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Short Paper

Understanding the Narrative Encounter of Taiwanese Students' First Cross-Cultural International Education Experiences in the Philippines

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Abstract

Internationalization is currently one of the pursuits among universities to be globally competitive and offer pluralistic programs. Philippine universities pursue partnerships with schools from other countries to engage in collaboration of programs, create innovative courses, and offer remarkable ventures. This study was conducted to examine the perception of the participating international students at a university from Taiwan on the academic, social, and personal factors that impact their localized university experience in a university in the Philippines. Qualitative data from focus group discussion were analysed from the participants of the cross-cultural immersion program who went and studied for one term. The study identified several implications that might be utilized to enhance the experience of the students participating in the university's international study program. A holistic approach in the creation of the program for international students is paramount. The program must navigate through culture, language, academic competencies, and support services with corresponding infrastructure facilities. Culture is integral for the delivery of lessons as well as communication in all transactions. Retooling mechanisms must be in place which may cover teaching strategies, access to information, a buddy system to bridge gaps and other related pursuits.



INTRODUCTION

The internationalization of education as defined by some is the process of integrating or 'infusing' into the ethos, artifacts, teaching, or learning an international, intercultural, multicultural, and global facets of a school, college, or university. Primordial is the link among nations, people, institutions, and systems (Bedenlier et al., 2018). Strategically positioning academic directions calls for innovation, variety, adaptability, and technology. Relevant changes for higher educational institutions or HEIs include uptrend number of international students, adjusted curriculum, cross border interactions, branch campuses, hubs, and the planning of internationalization at an institution level (Amblee, 2017).

A private higher educational institution (HEI) in the National Capital Region in the Philippines and partner school in Taiwan has undertaken a cross-cultural immersion program wherein students went and studied in the Philippines for one term. This study was conducted to examine the perception of the participating international students on the academic, social, and personal factors that impact their localized university experience by analysing qualitative data from focus group discussion of students enrolled in a customized study program. Specifically, the study's objective is to determine the practical realities experienced by foreign students such as learning digitalization and housing, and to adapt solutions for study abroad programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customized Study Program

In a 2017 study by Pane et al. with various high schools in the United States, personalized learning and adjusted modes of instruction address the individual goals and needs of students. In the Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd) for instance, a policy enforcement on changing the curriculum content for international students became imperative. This included topics on adjustment to campus life, prevalent culture, language, communication, education itself, accepted norms, and other social issues. Polishing mind frames and skills enhancement while enrolled is targeted (Bodycott et al., 2014). Some of the primary dimensions for international students crucial to their academic, social experience and wellbeing are as follows:

- Connection with the content and process of teaching and learning
- Bonding between host teachers and international students
- Engagement with the university communities
- Interaction between domestic and international students and among international peers
- Integration into relevant social and professional networks, the host community, and the host society
- Connection with family and home communities
- Online and digital connection (Tran, 2020)

Local Interaction

Valuable personal and cross-cultural relations aid educational goals, assimilation, and competence among local and international students. Understanding the dynamics of personal contact led to openness, trust, structure and space, empowerment, confidence building, modelling, and amplifying ideas (Zou & Yu, 2019).

Faculty

The inclusion of the faculty equation is vital to adjustments in curriculum, instruction, evaluation, and delivery of academic services. Likewise, relationships between the students both local and international with their course facilitators influences growth. Training in cross cultures, jargons or communication guides, teaching and counselling strategies. All are geared for global citizenship and professionalism (Zelenková & Hanesová, 2019).

Physical Environment

The actual classroom setup influences the international learning of students (Niehaus & Williams, 2016) as well as teaching styles. The physical set up like lightning, furniture, temperature, air quality, and consumed space adds or deters the interest in learning engagements. Planning and implementation must compliment the desired outputs, behavior, interaction, and socialization. (Puteh et al., 2015)

Student Services (Personnel Relations)

There is a need to maintain the quality and delivery of student services as evidenced by the study of Sarsale and Caday in early 2020. It was revealed that waiting time for the requested student service ranked first in the weak areas. Cafeteria related services came in second. Third is housing facilities or those rented inside the satellite campus of a Philippine State University.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The qualitative descriptive method was employed to draw information from all encounters in the locus or arena of events. According to Sandelowski (2000), qualitative descriptive study is the method of choice when straight descriptions of phenomena are desired.

