Number 2

57 Editorial boards
58 Who guarantees the quality of the quality assurance agencies? The exploration of the establishment and growth of the Asia-Pacific Quality Register (APQR) Jianxin Zhang and Jagannath Patil
68 ASEAN’s flagship universities and regional integration initiatives Murshidi Sirat
81 Cross-border quality assurance: case study of Hong Kong and Macao Robert Fearnside and Kathy Chung
95 Understanding regionalisation in Philippine higher education Jodarisse Espiritu Albia and Sheng-Ju Chan
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Higher Education Evaluation and Development
Vol. 11 No. 2, 2017
p. 57
Emerald Publishing Limited 2514-5789
Who guarantees the quality of the quality assurance agencies? The exploration of the establishment and growth of the Asia-Pacific Quality Register (APQR)

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Abstract

Purpose – After the “quantity era,” today higher education has entered into the “quality era” and as “the gatekeepers of quality,” quality assurance agencies (QAAs) are playing more and more irreplaceable important roles and their social status are becoming more and more prominent. However, how to guarantee the quality of the QAAs? Who can review the QAAs? The purpose of this paper is based exploration of these questions.

Design/methodology/approach – Following the founding of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) for Higher Education, the Asia Pacific Quality Register (APQR) became the second in the international quality assurance (QA) networks to implement QA register, in 2015 with initiative of Asia-Pacific Quality Network.

Findings – This paper first retrospects the history and process of APQR, and subsequently the implementation of APQR is described in detail from the two aspects of the criteria and the procedure, and at the end, the paper concludes with a summary of the three characteristics of this first formal implement of APQR: APQR is an international register open to all the QAAs; APQR emphasizes characteristics evaluation of diversity; and APQR highlights the combination of quantitative assessment and qualitative assessment.

Originality/value – Today on the international stage of QA, APQR has emerged as "the watchman of quality" in the Asia-Pacific region as counterpart of EQAR in Europe. How far away does such newly emerging form of guaranteeing the QAAs’ quality go forward, what is its future prospects and other concerning issues, are some of the question that need enthusiastic attention and contribution.

Keywords Quality label, Asia-Pacific Quality Register, European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education, Quality assurance agencies

Paper type Research paper

1. Preface

The keystone of a quality assurance (QA) in education is to define “who has to evaluate,” namely, what is the evaluation subject? The profiles of four QA agencies in China, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand (Zhang, 2010) show that some characteristics of four QA agencies in Asia, i.e. from the establishment time, the establishment of the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT) in Indonesia is the longest, which was...
established in 1994 and the other three institutions were established after 2000; from the nature of institutional evaluation, the four institutions are essentially obligatory; from the perspective of independence, they are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education; they cannot act independently, except BAN-PT in Indonesia; and in terms of ownership, all agencies are owned by the governments of the four countries, and work under the direct leadership of their governments. The so-called third-party QA organizations are “decorated” in the educational evaluation, and they have no real participation in education evaluation. Then, in the context of the QAAs being “both athletes and referees in a game,” who can guarantee the quality of higher education (HE) QA institutions?

In the field of QA of HE in the world, the “register” is a new and attractive creative activity. Following the footsteps of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) for higher education, the Asia Pacific Quality Register (APQR) also made a bold attempt: having carried on a review process with a specific set of standards and criteria to review the vision, mission, objectives, evaluation and accreditation process and other 11 criteria of a quality assurance agency (QAA), in order to review and verify the QAA’s capability and qualification, as well as regulate the behavior of its QA. APQR guarantees and improves the legitimacy, effectiveness and openness of the QAAs in the Asia-Pacific region. It is convenient for the governments, HEIs and all the stakeholders to identify the credibility and professionalism of all kinds of countless QAAs, and thus will have a significant impact on the development of HE.

On the basis of the existing research results of the QAA mechanism of the international, national, HEIs, professional and the third-party QAAs, the initiative of this paper, by opening a new road for itself, focuses on the registration system of regional and international QAAs, aiming to further enrich the accreditation and registration theory of the QA of HE.

2. The development background of APQR
The development trend of international HE is the same. After the “quantity era,” today HE has entered into the “quality era.” The new social demands to HE have been put forward, which urgently requires HE to get out of the “ivory tower.” As “the gate keepers of quality,” QAAs are playing more and more irreplaceable important roles, and their social status are becoming more and more prominent. However, how to guarantee the quality of the QAAs? Who can review the QAAs?

2.1 Learning from European experience: EQAR for higher education
QA is the cornerstone of “the Bologna Process” in Europe. According to “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area” in 2005, the European Association of Quality Assurance proposed the establishment of the EQAR for higher education. In March 2008, EQAR officially began its operation. EQAR promotes the long-range goals and objectives of European HE. EQAR’s vision is a coherent QA framework for the European Higher Education Area in which HE institutions have the freedom to turn to any EQAR-registered agency for their external QA reviews, and in which qualifications are thus universally recognized. EQAR has four main objectives which it has been devoted since its founding: promote student mobility by providing a basis for the increase of trust among HE institutions; reduce opportunities for “accreditation mills” to gain credibility; provide a basis for governments to authorize HE institutions to choose any agency from the Register, if that is compatible with national arrangements; provide a means for HE institutions to choose between different agencies, if that is compatible with national arrangements; and serve as an instrument to improve the quality of agencies and to promote mutual trust among them (EQAR, 2017).
EQAR’s mission is to further the development of the European HE area by increasing the transparency of QA, and thus enhancing trust and confidence in European HE. EQAR is to facilitate the identification of the credibility and professional quality of both international and national QAAs, as well as the QA field that they receive. From its establishment to 2015, EQAR has registered 40 QAAs, among which eight QAAs in German, three in Spain, seven in Holland, separately two in Belgium, France, Switzerland and the UK, one in Austria, Finland and other 14 European countries (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), 2015).

In global scope, we can see that some countries have established an accreditation system of the QAAs, one of the representatives is Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) in the USA. CHEA is a national advocate and institutional voice for promoting academic quality through accreditation, CHEA is an association of 3,000 degree-granting colleges and universities and recognizes 60 institutional and programmatic accrediting organizations. (CHEA, 2015). From the international perspective, the role of the EQAR is equivalent to a national accreditation system to an external QAA, helping the governments, HEIs, students, parents and other stakeholders know the right choice for their educational needs. EQAR has greatly promoted student mobility by providing a basis for the increase of trust among HE institutions, reduced opportunities for “accreditation mills” to gain credibility (EQAR, 2015) and what is more it has brought the experience of the pioneer of the registration system to the world.

2.2 The genesis of register in the Asia-Pacific region: APQR

After learning good experience from EQAR, in April of 2013, the annual general meeting (AGM) of the Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN) has endorsed the proposal of the establishment of APQR as part of its Decennial agenda. APQN is a non-profit, non-governmental international organization in the domain of QA of HE in the Asia-Pacific region, while APQR is a register which recognizes the QAAs of APQN’s members under the umbrella of APQN, listing those agencies that have demonstrated their substantial compliance with a common set of principles for QA in the Asia-Pacific region. On June 25-27 of the same year, APQN organized a three-day pilot review to Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council in Sri Lanka, APQN President Patil Jagannath as the Coordinator, Dr Pillai Latha as the Review Chair. On the basis of the pilot review, the APQR project went on developing under the leadership of APQN president.

After two years of consultation with various stakeholders, the document of “APQR” was officially issued in special meeting at Macao during January 22-23, 2015. Thus APQR comes into effect from January 2015 (APQN, 2014).

In April 17-19, 2015, APQN Conference and AGM was held in the Yunnan University in Kunming in China, the attendance of 192 participants from 28 countries in the world added to the credibility of APQR. APQN president excitedly said in the open ceremony: “Now […], the dream project of APQR is finally a reality […] the work done by us at APQN has been globally admired and recognized” (Patil, 2015). It is fair to say that after three-year hard work with perseverance, APQR finally came into existence having achieved a breakthrough in the registration system of education QAAs in the Asia-Pacific region.

3. The implementation of the APQR

APQR is an international, non-governmental, regulatory and constrained activity to the QAAs. Its registered members for inclusion will cover public, private and professional QAAs in the Asia-Pacific region (in the future it might be expanded to institution members made up of HEIs).
At the Kunming Conference in April 2015, the APQR Council (APQRC) was formed which is responsible for reviewing and approving the expression of interest (EOI) of the applicant QAA. Very soon, APQRC decided to carry out the “substantive review” of the first formal register according to the EOI from the Fiji Higher Education Commission (FHEC).

Under the leadership of APQN president and the APQRC, a review panel of three leading experts in the Asia-Pacific region is formed. The first formal review for APQR has been conducted on the FHEC in Suva, Fiji from June 24 to 26, 2015. “This exercise would be counted as milestone in history of APQN and APQR,” said the APQN president on July 2 (APQN Secretariat, 2015). From May 28 to 30, 2017, APQR organized a review panel of three well-known international experts from France, Kazakhstan and China to conduct on the Certification Association “Russian Register” Saint Petersburg, Russia and the APQRC has considered and decided to include Russian Register on APQR. Below, this paper will discuss the standards and the review procedure of the first formal implementation of APQR, and summarizes three characteristics of the first APQR review.

3.1 The review criteria of APQR
All evaluation, assessment, accreditation, review and other QA activities are bound to have standards, guidance or criteria. Good standards and guidance can guarantee QA activities achieving the desired objectives in accordance with the established QA development mission. APQR Standards and guidance for inclusion is especially crucial because APQR is a meta-evaluation to QAAs.

APQR is one kind of QA mechanisms based on self-evaluation and peer review. It is also one of the important means of self-management for QAAs. APQR criteria for inclusion are as follows.

The above 11 criteria are based on the eight criteria from “APQN Constitution” which form the basis to determine the types of APQN membership, as well as the principles from “Higher Education Quality Assurance Principles for the Asia Pacific Region (known as “Chiba Principle”). As we know, the “Chiba Principles” declared by APQN in February 2008 emphasize a generic approach that has relevance for all HEIs, QAAs and quality assessment practices in the region regardless of the level of development, size and national context, which are helpful to potential students, employers, parents, governments, HE institutions and professional bodies, both nationally and internationally. (APQN, 2008) Among the 11 criteria, seven are from “APQN Constitution” and four are from “Chiba Principle” (see Table I).

The structure of the above criteria shows that APQR has a tightly close relationship with APQN, and have the potential of inheritance and sustainable development. APQR’s review criteria still adhere to the “APQN Constitution” as well as the “Chiba Principle,” the registered members of APQR will still adhere to the APQNs mission, objectives and strategies (Table II).

3.2 The review process and principles of APQR
According to the APQR mission, criteria, procedures and other regulations, the APQRC made “the Guidance and Templates for the Asia Pacific Quality Register” in June, 2015. The entire process of the first APQR review was carried out in accordance with it. The first formal review process is followed by the seven steps see Figure 1.

Compared with the process of the acceptance of APQN members, one change of APQR is that the review panel should be on-site. The review panelists themselves carry on an on-site visit to QAA, through the verification of the QAA’s self-evaluation report (SER) and multiple evaluation methods, “to strengthen the connotation construction of the quality assurance agencies in higher education, encourage its characteristics project for guaranteeing educational quality, stimulate potential of the sustainable development,
enhance credibility of the QAAs, and better service higher education” (The APQR Council, 2015). Both the review panel and the reviewed QAA try to be in an equal communication and use the methodology of mutual problem-finding, mutual problem-analyzing and mutual problem-solving (The APQR Council, 2015). The main purpose of the on-site review panel is to analyze the QAA’s situation, diagnosis the “hidden issues” and promote its development. Therefore, in the entire review process, the following three principles are obeyed by the review panel.

3.2.1 Establish the “negotiating register” mechanism advocated in “the fourth-generation-evaluation” by combining the review panel and the QAA. That is, based on SER and situation of the QAA, the review panel tries to find the QAA’s commendations and negotiatively give the recommendations. Early before the review, FHEC submitted “Self-Evaluation Report of Fiji Higher Education Commission” (up to 45 pages), “Good Guidelines for FHEC – Booklet,”
“Quality Assurance – Policy,” “FHEC Annual Business Plan 2015” and other 15 relevant supporting materials. Before the arrival to FHEC, the panelists have carefully read the SER and formed a preliminary review conclusion. During the on-site visit, according to the problems found in the desk review, the panelists aimed to the key analysis and special judgment combined the on-site situation.

3.2.2 Combining the comprehensive whole background with crucial review elements. For example, the first review activity is FHEC “Presentation on the FHEC and Self-Evaluation Report” from the macro perspective, and then the second activity is the individual introduction from QA section, professional services unit, information technology and other five sections. Besides, except document reading and in-depth interviews, the panelists held a focus group made up of assessor, council member, EER evaluator, CBT assessor, program evaluator and other 15 persons. The panel drove to the campus of three stakeholders for in-depth interviews and discussion: University of the South Pacific (a public university),

Figure 1. The flowchart of the review process
ServicePro Institute of Tourism and Hospitality (a private institute) and Corpus Christi Teachers College.

### 3.2.3 Combining review and guidance together

It suggests that the review must make judgments to the basic situation of the QAA, but also supply the guidance in details for the future development of the QAA. According to the SER and on-site review, the panel describe the basic situation of the 11 criteria against the “the Guidance and Templates for the Asia Pacific Quality Register.” The last part of the review is to sum up 11 commendations of the FHEC, at the same time put forward ten recommendations for FHEC’s improvements. For example, the panel commends “the FHEC for its multifaceted methods for staff professional development, which include staff exchanges, job rotation and other learning activities,” and also recommends “QA will separate from FHEC” (APQR, 2015).

The specific review methods of the panel are including the following: to listen to the SER presentation from the QAA; to investigate the QAA’s infrastructure, facilities and working environment; to access and read the supporting information and documents of the QAA; to have interviews and focus group with the stakeholders of the QAA; and to conduct in-depth interviews with the leaders and important members of the QAA. According to the actual situation of the QAA, the panel can flexibly adapt the review methodology, e.g. based on quantitative statistics; qualitative review focused on in-depth interviews can be mainly used.

### 4. The characteristics of APQR

APQR will register the qualified QAA, whose primary purpose is to guarantee the qualified QAA; to provide an inspirational target for QAAs; to serve as a quality hallmark; to establish the basis for mutual recognition and to supply the basis for cross-border operation of quality agencies/institutions as well as reference to global stakeholders on trustworthy EQAAs in the Asia-Pacific region (APQR, 2015). Since 2012, APQR has gone through the development stage of “survey – research – design – pilot – programs – formal review;” its basic features can be summarized as follows.

