foreign students opted to enroll in business administration programs which specifically has 253 foreign students from the People's Republic of China and 189 Koreans. Another popular program among foreign students especially Iranians is the dental medicine program where 387 of them are currently enrolled together with 62 Korean nationals. Our nursing program has 181 Chinese scholars enrolled in the various institutions offering the course while 77 Americans, 23 Indonesians and 30 Koreans are also pursuing the nursing program in the country. Our hotel and restaurant management program are also popular among Koreans registering 188 foreign students, while Indian nationals also opted to enroll in psychology program with 132 of them currently registered as students in the Philippines.

Philippine Students Mobility (On-The-Job Training)

Student mobility programs are aimed at exposing university students to global and cross-border issues through their visits to other countries. These programs have given students an advantage in their overall knowledge and soft skills. It is only vital that we develop our country's intellectual capital, not only in enhancing their communication and mental skills.

In the Philippines, our country usually send out students during their On-The-Job Training courses administered by the HEIs themselves having established linkages with international institutes of learning. For the past four years since 2006, we have strengthened and revitalized our ties with many institutions around the world including Singapore and Israel where we have sent students during their OJT program. In 2006 alone, we have sent 1,719 Filipino students to HEIs in Singapore while 18 were sent to Israel. This number has increased to a total of 1,892 Filipino students performing their OJT abroad in 2008. However, for this school year, since we are only in the first semester, we have sent 958 Filipino students for their OJT in Singapore.

Filipinos as students have also been found around the world through scholarship endowments by local and international agencies. The countries where they are usually sent include the Netherlands, New Zealand, India, Malaysia, Japan and Korea. Note that these countries have developed strong bilateral and multi-lateral ties with our government and as such the mobility of our Filipino students have been considered in these agreements.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF PHILIPPINE STUDENT MOBILITY

The Philippines' Commission on Higher Education is committed to steering the whole higher education sector in the country. In our higher education landscape which is unusually large composing of 1,741 higher education institutions with an average enrollment of 2.5 million per year, the internationalization our higher education through student mobility will truly facilitate better exchanges of knowledge and skills between our nation and other countries.

Hence, CHED is currently pursuing strategies to strengthen the ties between the Philippines and other countries/economies. There is more emphasis on cooperation in the areas of faculty and student exchange, research capability building, curriculum development, credit transfers and recognition, promotion of intellectual property rights, quality assurance and areas to promote and strengthen higher education system in the country.

Along this thrust, the current leadership aims to continue and strengthen ties with

international education agencies/ bodies such as: SEAMEO-RIHED, and other countries through bilateral agreements. The current leadership is also working on to position the country as an educational center in the Asia-Pacific Region for foreign students.

With this vision ahead of us, the Philippine higher education will embark specifically on the following directions to make our system attuned to the needs of the future:

- We shall be implementing the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) starting school year 2010-2011 to all high school graduates. This mechanism will determine the readiness of students to enter the university or polytechnic stream since only SAT passers will be allowed to enter the university stream. The SAT, as a strategy, will ward off any frustrations from our graduates who would not make it to the board exams or could not immediately find gainful employment. It will also solve the perennial problem of “mismatch” between the output of HEIs and the quality of human resource required by industries.
- The Philippines is also gearing up to implement curricular reforms adopting the Bologna Process. Curricular reforms require massive investments to make our higher education programs comparable with those of the Bologna Process signatories.
- We are also working towards the following:
 1. Accreditation of Engineering and Architecture programs in compliance with the Washington Accord which is industry-based and outcome oriented, and APEC Registry requirements.
 2. Increasing the number of Philippine HEIs in the ASEAN University Network (to date only the University of the Philippines (UP), De La Salle University (DLSU) and Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU) are members).
 3. Strengthening the Philippine participation in the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) for students and faculty exchanges.
 4. Increasing the number of bilateral arrangements with other countries. To date, there are 18 bilateral arrangements forged for student and faculty exchanges.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the uncertainty of the economic problems that has plagued our countries in the past years, it seems that SEAMEO RIHED member states are assured of mutual cooperation. The Philippines will be working towards more collaborative efforts with the member states to enhance our internationalization process. This will be our commitment to the SEAMEO RIHED and to assure that we Filipinos will be constantly be supportive and open to more cooperation to be attuned to the demands, benefits and limitations of the globalization process as a worldwide phenomenon.

Thank you and good day.