Similar studies in higher education institutions in the United States used qualitative descriptive as information was scrutinized and harmonized to develop categories in establishing priorities for internationalization (Criswell & Zhu, 2015). In this study, data collection examined the perception of Taiwanese students on their experiences at a university in the Philippines in the areas of faculty, local student encounters, housing and other complimentary services, administrative policies and staff services.

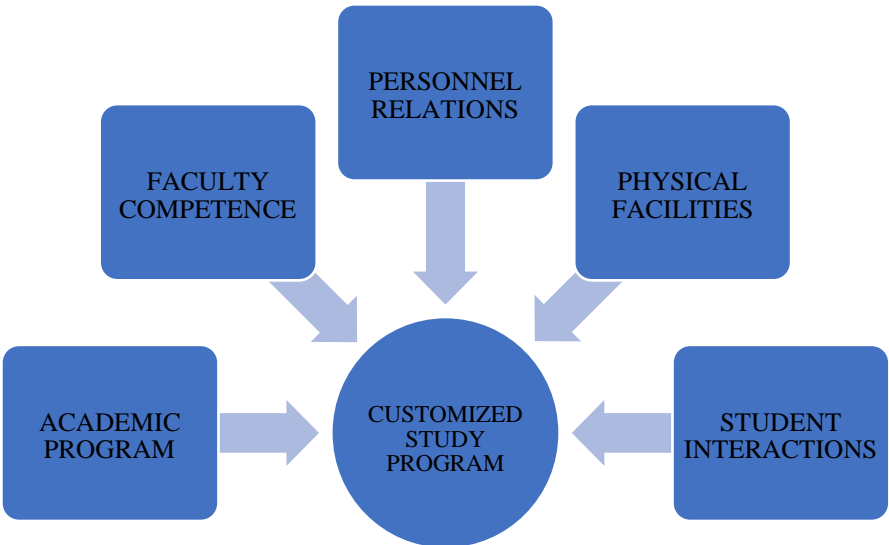


Figure 1. Research Conceptual Framework

Research Participants

There were 19 exchange student participants who joined, there were composed of 5 males and 14 females in the age range of 18-21 years. They were all conversant in the English language.

Research Locale

The College of Tourism and Hospitality Management of a Christian university in the heart of Quezon City became the venue of the study. Consenting participants came from the dormitory facility inside the said university.

Data Gathering Procedure

This study was conducted to examine the perception of the participating international students on the academic, social, and personal factors that impact their localized university experience. A purposive sampling method was employed in this study. Participants were all enrolled in a customized study program. A total of 27 students were part of the international program, and all were invited to participate in the study but only 19 students participated. A focus group discussion was applied for gathering pertinent information that would help answer the research objectives. The questions dwelled on determining the realities experienced by students on an international study exchange program. These include their subject courses, interaction with faculty, local students, and university personnel. The FGD also asked about the living conditions, telecommunications and other issues faced. The participants were divided into two groups to better facilitate the FGD. Qualitative descriptive method was employed to draw information from all encounters in the locus or arena of events.

The data were collected in May 2019, a few days before the departure of the students to Taiwan. A semi-structured interview guide was prepared and used during the FGD. The questionnaire was forwarded to the faculty coordinator of the students. The FGD lasted for about an hour for each batch. The participants were assured of their anonymity and thus they were coded. Every participant was encouraged to speak and contribute during the FGD. Two researchers were present during the FGD, one as a moderator and one acting as assistant to record and facilitate the FGD.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Academic Program

The delivery of the customized study program is essential for learning, competencies, and skills enhancement of international students. The hours spent per coursework aids in the enjoyment or excitement in attendance. Students have expressed that they need periodic breaks, according to a student participant “*I think some classes have to 2-3 hours I feel a little tired.*”

The language component is a crucial factor in internationalization. Expertise in writing, verbal communication from teachers matched with appropriate strategies enhance student-teacher interaction as cited by Hvalič-Touzery et al. (2007). Consequently, from the same study, the short-term study program as in the case of Taiwanese students at the university in the Philippines may illicit constructive values formation, respect for culture and beliefs. This was also expressed through a narration on experiences in their academic and non-academic life.

Faculty Competence

Equally relevant is the knowledge of faculty in the course delivery. Likewise, the attitude, classroom rules, and routine established with the students. A friendly environment (Dale, 2013) enables memorable and remarkable encounters. In contrast, it would be issues on tardiness, feelings of inadequacy, and other negative occurrences from the teachers hinder their learning and growth potentials. Here is an encouraging comment from one participant *“the teachers, the other faculty members, the students are very patient to us so we are relax to communicate with them.”*

Students appreciate teachers with deadlines and alternative learning activities as they need room for allowances because of adjustment periods. Discussions on outputs and presentation of examples by each faculty help the Taiwanese students develop their version. Computation of grades was highly appreciated as this tracks their progress in the customized study program.