#### 4.1 APQR is an important measurement of education globalization for the Asia Pacific region

In the era of globalization, all the criteria, standards and guidelines in the QA must be measured from the global perspective. As a professional, international organization consisting of 159 members from 40 countries and regions, the diversity of APQN itself is obviously self-evident. Its regional and international features are more prominent (Zhang and Patil, 2015). Only by reading the name of “Asia-Pacific Quality Network,” the “Network,” can we realize that the nature of APQN is non-mandatory, national, regional and international. “The Asia-Pacific Region” includes much of East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and Oceania, spanning as far west as Afghanistan, as far north as Russia, as far east as Fiji and as far south as New Zealand according to the UNESCO model APQN, 2005. The theme of 2015 APQN Conference held in Kunming is “Globalization and Diversification of Quality Assurance of Higher Education” which emphasizes the importance of the HE globalization in the era of globalization.

“APQR” (in Macao) clearly stipulates that the establishment of a registration system has seven main purposes, among which two highlights the international characteristics: to supply the basis for cross-border operation of quality agencies/institutions (the fifth purpose) and reference to global stakeholders on trustworthy EQAAs in Asia Pacific (the seventh purpose). Thus, the ultimate goal of APQR is to promote the international registration in the whole globe.

From the composition of the first formal review panel, one can also see its international feature, three experts are separately from QAA Council of Sri Lanka, Yunnan Higher
Education Evaluation Center of China and the Department of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology of Papua New Guinea. They are well-known international experts in QA in the Asia-Pacific region.

4.2 APQR emphasizes the characteristics review of diversity
In today’s “fourth-generation-evaluation” era, the new idea is to promote the development, to change from the “facts judgment” or “value judgment” to the developing evaluation of “value co-building,” and lead to an equal, credible and constructive negotiated dialogue (Zhang Jianxin and Liu Kangning, 2013). Although “APQR” (in Macao) provides 11 criteria and descriptions in detail, but there is no specific statistic requirements, whose purpose is to reach the basic criteria according to the diversity characteristics of the QAA.

“The Guidance and Templates for APQR” advocates taking full account of the diversified characteristics of diversified regions, diversified countries, diversified QAA. According to their diversified mission, objectives and service clients, APQR review diversified QAAs to form their own characteristics. This registration performance lies in the QAA’s situation, its performance and set aside enough space for registration, which will be conducive to mobilize the enthusiasm of the QAA, promote the QAA’s characteristics and personality and to achieve the sustainable development of the QAA.

In addition, the first formal review emphasis the dynamic development of the QAA. “The Guidance and Templates for APQR” requires “not to compare with your own QAA.” The regulation of “no horizontal comparison” makes the review mechanism base on its own diversified characteristics; choose its own development path, reflecting a dynamic development of the evaluation concept (The APQR Council, 2015). Inclusion to APQR will be valid for a period of five years. The governing body of the register has the right to cancel the membership if there are circumstances that question the substantial adherence of the agency to the review criteria.

4.3 APQR highlights the combination of quantitative and qualitative review
Acceptance onto APQR is based on “substantial compliance” with these criteria. Each criterion will be judged “fully, substantially, partially or non-compliant;” and substantial compliance with the whole set needs full or substantial compliance with each criterion.

To make decision on the above four categories, APQR review uses the qualitative evaluation method, pay very much attention to the “evidence,” any judgment should be evidence-based. These “evidence” is not only data, but more focus on the relevant facts and information from all the process. In the first formal review, the standard is “evidence-based” combing the quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods together, made up of three components such as: the basis of the review, the criteria statement and the core body. For example, in the review of the first criteria “Organization,” the first programmed is “Review Panel Observations are based on 1) the Self Evaluation Report; 2) the legislative status of the FHEC; and 3) interview evidence” (The Review Panel, 2015). Then the objective statement of the criteria and the core body are followed.

5. Concluding words
To answer the question of “who is to guarantee the quality of QAA” at the beginning of this paper, according to the relationship among the QAA, the government, the HEIs, the enterprises and other professional associations, we can generally divide into three types: the national education administrative departments (including its affiliated institutions) directly register the QAA; the quasi-governmental agencies established in “legislative and independent administrative agencies”; and the third-party organizations such as
professional associations (Dong Youzhi, 2013). Today, in addition to the above three categories, we can add a new the fourth one – that is, the international registration system. How to ensure the quality of QAAs? Who can review the QAAs? This is where this research begins. Following the founding of the EQAR for Higher Education, APQR became the second in the international QA networks to implement QA register. APQR has the following three characteristics: APQR is an important measure to promote the internationalization of HE in the Asia Pacific region; APQR individual characteristics evaluation; and the APQR method of quantitative evaluation and qualitative evaluation outstanding combination.

From April 2012 when APQN launched the initiative of APQR, so far, five years passed, and substantial progresses of APQR have been made in theory as well as in practice. However, the exploration of APQR is still not optimistic, and we still have a long way to go. The following questions are to be answered:

1. From the practice level, The EQAR for HE has been rapidly developed in full swing (as of June 2017, EQAR has recognized 47 QAAs), why is APQR has not got the active participation from the QAAs in the Asia-Pacific region?

2. From the theoretical level, how can the international registration system, such as APQR, to ensure the quality of the QAAs in the Asia-Pacific region, together the three types mentioned above (national education administrative departments, the quasi-governmental agencies and the third-party organizations)?

3. From the strategic level, how can APQN take effective measures to promote the QA of the QAAs in this region? How does APQN help the QAAs who have been accepted on to APQR play more effective roles in the trends of international HE and cross-border education?

Look around, today on the international stage of QA, APQR has emerged as “the watchman of quality” in the Asia-Pacific region as counterpart of EQAR in Europe. How far away does such newly emerging form of guaranteeing the QAAs’ quality go forward, what is its future prospects and other concerning issues, are some of the question that need enthusiastic attention and contribution.

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ASEAN’s flagship universities and regional integration initiatives

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of Association of Southeast Asian Nations’ (ASEAN) flagship universities in moving the agenda of regional integration forward through academic/research collaboration and cooperation.

Design/methodology/approach – Flagship universities are leading universities in the national higher education systems of countries that make up the ASEAN. This study on the ASEAN’s flagship universities is based on a three-pronged strategy, namely, a literature review, analysis of websites contents, and citation of supporting pieces of evidence from other relevant studies to support arguments. Using the QS top universities in Asia 2016 listing, top 70 public universities in ASEAN were selected for investigation. In instances where public universities in a particular ASEAN country were not listed in the QS listing, a premier public university of that country was then selected for investigation.

Findings – There is a tendency for ASEAN’s flagship universities to look beyond ASEAN, primarily to establish vertical collaboration, which is important to their efforts in creating their image and enhancing their reputation. As a result, academic/research collaboration among flagship universities and collaboration between these universities and other universities in ASEAN is glaringly on the low side. Interestingly, to move the regional integration agenda in ASEAN, other intermediary agencies outside of ASEAN, such as in the European Union, are very active in providing a platform for both flagship and non-flagship universities to collaborate.

Originality/value – While regional collaboration and cooperation within ASEAN and East Asia have been discussed elsewhere, this paper has utilised and expanded Douglass’ (2016) idea of flagship universities to include regional relevance for the purpose of regional integration of ASEAN.

Keywords ASEAN, Quality assurance, Flagship universities, Harmonization of higher education, Regional integration, Universities collaboration, World class

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the founding members of ASEAN, namely, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand (Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat, n.d.). With expanding membership, comprising Southeast Asian countries at various levels of development, ASEAN has evolved with a much-expanded scope of collaboration and cooperation in various sectors. Presently, this scope covers political-security, economic and finance, sociocultural fields, and higher education (HE). This evolution of the scope and coverage of ASEAN cooperation reflects the need to be relevant to the changing circumstances within and outside of Southeast Asia. Despite the periodic adaptation and adjustment, ASEAN still hold to the seven basic aims and objectives, with three of these continued to be expressed in terms of three thrusts, namely, collaboration, mutual
assistance, and cooperation in areas such as socio-economic, cultural, technical, and educational development. In the sphere of education development, for instance, cooperation and collaboration are pursued at all levels without affecting the structure of the respective country’s national education system. However, at the individual country level, there are emerging trends to create greater awareness and understanding of the “One ASEAN” spirit. Notably, an examination of the websites of sister organisations in Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) revealed that the focus is on exchanges and specialised trainings. Cooperation and collaboration among HE institutions in ASEAN/Southeast Asia are initially focussed on the harmonisation of the HE systems in Southeast Asia but now this is being expanded to include East Asia (see Yavaprabhas, 2014). Hawkins (2012) has alluded to the difficulties of regionalisation and harmonisation of HE in Asia. Harmonisation of the HE systems is being emphasised as this is considered as important in encouraging student mobility for intraregional cultural competencies and understanding. In addition, a harmonised system would help in addressing gaps in human resources for development among many member nations of ASEAN. Mutual recognition of qualifications should facilitate mobility of skilled persons, and indeed some countries in ASEAN are in dire need of this category of workers in order to move ahead with the development agenda. Admittedly, there are lessons to be learnt from collaboration and cooperation among the more developed and the developing member nations in ASEAN. Today, there are ten Member States in ASEAN and almost all nations in Southeast Asia are in this regional grouping. Thus, in this paper, mention of ASEAN will read also as Southeast Asian countries.

In the area of HE, the Cha-am Hua Hin Declaration on the Roadmap for the ASEAN Community (2009-2015) has drawn up a list of joint initiatives to promote regional cooperation in cross-border education. The Declaration specified that regional cooperation in cross-border education was aimed at improving the “well-being and livelihood” of ASEAN citizens, enhancing ASEAN human resources and building an “ASEAN identity” based on friendship and cooperation (Association of Southeast Asian Nations Secretariat, 2009). To achieve these objectives, HE institutions in ASEAN are expected to enter into collaborative and cooperative agreements covering academic, research, and cultural exchanges. As a matter of fact, joint working groups comprising senior officials of ASEAN countries are actively working on government-to-government agreements in the development of cooperation in HE, which would facilitate collaborations among universities. Arguably, the opportunities for cooperation and collaboration are made increasingly easier by the initiatives of various intergovernmental agencies within Southeast Asia such as the ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN University Network (AUN), the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO RIHED), and the UNESCO Bangkok Office. These agencies have and continue to provide working secretariat and platforms to facilitate collaborative and cooperative arrangements among HE institutions in Southeast Asia. Working closely with the European Union (EU), Japan, South Korea, and China, academic/research cooperation among HE institutions within and beyond ASEAN was also made possible, particularly with respect to resource mobilisation and the availability of experts. The East Asian Summit comprising countries from ASEAN, Japan, South Korea, and China is an important platform for East Asian harmonisation of HE initiative. This is in the context of the present and future role of the leading universities in ASEAN in intra- and inter-regional collaboration and cooperation in HE development.

It is axiomatic to expect long established, premier public universities in each of the ASEAN countries to spearhead collaborative and cooperative projects related to HE. Individual governments in ASEAN have high expectation of these institutions as they are the “agents” for their respective governments in ASEAN to push the agenda for region wide collaboration. As such, effectively, these premier public universities are the leading or
“flagship” universities of each member countries in ASEAN in a sense that they have a trigger or catalytic function. Notably, these universities are now operating in a transformed national socio-economic and political environment, but at the same time they have also to function in the context of ASEAN’s aims and aspirations, specifically to realise regional integration. Arguably, therefore, common aims and aspirations then would be the trigger for regional collaboration in HE. This paper will examine whether the premier universities in ASEAN that have been regarded as flagship universities are acting as flagship universities, based on emergent literature on the role and functions of flagship universities in the changing HE scenario. It is necessary to determine if these so-called flagship universities are performing their leadership roles as the nodes for the dense regional collaborative academic/research efforts which are important for regional integration.

It can be visualised that within ASEAN there would be several ASEAN universities acting as the regional nodes and it can be hypothesised that their network of collaboration and cooperation with universities in the EU, the UK, the USA, or even in East Asia would be very intense too. Nevertheless, in the spirit of regional integration, more intense intra-ASEAN collaboration would be more meaningful for regional integration objective. However, because of the nature of the aims and roles of sponsor organisations based in the EU, Japan, South Korea, and China, for instance, it is not far-fetched to believe that leading national universities in lower and low-middle income countries in ASEAN would be the main beneficiaries of the collaboration and cooperation. This is because these universities urgently need to build their capacity in their HE systems. However, on the more practical level, in this network of cooperation and collaboration, it is hypothesised that flagship universities of the more developed HE systems in ASEAN are critical intermediaries connecting the national universities in the lower and low-income countries with universities in the EU, Japan, South Korea, and China. Arguably, the flagship universities based in the more developed HE systems in ASEAN are exemplars for good practices in academic and research development. At the programming level, the platforms provided by AUN, SEAMEO RIHED, and UNESCO Bangkok are the critical success factors for such initiatives in the HE sector (Molly Lee, 2012; Sugimura, 2012).

Following on from the preceding propositions, therefore, this paper would specifically address the following:

RQ1. What are the roles of ASEAN’s flagship universities in terms of intraregional collaboration for the purpose of regional integration?

RQ2. Are there discernible patterns of interuniversity collaboration, which may impede regional integration?

RQ3. What are the main influencing factors which have given rise to such a pattern of interuniversity collaboration?

RQ4. Are inter-regional frameworks such as ASEAN plus 3 or ASEAN plus 6 important contributing factors in inter- and intra-regional collaboration and regional integration efforts?

The following arguments are the motivations for this paper: world class and global ranking ambitions among flagship universities, which only very recently were mandated for them by their respective national government, have diverted the attention and focus of these universities from ASEAN to global-wide engagement. Arguably, this situation could have slowed down or at worst, worked against regional integration objectives based on collaborative activities of ASEAN flagship universities. Therefore, in such a situation there is a need to reprise the important role of the flagship universities, giving priorities to national and regional relevancy for regional integration rather than for global image and reputation.
Public universities as flagship universities in the ASEAN context

In the introductory section, the discussion has alluded to three important terms – leading, premier, and flagship to describe public universities, which were established in ASEAN with specific national socio-economic and political agenda as their raison d’etre. It is important to note that in the context of ASEAN no public university has been established solely for the purpose of competing in the global universities rankings. Many public universities in ASEAN were established primarily for the purpose of producing human resource for the socio-economic development of a newly independent nation, for instance, in Malaysia. Such was the context of public universities in the HE system and in relation to socio-economic reforms. The latter is exemplified by the role of public universities in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam in the transition from socialist to market economy. Therefore, at the outset, the use of the terms premier, leading, and flagship to describe ASEAN public universities in this paper should not be construed as alluding to the idea of “world class” universities in the context of global universities rankings. Unfortunately, many flagship universities in ASEAN have assumed this role on their own or after being directly or indirectly guided by their respective HE ministries towards achieving that status. Arguably, for public universities, there are advantages associated with world class status. Indeed, in countries such as Malaysia, the performances of the public universities in the global universities rankings are debated in the Parliament, and those that have moved up the global universities rankings are showered with accolades from the prime minister (see The Star Online, 2017).