University Personnel Relations

In a 2009 study by Levett-Jones et al., international students need to have a sense of being at home in their host academic environment. This is also evidenced by responses that specified that the university in the Philippines’ academic and non-academic personnel guided them. It may come in the form of medical appointments, navigating in and out of university premises, attending to special needs or requests. The feeling of being supported adds to the trademark of hospitality. *The participant shared how “The CHTM (College of Hospitality and Tourism Management) members always help us by travel writing and Dean assist us and when we go to trade center Mam always help us to go later and with this, we get help and assist properly”, and according to another participant “my main experience so wish when the others come here can have a nice experience too”.*

Local Student Interaction

Relations with peers play a vital role in reinforcing study abroad programs or internationalization. Taiwanese students enjoy conversations with local student participants. These transpired in classroom sessions like with group activities and after school. They are assisted when they need to find a local store, printing shop, and other similar areas. Both Taiwanese and Filipino students value the friendships they have developed and treasured their bonding experiences coinciding with reciprocal peer-to-peer learning and interaction as espoused by Rasi, et al. in their 2017 study. A participant shared how *“very friendly and always give us good idea” while one said “I love Filipinos they always attend activities and I think that is a good relationship.”*

Delivery of Physical Facilities and Related Services

The facade, campus grounds, university housing, Wi-Fi, food, library, toilet and other basic needs to survive the student life in a foreign land must be rated as enough or adequate. *This being reflected in the response of one participant, where he shared that “I think the most difficult is language because we cannot talk not really good so something. In some place internet speed is a little slowly”, another had the same sentiment “in this university how, internet can be better”.*

Majority of the students rendered these factors as substantial qualifiers in their decision to seek international education. The promptness of reply or action to concerns assists in the comfortability aspect of their academic life. Transitioning from their campus in Taiwan to the Philippine campus here entails service quality in physical facilities and related services.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Effective promotional strategies are important for an educational institution to build its international program. It has to traverse culture, language, academic competencies, support services with corresponding infrastructure facilities and services. (Rosyidah, *et al.*, 2020).

Both universities through respective university officials had a memorandum of agreement to foster international relations. The selection of course offerings that would be beneficial for the Taiwanese students and their Filipino counterparts have been pre-determined prior to enrolment. Housing provisions inside the campus is a favorable condition for the international students.

Language as part of the learning culture is integral for the delivery of lessons and communication in all transactions affecting Taiwanese students. This is an area for improvement as retooling mechanisms must be in place which may cover teaching strategies, access to information, a buddy system to bridge gaps and other related pursuits.

Future research may consider using more traditional qualitative methods exploring staff perceptions to elicit in-depth responses and reflections which are difficult to articulate via open-ended survey items.

IMPLICATIONS

The overall learning experience of the international students is significantly affected by the school environment and the services provided.

Breaks must be done if a three-hour class is maintained or better yet shorten the sessions. Attention spans of participants are becoming shorter. Personnel involved in the program must ensure that there is more interaction with Filipino students in class and other outside classroom events or activities. Teachers and Instructors must be role models of punctuality in their respective classes.

Facilitators of the program should consider measuring the level of English proficiency of the participating international student to be used as baseline data in measuring the skills acquired during the program. Consider English and PE classes to be incorporated in the official course offerings of the customized International Study Program.

To complement learning, facilitators should consider co-curricular and extra-curricular related expense provisions to be allocated. Facilitators should also ensure the smooth delivery of expected facilities and services (ex. dorm amenities, internet connectivity).

A holistic approach in the creation of the program for international students is paramount. It should provide support that looks at the whole person, not just their mental health needs but should also consider their physical, emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing.

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DECLARATIONS

Conflict of Interest

All authors declared that they have no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent

All authors declare that this study is covered by the exceptions in the need of informed consent as no personal details were obtained.

Ethics Approval

Data were obtained from coursework and document analysis were performed from the archived data. The research did not involve human participants and did not utilize any personal data.

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Author's Biography

Teresita C. Bautista is a college faculty handling core and major tourism subjects in a private university in Quezon City Philippines. Alden Tolentino is the current HRM Chair from the same university, while Dr. Fernando Trinidad is the dean of the college and Dr. Ronald Manzano teaches tourism research in the undergraduate program.