This paper subscribes to Douglass’ (2016) idea of flagship universities as public universities with “national relevancy” and not as universities preoccupied with global university ranking. However, this paper extended further Douglass’ idea of flagship universities; instead of confining arguments to national relevancy notion of flagship universities, this paper argues for a regional/ASEAN relevance of these universities. Such argument provides the right contextualisation and conceptualisation of these flagship universities in the regional integration initiative.

It is important to note that no official definition has been given to the concept of a “flagship university” (Douglass, 2016). Berdahl (1998) explained that the original notion of flagship universities and its usage could be considered as elitist and boastful. On the contrary, it is argued that its usage is no less boastful than the term “World Class” or “Global University” in the HE literature. As a working definition to discuss the role of premier public universities according to what have been conceptualised by Berdahl (1998) and Douglass (2016), the following characteristics may be useful to identify or isolate the so-called flagship universities from the many public universities in ASEAN. First, flagship universities are the now fully matured public universities, with substantial state financial support for their operating and development expenditures. Second, these public universities have been established by and for the nation. Third, they have been established during the extraordinary period of university building for the newly emerging nation states, particularly in the immediate postcolonial era in Southeast Asia. This broad understanding of what defines flagship universities is subsequently adopted to examine the role of ASEAN’s premier public universities in spearheading regional academic/research collaborations for regional integration agenda. In other words, it can be proposed that these universities are the leading universities in the respective national HE system in ASEAN.

Douglass (2016) argued that in the context of the US HE system, “The New Flagship University” model provides an expansive vision for leading national universities to explore pathways to reshape their missions and academic cultures, and to pursue organisational features intended to expand their relevance in the societies that have given them life and purpose. This is the national relevancy context of these universities. Damtew’s (2016, 2017) investigation of flagship universities in Africa reconfirmed the salient raison d’etre of Africa’s
premier universities; they are universities established at the time leading up to and immediately after independence during the 1960s; and were mandated to become their respective countries’ leading institutions. In the case of Southeast Asia, some leading universities in the national HE system appear to be reshaping and re-envisioning their mission and strategies to maintain their relevance, not only to ASEAN but more important, their relevance in the context of ASEAN relationship with other regional groupings. Admittedly, in the context of re-envisioning, which is also in line with Douglass’ (2016) model for new flagship universities, Southeast Asia’s leading or flagship universities should not project their relevance and excellence solely on research productivity. Equally important, the mission and strategic intent of these flagship universities should be framed within the context of a university’s larger social purpose and outcome of research activities. In other words, research activities should not be an end unto itself, which is the typical strategic intent of world class universities actively pursuing global rankings (Douglass, 2016; Hazelkorn, 2017). In fact, the relatively recent phenomenon of global university rankings is fixated on a narrow band of data and prestige scores, an unfortunate paradigm not achievable or not useful for the economic and socio-economic mobility needs of their countries (Douglass, 2014). In the context of the preceding arguments in this paper, flagship universities in ASEAN should be working towards developing a dense network of collaboration and cooperation among universities at all levels aimed at achieving both national and regional societal development objectives. Ultimately, regional integration is the larger mission and the pursuit for ASEAN flagship universities and to which they have to answer positively.

On reflection, to a large extent, the global university rankings have, impacted on how policy makers viewed the role of flagship universities and on how they self-reflect on themselves (Hazelkorn, 2017). In addition, following the arguments of Feuer and Hornidge (2015), HE in the larger national and regional system such as ASEAN need to take into account the following points: the sociohistoric embedding of the HE and integration discourses as well as the local rationales of the ASEAN member countries for subscribing to them; the construction of HE integration as social imagery for a better future for ASEAN and Southeast Asia; the social and material resources for action mobilised with the aim of fostering integration, primarily through official/governmental channels such as AUN, SEAMO RIHED, UNESCO Bangkok Office, and some of the (un)intended power effects of the imagery noted above. One of the immediate unintended power effects at play now is summarised as “politics first, and then education” (see Morshidi et al., 2016).

ASEAN regional integration explained
Much has been written on ASEAN regional integration (see ASEAN Secretariat, n.d.). Briefly, from an economic perspective, the most widely recognised argument in favour of regional integration is the benefits from expanding markets and promoting competition through the elimination of barriers to trade among member countries (Guerrero, 2009). In the course of the development of ASEAN integration and cooperation, regional perspective reigned high in terms of programme priority and policy thrust. In the past, ASEAN successes have been usually presented in terms of cooperation in economic and infrastructure projects. In fact, as Chao (2016) highlighted, ASEAN regionalism has evolved from its security rationale to economic regionalism, and eventually to other areas such as education and culture. However, this paper is not to discuss the economic perspective of ASEAN regionalism. Instead, its focus is on regional integration from the perspective of HE, revolving around the notion of harmonising over 6,000 HE institutions in ASEAN (Cervantes, 2016). Yavaprabhas (2011) has alluded to a more concerted effort in the SEAMEO and ASEAN context for a vision of regional integration through the harmonisation process of HE. ASEAN regionalism from the perspective of harmonisation of HE took a queue from the Bologna Process and the creation of the European Higher Education Area.
The mechanism for achieving regional integration objective from a HE perspective is via cooperation and collaboration in the academic and research spheres including mobility, exchanges, and engagements. The platforms for these are the disparate initiatives in HE integration in ASEAN through various consortia involving ASEAN, AUN, SEAMEO RIHED, and UNESCO Bangkok Office among others, including quality assurance agencies and related national and regional mechanisms. Arguably, such efforts and initiatives underlie several initiatives to expand cooperation in regional HE, most notably with respect to regional mobility spaces, academic cooperation, and mutual recognition under the general umbrella of quality assurance networks. Thus, the critical role of intergovernmental institutions in these initiatives has to be acknowledged (see Chao, 2016). This has been so for over the past 20 years; the HE landscape of Southeast Asia has been transformed by social transformation, political realignments, rapid economic growth, and marked demographic transitions. Notably, member countries in the region, especially with respect to HE, have been shaped by three levels of institutional set-ups, namely, intra-Southeast Asian institutions for regional cooperation, ASEAN institutions for regional integration, and extra ASEAN/SEA institutions for collaboration and cooperation. In the context of the role of flagship universities, there are several initiatives to expand regional HE cooperation, most notably, cooperation within the quality assurance networks such as the AUN, ASEAN Quality Assurance Network, Asia Pacific Quality Network, UNESCO Bangkok Office, and SEAMEO RIHED.

Methodology
This study on the ASEAN’s flagship universities is based on a three-pronged strategy, namely, a literature review, analysis of websites contents, and citation of supporting pieces of evidence from other relevant studies to support arguments. The selection of public universities in ASEAN for investigation was based on an examination of the QS top universities in Asia 2016 listing. Using a cut-off point of top 70 public universities in Asia, public universities for investigation were then identified. In instances where public universities in a particular ASEAN country were not listed in the QS (2016) listing, a premier public university of that country was then selected for investigation. Inevitably, for some ASEAN countries, more than one public university were selected for investigation. Arguably, for some ASEAN countries, public universities in the global university rankings are considered as their premier universities. In fact, some ASEAN governments have allocated substantial resources for their public universities to be listed in global university rankings (see Hazelkorn, 2017).

Official websites of universities under investigation were interrogated in order to determine patterns of collaborations in various academic and research activities. Arguably, since 2010 many public universities were working on regional and global visibility through various medium. In fact, many of the public universities under investigation have been updating their website periodically. Factually, in Malaysia, for instance, the Ministry of Higher Education would write to the public universities concerned if their official websites have not been updated periodically. For many public universities in ASEAN, concern over regional and global visibility since 2010 could be attributable to the importance of the internationalisation factor in global university rankings. Taking into account this visibility argument, it is believed that public universities would want to exhibit all their activities on their website. Updating university websites with facts and data on international collaborations began in earnest in Malaysia since 2007. For public universities in the less developed HE systems within ASEAN this activity is a very recent one.

For detailed information on research collaboration, a recent bibliometric analysis undertaken by the Institut Penyelidikan Pendidikan Tinggi Negara (IPPTN) is a good source for the relevant data. These data covering a period between 2009 and 2013 were interrogated to establish pattern of research collaboration within ASEAN.
ASEAN flagship universities – pattern of collaborations

This section attempts to establish the roles of flagship universities in ASEAN in terms of intraregional collaboration. Presumably, any collaborative efforts in university-related activities are aimed at regional integration based on some common purpose and objectives endorsed by ASEAN and SEAMEO. In this regard, it is pertinent to establish some patterns of interuniversity collaboration; an intense network of collaborations and cooperation among ASEAN flagship universities would presumably facilitate or smooth out the journey towards regional integration. Table I is based on data as reported in the website of universities under investigation. Specific interuniversity collaborations within ASEAN are determined based on the Institut Penyelidikan Pendidikan Tinggi Negara (IPPTN) (2017) study on ASEAN universities collaboration. The IPPTN (2017) study has utilised the bibliometric data for the period 2009-2013 to determine interuniversity research and academic collaboration of flagship universities within ASEAN. Connecting the resulting patterns with other pieces of evidence from various studies could isolate the main influencing factors, which have given rise to such a pattern in interuniversity collaboration and cooperation. Arguably, inter-regional frameworks such as ASEAN plus 3 or ASEAN plus 6 are important contributing factors in inter- and intra-regional collaborations and regional integration efforts.

Table I illustrates a very broad pattern of academic/research collaborations expressed as percentage of total collaborations of each ASEAN flagship universities on four items, namely, percentage of collaborations with HE institutions within ASEAN, percentage within East Asia (Japan, China, and South Korea), percentage of collaboration with EU, and percentage of collaboration with universities in North America. It could be gleaned from Table I, collaborations between HE institutions within Southeast Asia is markedly high for Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (at 30.8 per cent), and at a low 7.7 per cent for Universitas Indonesia. Other flagship universities intra-ASEAN collaborations fall between the above range of low and high figures. The case of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (National University of Malaysia) is very interesting that its mandates are primarily national in emphasis, such as the usage of Malay as the medium of instruction and the championing of the other national aspirations. It appears that even though Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia’s patterns of intraregional collaborations and cooperation are very encouraging for regional integration, the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>ASEAN (%)</th>
<th>East Asia (%)</th>
<th>Europe (%)</th>
<th>North America (%)</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Universiti Malaya (2016)</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Universiti Putra Malaysia (2016)</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (2016)</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (2015)</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Universiti Sains Malaysia (2016)</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>National University of Singapore (n.d.)</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nanyang Technological University</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Chulalongkorn University (2015)</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mahidol University (2015)</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Universitas Indonesia (2016)</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Hanoi University (2013)</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>Royal University of Phnom Penh (2012)</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>119</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>University of the Philippines (2016)</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Brunei</td>
<td>Universiti Brunei Darussalam (2016)</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>National University of Laos</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>University of Yangon</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Websites of universities under investigation
directions of collaboration and cooperation within ASEAN are primarily with universities in Indonesia and Singapore (IPPTN, 2017). The IPPTN (2017) study indicated that there is a tendency for ASEAN flagship universities to have a typical horizontal collaboration within ASEAN and vertical collaboration globally.

Notably, many ASEAN flagship universities look towards East Asia for academic/research collaborations. Universiti Malaya, Mahidol University, Universitas Indonesia, University of the Philippines, Hanoi University, Royal University of Phnom Penh, and even Universiti Brunei Darussalam have more than 40.0 per cent of their collaborations with HE institutions in East Asian countries. From Table I, the National University of Singapore is not East Asian focussed; a low 19.0 per cent of its total collaborations are with East Asian HE institutions. But the National University of Singapore, together with Chulalongkorn University and Mahidol University have established collaborations with HE institutions in North America; ranging between 21.8 per cent of total collaboration (in the case of National University of Singapore) to about 16.2 per cent for Chulalongkorn University and 18.8 per cent for Mahidol University. For many flagship universities, extra ASEAN collaboration with HE institutions in North America is not very evident from the data. Collaboration outside of Southeast Asia specifically with HE institutions in Europe is highest for National University of Singapore and at only 13.4 per cent in the case of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

Additional evidence for the above-mentioned patterns of collaborations of ASEAN flagship universities, which have implications for regional integration efforts, could be gathered from other studies.

The IPPTN (2017) study investigated research niche and research collaborative efforts among members of the AUN with regional integration based on regional collaborative research and publication as one of the main focus of concern. A bibliometric analysis covering the period 2009-2013 was undertaken and the highest number of collaborations was noted for AUN members in Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia in that order of importance. Arguably, there is a tendency for flagship universities in these countries to engage in research collaborative initiatives among members within their circle.

Kumar and Jan (2013) investigated the patterns of collaboration in the business and management field, and this study concluded that Malaysian institutions collaborated more often with foreign partners than with institutions within Malaysia. For Malaysian institutions, including flagship universities in the Malaysian HE system, their top international partners are HE institutions in the developed countries. Evidently, minimal collaboration with ASEAN universities has been observed. Kumar et al. (2014) studied international research collaborations in economics, and concluded that universities in the USA were the most favoured international partners for ASEAN nations. Intra-ASEAN collaboration accounted for just 4.0 per cent of all international collaborations. Payumo and Sutton (2015), working on a bibliometric assessment of ASEAN collaboration in plant biotechnology, one of the main areas of cooperation for regional food security and sustainable development in ASEAN, found very limited evidence for regional collaboration or partnership. Such a pattern emerged despite a common aspiration for regional integration through research collaboration, raising concern for regional integration and S&T cooperation among ASEAN universities.

ASEAN flagship universities collaboration with universities in the EU need further empirical evidence to support the pattern indicated in Table I. For instance, Hassan et al. (2012) used Scopus database over the period of 2000-2008 to elucidate the structure of the ASEAN research landscape. Based on the results of two complementary types of analyses on projects which have been carried out in the course of the EU FP7 funded project, this study has provided important insights into the dimensions, patterns, and trends of cooperation between ASEAN and EU within the SEA-EU-NET project. The study covered seven FP7 thematic areas: nanotechnology; energy; health; food, agriculture and biotechnology; environment;
information and communication technology; and industrial technology. The study showed that EU is the most important copublication partner for countries like Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia, but not for Thailand, Singapore, and the Philippines. Thailand is the most important copublication partner for the EU in the fields of health, environment, energy and food, and agriculture and biotechnology. Again, in the context of ASEAN-EU collaboration, Gruber and Degelsegger (2011) investigated scientists’ and policy makers’ assessment of factors that act as important drivers for collaboration in the S&T fields. The study listed several motivating factors for scientists to cooperate. The study concluded that while having topics of mutual interest and relevance is important, other influencing factors including the desire to contribute to the development of a country or the solving of global challenges, access to a field, expertise and equipment, friendship or reputation are other important motivational factors.

Kakuchi’s (2011) study on ASEAN-ASIA (Japan, China, and Korea specifically) collaboration based on an Asian model of HE integration in the context of the growing momentum to build university collaboration within the region, highlighted the need for the harmonisation of HE in Asia. Arguably, the harmonisation of HE systems would spearhead student mobility and exchanges in East Asia, in particular. However, harmonisation of HE as championed by ASEAN through AUN, the SEAMEO RIHED, and the trilateral groupings between the Governments of China, Japan, and South Korea is moving rather slowly. It is argued that while these regional actors share some history of collaboration, driven in part, by the desire to create a common East Asian HE space, they implemented regionalisation schemes largely based on different needs, goals, timetables, and customs (Choi, 2017).

Noting the slowness of harmonisation in ASEAN and East Asia, the EU has to come in to push this agenda among ASEAN member countries. It appears that the intermediary for HE collaborations and harmonisation in ASEAN is the EU. The EU-SHARE brought together ASEAN flagship universities in a collaborative effort with universities in the EU, guided by its objectives as follows:

1. to enhance the harmonisation of ASEAN HE area through the formulation of ASEAN HE frameworks, taking into account the EU experience and work already underway across ASEAN through international partnerships; and

2. to support mutual recognition and student mobility among HEIs in ASEAN to strengthen people to people connectivity.

It is important to note that EU has to come in to provide a platform for ASEAN flagship universities to collaborate. It appears that AUN and SEAMEO RIHED together did not have the necessary clout to push this agenda among ASEAN flagship universities. Most likely, the availability or rather, the unavailability of resource and expertise were the main constraining factors for AUN and SEAMEO RIHED to push this harmonisation agenda forward at a much faster pace. In this respect, the role of ASEAN flagship universities in promoting and facilitating regional cooperation and collaboration in activities related to HE development was somewhat muted.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper began with some pertinent questions. What are the roles of ASEAN’s flagship universities in terms of intraregional collaboration for the purpose of regional integration? Arguably, the roles of ASEAN’s flagship universities in moving the agenda for regional integration through intraregional collaboration appear to be at a very nascent stage for many public universities in the less developed HE system. The IPPTN (2017) bibliometric analysis has provided evidence to this fact. For the more developed HE systems, it is argued that the roles of flagship universities in moving the agenda of regional
integration are also rather muted; and this is based on an examination of the pattern of interuniversity collaboration and cooperation at the level of ASEAN and outside of ASEAN, as reported in the websites of the flagship universities. This statement is also corroborated by evidence from several studies investigating academic/research collaboration and cooperation among HE institutions in ASEAN. However, these studies, except for the IPPTN (2017) study, did not necessarily have regional integration issue as a major contention or thrust of the investigation.

Are there discernible patterns of interuniversity collaboration, which may impede regional integration? What are the main influencing factors which have given rise to such a pattern of interuniversity collaboration? It appears that there is a tendency for flagship universities in ASEAN to look beyond ASEAN, primarily to establish vertical collaboration, which is important to image-making and the enhancement of reputation. In this respect, it is tempting to argue that world class and global university ranking ambitions among flagship universities, which have been mandated to them only very recently by their respective national governments, have diverted the attention and focus of these universities to regions beyond the ASEAN region. Lane and Kinser (2017), for instance, pointed out that it is the pursuit of rankings that guide policy making, strategic priorities, and resource allocation. Arguably, global university rankings are used as limiting criteria to determine institutions with whom university may partner or students may study (Lane and Kinser, 2017). Malaysia, for instance, is very committed towards the world class university agenda and has been using global universities rankings to steer its flagship universities to that penultimate destination (Morshidi et al., 2017). Inevitably, this pattern of collaboration and cooperation among ASEAN universities may impede regional integration in the HE sphere. Therefore, there is a need to reprise the important role of the flagship universities, prioritising both national and regional relevancy for regional integration, true to the underlying notion of the new model of flagship universities.

Are inter-regional frameworks such as ASEAN plus 3 or ASEAN plus 6 important contributing factors in inter-and intraregional collaboration and regional integration efforts? Interestingly, intermediary agencies based in Japan, Korea, and EU are coming in to provide the much needed platform and resources to bring together flagship universities and other universities in ASEAN in collaborative research and academic exchanges. Guided by the need for regional harmonisation of HE systems, these platforms have facilitated meaningful academic exchanges and student mobility between flagship universities and other universities in the ASEAN region, which in the longer term would bring the region closer in terms of HE development and cooperation.

In the final analysis, the preoccupation of ASEAN’s flagship universities with global university rankings does not bode well with the spirit of regional integration in the HE sphere. Nevertheless, the efforts undertaken by quality assurance agencies in ASEAN and Asia Pacific are in line with the spirit of HE harmonisation and regional integration through synergistic approach to overall drive towards quality in HE.

References


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Cross-border quality assurance: case study of Hong Kong and Macao

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to set out the experience of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) in carrying out cross-border quality assurance (QA) in Macao.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper draws on case studies of two very different QA exercises conducted by HKCAAVQ in Macao in 2015 and 2016. The first was a program accreditation conducted as part of a pilot of the external QA standards and process developed by the Macao Government’s Tertiary Education Services Office (GAES) for potential use by all higher education institutions (HEIs) in Macao. The second was a learning program review (LPR) conducted by HKCAAVQ following a request by a HEI in Macao using QA standards and processes developed by HKCAAVQ.

Findings – The key findings from the case studies are that an agency engaging in cross-border QA needs to have a clear rationale for their engagement, ensure that they are “fit-for-purpose” in terms of the context of the employing jurisdiction and the expectations of their HEIs and have a clear understanding of the relevant legal framework.

Originality/value – Cross-border QA is likely to grow in importance and activity in the coming years. The example of Macao provides a useful reference point for governments, HEIs and external quality assurance agency considering engaging in cross-border QA activities.

Keywords Hong Kong, Cross-border, Macao, HKCAAVQ

Paper type Case study

Introduction

Internationalization of higher education not only involves the mobility of students, academics, institutions, and programmes, but also the movement of quality assurance (QA) services. National accrediting agencies in Asia are attempting to internationalize themselves through internal and external approaches (Hou, 2012). This paper focuses on cross-border QA in the process of internationalization and sets out the experience of the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) as an external QA agency in carrying out two cross-border exercises in Macao. Such experience can serve as a reference for higher education institutions (HEIs) or QA agencies in other countries/regions planning to engage in cross-border QA.

Literature review

The Observatory on Borderless Higher Education Report says internationalization has become an increasingly important phenomenon in higher education (Middlehurst and Woodfield, 2007; Altbach and Knight, 2007). During the past several decades, internationalization has emerged as an important goal of higher education (Childress, 2009).
Yang (2002) also argues that internationalization and university development are linked to each other. Not only do HEIs engage in the process of internationalization, but QA agencies around the globe have also become more internationally active through engaging in cross-border QA exercises. The European Commission (2009) states that cross-border QA is increasingly important in face of globalization, economic integration and increased academic and professional mobility (cited in Bernhard, 2012).

Arum and van de Water (1992) define internationalization as multiple activities, programmes, and services that fall within international studies, international educational exchange and technical cooperation (cited in Knight, 2004). Cross-border QA is one of the internationalization activities and strategies, but there is little published work as cross-border QA is still a younger field of research. Cross-border QA is conducted by foreign QA organizations in the local environment (World Bank, 2007 cited by Hou, 2012). The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (EAQA), European Students’ Union, European University Association, European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) and European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) for Higher Education define cross-border QA as follows:

Cross-border QA refers to external QA activities of a QA agency carried out in a country other than the one in which it is based or primarily operates. For higher education institutions, this may be a voluntary process or part of the national mandatory external QA (EAQA et al., 2017, p. 2).

In this paper, the above definition is used to illustrate how HKCAAVQ as an external QA agency carried out two cross-border QA exercises in Macao.

Why does cross-border QA matter? As a result of globalization, HEIs operate in a competitive landscape, vis-à-vis other institutions from all over the world. Maringe and Foskett (2010) state that most universities recognize the importance of developing teaching and instructional programs that are both locally and internationally relevant, to recruit students in a global market and to prepare all students for lives in a globalized world. HEIs are being asked to help meet major global challenges, to educate students in their disciplines with a sense of global competence and engagement, and to contribute to local and national economic competitiveness (Morris, 2009). Many governments have found that traditional academic controls are not adequate for today’s challenges (El-Khawas et al., 1998). The engagement in cross-border QA activities therefore becomes one of the internationalization strategies to make higher education more globally competitive.

In Asia higher education is playing an increasingly important role in economic and social development (Coates and Shah, 2017). However, Bernhard (2012) argues that the quality of higher education on average has declined in most countries under a mass higher education system. Benchmarking and QA can be an essential means to enhance transparency and to work against degree mills (CE, 2009 cited in Bernhard, 2012). Therefore, cross-border QA is one of the internationalization strategies to address quality issues. Regionally or internationally recognizable education quality standards can also be established to further enable student mobility.

The term QA refers to the policies and procedures necessary to ensure that the quality is being maintained and enhanced (Woodhouse, 1999). Some countries have adopted and adapted quality systems from other parts of the world (Coates and Shah, 2017). Some countries could benefit from foreign experience and knowledge to improve the quality of their tertiary education system (World Bank, 2007). Cross-border QA becomes a good strategy for those countries or areas which have not fully established the QA policies and systems to upgrade standards and strengthen quality of higher education. This is consistent with the OECD’s capacity-building approach to internationalization to help HEIs to build capacity through the transfer of educational know-how in curriculum design and QA (Asteris, 2006 cited in Santiago et al., 2008).
One of the benefits of engaging in cross-border QA is to strengthen local institution’s internationalization policies and improve the recognition of their qualifications (European Association for Quality Assurance (EAQA) in Higher Education et al., 2017). Many countries in Asia have ambitious internationalization goals to enhance the quality of their higher education systems. Several countries, such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand aim to establish themselves as regional higher education hubs, and others have systems and policies in place to attract international students, increase higher education and research spending and grow their own reputations as first class higher education providers. For example, South Korea has built a comprehensive cross-border QA and accreditation framework (British Council, 2011). Thus, cross-border QA has become a prevalent internationalization strategy among Asian higher education.

Teichler (2004) argues that universities are “international” by nature. However, internationalization efforts are not restricted to individual institutions or universities, but also to QA bodies, which issue certificates of accreditation to courses and learning institutions at many levels. Many Asian QA agencies have begun to pay more attention to internationalization (Hou, 2012). Collaboration between QA agencies through engaging in cross-border QA appears to be one of several important international activities. From QA agencies’ perspective, one of the benefits of engaging in cross-border QA is to expand their national and international profile and gain learning opportunities to improve their own processes and methodologies (EAQA, 2017). For example, the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) through the Bologna Process has contributed to an increase of cross-border exchanges and cooperation in higher education and supports the enhancement of trust and confidence among higher education systems. In the framework of the Bologna Process, cross-border QA is supported.

Background of the study
Under the principle of “one country, two systems” enshrined in the Basic Law following the transfer of sovereignty over Hong Kong from the UK to the People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region able to operate its own higher education system and external QA arrangements. In addition, Hong Kong is an active member of various regional QA networks which has provided an opportunity for sharing good practices and raising awareness about QA practices through the networks (Coates and Shah, 2017).

HKCAAVQ provides QA and assessment services to non-self-accrediting education and training institutions, course providers and the general public in Hong Kong. In addition to its statutory roles, HKCAAVQ also provides advisory and consultancy services in education qualifications and standards to government bureaux and other organizations in Hong Kong and the Asia-Pacific region. HKCAAVQ has been working together with partner organizations (11 as of September 2017) in Europe and the Asia-Pacific under bilateral Memoranda of Cooperation/Understanding to share international good practice and enhance quality culture regionally and globally.

Macao is also a Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China with similar but separate powers over education to that of Hong Kong. Hong Kong and Macao share a common language and similar culture and history and similar education system/demographic student/school profile/in-bound non-local students. There is considerable collaboration at different levels of education between Hong Kong and Macao.

The paper draws on two case studies of cross-border QA exercises conducted by HKCAAVQ in Macao in 2015 and 2016. The first was a program accreditation conducted as part of a pilot of the external QA standards and process developed by the Macao Government’s Tertiary Education Services Office for potential use by all HEIs in Macao.
The second was a learning program review (LPR) conducted by HKCAAVQ following a request by a HEI in Macao using QA standards and processes developed by HKCAAVQ.

Overview of higher education in Macao
The following information is extracted from the Macao Yearbook 2015 published by the Government Information Bureau of the Macao Special Administrative Region (2015):

The Tertiary Education Services Office.
Established in 1992 and currently headed by the Secretary for Social Affairs and Culture of the Macao SAR Government, the Tertiary Education Services Office (GAES) is a government department that coordinates, follows up and develops tertiary education in Macao[1].

Higher Education Institutions in Macao.
Macao started to develop modern tertiary education around 30 years ago. Since there were only a few tertiary education institutions in those early days, the range of programs and disciplines offered by these institutions were relatively limited. However, as the number of institutions increased, and society demanded different types of expertise, the types of programs have diversified.

Currently, Macao has ten tertiary education institutions. Four of them are public and six are private.

Public:
(1) University of Macau (UM);
(2) Macau Polytechnic Institute (MPI);
(3) Institute For Tourism Studies (IFT); and
(4) Academy for Public Security Forces of Macao (ESFSM).

Private:
(5) City University of Macau (CITYU);
(6) University of Saint Joseph (USJ);
(7) Kiang Wu Nursing College of Macau (KWNC);
(8) Macau University of Science and Technology (MUST);
(9) Macau Institute of Management (IGM); and
(10) Macau Millennium College (MMC).

About 16 percent of the Macao population has a higher education degree. The ten higher education institutions combined enroll about 30,000 students. Students are from Macao, Mainland China and abroad. At present, there are around 275 programs in operation. The top five programs in terms of student enrollment are business and management, tourism and entertainment, law, journalism and communication, and languages and literature.

The Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region and the HEIs recognized the importance of QA. Since 2012, they have been working to develop a Quality Assurance Framework. In this framework, evaluations are to be conducted at the institutional level, and
the program level. At the institutional level, there are the institutional accreditation and institutional quality audit. At the program level, there are the program accreditation and program review.

Macao is a small jurisdiction and because of the scale of its higher education system and the costs involved in setting up and maintaining its own external quality assurance agency (EQAA), a policy decision was therefore taken by the government to explore the engagement of EQAAs from outside of Macao to provide QA services to their HEIs at both institutional and program levels.

The Macao Government has no plan to set up its own accrediting body in the near future. Instead, the government will let HEIs approach appropriate EQAAs themselves. However, before the appointment of an EQAA, the HEI has to receive prior approval from the government. In addition, the results of the evaluations by EQAAs will have to be confirmed by the Macao Government.

To cater for the needs and characteristics of Macao, the government has developed four sets of QA guidelines that stipulate the standards and procedures of each of the evaluation exercise, they are the “Guidelines on Institutional Accreditation,” “Guidelines on Institutional Quality Audit,” “Guidelines on New Program Accreditation,” and “Guidelines for External Quality Assurance Agencies.” The “Guidelines on Program Review” is under development at this point. The first pilot study on program accreditation was concluded at the end of 2016.

HEIs in Macao have a history of using cross-border EQAAs and international professional accreditation bodies to conduct independent reviews. The essential difference in the government proposal under the proposed new Higher Education Act is that while the “market” for EQAA services could still be maintained, the QA activities would be carried out under guidelines developed and approved by GAES and that the final decision-making power in all of the evaluation exercises would lie with the Macao Government.

It was in the context of the pilot study on the proposed program accreditation guidelines that HKCAAVQ as the EQAA conducted a program accreditation of a bachelor degree of a Macao HEI against the accreditation criteria and standards set out in the guidelines on new program accreditation developed by HKCAAVQ for GAES.

Separately, HKCAAVQ was approached by another Macao HEI, on their own initiative, to conduct a LPR for three of its bachelor degrees in business. This institution had previously engaged different QA agencies and professional bodies to conduct external review for the institute and various programs.

Research methodology
International education is now a hugely competitive market, and national governments and individual providers often see agencies as key tools for developing positional advantage:

RQ1. What are the implications for agencies in seeking to meet these expectations?

RQ2. As some agencies position themselves to offer services outside their national jurisdictions, are we also now seeing the emergence of a competitive international market in QA itself?

RQ3. Competition within countries is also intense in many places; is QA seen as a help or a hindrance?

Based on interviews with the HKCAAVQ Registrars that conducted the two exercises listed above, the case studies of a pilot program accreditation and a LPR in HEIs in Macao are used for illustrative purposes in answering the key research questions above.
In 2016, the EURASHE published a “Roadmap for Cross-Border QA.” This roadmap is presented in the format of guiding questions and key considerations to be taken into account before engaging in and carrying out cross-border QA and includes the following:

1. Engaging in cross-border QA:
   - What is the rationale for engaging in cross-border QA?
   - Which QA agency is fit-for-purpose for this specific case?
   - What is the legal framework prescribing?
   - What other aspects (beyond the legal framework) need to be considered beforehand?
   - Has the institution communicated its decision to undergo cross-border QA to relevant stakeholders?

2. Carrying out cross-border QA:
   - What sort of preparation supports successful cross-border QA?
   - How are the peer-review experts selected and trained?
   - Are the practical specificities of carrying out cross-border QA clear for both parties?

The experiences in the two case studies will also be used to address some of the key factors identified in the conceptual framework of the EURASHE Roadmap.

**Description of two case studies**

**Case 1: pilot program accreditation for GAES**

In the context of the pilot study on the program accreditation guidelines, the academic accreditation and assessment unit of HKCAAVQ was invited to serve as the EQAA to conduct program accreditation for an HEI in Macao against the accreditation criteria and standards set out in the guidelines on new program accreditation developed by GAES. The HEI seeking the program accreditation is a private university in Macao and was similarly invited by GAES to participate in the pilot study. A new program adopting English as the medium of instruction and scheduled to be delivered in the following academic year was chosen to be the subject of accreditation.

The guidelines were developed by the consulting arm of HKCAAVQ under contract to GAES and because of commercial-in-confidence considerations cannot be reproduced in this paper. Notwithstanding, the guidelines are based on the Approach-Deployment-Results-Improvement quality audit methodology and adopt the principle of peer review through the use of expert peer-review panels to evaluate the programs through consideration of a self-evaluative accreditation submission and a site visit.

The accreditation standards and criteria, as well as the accreditation process, were understandably new to both HKCAAVQ (as EQAA) and the HEI concerned. Thus, GAES commissioned the consulting team to provide briefings to the HEI, HKCAAVQ, as well as each of the panel members. Thereafter, HKCAAVQ liaised with the HEI direct, while keeping GAES informed of the decisions at various stages of the accreditation process.

To ensure that the evaluation outcome aligns with international standards, an EQAA is required by the guidelines to form a panel comprising overseas experts from different
jurisdictions, in addition to experts from Hong Kong, Mainland China and/or Macao. Ultimately, the panel for the pilot study comprised of a panel chairman from Australia, an overseas academic from the UK and two academics from two of the government-funded universities in Macao. A designated staff member from HKCAAVQ served as the panel secretary.

To clearly signify that the decision-making power of all evaluation exercises lies with the Macao SAR Government, the accreditation report included the following in the section covering accreditation outcome and decisions:

On the basis of the findings documented in previous sections, the Panel’s overall recommendations are as follows.

Having considered the panel’s recommended accreditation outcome and decisions as well as associated evidence and considerations documented in the final draft accreditation report, the Government of Macao SAR accepted the following accreditation outcome and decisions:

- Approval
- Conditional approval
- Non-approval.

As HKCAAVQ has no accreditation authority in Macao, the accreditation outcome was reviewed and endorsed by GAES in the capacity of the proposed Higher Education Evaluation Committee before the accreditation report was finalized and issued to the HEI.

**Case 2: LPR for Macao HEI**

The second case study involved the conduct of a LPR in another HEI in Macao. HKCAAVQ conducts LPR as a consultancy project outside Hong Kong. LPR is similar to the accreditation in Hong Kong in the aspects of guiding principles (transparency, evidence-based, fitness for purpose and peer review), panel formation, process and procedures. However, noting that HKCAAVQ has no accreditation authority in Macao, the LPR outcome will comprise “Observations” and “Recommendations” only.

The guidance notes on LPR sets out the criteria and standards for reviewing the programs. These criteria and standards are adapted from those used in the accreditation of local programs operated by institutes/operators in Hong Kong, excluding requirements regarding the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework. The LPR has ten criteria as follows:

1. program objectives and learning outcomes;
2. program content and structure;
3. admission requirements and student selection;
4. teaching and learning;
5. student assessment;
6. staffing and staff development for learning programs;
7. financial and physical resources for learning programs;
8. QA (including program development and management);
9. workplace attachment and student support services; and
10. student records and information management.
The panel of the LPR is composed of eight members from different disciplines pertaining to the programs under review, and/or with substantial QA experience in a higher education setting, including the HKCAAVQ staff member serving as a full member on the panel. To ensure that the panel is representative enough to benchmark the accreditation subject (HEI/program) against international standards and practices, the majority of the panel members came from different overseas jurisdictions operating different mainstream education systems where Macao students further their studies.

The panel chair verbally conveyed to the senior management of the HEI the panel’s broad observations at the last session (exit meeting) of the site visit. Details about the panels’ conclusive views were captured in the LPR report in the form of recommendations to HKCAAVQ, which has the final authority on the LPR exercise.

While the two cross-border QA activities were both conducted by HKCAAVQ and shared a lot of similarities in terms of the guiding principles and major processes, there are obvious differences in their nature and outcomes. Table I presents the main differences between two cases.

**Results**

International education is now a hugely competitive market, and national governments and individual providers often see agencies as key tools for developing positional advantage. What are the implications for agencies in seeking to meet these expectations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case 1</th>
<th>Case 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initiation</strong></td>
<td>Voluntary engagement of cross-border QA initiated by the HEI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government-initiated project with EQAA and HEI preliminarily identified by GAES</td>
<td>Benchmarking with international standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td>Evaluation process conducted by HKCAAVQ under a Consultancy Service Agreement, pursuant to sections 4(1)(g) and 4(2)(b) of HKCAAVQ Ordinance (Cap 1,150)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot study for the guidelines developed by GAES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Legal framework</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New program accreditation mandatory under the proposed Higher Education Act</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject under review</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New program scheduled to be launched in the following academic year</td>
<td>Existing program(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accreditation/review standards and criteria</strong></td>
<td>Essentially adopted from existing HKCAAVQ standards and criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program accreditation guidelines developed by GAES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Panel composition</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline and QA experts from overseas and Hong Kong, with HKCAAVQ staff member serving as panel secretary</td>
<td>Discipline and QA experts from overseas and Hong Kong, with HKCAAVQ staff member serving as panel member-cum-secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accreditation/review outcome</strong></td>
<td>Recommendations to the HEI for continuous improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval, conditional approval, or non-approval, as well as recommendations for continuous improvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reporting</strong></td>
<td>The findings of the panel presented in the form of “Recommendations” and “Observations”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The accreditation report covered accreditation outcome and decisions (e.g. conditions and/or requirements for approval, program title and qualification, mode of delivery, specialization, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Table I.</strong> Main differences between the two evaluation cases</td>
<td>Final decisions made by HKCAAVQ with respect to panel’s recommendations</td>
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</table>
The pilot study on the program accreditation guidelines under the Proposed Higher Education Framework of Macao was designed to test the accreditation and standards as well as the process by which a mandatory external QA procedure could be introduced through the jurisdiction’s legal framework. The development of the knowledge and understanding of QA among GAES staff through the process and the building of the quality culture in the pilot HEI were added value in the process.

HKCAAVQ aims to be a nationally and globally recognized independent QA body in education and training, dedicated to high quality accreditation, assessment and consultancy services. The objectives in the HKCAAVQ strategic plan include providing consultancy and QA services for the education and training community beyond Hong Kong. HKCAAVQ is regarded as an internationally recognized EQAA, and has been successfully audited against the guidelines for good practice of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).

Apart from positively assessing its expertise and capacity to conduct cross-border QA, engagement of HKCAAVQ as the EQAA in the pilot study had a strategic fit with its scope of activities.

With regard to the legal framework prescribing the cross-border QA, the EQAA should consult and liaise as appropriate with the jurisdictional regulatory bodies so as to have a proper understanding of the accreditation criteria and legal framework. Communication and mutual understanding are important.

If the EQAA is requested to make use of the guidelines issued by the jurisdictional regulatory body (as in this case), the EQAA should consider if it has a sufficient understanding of the guidelines. In case of doubt, the EQAA should seek clarification from the regulatory body. The EQAA should also ensure that the evaluation criteria contained in the guidelines are broadly comparable with international standards in light of the outcomes of the evaluation otherwise, the QA agency may risk jeopardizing its professional standing and integrity.

In conducting the pilot accreditation for GAES, HKCAAVQ as the EQAA interpreted and implemented the guidelines to the best of their understanding based on professional expertise and experience in other accreditation exercises. Due to the different interpretations of each party in a number of procedural steps, the process required considerable negotiation and hence took longer time than expected. Readability was hindered as Chinese and English guidelines are presented concurrently for each statement. Some templates required much adaptation for use by the panel; however, most milestones were achieved ahead of the stipulated deadlines in the service agreement.

Overall, with close communication between GAES, the HEI and EQAA, the accreditation exercise, and the site visit in particular, was completed successfully.

From the perspective of the HEI their participation in the pilot study enabled them to gain insight into the likely QA arrangements for program accreditation under the proposed Higher Education Quality Assurance Evaluation Framework of Macao and also build their relationship with the regulatory body, GAES. From a program perspective where a maximum of 50 percent of the student population can be drawn from outside Macao (largely from Mainland China), the accreditation by HKCAAVQ as an EQAA provided an additional benefit of external recognition of the program. Participation in the pilot study was clearly viewed by the program leaders as a key means for developing positional advantage.

However, due to the nature of the pilot study and the necessary involvement of GAES and their consultants and the need for confidentiality, some of the ownership of the process by the HEI was lost. The exercise was largely conducted by the HEI through the agency of an institutional “champion” of the process and it was not clear as to whether the decision to undergo cross-border QA and the reasons for engaging HKCAAVQ were adequately communicated to the institutional community, including students. As a result, the
opportunity for building up institutional QA capacity was not taken up to the extent that it might have been.

In contrast to the pilot study, the HEI involved in the second case study of LPR had a clear purpose for engaging HKCAAVQ as the EQAA and the arrangement followed a number of deliberate activities designed to build up the institution’s QA capacity. Notwithstanding, the desire of the HEI to benchmark the standards of their program with Hong Kong standards presented problems for HKCAAVQ in considering whether its procedures could remain the same in a cross-border context.

Specific adaptations were required based on the legal framework under which HKCAAVQ operates as set out in Table I and unlike the pilot study outcome of accreditation by the regulatory authority in Macao, the outcome of the procedure was a review report only.

Prior to engaging in the LPR the HEI had undertaken an institutional review with another EQAA and included in its strategic plan a clear commitment to undertaking program review with another EQAA. The HEI has an internationalization agenda and is keen to build up the reputation of the institute and attract high quality students.

The HEI has also engaged professional bodies to conduct reviews of their programs that lead on to professional employment before undertaking LPR. In addition in the 12-18 months prior to the LPR the HEI engaged HKCAAVQ to provide training for relevant staff to prepare them for the exercise and help to build up the quality culture of the institution.

These training sessions and meetings between HKCAAVQ and the HEI helped to ensure an understanding of the institutional context and the QA process. The service agreement setting out the aims of the exercise and the responsibilities of all parties was also able to be satisfactorily negotiated over this time and taking into account that HKCAAVQ was able to conduct its QA activities in different ways in different contexts.

In this process, it was important for HKCAAVQ to be mindful of the awareness of external QA and culture of internal QA within the HEI. There can be very different understandings of even well accepted QA terminology. The HEI, newly engaged with the HKCAAVQ accreditation model and process, found it helpful to receive assistance/facilitation prior to undertaking external QA.

HKCAAVQ is not an accreditation authority in Macao and cannot issue a statement of accreditation approval nor benchmark overseas qualifications to the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework.

With regard to the outcomes of cross-border QA, it is essential that the EQAA has informed the institution in advance the extent of recognition the institution would gain. Gaining international recognition is a key incentive for an HEI to engage an international EQAA to review their programs. There is an expectation that their programs can be benchmarked against well-recognized standards, and the outcomes can be explicitly stated. Therefore, maintaining a good balance between the constraints the EQAA faces and the HEIs’ objectives is important for effective collaboration.

The official language of the HEI also needs consideration. It is directly related to the language used in the submission and working documents, and communication during the site visit. This is one of the deciding factors for the selection of appropriate peer-review experts.

In the review process, a more enabling approach is needed to facilitate the HEI in making continuous improvement, which reflects the spirit of QA. In the case of Macao, some interim measures were employed with a view to providing the HEI with opportunities to fill the gaps between their current operation and the established criteria.

All in all the outcome for the HEI and HKCAAVQ from the exercise was a positive experience, and subsequent LPR exercises have been undertaken and further ones are planned:

And, as some agencies position themselves to offer services outside their national jurisdictions, are we also now seeing the emergence of a competitive international market in quality assurance itself?
In Europe, the EQAR for Higher Education was established to enhance transparency and information on credible QA agencies operating in Europe and to facilitate the recognition of their decisions. Amongst other objectives, HEIs could use the register to choose to be evaluated by a registered QA agency that suits their mission and needs.

The recognition of cross-border external QA activities of EQAR-registered agencies is designed to further stimulate the recognition of degrees and qualifications and enhance the European dimension to QA.

The Recognizing International Quality Assurance Activity in the EHEA project revealed that QA agencies have rapidly expanded their international activities, and HEIs are keen to take advantage from the opportunities of a cross-border external review. They recognize as main benefits the development of an international profile, a review that best suits their needs, and enhanced recognition of their degrees. However, the project found that the national frameworks are lagging behind: the number of countries that allow their HEIs to work with a suitable QA agency from abroad is small, although cross-border reviews are a reality in almost all EHEA member countries.

International evaluations or accreditations in these countries often happen in addition and parallel to the national, mandatory external QA, rather than being recognized as part of it. This leads to an unproductive duplication of efforts and does not contribute to promoting a genuine European dimension to QA (European Quality Assurance Register, 2014).

In the case of Macao, a competitive international market for both institutional and program QA already exists. In the case studies described above two different HEIs in Macao are both being pro-active in accessing international QA services but have selected different routes to achieve their goals.

In the pilot study, the HEI has taken advantage of the Macao Government’s initiative to regulate the market through the establishment of standard guidelines and approval processes for international EQAA undertaking program review in Macao.

Under these arrangements the EQAA and the HEI have to take account of the necessary steps to achieve recognition by the Macao regulatory body of any recommendations following the completion of the cross-border QA process.

Equally they have needed to consider the arrangements for the EQAA’s follow up procedures for any recommendations or conditions and how these marry with the jurisdiction’s proposed regulatory requirements.

Essentially, what the Macao Government is attempting to do through the pilot study on the program accreditation guidelines under the proposed Higher Education Framework of Macao is to establish a “managed market” for international QA services whereby the HEIs can choose an EQAA that is fit-for-purpose given the nature of their programs, institutional goals, language requirements, etc., while at the same time the selected EQAA must operate within the regulatory framework of standards and processes.

In the LPR, the HEI had undertaken accreditation by professional bodies of its relevant programs first before seeking out program review by HKCAAVQ. Although the accreditation by the professional bodies was more in the nature of a compliance review, they provided a “health check” for the HEI and stimulated their preparation for program review.

These preparations included attending and conducting conferences on QA with the Asia Pacific Quality Network and attendance by staff at INQAAHE conferences. For jurisdictions like Macao, the international market for QA includes training and conferences as well as direct QA services.

HKCAAVQ was identified as a fit-for-purpose EQAA by the HEI as it sought to benchmark its program standards against those in Hong Kong and internationally. The choice of HKCAAVQ as a well-recognized EQAA that regularly used international

Cross-border quality assurance

91
panels in its accreditation exercises was deliberate in order to meet their internationalization goals and build up the reputation of the institute and its programs. However, for another program area, the HEI intends to use another well-recognized international EQAA in order to ensure that the program standard can be benchmarked within Macao as this EQAA has already conducted reviews of these programs in other Macao HEIs:

Competition within countries is also intense in many places; is QA seen as a help or a hindrance? There is no doubt that both of the HEIs in the case studies saw external QA by an internationally recognized EQAA as helpful and essential for achieving their goals of internationalization, reputation building and benchmarking of professional programs to improve the employability of their students within their region.

However, in conducting the exercises it was recognized that there is potential for developing a more robust QA culture within the HEIs. The knowledge and understanding of outcome-based teaching and learning is limited and there is a capacity gap in terms of experience in QA systems and processes. This lack of QA knowledge and experience, rather than QA of itself, may be regarded as a “hindrance” to the future development of the HEIs given their strategic goals and the policy intent of the Macao Government to require all programs of Macao HEIs to undertake program accreditation using the program accreditation guidelines under the proposed Higher Education Quality Assurance Evaluation Framework of Macao.

Conclusions
Each country context is unique and has its own purposes for QA (World Bank, 2007). Engaging in cross-border QA creates significant challenges for the EQAA and for the HEIs involved. Not least among which is the necessity for close communication with the jurisdictional regulatory bodies, which is essential to the conduct of successful cross-border QA. As such, apart from preliminary meetings between the agency and the institution for ensuring a shared understanding of the jurisdictional and institutional context for the forthcoming QA process, it is good practice for the QA agency to meet regularly with the jurisdictional regulatory body to ensure that both parties have a common understanding of the key issues involved.

The experience of HKCAAVQ is that there are also significant benefits to be gained. For the EQAA, these benefits include enhancement of their own reputation and recognition of their effectiveness and capacity. It is also professionally rewarding for the staff and panel members involved in that it expands their own range of knowledge and experience and allows them to contribute to the development of QA in another jurisdiction.

Internationalization is a useful tool for helping institutions upgrade standards and strengthen quality in teaching and learning (Knight, 2005). Cross-border QA is likely to grow in importance and activity in the coming years to enhance the quality of higher education. Hou (2012) states that Asian QA agencies are required domestically to play vital roles in both the national and the international context. The example of Macao provides a useful reference point for governments, HEIs and EQAAs considering engaging in cross-border QA activities.

Note
1. Further information about GAES can be found in their website: https://gaes.gov.mo/eng/overview/introduction
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Understanding regionalisation in Philippine higher education

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Abstract

Purpose – Regionalisation in education has gained increased interest and importance because of the increasing collaborations among neighbouring nations. Definitions of the term vary, and more so the regionalisation practices and initiatives of higher educational institutions. In the Philippines, the emphasis on regionalisation has become even more pronounced with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Integration Vision. This vision of the ASEAN is geared towards enhancing regional collaboration and the creation of an ASEAN identity and puts education at the forefront, considering it as a strategic objective to achieve the region’s development agenda of economic, social and cultural growth. It becomes of paramount importance then to examine how regionalisation in education is understood by university constituents, its manifestations in terms of institutional activities and especially, how the ASEAN Integration shapes these initiatives and constructions of regionalisation. The paper aims to discuss these issues.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a multiple case study design that looked at three higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines, this study found that regionalisation is associated and interchanged with internationalisation in terms of purpose, goal and activities, but is differentiated in dimensions of geographical location and orientation.

Findings – Institutional initiatives pertaining to regionalisation were largely functional and mostly open and soft collaborations. The ASEAN Integration creates an ASEAN-centric consciousness, and functions as an opportunity for expanding partnerships, institutional niches and programmatic initiatives; and for legitimising regionalisation and internationalisation goals.

Originality/value – These definitions and approaches to regionalisation have significant policy implications as HEIs strive to respond to the challenges of the Integration.

Keywords Higher education, ASEAN Integration, Regionalisation

1. Introduction

Globalisation has far-reaching effects on nations and regions of the world. The phenomenon, which has been associated with the breaking down of barriers has heightened competition among nation-states as neighbouring countries enter into arrangements directed at creating a common market and allowing the free movement of goods, capital and labour (Gray, 2017). One of the significant responses to the phenomenon is the emergence of the notion of regionalisation, which began with the regional policy harmonisation in Europe, and eventually turning the discourse to higher education reforms and initiatives (Woldegiorgis, 2013). Various conceptions of regionalisation in education have been forwarded. In the context of higher education, it has been associated with such terms and constructions as harmonisation and the creation of a point of reference for comparisons (Woldegiorgis, 2013; Yavaprabhas, 2014). It is also closely associated with internationalisation, which may be viewed as a general, more overarching approach that refers to mechanisms by which higher education institutions (HEIs) adapt to the increasingly dynamic and borderless environment as a result of globalisation forces (Gacel-Avila, 2005). Knight (2012) suggests that regionalisation and internationalisation
are symbiotic and complementary approaches in higher education, but has also emphasised that while both terms may be used interchangeably, both suggest distinct differences if examined closely.

This notion of regionalisation is particularly significant for Southeast Asia as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) embarks on a full-scale campaign to fully realise the ASEAN 2020 Vision of Integration. Under its banner statement of “One Vision, One Identity, One Community”, the ASEAN seeks to strengthen regional cooperation and foster a sense of community among the member-states. The role of education in achieving this vision has been particularly emphasised when ASEAN (2009) identified as one of its strategic objectives the “integration of education priorities into ASEAN’s development and creating a knowledge based society” (p. 2). Such objective has significant repercussions and implications for the Philippines, one of the oldest member countries of the ASEAN.

In 2014 alone, the country recorded over 2,300 HEIs and a total higher education enrolment of over three million for the same academic year (Commission on Higher Education, 2014a). Indeed, this high demand for higher education poses a paramount challenge for HEIs as they struggle both to meet this demand and to deliver education that is comparable with the rest of the region (Killingley and Ilieva, 2015). In light of the Integration, the Commission on Higher Education has mapped out the country’s major internationalisation strategies focusing on enhancing the implementation of quality assurance framework; facilitation of countrywide and regional mobility and market access of students and faculty; and strengthening of international linkages of Philippine HEIs (Commission on Higher Education, 2016). Other initiatives were the implementation of the K+12 curriculum, which mandates the addition of two years to the country’s basic education in keeping with global standards; and a stronger emphasis on outcome-based learning in higher education (Commission on Higher Education, 2014b). Yet despite these efforts, reports pointed to how the country has been lagging behind its Southeast Asian neighbours (see Geronimo, 2013a; Domingo, 2013). Amador (2013 as cited in Geronimo, 2013b), for instance, had listed key issues that the country’s higher education sector must address as part of the Integration, including the expansion in the membership to the ASEAN University Network (AUN); and enhancing student and faculty mobility and collaborations in research and extension.

The ASEAN Integration therefore serves as a crucial force driving reforms of the region’s overall higher education sector and individually, at the national level such as in the case of the Philippines. With this push for strengthened regionalisation in the ASEAN, a number of compelling questions arise: How do university administrators and faculty members construct and define the subject of regionalisation of higher education? What are the institutions’ regionalisation approaches, initiatives and practices? How is the ASEAN Integration driving the regionalisation of higher education in the Philippines? This study aims to explore these issues from the perspective of three HEIs in the Philippines, and subsequently, describe the regionalisation of Philippine higher education.

2. Literature review
2.1 Regionalisation: a general definition
Regionalisation is not new or uncommon, but it has earned increased attention as nations seek new ways and forms of working and living together. Kacowicz (1998) suggested a close interrelationship among the concepts of globalisation, regionalisation and nationalism where the first is seen as a more overarching term that refers to a “set of related changes” in the economic, ideological, technological and cultural spheres of the global society (para 4). Regionalisation, on the other hand, may be discussed in the context of a group of states, often defined by geography, but also by other criteria such as social and cultural
homogeneity, similarities in political attitudes, and economic interdependence, and builds on the idea of regionalism (Kacowicz, 1998).

Mittelman (1996 as cited in Kacowicz, 1998) further suggested three lenses by which one can view the interrelationship between globalisation and regionalisation: regionalisation as a subset or component of globalisation; regionalisation as a response to globalisation; and regionalisation and globalisation as both parallel or overlapping processes. As a subset of globalisation, regionalisation promotes integration activities aimed at multi-lateral cooperation. As a response to globalisation, it is a counter alternative, an opposing response of nation-states to the idea of a “single universal culture” that is associated with the goals of globalisation (para 22). The third notion views the two as more than an economic process: the integration and creation of “megaregions” (Wyatt-Walter, 1995 as cited in Kacowicz, 1998, para 23).

2.2 Regionalisation in higher education

In higher education, the discourse on regionalisation seems to revolve around the appropriateness of terminologies to be used. Woldegiorgis (2013) and Yavaprabhas (2014) both underscored the term harmonisation in describing regionalisation. Compared to other associated terms like uniformity or standardisation, the former suggests a point of reference for comparability and compatibility. In this sense, harmonisation in education suggests that universities are able to retain their own identity, while ensuring that their quality of education is comparable and compatible with others, though not necessarily similar. Sirat et al. (2014) also emphasised that the conceptions and understanding of regionalisation in higher education vary depending on the actors involved in the process. Further, while there are several actors involved, much of the harmonisation actively takes place and stems from the educational institutions, further suggesting that the process is bottom-up. This is in contrast with Woldegiorgis’ (2013) suggestion that regionalisation in higher education, taking the Bologna Process as an example, is a top-down process where the initiative stems from regional organisations or supranational bodies.

Knight (2012) further adds that there are several lines of inquiry that can be used to view regionalisation, one of which is in terms of the relationships between and among HEI actors and systems, or what the author refers to as higher education regionalisation. This relational notion of regionalisation may be illustrated through a continuum of regionalisation terms where on one end, associated terms like cooperation and collaboration suggest more informal and open relationships, and on the other, terms like integration, interdependence and community connote more formalised and institutionalised relationships (Knight, 2012). The author further proffers a model of interrelated approaches – functional, organisational and political approaches (FOPA) – by which one may examine the pursuit of regionalisation. The functional approach looks at the practical activities of HEIs, including policies, strategies and programmes for alignment and collaboration. The organisational approach pertains to the structures, frameworks and agencies that facilitate regionalisation, and lastly, the political approach refers to strategies and the political will in decision making concerning regionalisation (Knight, 2013).

2.3 The impetus for regionalisation: ASEAN Integration and the Philippine higher education sector

The subject of education and more specifically, regionalisation of higher education are covered in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) pillar, one of the three pillars of the ASEAN Integration. The ASCC’s goal of promoting a “people-centred and socially-responsible” ASEAN Community (ASEAN, 2009, p. 1) rests in part on human resource development, which in turn is grounded on education. In fact, higher education has been identified as a “core action line” to boost regional human resource development and the idea of a “Common Space of Higher
Education in Southeast Asia” (Sirat et al., 2014, para 8). Indeed, the ASCC Blueprint identifies a number of actions in support of the objective of advancing and prioritising education in the region, including enhancing inter-institutional networking to increase academic exchange and professional interactions; creating research clusters; increasing university placements through year abroad or semester abroad programmes; and offering courses and degree programmes on ASEAN studies (ASEAN, 2009, pp. 2-3).

A closer look at these proposed actions suggests that these are largely institutional-based or initiated and operationalised at the institutional level. In the Philippines, these initiatives are not necessarily absent nor are they relatively new. Kilingley and Ilieva’s (2015) research point to, for instance, the presence of outbound and inbound student mobility programmes in Philippine HEIs, although relatively lower in comparison to its Southeast Asian neighbours like Thailand and Malaysia. On the other hand, the country’s use of English as a medium of instruction in schools is one opportunity that can be maximised. This, coupled with the low cost of tuition and living, has led to a significant increase in international students, mainly non-native English speakers like Koreans, who come to the country to study English. The authors noted that such offers a potential for the country to develop itself into an education hub (Killingley and Ilieva, 2015). Full and active implementation of such initiatives is, however, hampered by a number of factors. At the national level, for example, there are unfriendly labour and immigration laws that serve as a disincentive for foreign students and faculty (Killingley and Ilieva, 2015). At the institutional level, there are policy gaps and standard operating procedures that must be addressed such as those that will encourage increased research productivity of faculty members (Rosaroso et al., 2015).

Recognising then the critical role of HEIs in forwarding regionalisation, it is at this level of the institution that the research is particularly invested in as it examines how regionalisation is understood and made evident in institutional initiatives and practices against the backdrop that is the ASEAN Integration. The next section details the design and methodology used to answer the research objectives.

3. Methods

This study employed the multiple case study design to look into the definitions and practices of regionalisation of three types of Philippine HEIs: public (state-managed), private sectarian (for-profit institutions that are denominational or run by a religious order) and private non-sectarian (for-profit HEIs that are managed or owned by individuals and/or private corporations and associations). While it is not the research’s objective to compare regionalisation practices, the choice to include three institutions that belong to each of the three types of HEIs in the country was made in order to see how distinct institutional factors such as organisational nature, orientation, structure and even geographical location shape the HEIs’ definitions of and approaches to regionalisation.

3.1 Case selection

Given the extensive number of HEIs in the country, the study cases were selected following the general classification of Philippine HEIs based on ownership. Furthermore, the following criteria were used in the selection: should be a recognised autonomous HEI by the Commission on Higher Education; should have CHED Centres of Excellence and/or Development, an award given by the Commission to HEIs with notable degree programmes in particular academic disciplines; and at least one HEI should be based outside of the capital. HEI A is a public, state-funded university and is the second largest autonomous campus of the national university. HEI B is a private sectarian HEI and is one of the six main autonomous tertiary institutions established by a religious order of priests. Both HEIs A and B are outside of the capital but in semi-urbanised/urbanised communities.
HEI C is a private non-sectarian institution in Manila (capital) founded by a family of architects. As mentioned, these HEIs differ in organisational nature and structure, and are representative of each of the three types of HEIs in the Philippines.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

As a form of triangulation and in order to provide for a comprehensive and richer discussion on the definitions and practices of regionalisation of the institutions, data were gathered from three sources: administrators involved in or undertaking regionalisation initiatives; selected faculty members and research and extension personnel (REPs); and documents/secondary sources (Figure 1).

Interviews with administrators sought to uncover their perceptions and understanding of regionalisation; the regionalisation initiatives of their office, including policies concerning regionalisation; and their views on the ASEAN Integration and how it is impacting institutional initiatives. A similar interview guide was also used for the REPs[1], but focused on their research and extension engagements that have a regionalisation focus. Semi-structured questionnaires were used to gather the insights of selected faculty members on their understanding of regionalisation; their knowledge of the regionalisation initiatives in their institution and their perception on their extent of implementation; and how the ASEAN Integration is shaping their work as faculty members. As the questionnaires were not designed for a survey but rather as a means to solicit representative answers from faculty members, convenience sampling was employed in determining faculty respondents. Lastly, a document review and analysis of publicly available documents was carried out. The documents were sourced from the institutions’ respective websites, and included institutional write-ups, news and feature articles on regionalisation and internationalisation activities, newsletters, downloadable reports and promotional materials (Table I).

A two-cycle coding process (Saldaña, 2009) was applied on the data gathered from the three data sources. A mix of descriptive, in vivo and initial coding methods were used in the first cycle coding to identify concepts, categories and loose themes, while the second...
cycle coding used pattern and axial coding methods to arrive at overarching themes and to note associations and thematic relationships. The themes emerged from the coding process served as discussion points in approaching the HEIs’ definitions and practices of regionalisation and the role of the ASEAN Integration as a push factor.

4. Results and discussion
4.1 Definitions and constructions of regionalisation
Five themes were uncovered from the HEI constituents’ definitions and understanding of regionalisation in higher education. These definitional dimensions were: purpose, referring to the goals and objectives or the “whys” of regionalisation; spatial or notions relating to space, time and magnitude or coverage of regionalisation; outcome or the expected results or consequences of regionalisation; orientation, pertaining to ascribed beliefs and attitudes towards regionalisation; and activity or the modes by which regionalisation happens or proceeds. In all three HEIs, there was the prevailing idea of regionalisation as directed to or a precursor of a bigger, overarching notion such as internationalisation. This close association between these two concepts seems to support Mittelman’s (1996 as cited in Kacowicz, 1998) argument about regionalisation as a subset of globalisation. Regionalisation, very much like internationalisation (also a response to globalisation), is a venue for creating multi-lateral collaborations, an idea that constituents of the three HEIs also perceived to be its main purpose. Interviews and responses in the semi-structured questionnaire emerged the most commonly associated terms with regionalisation to be collaboration and partnership, and following Knight’s (2012) conceptual mapping of regionalisation terms, these words suggest a more informal and open relationship between partner universities, than a rigidly structured one. Likewise, for all three HEIs, regionalisation was equated with competitiveness as its perceived outcome. Regionalisation is meeting standards in order to become “at par with the others”. Through regionalisation or more specifically, the adherence to standards and accreditation, students of the HEIs are “acceptable” and
“adaptable” anywhere, and their education comparable to the education of their foreign counterparts.

A clear differentiation between regionalisation and internationalisation was identified, however, in terms of the spatial and orientation dimensions. For the HEIs, regionalisation, in referring to the geo-political unit, is limited to those within the “immediate” and “neighbours” or those with whom the country or university shares commonalities with or similarities in interests and/or socio-economic background. They then automatically identified the region as Asia and more specific, Southeast Asia. Concurrent to this, regionalisation was associated with a more Asian/Southeast Asian-centric orientation where the study participants seemed to attach a protectionist lens to regionalisation, describing it as putting the region first (in this case, Asia/Southeast Asia), and using this geo-political unit as the frame of reference or operating context. As respondent HEI B-A1 expressed:

One aspect of regionalisation is, we’re able to protect our own region vis-à-vis the international community where we cannot compete as much because we are just a third world country and they are more.

Such view also lends support to another lens of inquiry by which one can view regionalisation: as a counter alternative to globalisation (Mittelman, 1996 as cited in Kacowicz, 1998). In this case, regionalisation is seen as a mechanism to elevate the region’s own culture and development and boost its ability to compete. As regionalisation brings together countries, the competitive advantage is enhanced when countries operate as a region rather than as individual nations. Initiatives directed to encourage higher education partnerships and collaborations, for instance, become a collective, regional effort that makes the region much more competitive, a feat that is achieved more easily as a group of nations rather than as individual countries.

4.2 Initiatives and approaches in regionalisation

The coding process also yielded three themes with regards the institutions’ regionalisation initiatives, namely: programmatic, resource-oriented and institutional leadership. Table II provides a summary list of the key regionalisation approaches and initiatives of the HEIs in these three areas.

4.2.1 Programmatic. Across all three HEIs, there was a strong emphasis on programmatic initiatives, particularly degree programme enhancements. These include the focus on outcome-based education (OBE); academic exchange, particularly student exchange; and accreditation. All three HEIs have taken steps to revise their degree programme curricula to follow OBE standards. This move to OBE is in accordance with the CHED Memorandum Order No. 46 Series of 2012 (Commission on Higher Education, 2012) which lays down the rationale for the adoption of a competency-based learning standard and outcomes-based quality assurance monitoring and evaluation.

Academic exchange, particularly student exchange, also appears to be the easiest and most popular form of institutional collaboration, and is particularly actively pursued by HEIs A and C, making use of their extensive institutional network, the Asian University Network and the university system network for HEI A, and the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific for HEI C. HEI B has its own network to tap but has only recently started exploring academic exchange and partnerships with a university from the same religious order. Documents reviewed and insights shared by administrator respondents, however, point to an imbalance in numbers where there were more inbound than outbound students participating in said programmes. A key constraint factor was funding because while there are grants available, these are generally limited and students have to shoulder part of the expenses.
Accreditation is common among all three but comes in different types. HEI A has taken advantage of its membership in the AUN to pursue the regional AUN-Quality Assurance Standard Accreditation, whereas HEI B is focused on local accreditation provided by the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities. HEI C’s engineering and computing programs, on the other hand, are accredited by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET). This varying focus on accreditation may be attributed to resource and relevancy factors. Accreditation is an expensive investment for institutions, which may explain why HEI B has chosen to focus on local accreditation owing to its nature as a private institution and with no state support.

### Table II. Summary list of major regionalisation approaches and initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regionisation initiatives</th>
<th>HEI A (public)</th>
<th>HEI B (private sectarian)</th>
<th>HEI C (private non-sectarian)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Programmatic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Curricular</td>
<td>AUN-QA standard accreditation of degree programmes</td>
<td>Implementation of K-12 (senior high school)</td>
<td>ABET accreditation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Synchronisation of academic calendar</td>
<td>International on-the-job-training programme (College of Business Administration)</td>
<td>OBE curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outcome-based education (OBE) curriculum</td>
<td>OBE curriculum</td>
<td>Joint/double degree programmes (i.e. Chung Yuan Christian University, Taiwan)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Postgraduate short-term courses for credit</td>
<td>Chinese language programme</td>
<td>International on-the-job training and internship programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establishment of satellite campus (Nagoya Asian Satellite Campus)</td>
<td>Study visits</td>
<td>Study and plant visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linkaging</td>
<td>Membership in AUN; SEARCA University Network</td>
<td>Membership in Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities in Asia Pacific</td>
<td>Membership in University Mobility in Asia and Pacific; Higher Education Consortium Partnership</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inbound and outbound student exchange</td>
<td>Institutional partnerships with Sanata Dharma University (planning stage); Open University Malaysia; Center for Logistics Management Studies; Taylor’s University, Malaysia (active)</td>
<td>Inbound and outbound student exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Active partnerships with universities (e.g. Kobe University; Kyoto University; University of Putra Malaysia) for research</td>
<td></td>
<td>Active partnerships with universities (e.g. National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan; Politeknik Pikesi Ganesha, Indonesia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource</td>
<td>PhD scholarships to staff (international and local through CHED scholarships)</td>
<td>PhD scholarships to staff (through CHED scholarships)</td>
<td>Attendance/participation in international conference/paper presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human resource</td>
<td>Internationalisation of faculty/hiring of foreign-trained PhD faculty and researchers</td>
<td>Attendance/participation in international conference/paper presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attendance/participation in international conference/paper presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infrastructural</td>
<td>Construction of facilities (e.g. International Student and Cultural Center)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>Exploring external funding (i.e. Erasmus Mundus Fund) in development of proposals for joint degree programmes with foreign universities</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Table II.</td>
<td>Increased role of Office for Institutional Linkages</td>
<td>Review of institutional plan (CorePlan 2020)</td>
<td>Creation of Office for International Linkages for Research and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional leadership</td>
<td>Drafting of a policy framework for joint/dual degree programmes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
For HEI C, the ABET accreditation may be viewed as lending more weight and significance to its programmes because it is international.

Another notable programmatic initiative of the HEIs was niche building and development. Given the emphasis on comparability and competitiveness associated with regionalisation, degree programme initiatives were geared towards harnessing, strengthening and/or developing new niches in areas and fields of study. HEI A’s postgraduate short-term course for credit offered through the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture University Consortium, as well as the Transnational PhD Program for Leading Professionals offered through the Nagoya Asian Satellite Campus, both build on the institution’s niches in agriculture, biotechnology and environmental science. HEI B is positioning its degree programme on Digital Illustration and Animation as a possible draw for foreign students. HEI C is crafting a new niche that marries engineering technology and entrepreneurship through partnerships with universities in Taiwan and China. Taking advantage of the Philippines’ niche in English language education, all three HEIs also offer some form of non-degree English Language course designed primarily for non-English speakers and students coming mainly from countries like South Korea. Academic linkages and partnerships with universities, both in research and instruction, were also closely tied with the development and creation of niches. For HEIs A and C, its roster of partner universities from within Asia/Southeast Asia are institutions with the same or similar academic niches like Kasetsart University (Thailand) for HEI A and National Cheng Kung University (Taiwan) for HEI C.

As far as synchronising systems, only HEI A has shifted its academic calendar to August in order to synchronise with the calendars of other Southeast Asian universities. HEI B as a provincial university has yet to shift its calendar system, a move that the institution argues should be a decision that needs to be made along with other HEIs in the local community because of profitability issues, competition for local student enrolment and other socio-cultural considerations. HEI C has continued to follow its quarter system, an arrangement that does not seem to pose a conflict as far as foreign student exchange is concerned.

4.2.2 Resource. Much of the HEIs’ focus on resource development as part of regionalisation is the professionalisation of its staff. This includes encouragement of faculty members to avail of scholarships and grants for PhD studies, and support in attendance in international conferences. These two are also closely tied to financial initiatives. All administrator respondents of the three HEIs agreed that there has been considerable increase in financial support when it comes to advanced studies and conference attendance and participation compared to previous years. However, it remains limited due to increased competition. For HEIs B and C that are both private institutions and receive no state support, initiatives that require financial resource must be tempered and must be viewed in terms of greater returns for the institution as HEI C-A2 explained:

The main challenge is that because we are private and for-profit, we have to be conservative with our efforts, with the spending. As much as possible, any move you make should have a corresponding return or at the very least, it should not cost you money, which [then] hampers our efforts [because] it means you can only go so far.

Next to professionalisation, much of the resource initiatives were also concentrated on improving infrastructural resources. This is particularly evident in HEI A, a state-funded institution that has seen the development and construction of infrastructures like the International Student and Cultural Centre, pursued as part of the institution’s internationalisation objective.

4.2.3 Institutional leadership. All three HEIs acknowledge the value of internationalisation. HEIs A and C have explicit, clearly articulated internationalisation
goals in their vision-mission statements. For these two institutions, the direction is towards
global recognition where HEI A aspires to become “a globally competitive graduate and
research university”, and HEI C seeks to “be among the best universities in the world”. For HEI B, there exists a strong local mission, the development of the local community, but it also recognises the benefits of and contributions it can make to the broader global context as expressed in its vision-mission statement: “To contribute to and benefit from
global society for the transformation of the Filipino nation”.

The inclusion of this institutional goal that is reflective of and relating to globalisation, particularly for HEIs A and C, was found to be a crucial element used to rationalise and justify its pursuit of regionalisation and by extension, internationalisation initiatives. It legitimised the creation of structures and mechanisms such as facilitative or coordinating units that undertake the task of regionalisation; and the development and institutionalisation of supportive policies, among others. For HEI A, this was evident in the increased role and visibility of the Office for International Linkages in protocols and procedures concerning institutional partnerships, while in the case of HEI C, it has led to the creation of the Office for International Linkages for Research and Development that has been tasked to coordinate and oversee all international research and development collaborations of the institution. For HEI B, the addition of an international relations function to the original alumni office was a first attempt to suggest a modicum sense of international function or mission. Respondents of HEI B though insisted that to be able to truly commit to regionalisation or internationalisation, a separate office with a firmer internationalisation mandate should be created.

The crafting and implementation of institutional policies that create an enabling and conducive environment for regionalisation, was also recognised as a critical initiative. A significant move for HEI A’s Graduate School, which remains one of the primary units of the university that actively promotes and pursues regionalisation/internationalisation, was the drafting of a framework for implementation of joint and degree programmes to address issues like crediting and fees, and enable the actual development of such programmes with partner universities. For HEIs B and C, responses from both the administrators and faculty members point to the need for more clear-cut institutional policies that will address issues such as de-loading of teachers and crediting of research collaborative work, and fairer compensation terms for those who will be going on faculty exchange or serving as visiting professor in partner universities.

Juxtaposing these initiatives with Knight’s FOPA, it was found that most of the regionalisation initiatives of the HEIs were largely functional, which Knight (2013) describes as those involving programmes and policies directed at strengthening collaboration and partnership. Organisational approaches at the institution level were limited to the creation of designated internationalisation units and offices, and the focus on membership and engagement in inter-university networks and organisations to strengthen institutional networks. Political approaches were minimal, and may be due largely to the fact that these require inter-country agreements, and the current initiatives of the universities are still primarily facilitated by inter-institutional arrangements.

4.3 Role of ASEAN Integration in shaping regionalisation initiatives
The ASEAN Integration is seen both as a consciousness and an opportunity that underpins the pursuit of regionalisation. Across all three HEIs, the ASEAN Integration seems to foster a positive consciousness that supports an increased Southeast Asian/Asian orientation or bias. Study participants in all three institutions attested that the Integration cultivates not just multi-cultural awareness, but also a more heightened awareness and focus on the region of Southeast Asia as the context to operate in. In addition to exposure gained from the
interactions, albeit limited, with some foreign students and attendees in international conferences, the mention of the ASEAN Integration in institutional discussions, workshops, in-house conferences and events has prompted faculty and administrators to explore and use materials and literature that offer perspectives from other Southeast Asian nations. One illustration from HEI A-R2 is the increased use and recognition of templates, models and literature on best practices from Asia and Southeast Asia not just the West or the Philippines. Indeed, this Asian/Southeast Asian-centric mindset is seen as a way of elevating the region and veering away from the traditional impositions of western perspectives. Furthermore, this focus on regional development appears to also be closely intertwined with nation building as suggested by HEI A-F10:

I see more young Filipinos exposed to the socio-cultural realities of other ASEAN nations so they will deepen the appreciation of Asia’s cultural heritage and diversity, resist the cultural domination of the West, and use their exposure in enriching the cultural consciousness, appreciation and empowerment of Filipinos.

Another positive consciousness that the ASEAN Integration appears to foster is positional awareness. The Integration, as all administrator respondents and most faculty responses from the three HEIs noted, has encouraged an increased awareness of the need to look at the quality and comparability of their education, their position as an educational institution in the overall regional context, and what they should be doing to respond to the challenges of the Integration. It has encouraged questions among constituents, such as “Where are we?” or “What should we do?” HEI C-A1 explained:

The ASEAN Integration propelled us to revisit our internationalisation efforts and capitalised on its objectives to find valuable partners in the region. It helped us recognise the need to prepare the students to adapt to local/regional opportunities while being global in perspective.

On the other hand, there are also traces of negative and ambivalent consciousness wherein the Integration was noted as a “top-down” and forced initiative. As HEI A-F4 expressed:

It is more of a top-down-hands-down approach where we only follow what the focus of the top [administration] wanted without really understanding how to make use of the tools and practices of the integration.

Such view certainly seems to adds to Woldegiorgis’ (2013) suggestion that regionalisation is a top-down process. At the same time, there also appears to be certain ambivalence towards the ASEAN Integration. For instance, while administrator respondents of HEI B agreed that the Integration cultivates positional awareness of the institution, three also described it as “difficult to grasp” and the institution’s initiatives as “sporadic and fragmented”. In HEI C, two faculty respondents noted that the institution has been engaging in partnerships with foreign universities long before the Integration and thus, its introduction did not require much adjustment on their part, nor are its benefits distinctly felt or visible. The apparent lack of clarity of the Integration goals and how it specifically translates to higher education initiatives also echo Ratanawijitrasin’s (2015) critique of the ASEAN Integration’s Five-Year Work Plan on Education as not providing specific policies and measures for implementation. At the institutional level, these types of consciousness also reflect how the HEIs are translating the Integration’s goals into their respective initiatives and are contextualised in sector or constituency roles and responsibilities.

Likewise, the Integration is seen as a platform of opportunities. First, it serves as an opportunity for institutional review and redirection and the creation of mechanisms that will undertake regionalisation or internationalisation functions. Second, it provides the HEIs an opportunity to seek and pursue programmatic developments, particularly in the areas of curricular and degree programme innovations; and the establishment and strengthening of educational niches that will enhance the institutions’ track record, give them a comparative
advantage, or cement their position as educational institutions in the region. Most administrator respondents noted that while foreign partnerships and linkages with universities were already in place even prior to the ASEAN Integration, the Integration has provided an added impetus for the institutions to further their initiatives and use Southeast Asia as their point of reference or operating context. For HEIs A and C, the Integration also seems to offer broader opportunities for research and industry collaborations that can also improve and deepen institutional relevance through knowledge sharing.

4.4 Issues and implications

The findings presented in the earlier section revealed a number of noteworthy issues relating to how regionalisation and the ASEAN Integration are approached and viewed at the institutional level, and how these relate to national and regional discourses on the Integration.

4.4.1 The interchangeability of internationalisation and regionalisation. The prevailing notion of regionalisation as being part of and a foundation for internationalisation leads to an evident interchangeability of the two terms. For the HEIs, regionalisation is part of a bigger goal of internationalising their institutions. The geo-political and orientation emphasis on Asia/Southeast Asia to refer to the region suggests that regionalisation is viewed as smaller in scope than internationalisation because it is confined first and foremost to this particular geo-political boundary. Other than this, HEI constituents consider regionalisation and internationalisation as having the same purposes, objectives, approaches and activities. Any form of regionalisation is also internationalisation. This interchangeability further asserts how these two notions, often construed to be contradictory, are in fact closely tied to each other (Yang, 2002), and how their approaches are symbiotic and complementary as posited by Knight (2012). The HEIs’ idea, for example, of subscribing to regional standards as a way to be competitive is not only limited to being comparable with universities in the region, but is also a step at levelling up in the international arena.

This interchangeability of the two terms also reflects how regionalisation and the ASEAN Integration in higher education are discussed at the national level. In the Philippine context, internationalisation is the more popular, widely used and pervasive term used by education experts, school leaders and administrators, and even education officials. CHED Memorandum Order No. 55 Series of 2016 titled, “Policy Framework and Strategies on the Internationalization of Philippine Higher Education”, clearly establishes internalisation as the response to the ASEAN Integration. The document further indicates one of the Commission’s objectives for pursuing internationalisation as a strategy, which is to “develop Philippine HEIs as productive members of the international academic community” (CHED, 2016, p. 6). Clearly then, internationalisation is regarded as one of the broad goals of the Philippine higher education sector, and as a response to the Integration, regionalisation is only but a subset of this bigger goal. The ASEAN Integration provides a convenient platform for pursuing regionalisation because it contributes to the internationalisation of higher education.

4.4.2 Prioritising regionalisation. Given how internationalisation has been positioned as the response to the ASEAN Integration, regionalisation then, in and of itself, does not appear to be the priority of the HEIs, but rather internationalisation. This is clearly evident in the articulated vision-mission statements of HEIs A and C, for example, and in the number of academic linkages and partnerships, previous, current and under negotiations, with universities that are well outside of the geo-political unit of Southeast Asia. As a subset of internationalisation, regionalisation facilitated through the ASEAN Integration provides a good starting point for exploring academic collaborations, but as most respondents
explained, the Integration does not limit them from reaching out only to immediate or
neighbouring universities.
Likewise, in looking at how the HEIs regard the objectives of regionalisation vis-à-vis the
ASEAN’s broad goal of using education to advance the region’s human development
agenda, it appears that the ASEAN Integration cannot also be separated from objectives of
institutional and national building. At the conceptual level, the Asian/Southeast Asian
orientation places emphasis on increased regional consciousness and awareness, but in
more practical and concrete terms, regionalisation is seen as contributing to nation building
such as when faculty members train or study in other universities in Southeast Asia or
maximise their partnerships with foreign Southeast Asian universities to fill in inadequacies
or gaps in expertise or facilities; or to strengthen and enhance their programmatic niches by
partnering with universities that have notable reputations in the niches they wish to
develop. Indeed, a closer look at the motives of the HEIs for exploring partnerships and
collaborations suggests that they cooperate, first and foremost, to improve individual
institutional capacities and boost institutional track record.

4.5 Raising awareness on the ASEAN Integration among relevant stakeholders
The negative and ambivalent consciousness of HEI constituents towards the ASEAN
Integration also underscores the importance of communicating the broader goals of the
Integration and how it can be translated to institutional and individual (sectoral) roles and
actions. While the study found that there were efforts to communicate the Integration, these
were minimal and in most cases, present only an overly broad discussion of the ASEAN
Integration’s implications, such as job placement and employability of graduates. Little
discussion has been made on the implications of the Integration on both the professional
development and responsibilities of the constituents of the HEIs. There also appears to be
little active discussion going on at the smaller units of the institutions (i.e. departmental or
sectoral levels). The importance of targeted discourse and awareness-raising efforts that
emphasise other issues of the Integration such as pedagogical innovations, teaching styles
for multi-cultural classrooms, resource and facility-sharing and collaborative teaching/
instruction should not be discounted.

5. Conclusions
Constructions and definitions of regionalisation closely intersect with notions of
internationalisation particularly in terms of purpose, outcome and activities. The overlap
further positions regionalisation as a subset or precursor to internationalisation, and leads
to a tendency to interchange both terms. A major point of difference, on the other hand, is in
terms of notions of geographic location and proximity where the geo-political unit of the
region is identified as those that include the immediate and the neighbours, in this case,
Southeast Asia and Asia, as well as those that share common and similar interests and
backgrounds. In this regard, it is differentiated from internationalisation in that the latter
covers those outside of this geo-political unit. Congruent with this, regionalisation is
also associated with the creation of a region-first orientation or a form of Asian/Southeast
Asian-centrism where the geo-political region is placed first over other regions, and
therefore becomes the frame of reference of HEIs in their internationalisation activities.

The HEIs’ regionalisation approaches and initiatives are largely functional, particularly
in terms of academic and programmatic initiatives, namely student exchange; accreditation;
curriculum development adherence to outcomes-based education standards; and niche
building and development. Institutional partnerships and linkages are facilitated through
and begin within the institutional network of the HEIs. There is more concerted effort from
HEI A to concentrate on region-oriented academic initiatives, such as membership in the AUN,
accreditation from the AUN-QA of its degree programmes, and the academic calendar shift. HEI B’s regionalisation activities are still largely in the exploratory and planning stage in part due to its being a provincial university with a strong local mission, while HEI C is focused on elevating its regional position through international accreditation of its niche programmes. Initiatives relating to resource development largely point to the strengthening of the institutions’ human resource through an intensified campaign to encourage faculty and staff to acquire PhD and postgraduate degrees, and infrastructural development.

In terms of institutional leadership, a key initiative is the creation of and the increased emphasis given to facilitative or coordinating units that are tasked to undertake regionalisation/internationalisation efforts. Moreover, at the institutional level, the regionalisation initiatives denote a less formalised and more open relationship, hence a softer form of collaboration, rather than more structured and formalised ones that require inter-country intervention or facilitated through inter-country arrangements.

The ASEAN Integration drives the regionalisation of the HEIs by serving both as a consciousness and an opportunity. On one end, it has encouraged heightened multi-cultural awareness; an increased emphasis and focus on the region (Asia/Southeast Asia) as a context; and of positional awareness driving competitiveness. On the other, it has also created impressions of the Integration as a vague and top-down initiative. As an opportunity, the ASEAN Integration is used to legitimise and rationalise institutional planning and redirection, foreign university partnerships and networking, and increased knowledge sharing.

As HEIs recognise and acknowledge the reality of the ASEAN Integration, there is a strong need for HEIs in the Philippines to pursue more concerted efforts beyond curricular and degree programme initiatives at the broad institutional level, and also focus on the individual/sectoral level (i.e. among groups of faculty members, research personnel, administrative staff, etc.). Awareness-raising efforts that will focus on the strategic and effective communication of the goals of the ASEAN Integration (regional level), how these translate to university-level programmes and initiatives (institutional) and what it means, what it can do, and the roles of the different sectors of the institution, are needed.

Alongside institutional leadership reforms and programmatic and curricular initiatives, there is a need to pay attention to the review, crafting and implementation of institutional policies that will not just legitimise regionalisation and internationalisation initiatives, but more importantly, provide an enabling environment that incentivises, encourages, promotes and gives adequate support to university stakeholders to actively pursue and engage in regionalisation and internationalisation.

Note
1. Research and extension personnel (REPs) are unique only to HEI A.

References


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Higher Education Evaluation and Development

Number 2

57 Editorial boards
58 Who guarantees the quality of the quality assurance agencies? The exploration of the establishment and growth of the Asia-Pacific Quality Register (APQR) Jianxin Zhang and Jagannath Patil
68 ASEAN’s flagship universities and regional integration initiatives Murshidi Sirat
81 Cross-border quality assurance: case study of Hong Kong and Macao Robert Fearnside and Kathy Chung
95 Understanding regionalisation in Philippine higher education Joclarisse Espiritu Albia and Sheng-Ju Chan

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